

OUR MISTAKES IN GERMANY

BY S. MILES BOUTON

AMERICAN military occupation in Germany is well into its third year. In our zone, as in the others, Military Government has plenary powers regarding every activity of the conquered. It makes the laws and it administers them, either directly or through citizens of the conquered nation. It supervises the German courts and, where necessary, creates its own courts. It regulates all phases of business, industry, education, housing and communication. American Military Government holds all the power and bears all the responsibility. What is the situation for which it must be held accountable?

"In some respects the Germans are facing their most disastrous days at the present moment." This statement was made by General Lucius D. Clay, American Military Governor, in a speech last February 3 at Stuttgart. He was addressing a mob of Germans who had protested against food rations that were hardly above the starvation level. He was admitting, in other words, that after 32 months of occupation, and after hun-

dreds of millions of dollars had been poured in, conditions in the American zone had grown worse rather than better.

Reporting from Germany has been inadequate. Few of the American journalists who know Germany intimately from long residence and study, who are masters of the language, and who understand the German mores and thinking habits, have been put to work. Several have offered to serve with the State Department and Military Government in any capacity, but their offers have always been rejected by subordinates who could not understand that they were not merely "looking for a job." Enough, however, has been disclosed by such reporting as has been done to justify Robert M. LaFollette's statement, before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee in January, that Military Government's policies in Germany had been "ill-conceived." If any competent observers not connected with the government have contradicted Mr. LaFollette I have overlooked their statements, despite

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a wide reading of our daily and periodical press.

There is no longer any question that our rule in Germany has been a well-nigh total failure. The men who set our Military Government policy know themselves that it has been a failure. They have not, of course, specifically owned up to their errors; but they have admitted it nevertheless by reversing virtually every one of our major policies in Germany. The reversal is only just getting under way now, and many of the older policies have not been completely jettisoned. Nevertheless, in a halting, fumbling manner, we are beginning to repair the damage done in two years of sheer folly. Some searching questions are being asked about those years.

Why, for example, did more than two years elapse before the Germans were permitted to help themselves, if only in a small way, by exporting goods for which labor and raw material had existed from the beginning — glassware, porcelain, wooden toys and other articles of wood?

Why was an order issued last October by the American (and British) authorities for the destruction of nearly seven hundred more industrial plants, more than half of which were conceded to be incapable of producing war materials? Labor which could have been engaged in useful work had to be diverted to the dismantling process. The machinery and other equipment are now being sent abroad as reparations. If the plants had been

put into operation where they stood, reparations paid from their output would have been available much sooner, and without the added expense involved in dismantling, shipping and re-installing their equipment. Government spokesmen have defended the order, but independent, informed observers, representing a variety of leading newspapers, condemned it.

It was reported later that the program for destruction of the plants was not to be carried out as rigorously as had originally been planned. The excesses of the denazification policy, which will be referred to later, are also being modified. The trial of the Krupp industrialists has collapsed. The decartelization plans, apparently never seriously put into effect, are being abandoned in part. The agreement to hold back Germany's industrial productivity to a stated figure is about to be dropped. All along the line one can sense the beginnings of a confession that our policies and their administration have been failures.

II

What policies of our Department of State and Military Government, and what mistakes of administration, are responsible for the fact that so little has been accomplished?

The blunders have been partly psychological, partly economic and — this can fairly be said — partly philosophical. We have been un-Christian, motivated by a spirit of revenge. Edmund Burke told the House of

Commons more than a century-and-a-half ago that he knew no way of drawing up an indictment against a whole people. But the occupying powers and their governments have tried to do just that in Germany. Anglo-American jurisprudence knows nothing of collective guilt, yet that concept has been held by the victors over the Reich and has still not been abandoned.

