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Hamburg-Blankenese

It is now seven months since I announced my intention to send a report on spiritual conditions in Germany — seven months instead of seven weeks as was my intention. The reasons for this delay can perhaps best be summed up in one word: winter-Paralysis.

At long last one of the worst winters of my experience lies behind us. Our feeling is one of relaxation and thankfulness after a period of unparalleled nervous strain. As you all know, general living conditions in Germany are bad. But the long duration of severe cold weather made them ever so much harder to endure. I don't know whether you can fully imagine the effects of the cold on our lives. Let me speak of my personal experience only in order to cut out any exaggerations.

Ours is a family of four. In our home we occupy one sitting room, one parents' bedroom and one children's bedroom, the rest of the rooms being let to six bombed-out persons. As only our sitting room was heated the cold gradually crept into our house. First one track of the water pipes froze up then both WC bowls were cracked with no replacement to be had for over six weeks. In our cellar we had three degrees C below freezing point with the effect that our small stock of potatoes and Steckrüben (Swedish turnips) turned sweet with frost. Since September last year our family received four hundredweight's of lignite coal (Braunkohlenbriketts) and two cwt of wood. Of course, you could not keep a room warm on this amount of fuel. Very fortunately we have been able to buy a mixture of sawdust and rejected oil at an exorbitant price last summer. But to heat a room with this meant an expenditure of time of at least three solid hours a day; even so we never had more than 16 degrees C in our sitting room.

During the worst weeks we had no electricity for days, or the current was cut off from 7 am until 9.30 pm. We used what little bits of candle could be found as well as a rest of paraffin oil we had left from our yacht. But of course there was only one source of light for the whole family which means that it was impossible to do real work after dark. Very often we lay down to sleep directly after supper (about 7.30 pm) and did the necessary work (washing, ironing, typewriting) during the early morning, but this in turn meant additional fuel and food as well as working wrapped up in coats and blankets. For weeks the gas supply was so bad, that a pot of water would not reach the boiling point on the gas stove. For many hours during the day even telephone was cut off.

To the domestic difficulties were added many others outside the house. Queuing up in front of shops or at the Red Cross (for the luncheon soup) in this severe weather was a burden which had to be shouldered by all members of the family in turn. Between 10 am and 2 pm train services to town were restricted to certain types of travellers. This means that every time one had to go to town you would be exposed to the bitter cold (more or less for about five hours). By the time you had warmed up after your return, daylight was fading and another day was lost for your work. Tickets for long distance journeys were only to be had if you were lucky after waiting in a queue from 4.30 am till 7 am. In this and many other ways an incredible portion of one's time is taken up by the routine work of every-day life. It is these many little obstacles which get you down in the end.

I noticed how far from "normal" we are when, for some days, I was staying as a guest of a British IVSP team in Berlin. The frost was severe then, but there was no delay and loss of time over coal, food, transport, telephone &c. The result was striking almost at once I felt greatly released, my energy was restored and set free for renewed activity.

So far I have only spoken of my personal experience. I should be kept in mind though that my own lot is ever so much better than that of millions of refugees, bombed out, old or sick people. Only two snapshots : a married couple, both over 60, left their home at 6 am with a push cart walked five miles through icy wind and snow to the forest, collect branches and twigs, pushed their cart back five miles and returned home about 3 pm with a small load of firewood. They did this 24 times within 6 weeks. Less honest people plunder coal wagons in the freight-yards. The widow of a University professor, also over 60, hasn't had a warm room all though the winter and has come out of it with frost bites on her hands and feet and with a hunger oedema.

I am really astonished that there was not more open rioting in our large towns.

Now, must probably, you have read or heard similar accounts of hardships in Germany and other European countries before and are left wondering why I am telling you the same old story over again. You may rest assured that I have not in the least forgotten that other countries are just as badly off as Germany and that, to a large extent, our present day sufferings are the direct consequence of the foolishness or even criminality of our policy in past years. I am mentioning our every day miseries because they form the background against which the stage of our spiritual troubles is set.

To be precise they make up only part of that background. Other important factors are the almost complete stagnation of production and commerce; full time or part time unemployment owing the lack of coal and electricity; exhaustion of bank savings; resentment against the occupation powers; a feeling of prostration and apathy as to the possibility of influencing Germany's future; the display of national egotism and mutual distrust by almost all nations of the world.

