

"The Whole Town Is Sore"

How New Yorkers Took the Pogrom

RUTH McKENNEY

IT WAS Thursday, Nov. 10, 1938. I walked down lower Fifth Avenue in the warm late-morning sunshine. The stately buildings lining the broad street had a freshly scrubbed look in the fine fall day. A boy in a starched, very clean white jacket stood in front of the Longchamps window, pasting up the sign "Luncheon." Three taxicab drivers gossiped at a hack stand and their voices sounded good-natured and pleased as I passed. A pretty girl ran for a bus, her high-heeled slippers clack-clacking on the sidewalk, her face all flushed, her fur neckpiece flying. A white-haired gentleman in a bowler tramped past me, swinging a shiny cane. The discreet sign on the First Presbyterian Church advised passers-by that the choir would sing an all-Bach program the following Sunday.

I turned into Eleventh Street. The sidewalks were nearly empty, and the street was very quiet, almost serene. The little boy from my grocery store trundled his little green cart past me and paused to tip his hat and smile very broadly. Halfway down the street I noticed that Helen, a friend of mine, had her baby's carriage out on the little balcony. I stopped to climb up the three stone steps and glance at the sleeping child. Helen saw me from her window and she opened the casement to bid me good-morning and report that Peter, her son and only child, had gained four ounces and been promoted to strained carrots. I offered my profoundest congratulations, and set off for Sixth Avenue, feeling warm and good about Peter, and the fine morning, and New York City, and the world.

It was a little after eleven when I reached the corner. Mr. Salvin was putting out the first editions of the afternoon papers. Mr. Salvin is an old acquaintance of mine. His boy delivers the *Times* to our door every morning, and every Thursday I stop to pick up the four weekly magazines. Usually Mr. Salvin has a good or bad word to say for an article in the *New Republic*, a cartoon in *NEW MASSES*, the cover of the *New Yorker*. On this morning, Nov. 10, 1938, a Thursday, Mr. Salvin handed me the thick bundle of magazines without a word, not even a good-morning. Puzzled, and a little annoyed, I followed Mr. Salvin out of his dark shop. At the street newsstand, Mr. Salvin went back to his work, stacking up the fresh editions of the *Post* and *World-Telegram*, gathering up the left-over *Herald Tribunes*. I hesitated a moment, watching him. Mr. Salvin's face was entirely without expression. His gray mustaches drooped over his tight mouth. His rounded, tired shoulders were relaxed.

Then Mr. Salvin glanced up at me. His eyes were full of terrible sorrow, so that I felt a thrill of shock.

"Mr. Salvin!" I said stupidly, and then I was afraid. A little while ago the wife of Mr. Ginsburg, who runs the laundry, died, and when he came to tell me my laundry would be late because of the funeral, his eyes had been like this.

Mr. Salvin put his finger on the black headline running two decks across the *World-Telegram* and then I read for the first time: NAZIS LOOT, BURN, TERRORIZE GERMAN JEWS; 10,000 ARRESTED; MANY DEAD.

"Pogrom," Mr. Salvin said in a very low voice. "When I was a little boy, we had a pogrom in my town in Russia. But it was not so bad as this."

I moved over beside him, picked up the paper. The *El* thundered by overhead, drowned out Mr. Salvin's words. I saw his lips moving and his face contorted with anger and sorrow.

When I went home, I hesitated at the door to my husband's study. He is a writer, and we have a strict house rule about conversation during working hours. Yet I needed to tell this thing. I opened the door, and he glanced up from his typewriter, his face annoyed.

"But look," I said, holding up the newspaper black with headlines.

I watched him as his eyes moved over the terrible words. He took the paper from me then and sank back in his chair, spreading the sheets out over his desk. I stood beside him, my hand on his shoulder, and we read together. Finally he put the flat of his hand down on the headlines. After awhile we sat down to lunch, but neither of us felt very much like eating, and my husband said, "The food makes me sick." He pushed away the plate.

After awhile he went to the radio. The woman upstairs was dialing her telephone and at first the announcer's words were filled with buzzing. Then suddenly it came clear: "... and scenes of indescribable horror, flames in the night, women screaming, children herded into police stations. Reports say ..."

"Turn it off," I said sharply.

"No," my husband said. "I want to hear it, all of it."

At three o'clock I went out on the streets again. At the Seventh Avenue subway entrance several men stood in front of the corner newsstand, reading the headlines. They read silently, and as they turned away, one by one, from the little stand and started down the

stairs, their faces were drawn and they had a haggard look. On the train everyone bent over his newspaper and a woman across from me moved her lips, reading half-aloud. Her face was deeply absorbed. Two schoolgirls stood at the end of the train, tittering. Their silly, empty laughter made me feel irritable. I wanted to go up to them and say, "Stop laughing. You are old enough to know something terrible has happened. Stop tittering." And I was not the only one who felt their vacant giggles. Men looked up from their papers and stared hard at the foolish girls, the woman across from me stopped her reading to regard them with anger.