A psychological blunder of enormous stupidity has been committed in the "re-education" and "democratizing" programs. A large majority of the Germans has been anti-Semitic for many years, and reports agree that anti-Semitism today is stronger and more widespread than ever before.¹ An intelligent policy would have recognized this fact and would have refrained from exacerbating that majority. But our Military Government has employed an amazingly large number of Jewish educators in its democratizing plan. There is no question of the standing and ability of these men, but it should be obvious that they cannot hope to gain the respect and consideration of their German "pupils." A precise parallel would be presented if an enemy government of occupation in the United States employed mostly Negroes to re-educate the whites of the Deep South.

Another blunder with grave consequences, one responsible for helping delay Germany's recovery, was the

agreement that she should not be permitted to recover economically more rapidly than the other states of Western Europe. The economic level and standard of living of a designated prewar year (1932) might not be exceeded. At the three-power and five-power conferences in Brussels and London last March, however, it was finally recognized that without German recovery there could be no general recovery. Even France has now seen the light, and has agreed that the western zones of Germany shall be included in the benefits of ERP. Only persons ignorant of the potentialities of German science, industry, efficiency and willingness to work hard can believe that the country can be held down indefinitely to a minor rôle in world affairs.

An American bishop who spent some time in Germany last fall and winter came back to report that the chief reason for the postwar débâcle was that "there are few German leaders. Most Germans of leadership qualities are in jail." This was somewhat exaggerated, of course, but it directs attention to what, in the long run, will be demonstrated to have been the most harmful blunder of all. This is the denazification folly, with its corollary — the vain belief that a people's folkways and mores can be altered, and its whole psyche changed, by foreign teaching and indoctrination. No democratic government can be imposed in permanence by victors on a conquered country. This idea, which is now obviously weakening,

¹ See "German Anti-Semitism Today" by Richard Hanser, in the April 1948 AMERICAN MERCURY.

that the Germans could be re-educated to democracy, that they could be "democratized" by foreigners, shows plainly how little the men of the occupation knew of German history, the German mentality and even of human nature generally.

When Adolf Hitler came to power, Dr. Joseph Goebbels summoned all foreign correspondents to his Propaganda Ministry and made a long speech to them. Most of them, he said, had been writing against Hitler and National Socialism. Now, however, the Nazis were in power, "and you will have to change your minds." In reporting this incident to their newspapers, most of the correspondents did not fail to comment acidly on Goebbels' calm assumption that men could be made to change their opinions by order.

"He that complies against his will is of his own opinion still," wrote Samuel Butler some three centuries ago. That is elementary wisdom, but the Nazi leaders disregarded it by throwing tens of thousands of Germans into concentration camps, torturing, killing and bullying them in order to make them "change their minds." It has been equally disregarded by the formulators and administrators of our occupation policies.

The Military Government began by banning from any occupation except manual labor all Germans who had joined the National Socialist Party before May 1, 1937. Those who joined after that date were given a

chance to vindicate themselves, those who joined before could not do so unless their appeals were passed on by the highest authorities. In the main, only physicians have been exempted. Educators, scientists, judges, men prominent in business and industry have been interned, waiting for trials by German courts whose possible verdicts of acquittal can still be reversed by American authorities — another breach of the Anglo-American principle that no man may be placed in jeopardy twice for the same offense.

Consider the case of Fritz Kuhn. The former leader of the German-American Bund, who escaped from Dachau and was only recently apprehended, was tried last April *in absentia* and sentenced to prison. Not only may a defendant in a criminal case in the United States not be tried *in absentia*, but even the passing of sentence on him when he is not present in the courtroom is reversible error.

The reason for using the May 1937 date to separate the sheep from the goats is that before then it was necessary to make formal application for membership in the National Socialist Party. Our authorities naively assumed that all Germans who became members before May 1937 did so because they wanted a totalitarian government; because they wanted, in Hitler's phrase, to "see heads roll"; because they wanted political opponents imprisoned, tortured and killed; because they wanted the Jews deprived of citizenship and all human

rights. In brief, because they desired just what they subsequently got.

Some did desire that, of course, but observers who watched the events of the years from 1918 to March 1933 do not believe that the majority of Germans were so perverse as to long for the régime which they finally ended up with. They believed Hitler's oft-repeated avowals that he intended to come to power "only by legal means." They did not want the Jews exterminated, though probably a majority welcomed the prospect that they would be subjected to some disabilities.

