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WHY HITLER'S GENERALS ARE DESERTING

BY OTTO STRASSER

IN ESTIMATING the political crisis in Nazi Germany, the outside world is making at least two critical mistakes. First, it assumes that Adolf Hitler has taken the initiative in "revising" his military staff, whereas in truth his hand has been forced by the generals. It is they who are forsaking the Führer and not the other way around. Second, it assumes that the widening breach is the product of a hasty decision made as a result of the recent defeats in Russia. Actually, the Russian reverses have merely provided convenient excuses for political desertions that have long been ripening.

In an article in the AMERICAN MERCURY last September, I was able to report, on the basis of underground information, that "the

conflict between Hitler and the generals — between the Army and the Party — is now raging." Its ultimate goal, I asserted, was "the seizure of power by the Prussian military clique." Events have, since then, moved faster than my colleagues inside Germany had anticipated. It may now justly be stated that the shot-gun marriage of the old Prussian Junker forces and the National Socialist Party, between the old and the new imperialists, has ended in divorce. From this time forward, Hitler will have to face not only his usual political enemies — the various anti-Nazi elements which have fought him for a decade, with thousands of their number dead and over two million in the concentration camps at various times —

but the old Prussian forces. Though few in number, these latter are influential, courageous and ambitious.

The primary concern of both the Party and the Army is not the fate of Germany, but their own survival. To that end, each is now competing for support of the nation, for control of its people and its power. How rapidly this rivalry will flare into violent conflict can only be surmised, but it is significant that the struggle has broken into the open on schedule, almost within hours of the acknowledgment of the first major defeats.

For the United States, Britain and their allies—including the forces of freedom among Germans themselves—a clear-headed understanding of the internal struggle in the Reich is essential. They must not lose sight of the fact that the Prussian generals are more dangerous now that they have been dismissed than they were as commanders of armies. In being relieved of their posts, their whole energy has been directed toward the perpetuation of their power in post-war Germany. Their machinations are fraught with serious consequences for the whole world, in that they are consciously and consistently laying the groundwork for another military Reich, once

the Nazi chapter in German history has been closed.

The generals, having used Hitler and his frenzied followers, are now preparing to overthrow him. The moment seems to them too important to miss: the moment when they are certain that Germany cannot win but has not yet lost, that the Allies cannot be beaten but have not yet won. They know that public opinion in America and Britain will never entertain any suggestion of peace with Hitler. They plan, therefore, to sacrifice him at the first opportunity, hoping that the common fear of a social revolution in Europe will help them retain their own economic and political domination over Prussia and Germany. They hope, in effect, that the Allies will repeat their behavior of 1919 by striving to keep the older forces more or less in power as a guarantee against disorder and revolution.

I know specifically, for instance, that the most influential Prussian circles, centering around General Fedor von Bock, have long considered the possibility of making a man like Pastor Martin Niemöller the Reichschancellor in a post-Hitler régime. Niemöller is respected throughout the civilized world for his valorous Christian outlook, but he is decidedly not a

politician and would be putty in the skillful hands of the old Prussian clique: a perfect mask behind which ancient forces could operate.

In this they would merely be repeating the experiment with Michaelis in 1917. Michaelis, former head of the Protestant Christian Home Mission but almost unknown to the world, was Ludendorff's candidate for successor to Bethman-Hollweg and, following the launching of the U-boat campaign in February, became Chancellor for some months. Bock, I am informed from close quarters, hopes that Pastor Niemoller may serve as his Michaelis. Interestingly enough, when Michaelis proved to be an utter failure, even as a puppet, he was replaced by Count Hertling, a leader of the Catholic Party. To circumvent the failure of 1917, Bock's scheme counts on teamwork, the Catholic partner to work with Niemoller being none other than Franz von Papen.

If this, or any equivalent plan, were to develop, it would represent a far-reaching menace to the world, a menace all the greater because camouflaged with honest and trust-inspiring names. It would achieve the elimination of the Hitler Party, but would leave untouched the sources of the Prussian dynamism which has so long sought to domi-

nate the world. The international danger of Hitlerism arose, it should be remembered, less from the ideas of National Socialism than from the older Prussian idea of world ascendancy which Hitler espoused. It was that espousal which made him acceptable to the Junkers.