At Times Square the train emptied, and I started down the long walk to the shuttle. The air was close and sticky. People hurried past me, brushing my coat sleeve. I passed the flower stand and the cloying smell of the gardenias made me feel a little sick. Just before I reached the wooden shuttle platform I heard a loud voice behind me, shouting words that I couldn't quite understand. I stopped. The men and women rushing past me hesitated, too, and turned back. The loud, wild voice sounded again above the constant noise of the hurrying restless crowd. "Jew," I heard, but the rest of the words were indistinct. I began to retrace my steps, going toward the huge voice. In a moment I was in the center of a pressing crowd. A man stepped on the heel of my shoe and I turned to half snarl, "Don't push." My words were blanketed out again by the voice, and as we turned into the corridor along the subway platform, we saw him.

The man was big, nearly two hundred pounds, and tall. He wore good clothing, a handsome, warm overcoat, a dark suit, and blue tie and shirt. His felt hat was dark brown and nearly new. The man's face was fat and heavy, and just now it was very red. He was exceedingly drunk, and all his fine clothing seemed slightly disordered, the overcoat unbuttoned, the suit jacket rumpled, the hat pushed back on his bald head.

"The dirty Jews!" the man roared. "Got what was coming to them. Dirty Jews!"

The crowd circled the man completely.

"You're a dirty Jew," the drunken man shouted, pointing at a little man with a neatly trimmed Vandyke beard standing in front of me. "Lemme pass. Out of my way, dirty Jew."

The crowd fell back. The man staggered through the rows of people, stopping after a few feet. "We oughta do it in this country!" His voice wavered. His next few words were slobbered, undecipherable.

"Shame!" a woman's voice cried. I couldn't see this woman, she was smaller than the men in front of her. But the voice was sharp. "Shame!"

The crowd began to murmur. A man beside me stepped toward the drunk. "I oughta slam you in the jaw." The drunk wheeled, his face contorted in menace.

"Yuh dirty Jew!"

A policeman pushed through the crowd, shouting, "Break it up, break it up."

The drunk felt he had found an ally. "I bet

you aren't a lousy Jew bastard," he said to the policeman. The policeman's face went red with anger.

"You're unner arrest!" he said.

The drunk began to cry, his large face sagging. "Don' arres' me, officer." Suddenly he stopped weeping. He shouted to the crowd. "It's them Jews that done it all. The Jews run Wall Street."

The policeman grabbed the drunk by the arm and I turned away, with the rest of the crowd, feeling my face stiff, and the muscles around my mouth aching.

When I got to my meeting I felt wornout. The other writers on the committee talked and the words "protest," and "signatures," and

"petition" went around the circle and back.

"Look at this," Joe said, and the tone of his voice, its sharp disgust, clicked against the weariness in my mind. I looked up. He was holding a magazine called the *Patriot Digest*. He turned its pages slowly. The men in the room put down their cigarettes, bent over to see better. The room fell silent. A man sighed. Joe said, "Look!" He pointed to a cartoon. The picture showed a huge figure with a hooked nose and a vicious face, terrorizing two smaller figures, a man and a woman, labeled, "American Labor."

Joe put down the magazine. "They sell it on all the newsstands of New York." He shuffled a pile of literature, pulled out *Social Justice*. "Coughlin," Joe said. He held up the

paper, spreading it out across his chest. "The Protocols of Zion," the black type said.

I went home in a taxicab because I felt so tired. The driver said, "What a hell of a thing they're doing in Germany."

"Yes," I answered. I didn't want to talk. But the driver went on.

"I ain't a Jew, lady," he said, "but, by God, my fingers itch to get over there and clean up on them cowardly punks."

"Yes," I said.

"This whole town is sore," the hackie said. "Every fare I've had today has said something to me about it. That don't usually happen, even about the elections."

I saw that he meant it very much and I felt better.



"It's a nice place when it's fixed up, Herr Lindbergh. The last tenant let it get a bit run down."

Mischa Richter



Fred Ellis

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Humanity Against Fascism

THE response of American public opinion to the Nazi pogroms was immediate, vigorous, and unanimous. No responsible newspaper or person in this country has come forward to extenuate fascism's enormous crime against humanity. When President Roosevelt declared that he could "scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization," he gave forceful expression to what most Americans were thinking. The recall of Ambassador Wilson and Commercial Attaché Douglas Miller from Berlin was a concrete manifestation of our desire to quarantine a government which could so callously deprive hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings of their livelihood and civil rights. Few Americans lamented the consequent withdrawal of Nazi Ambassador Dieckhoff from Washington.