This, of course, does not justify their joining the Nazis, but at least it explains their actions. Millions of Germans joined the Party not because they wanted the reign of felony, murder, torture and aggression that came, but for reasons which would have had a strong appeal to Americans in the same circumstances. The Nazis had been in power more than four years on May 1, 1937. In that period tens of thousands of German officials, judges, teachers, civil servants and others had been faced with the choice of "changing their minds" or being, at the best, pauperized, at the worst interned or killed.

A friend of mine of many years' standing was the owner of a small factory producing machine tools. He belonged to the Democratic party and was, by German standards, a believer in democracy and a supporter of the Republic. "What am I to do?" he asked me in the spring of 1934.

"I have a wife and three children. If I remain outside the Party I shall lose everything. The Brown Shirts keep coming to my factory and warning me that there will be trouble if I don't join."

This was the situation of a good many Germans. I know personally scores of men who faced the same alternatives as this man — become a Nazi or become a pauper. In the background loomed the concentration camp for persons merely suspected of not being *politisch zuverlässig*, i.e., politically dependable, by Nazi standards. No American who did not live in Germany in those days can realize what bravery and steadfastness were required to risk even the suspicion of opposition to Hitler's régime.

III

It is perhaps only natural that Americans, convinced that a republican form of government is always the best, welcomed the proclamation of the German Republic and the end of kings, dukes and princes. What they did not know, and refused to be told, was that a republican form of government was unsuited to the German mentality. Moreover, it came too suddenly. When Hermann Goering, testifying at the Nuremberg trial, declared that he regarded the Republic as inimical to the best interests of Germany, he spoke for the greater part of the German people, and certainly for the overwhelming majority of the educated classes. There never was a convinced republican majority

in Germany. Of the parties comprising the coalitions which, for most of the Republic's life, held the reins of government, only two — the Social Democrats and the tiny Democratic party — were republican at heart. The two Roman Catholic parties — Center and Bavarian People's party — were avowed monarchists to the end. The People's party, an occasional coalition partner, headed by Gustav Stresemann, "placed itself on the basis of the facts," as the current phrase had it, but it accepted the Republic only as a transition. It preferred a limited monarchy.

The men responsible for setting the May 1937 date did not know, or did not evaluate intelligently, one of the factors that played an important part in moving millions of Germans to join the Nazis before that date — this despite the fact that it played a larger rôle in our own zone than in any other except the small French zone. Roughly one third of the German people were Roman Catholics. In Bavaria, in the United States zone, two thirds of the people professed that faith. They predominated in the entire zone and made up as much as 80 per cent of the population in some parts of the Rhineland.

The Bavarian government played a leading part in facilitating Hitler's accession to power. The National Socialist Party had its headquarters in Munich. The state government furthered its rise in both legal and illegal ways. The two Clerical parties in the Reichstag voted in March 1933, with

no abstentions, for Hitler's Enabling Act, which dealt the death blow to the Republic.

In view of the hold of the Catholic Church on its members, it was only natural that hundreds of thousands of Catholics should follow the lead of the two Catholic parties that represented them in the Reichstag, and voted, nearly three and a half years before May 1937, to end the Republic and hand all power over to Hitler. And were not many high officials of the Nazis also Catholics? Franz von Papen, chief owner of *Germania*, the leading Catholic daily, and one of the most prominent laymen of the Church, was a Papal Chamberlain. He signed the Concordat with the Vatican as Nazi Ambassador, and said of it: "The Third Reich is the first power which not only recognizes but puts into practice the high principles of the Papacy." That Concordat was signed a full four years before the arbitrary 1937 date set by our Military Government. Dozens of men in high positions in the National Socialist Party were Catholics. It is not to be wondered at that a great number of German Catholics followed the example set by them. It would have been astonishing if they had not.