In fighting Hitlerism, the Allies should not forget that its deeper roots, in Prussianism, must also be destroyed.

II

What can be described as the Hitler System is made up not only of the Nazi Party, but of the centuries-old Prussian forces. Without this coalition, Hitler would never have achieved supreme power. No appraisal of Nazi Germany is realistic unless it takes into account the fact that these Prussian forces have never ceased to wield power. It was at their command that Hitler annihilated the cream of the *Sturm Abteilung* on the bloody night of June 30, 1934. It was they who, for the second time in this century, helped thwart a German urge toward social revolution by diverting the pent-up national energies to international war. Their influence has persisted, regardless of political developments on the surface, through the Army, the large

landowners and big industrialists, and through leading officials in the government departments.

The union of expediency was made possible, despite distrust on the side of the Nazis and deep contempt on the side of the Junkers, by agreement on a common goal, namely, the continued domination of Germany through Prussia, Europe through Germany, and finally (in the Hitlerian flights of fancy) domination of the planet through Europe. Beyond this one base of common ambition, however, the two groups not only hate each other, but their interests, economically, politically and socially, are poles apart. For the Prussian clique, Hitler has always been an instrument of their will and the world will make a fundamental mistake if it considers that this relationship is ended. Admittedly he has been a dangerous instrument, which at times threatened to turn on its master. The relationship might best be symbolized, psychologically, by that of a general and a corporal. General von Schleicher once summed it up when he told a group of senior officers: "I know Hitler is a swine, but he brings us the people."

The nature of their one common interest made it inevitable that each member of the partnership

would seek to save itself the moment the joint aim seemed doomed to failure. And that is the stage of present developments. The difficulties in Russia are a defeat for Hitler in the special sense that it was he who forced the campaign in defiance of the advice of every Prussian general. He reckoned on the collapse of the Bolshevik system after the capture of Moscow — but the Führer's "intuition" was not given the benefit of that test and the generals were vindicated.

As long ago as last April, in connection with the flight of Rudolf Hess, I received a detailed report to the effect that the Prussian generals were opposing a proposed offensive against Russia. They argued that even if initial successes were achieved, no decision could be reached. Since Hitler could not be dissuaded, the generals argued that every responsible German patriot must prepare for a peace as soon as the impossibility of victory in Russia was evident.

The second clash between Hitler and his Prussian generals came in November when General Walter von Brauchitsch, backed by Bock and Rundstedt, opposed the renewal of the October offensive against Moscow. They advised, instead, a strategic withdrawal to prepared winter lines, to conserve

and concentrate army strength. But Hitler dared not confess the true situation in the Russian war. Backed by men like General Alfred Jodl, he ordered a renewal of the assault on Moscow, with results that soon became only too obvious. Jodl is not a Prussian, nor has he had much staff experience. In World War I, he was a regular captain. Like so many Austrians, he has an extremely active imagination which, nourished by maps and half-digested history, slurs over difficulties such as weather and the exhaustion of troops. He is a general made to order for Hitler.

An interesting and significant feature of the Prussian generals' attitude toward Russia is its consistency over decades and even centuries. Collaboration with Russia has been a guiding principle of Junker policy which the advent of Bolshevism did not alter in the slightest. Need we recall that the Prussian General Staff, by sending Lenin through the Reich in a sealed train to the Russian border, played a major role in the Russian Revolution? Again, in 1922, the Treaty of Rapallo, which re-established Russo-German collaboration, had the support of the Junkers. Through secret clauses in that treaty, thousands of German officers went to Soviet Russia as in-

structors and incidentally gained experience with tanks and airplanes, weapons forbidden to Germany by the Versailles Treaty. German technicians organized the Russian war industries. One of my closest friends was the director-general of a German airplane factory in Russia and I know of many others who fulfilled similar capacities in both air and tank production. Finally, it was the German General Staff which backed Hitler to the hilt in his unpopular pact with Stalin in August 1939.