The character of the American response to the ghastly treatment of Jews and Catholics in Germany was distinctly heartening. It was a dramatic contrast to the confusion and defeatism which spread in some circles after the Munich betrayal. Within a few weeks the spirit of opposition to fascism has stiffened considerably. The fatal illusion that Hitler could be appeased has to a great extent been dissipated. The dangerous mood engendered in some people by Munich, the mood of defeatism, has given way to a determination to act militantly in behalf of democracy and peace. A positive, firm, and unmistakable note has been struck, as Ambassador Dieckhoff will no doubt be obliged to inform his bloodthirsty master. In reading the press comments in France, England, and America, one realizes that Hitler has at last met a solid wall of resistance with which he will have to reckon in the future. The pogroms have underlined the meaning of Munich. Less than two months after the

great betrayal, the Daladier-Bonnet government is under severe fire, and Chamberlain can already look back on four parliamentary by-elections in which he must read the repudiation of the English electorate.

But the fight has only begun. The wanton assault on the Jews is by no means over. The Manchester *Guardian's* diplomatic correspondent reported this week that he had learned "reliably" that 200 German Jews had been executed at the Buchenwald concentration camp. *Der Angriff*, organ of Propaganda Minister Goebbels, announces preparations to drive Jews from their homes throughout the Reich. "It is officially estimated," says *Der Angriff*, "that 8,000 homes in Berlin alone will be vacated because Jews in the future will be unable to afford the expense of the homes. Large apartments probably will be partitioned among Germans." While Hitler's conspicuous silence made the headlines, Joachim von Ribbentrop jeered at "the hostile world" during the funeral services for Ernst vom Rath. Nor has there been any let-up in the attacks on Catholics. Indeed, this has been extended to an attack on German Protestants, who have been forbidden to use the name "Jehovah" or the names of the Old Testament prophets. The Nazis have promised to burn "disobedient" Protestant churches just as they burned Jewish synagogues.

No action has as yet been taken by our government to suspend trade relations with Germany. An embargo is the obvious step that must be taken to make effective our universal indignation at the Nazi atrocities. As we pointed out last week, such an embargo is provided for under Section 338 of the Tariff Law. Many firms have already canceled contracts with Germany on their own initiative. This action should be made official. We urge our readers once again to demand the enforcement of a trade embargo and to strengthen the boycott against German goods.

The refugee problem is now a pressing matter which will have to be dealt with immediately and realistically. President Roosevelt is to be congratulated upon his decision to extend the stay of 15,000 German and Austrian refugees who are in this country on a temporary basis. A logical corollary to this decision would be the liberalization of our immigration laws. The quotas on fascist countries should be raised. But it must be remembered that unilateral action constitutes no solution to the refugee problem. It is a world problem, and it must be faced as such. We favor the calling of an immediate international conference, which would include the Soviet Union, to discuss coordinated plans for removing and settling the victims of fascist oppression. The problem

cannot be left to Mr. Chamberlain, who is famous for his "realistic solutions." Former plans for refugees were not based on this new and overwhelming situation. The new situation demands a new plan.

In the meantime, the struggle against fascism must be intensified. As long as fascism is allowed to go unchecked, we shall be faced with problems of this kind. Any concession to fascism, in any sphere, is a concession to fascism's racial policy. We have been saying this for years, but this is a truth which is only now becoming apparent to the entire population. We are not faced with a temporary situation, but with a problem which will disappear only with the disappearance of fascism. With an outraged public opinion against it, fascism is already on the defensive, despite its victory at Munich.

CIO Goes Forward

THE most sensible, courageous, and progressive national convention of a trade-union federation ever held in the United States finished its business last week. The Congress of Industrial Organizations worked behind a smokescreen of misrepresentation laid down by the nation's newspapers, but a sober appraisal of the convention decisions shows clearly that the CIO is on the march for a strong, united union movement and a progressive America. Consider the action of the CIO convention on:

Unity.—David Dubinsky made all the headlines with his loud announcement that his International Ladies' Garment Workers Union would eschew the Pittsburgh meeting because the convention would sabotage labor peace. But the CIO conclave actually brought labor peace nearer, when it wildly applauded President Roosevelt's unity plea and voted to press for any peace plan that did not seek to destroy industrial unions and labor strength.

Any sensible approach to the labor peace situation will indicate that the CIO convention makes labor unity more probable. William Green and the AFL executive council have long been offering the CIO a Munich peace—pardon for the original unions summarily and illegally expelled by the AFL and the hatchet, in so many words, for all the new organizations in the union movement, with their millions of members. But now the old and the new CIO unions can no longer be separated by AFL "peace-makers." Now the new Congress of Industrial Organizations can meet on equal terms with the AFL executive council, seeking not "forgiveness" for part of the group, but just peace for all. The friendly and even enthusiastic reception by the Pittsburgh delegates of the dozens of speeches emphasizing