IV

At the end of January this year Pastor Martin Niemöller, who had previously been calling on his people to repent, issued a pastoral letter forbidding the clergy of his synod to act as informers or witnesses against Ger-

mans accused of Nazi membership. He declared that

our people have been led not down the path of atonement but down the road to reprisal, and the new seed of hatred which has been sown has grown profusely. The old system of guilt of kith and kin has returned. Tens of thousands have lost their work and daily bread to await in internment camps either sentencing or liberation.

General Lucius D. Clay rebuked Pastor Niemoeller for interfering with American policies. However, seven weeks later Francis E. Sheehan, acting director of the Hessian State Military Government, sent to Niemoeller and the Catholic bishops of Mainz and Limburg a letter endorsing church proposals for easing the denazification program and bringing it to an early end. A dispatch from Frankfurt-on-Main noted that this conciliatory attitude was "a turn-about from the original stand expressed by General Clay and many of his subordinates." Sheehan endorsed church proposals to ease employment sanctions on convicted minor Nazis, especially those in key positions, and to make softening measures retroactive. Internees held for months in labor camps without hearing or trial will be paid for their work there and amnesty will be given returned prisoners of war — which disclosed, for the first time, that soldiers who were inducted into the German Army had been punished for fighting against the Allies.

Personal letters from men and women in all parts of Germany have

been telling me for two years — what I did not need to be told — that Pastor Niemoeller spoke by the book when he declared that the denazification program had sown only a seed of hatred.

The long list of blunders included one more, now confessed and abandoned, but important in its bearing on the whole occupation policy. Former directors of the great Krupp works were placed on trial on charges of conspiracy to conduct a war of aggression. If the United States were ruled as was Nazi Germany, if it were engaged in war, and if a refusal to manufacture weapons of war and contribute money for it would mean the concentration camp or even death, one might wonder how many of our industrialists would have refused to obey orders. This quite apart from the fact that patriotism is not the monopoly of any country. "My country right or wrong" is a motto not unknown to Americans.

The decision to prosecute these men was not only indefensible, but also without foundation in either law or common sense. The trial went on for four months. Then it was suddenly ended, the three American judges admitting that the conspiracy charge could not be proved. They intimated that the defendants would be tried on further charges, but it is safe to predict that it will never be done. However, further grievances have been created and nourished.

The Catholic bishops of France

united in February in an appeal to the government to abandon the trials and pending trials of thousands of persons accused of collaborating with the Vichy Government. "We are convinced," said the appeal, "that three years after the liberation the time has come for measures to put an end to the anxiety and fears that keep the country in a permanent state of unrest."

Unrest will continue also in Germany and hatred will increase unless the occupying authorities abandon vengeance as a guiding motive and abandon the idea of collective guilt. During the first two years of the occupation all reports agreed that few Germans could be found who would admit that they had favored Hitler. Today the reports say that the percentage of those who openly declare that Hitler was right is increasing steadily. A dispatch from Berlin in January reported that a poll of 10,000 Germans in the Ruhr area disclosed that only 3.5 per cent favored the

United States form of government, while more than 75 per cent wanted a centralized governmental structure with more power at the top. This is a plain attestation of the failure of Anglo-American efforts to "democratize" and "reeducate" the people. It should astonish no one who knows the Germans.

The events of the last few months, with their sharp changes of front, amount plainly to a tacit admission that grave mistakes have been committed both in formulating and executing our policies toward a defeated Germany. The including of the United States, British and French zones in the European Recovery program is, from a purely materialistic viewpoint, especially significant. It should be disclosed before the end of the current year whether the damage done by mistaken policies was irreparable. There is as yet no adequate picture of the whole situation in Western Germany upon which to base any prophecy.

LAST WORDS OF A COLLEGE PRESIDENT

BY CHARLES ANGOFF

I walked and sat erect for thirty years,
A proud merchant of correct ideas,
Cold gladness and unsullied decorum.
I fashioned cautious men without souls
And brittle women with measured passions.

Behold a traitor
To his Creator.