It would be frivolous to close our eyes to the potentialities of these facts for the future relations between the Reich and Russia, notwithstanding Stalin's undertaking not to make a separate peace with Germany. The Nazi doublecross of June 22, as the Soviet leaders know much better than other Allied leaders, was specifically Hitler's doing.

I am not sure that Harry Hopkins, in a magazine article describing his conferences with Joseph Stalin in the Kremlin, was entirely aware of the full significance of one fact to which he alludes repeatedly. I refer to the peculiarly intense concentration of Stalin's hatred upon Hitler personally. "As Stalin made clear to me," Mr. Hopkins writes, "this was not a hatred of

the German people nor of the German General Staff. The invasion was regarded in Moscow as the treachery of a partner who had suddenly revealed himself as a rabid dog." Once the unfaithful partner is eliminated, and a traditionally pro-Russian group takes over in Germany, the background will have changed greatly, perhaps decisively.

III

Some time ago I revealed information from a secret source to the effect that Heinrich Himmler had discovered a plan for a military *putsch* against Hitler after the first real defeat. Despite his vigorous counter-measures, the *putsch* is still in the making.

Whatever the timing, a seizure of power by the Junkers would be purely selfish, no matter how well disguised as national interest or how well embellished with "respectable" names to placate the non-German world. Its aim would be to perpetuate Prussian ascendancy in post-war Germany. The generals cannot afford to wait for an actual defeat or collapse of their country. They are eager to gain peace *before the complete exhaustion of Germany and the German Army*. From the expe-

rience of the last war, they know that peace cannot be gained with any advantage to themselves at the eleventh hour. The period of stalemate, before the Allied victory of which they are certain becomes too apparent, is their opportune interlude.

Hitler, however, cannot indulge in any delusions of a negotiated peace. For him this is literally a struggle to the death. The specific immediate reasons for the rift between him and the Army leaders are not especially important. If one set of pretexts were not at hand, another would have been found. The whole Junker idea is to leave Hitler in the position of sole and direct responsibility — just as they did with socialist President Ebert in 1918. They are leaving Hitler, as they once left Ebert, to shoulder the blame for events already fast unfolding, and a day of reckoning already visible on the horizon.

They chose an appropriate hour for forcing the break and maneuvering Hitler into assuming the title and responsibilities of Generalissimo. Their firm proposal was for a strategic retreat in Russia as far as Smolensk and Kiev, on the ground that the Army must have winter shelter, a shorter defense line and shorter communications lines. They knew that Hitler could

not and would not accept the proposal, because a retreat of some two hundred miles, no matter how strategic, would be regarded as a defeat at home, with repercussions which Hitler quite rightly believed he might not survive.

The generals refused the alternative plan offered by the "intuition" team of Hitler-Jodl, calling for a giant pincer movement in the Mediterranean. This plan aimed at control of the Atlantic ports of Spain and Portugal for intensification of the Battle of the Atlantic at one end, and at the other a drive through Turkey to the Mosul oil fields, from whence the German armies would threaten Russian oil sources to the north, Suez to the southwest, and India to the east in conjunction with Japan. The generals turned thumbs down on this scheme for fear of dissipating German military strength to the point where, in the event of defeat, they would be deprived of a bulwark against social upheaval. Unlike the Nazis, the Junkers cannot afford to be reckless in expending military forces because, again unlike the Nazis, they can still foresee and plan a future for themselves.

Who are the leaders of these Prussian schemers? It is well that all should know and not forget them in the crucial period ahead.

In the opening stages of the break between them and Hitler, the psychopathic manifestation of a corporal elevating himself to the exalted position of Chief of the German General Staff was interesting and curious. But that is of minor importance compared with the action of the generals and the nature of their historic cause. The leading figures, as I have already intimated, are Fedor von Bock in the military field and Franz von Papen in the political field.