I think Germany's spiritual countenance is characterised best by the words a free fight for all. Germany is broken up into a host of sections large and small, of varying and overlapping composition, interests, aims, hopes and fears. But, as we Germans are as individuals, these groups have one thing in common: the relentless pursuit of their own selfish interests. The words "Germany" and "strife" have become synonyms.

I will only speak of what I consider the large and serious splits which run through our whole life.

There are the political parties. They all speak of Germany, but as far as I can judge, they act in their own narrow party interests only. Each of them is striving for power instead of serving their country. As far as the British Zone is concerned, my impression is that we are splitting up into the great factions, the working class people and the bourgeois. Friends from other zones in general confirm this statement for their zone. This need not be bad in itself but, coupled with party egoism, it destroys the basis for mutual understanding and collaboration in the common interest. If party politics and strategic advantages are placed above common interests of our people, then our parliamentary system is void of that sense of responsibility which alone guarantees that adequate solution to our pressing national problems will be found. To my idea, our right and left wing factions are both wrong in assuming that their proposed solutions to our problems have nation-wide scope. They cover only the interests of one part of our population. Now "democracy" is a plant which has hitherto sunk only tender roots into the German soil. I am more than doubtful whether it will withstand the storm of party strife. Our whole parliamentary system is rather unpopular with the majority of German intellectuals. They are extremely suspicious and sceptical as to the capacity and integrity of our political parties and our parliamentary institutions. I dare say that matters are not much better with the bulk of the working class population. Certainly what I have said holds true of German youth, who on the whole have a strong aversion against tying themselves up with any new ideas or ideals.

Now, if our political parties do not develop a deep sense of responsibility to the whole people then their narrow interests are bound to clash more and more sharply until they lead to a deadlock. What, then, will be more in line with our psychical set-up than the call for a "Strong Man"? You will remember that in 1933 many well meaning Germans said: "Well, bad as Hitler may be, the Reichstag has certainly proven itself unable to disentangle our national problems. So something different had to be put in its place." Let us not disregard the fact that we Germans are brought up to like and respect authority and that we are lacking that measure of tolerance which frees party strife in Anglo-Saxon countries of its dangerous aspects. Consequently we must expect the German people to be impatient with parliamentary bodies and to call for a Strong Man when in their eyes democracy fails. I have been surprised (although I should not have been) when speaking to a number of students, to find that they identify order, discipline and welfare with some source of authority outside themselves. The incarnation of such authority in Hitler being "outlawed" they substitute (subconsciously) a "legal" authority for it, namely the idea of returning to constitutional monarchy.

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While I have ample proof that these students are trying hard to overcome the rest of their narrow minded nationalistic indoctrination's with which they had been fed by school and Hitler youth, the above shows that they have not altered a bit regarding their attitude towards the problem of authority

and subordination. May I repeat what I have said so often, that it will be a thousand times more difficult to uproot the 200 years old tradition of subservience than it will be to eradicate nation socialism.

The sociological split up of our people is only one of our serious problems. Another, but not less alarming one, is posed by the totally different development of economic, mental and spiritual conceptions in the Russian and Western zones of occupation. When recently in Berlin, I met a number of educated and well meaning people (one of them was a Quaker, another one a war resister of old standing), both connected with education in the Russian zone. From what these people said I had the impression that very soon the Germans living in the Russian zone will no longer understand the Germans living in the Western zones and vice versa. The wave of distrust and suspicion which separates the Western powers and Russia making true co-operation impossible, has found its way into the German hearts and minds too. It is high time that economic and cultural unity of the occupation zones is achieved lest Germany be irreparably broken up. Also, I consider it important, that a more intense exchange of ideas from person to person, takes place, as newspapers, periodicals and radio are suspected on both sides of being tools of a propaganda directed by Russia or the Western powers respectively.

Visiting Freiburg in the south part of the French Zone I was puzzled to learn that not only exists a cleavage between East and West but another one between south and north. While it is well known that many Bavarians never thought highly of people living north of the Main (a Bavarian official declared recently in public that the Prussians ought to be sent to Siberia, and marriage between a Bavarian and a Prussian girl amounted to a crime) we have never had to complain much of ill-feeling between people living in Württemberg or in Baden and the "Prussians".

Unfortunately, so I am told, a profound change has taken place. The fact that we people of North Germany are now being "hated" in southern parts of Germany is probably due to our presumptions behaviour when coming south as refugees, during the bombing. But I am inclined to believe that in part at least we are being made the scapegoats for varied feelings of disappointment, resentment and general discontent. At any rate, a cleavage between south and north means additional obstacles on the path to national reconstruction and recovery.