Hitler's first move in the shake-up was in the nature of a squeeze-play. Brauchitsch is one of the weaker and more compromising among the Prussian generals; for that reason, the Nazis have found it easier to cooperate with him and he rose to the highest post in the Army. Much more stern and hard was his commander on the Moscow front, von Bock. In his first move, therefore, Hitler forced von Bock's dismissal — in the hope of terrifying Brauchitsch. He failed. Not the least significant feature of the whole episode is that it was the weaker Brauchitsch who first openly opposed Hitler, and when ousted, was followed by both von Bock, and von Runstedt, commander of the southern army in the Ukraine. Hitler's request that von. Leeb, who was in command on the Lenin-

grad sector, take over Brauchitsch's post was refused, with the result that a few days later Fritz von Leeb, too, was replaced.

In *History in My Time*, I told the story of the famous secret meeting of senior officers at the General Headquarters in Spa, on the night of November 8-9, 1918, when it was decided that the abdication of the Kaiser would be forced. Details of that event reached the world from those present with remarkable unanimity — with but one exception. A certain "young captain of the Crown Prince's staff" was not sworn, probably through an oversight.

He reported in writing to the Crown Prince the very important historical fact that it was von Hindenburg himself who organized the conspiracy by outlining the situation in such terms that the senior officers had no other alternative but to back his decision.

I have since learned that the "young captain of the Crown Prince's staff" was Fedor von Bock. He is one of the very few men in Germany who is on the most intimate terms with the Crown Prince. It was he who organized the Black Reichswehr in Stettin, together with the Junkers of West and East Prussia. Several times he was brought to trial, and became

known as "the most fanatical enemy of the republic." He commanded one of the German armies against Czechoslovakia and later against Poland, in both instances with such success that he was given command of the key central army in the Russian campaign. Bock hates the Nazi Party with a fanaticism equal to his earlier hatred for the Weimar Republic. A rabid monarchist, von Bock is the one man in Germany whom the world can ill afford to ignore.

Brauchitsch, though more amenable than the iron Bock, also has a record of strong anti-Nazi feelings which speaks for itself. In 1934, when relations between the Army and the Party were verging on an open break, he provoked a storm by stopping a procession of Brown Shirts in the street with a detachment of the Army. A year later, when he was stationed in East Prussia, Army units under his command clashed with the Brown Shirts and the Führer himself had to make a trip there to settle the dispute.

Most of the generals who have stood by Hitler to date, it is interesting to note, hail from elsewhere in Germany than Prussia. It does not mean that these men — such as List, Rommel, Milch — are any more favorably inclined to Hitler

and the Party. Being less politically minded than the cohesive Prussian group, they have not acted so quickly to prepare for their own survival in the political upheaval which will come with defeat. In the ascendancy now is a group of younger generals who made their reputation in the *Luftwaffe* and the Tank Corps. The most outstanding among them is perhaps the least known to the world. It is General Alfred Jodl, now personal military adviser to Hitler. The two men always confer in the Austrian dialect. Hitler has found a spirit more akin to his own in this officer who is less cold, more imaginative than the class-conscious Prussians. Jodl is probably the one general who will stick by Hitler to the bitter end.

Outside the military circles, von Papen is the foremost representative of the old Prussian group. It is not necessary to deal at length with this familiar figure. He is not only treacherous and unscrupulous, but fanatically ambitious. In his office at Ankara, somewhat removed from the close watch of Himmler and the Gestapo, he is in an extremely advantageous position. It is not an accident that most of the German peace-feelers have been found to emanate from the Turkish capital. Von Papen is

aided by another influential traitor, Dr. Meissner, who was secretary to the private cabinet of President Ebert, later of von Hindenburg, and now of Hitler. Still another figure worth watching is young Mackensen, son of the old field-marshal; formerly he was German minister to Hungary and now he is the leading under-secretary in the Foreign Office in Berlin.

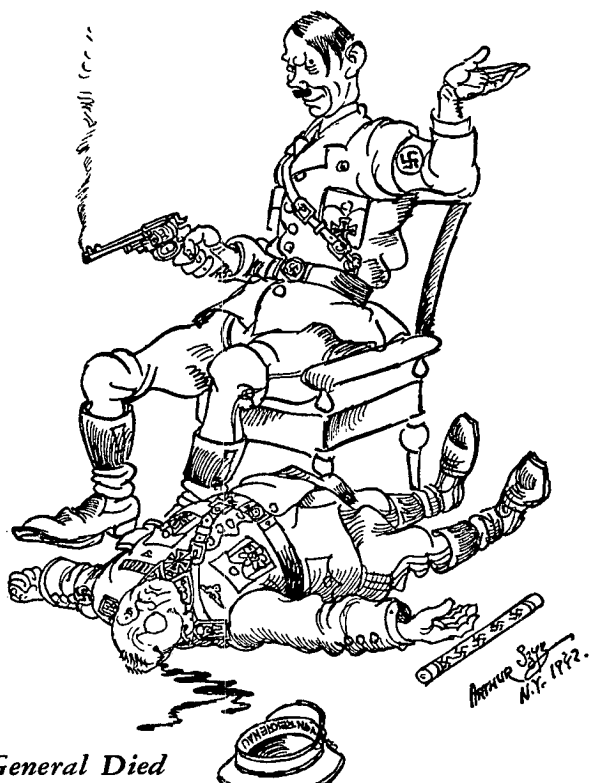
Such are the men who today personify the Junker class. Their policy is clear: They seek peace, because they know they cannot win; and they want it before Germany's strength is any further dissipated. They hope for and would prefer peace with Russia; but they would make it also with England. Convinced of a looming débâcle, the Prussian generals are pulling out, to leave all the blame with Hitler. What they know now, the German people will inevitably learn later. It is their hope that the people will then rally around them, as the group which had opposed the Russian campaign from the start.

But the peace they seek would be only an armistice at best. For centuries the Junkers have held Prussia within their grip. Through Prussia they have come to dominate Germany. Now they have sought once more, through Ger-

many, to dominate Europe. Should they survive, they will try again. As long as the Allies never lose sight of these developments and their significance, the advantages can only lie with them.

The break between Army and Party has loosed a thousand fears in the public mind of Germany. The mounting unrest has caused

Hitler to turn his bitterest invective on those "traitors" at home who would stir up trouble. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the weakest point in the Axis front is inside Germany. Any intelligent Allied strategy must take that into consideration — and act upon it. It offers hope for a quicker and less costly victory.



*The General Died
of Apoplexy*

► *The drama — and the tragedy —
of a career under dictatorship.*

MEET THE REAL LITVINOFF

BY WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

THE portly, sixty-five-year-old Maxim Litvinoff, new Soviet Ambassador to the United States and now the toast of America's best capitalist society, is a man who has good reason to remember the adage concerning the ill wind that blows no one good. Only a year ago he was a broken man politically, a scapegoat for the abandonment of that policy of anti-fascism and collective security which he had promoted. Most of the prominent figures in the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, the department he had directed for a decade, were listed among those dead and missing in the purge of "traitors" and "mad dogs." He had been dropped from the Central Committee of the Communist Party, with a spiteful note about alleged incompetence and neglect of duty. The immediate past had been gloomy. The future seemed black and unpromising. Then Hitler hurled his forces against the Soviet Union. Stalin hastily remembered that Litvinoff was his best, if not his only surviving, effective public relations man

for the democratic countries whose support was again urgently needed. He was taken out of the attic, dusted off and put on the microphone to broadcast a message of good cheer, good will and "let bygones be bygones" to England. And later, he was given the strategically important diplomatic post at Washington.

The luck that stood by Litvinoff in his adventures both with Tsarist police and with Soviet purges remained constant during his trip to America. He passed through Singapore just before that Far Eastern outpost of the British Empire became the center of a war zone and turned up safe and sound in Washington to announce the Soviet determination to concentrate its war effort against Germany and to explain Soviet unwillingness to take on Japan.

There are two Litvinoffs, a legend and a living man. The legend depicts a statesman of great independent authority, a doughty champion of indivisible peace and collective security, a crusading anti-