Another partition which runs right through German people is that of native population and refugees from the east. So far very little progress has been made in the attempts to absorb the "new" section of our population. I am afraid that with the majority on both sides lack of good will and selfishness prevail. The "natives" are unwilling to make any sacrifices, the "newcomers" except "higher authority" to provide the necessary means for their subsistence.

As to the religious front: I am not so sure of myself with regard to our two leading denominations. But it would be a miracle if they had escaped strife and selfishness. So I am inclined to believe those who speak of ruthless endeavours on both sides to strengthen their power and influence not only in the religious sphere but in politics too. Members of the German Peace Society, returning from a conference, described protestant pastors as rather militaristic and nationalistic; Freiburg friends spoke of the supreme efforts of the catholic Caritas Reichsverband to get a firm grip on life in the French zone and beyond.

I need not dwell on the problems of our relation to the occupation powers. Most people's thinking is frightfully primitive. They say that under Hitler they lived well whereas under the occupation powers they do not live well. They will not see that under Hitler they could live well only under a huge armament programme and that their present misery is the direct consequence of Hitlers rearmament. I think that almost everybody in Germany has understood that there was something fundamentally wrong with Hitler and National Socialism. But as the "new" authorities do not provide well for them, people are certainly as convinced that there is something fundamentally wrong with the occupation powers. And unfortunately, the occupation forces are being identified with "democracy".

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So here you have the present day average German hungry, cold, tired out, exerting most of his or her energies to subsist, self-centred, ruthlessly egoistic, hardened, often casting aside "normal" ethical and moral values and standards, striving for power and influence to the detriment of others, disillusioned at the past, resenting the occupation, suspicious of other nations' motives and aims, sceptical as to Germany's future, hence apathetic with regard to economic or spiritual reconstruction, filled with a spirit

of negation, longing subconsciously for a new source of authority to which one might look for direction of one's efforts to speedy material recovery and national rehabilitation.

Of course, you know as well as I do, that generalisations lack that reverence for personality which is inherent in Christian faith. Although I do not intend to speak of the many fine people in Germany I wish to pay tribute to their splendid work and to their sense of devotion. But it is evident that the psychical background and attitude of the majority of our people make their work exacting and exhausting.

To my idea our task is threefold:

- 1) We must replace the destructive spirit of negation by a warm, affirmative spirit of Christian love. This alone can set free forces of sufficient magnitude and intensity to solve our national and international problems; certainly it is not sufficient for Germany alone to do so.
- 2) If we succeed in substituting love for hatred, positive willpower for negative apathy, then the problem of eradicating national socialist conceptions will be solved almost by its own accord.
- 3) The toughest problem will be to transform subordination to authority into personal freedom coupled with self-discipline and true allegiance to one's community. Here only a long and weary process of education can bring results. Frankly I have no solution to offer to the question how democratic institutions can be maintained in Germany until the time when they will be borne by the free will of a free population.

But our dilemma is even more acute. Sincere and deep changes in our mental attitude can only be attained if they have sufficient time to nature. But it will almost appear to me as if we have not got that time. It is easy to perceive that the thinking sections of our youth and also of our adults are in a mental state where old beliefs have broken down without new conceptions taking their place as yet. These people are on the lookout, so to speak. This then is the supreme moment to offer our people new and better ideas. But alas, how inadequate are our means and endeavours, compared to the magnitude of our task. And we realise only too well that nobody can stay for more than a short while in a state of mental indecision.

To exemplify: we are at present forming a German branch of the well known "Service Civil International" (of which the "International Voluntary Service for Peace" is the British branch). This international movement organises workcamps in many countries where volunteers of different nationalities work and live together in order to bring help in cases of catastrophe or pressing need. Such camps prove to be wonderful instigators of goodwill and international understanding. But unfortunately we cannot cope with the number of German volunteers (mostly boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 30) because we lack the necessary food, leaders and foreign volunteers to organise a sufficient number of workcamps. Only five such camps will be run during the summer months in the Western zones and in Berlin. Thus, while there is an urgent need, both spiritually and materially and while opportunity knocks at our door to present what I consider better ideas to many young German lads and girls, we must admit our deficiency to cope with the magnitude of our problem.

I cannot help thinking but that such deficiency may become fateful.

Heinrich Carstens