

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Statement, concerning Mrs. Margot von Opel.

Mann, Klaus

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Statement,
concerning Mrs. Margot von Opel,

The first time the name of Margot von Opel was mentioned in my presence was about nine years ago, in Europe. She was referred to as an elegant, attractive woman, who was a great friend of Erich Maria Remarque, the author of "Nothing New From the Western Front."

I did not know Mrs. von Opel in Europe.

I met her when she arrived in this country accompanied by a great friend of mine, Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, a Swiss girl married to a French diplomat. Miss Schwarzenbach (to use her ~~rather~~ maidenname) is descended from one of the best families in Switzerland and has a fine reputation as a writer and journalist. Her ardent~~ly~~ anti-Nazi feelings are beyond any doubt: she has expressed them in innumerable articles and manifestos. Now, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, who happens to be an old acquaintance of my sister Erika as well, kept assuring us that her new friend, Margot von Opel, was as anti-Hitler as we are, and altogether an excellent person. However, we remained suspicious, mainly because of an interview, which Fritz von Opel gave ~~to the newspapermen~~ on occasion of his arrival in this country. This interview seemed to us, euphemistically spoken, very awkward, if not ~~demerit~~ outright objectionable from a democratic point of view. So my sister Erika consistently refused to meet the wife of the man who had made those statements.

As for myself, I was presented to Mrs. von Opel, about two years ago, on occasion of a theater party arranged by Annemarie Schwarzenbach. We saw a show together - the two ladies, myself and a friend of mine, whose identity I cannot recall. (I think it was Dr. Martin Gumpert.) Afterwards we had drinks together. I rather liked Mrs. von Opel. As Miss Schwarzenbach had told me in advance, she was full of horror and indignation as regards Hitler and his régime.

During the following months I saw Mrs. von Opel several times, mostly together with Miss Schwarzenbach or in order to discuss with her the various worries Miss Schwarzenbach's health caused among her friends. I never met nor did I care to meet Mr. von Opel (who, incidentally, was not on very intimate terms with Annemarie Schwarzenbach, either.)

I think it was ~~in~~ ^{January} about November, 1940, that Miss Schwarzenbach returned to Europe (from where she subsequently undertook an extensive journey to the Belgium Congo.) Yet I continued to see Mrs. von Opel, if only in considerable intervals. I suppose that I saw her about ten or eleven times throughout the fourteen months since Miss Schwarzenbach left.

I always enjoyed being with her. She is charming company - very intelligent, broad-minded, lively and cosmopolitan. Her political attitude seems completely sincere. In her letters to me as well as in her conversation she stressed again and again her implacable, hatred of Nazism.

Mrs. Opel asked me several times for drinks and twice or three times for dinner in her apartment at the Hotel Pierre or, later, at the Del Monico.

I don't think she led a very social life in general. At any rate, I did not meet her friends, except those whom she had met through Miss Schwarzenbach and most of them were my own friends as well. Dr. Martin Gumpert (the writer and physician, author of "First Papers" and other books) was repeatedly present when I came to see Mrs. von Opel. If I am not mistaken, ^{was in his medical care.} ~~She treated her as a doctor.~~ The only personal friend of Mrs. von Opel I met was the English gentleman who talked to me this morning from Mr. Kreset's office. (I saw him two or three times but am unaware of his background or activities. Nor can I recall his name.)

It chanced several months ago that I made the acquaintance of Fritz von Opel - almost against my will. He just dropped by, in Mrs. von Opel's apartment, while I happened to be around. I stayed only another quarter-of-an-hour, after his arrival. I have no reason to distrust the man nor

did I find him particularly unpleasant. It's just that there is nothing we have in common.

I saw him only one other time when I had a date with his wife to see a film and have dinner. ^{With us} ~~There~~ was a ~~young~~ man called Sergey Sax, who seems on intimate terms with the Opels. I had known him many years ago - first as a young man in Munich, then as a stage director in Berlin and Frankfort-on-Maine. He is the stepson of a lady who used to know my family in Munich. Her name is Mrs. von Oldenburg. I think it is her husband who runs a publishing house in Munich, which, I am told, is Nazi. When I asked Mr. Sax some question concerning his stepmother, he flatly denied the relationship. This struck me as somewhat puzzling. Besides, I have no idea as to ^{his} ~~her~~ opinions or activities. ~~of him~~

The evening was not a big success. I felt that it may be a waste of time to see much more of Fritz von Opel and people like Sergey Sax. That is to say that I virtually stopped seeing Mrs. von Opel as well. However, we had several telephone conversations before she left for Miami. I called her up when I had word from Miss Schwerzenbach, who ~~is~~ still is in Africa. We wanted to make a date - Mrs. von Opel and I - but it never worked out, any more. I remember that she once asked me why I had turned so reserved and that I told her, quite frankly, that I did not see much point in my sitting about with Herr von Opel. She said she was surprised to hear that and asked me if I didn't think her husband utterly inoffensive. I said that he probably is, but that I still wasn't so very eager to see him.

I had one letter from Mrs. von Opel since she left for the South. She told me how dreary it was down there, and that she was worried about the progress of the war. "If Hitler actually wins," she wrote me, "I am certainly not going to survive it."

The next thing I heard was the news of Herr von Opel's arrest. I did not

know whether his wife was arrested too. I am sorry to learn that she is. Not only do I like her as a stimulating, amiable person; I can also testify to her character. She has been very ^{Kind to} ~~good for~~ a Jewish refugee girl from Vienna, as I happen to know. And when I told her ~~some~~ ^{Some} about ~~the~~ ^{worries I had on account} financial ~~trouble~~ of a magazine I am running (a literary monthly called DECISION, published here, in New York) she promptly lent me hundred-and-fifty Dollars to meet some urgent bill. I promised her, at the time, to refund the amount in a couple of weeks or so, but then couldn't manage. So, after a certain while, Mrs. von Opel suggested that we may as well forget about it. I accepted this generous proposition, made to me in the nicest, most casual way - under the condition that I may pay her back as soon as either the financial situation of the magazine or else my personal conditions will have changed for the better. However, I felt, and still feel, that she made this ~~satisfying~~ gesture, not only out of personal sympathy, but also for the sake of the cause to which the magazine is devoted. At any rate, that is the spirit in which I understood and accepted her friendliness.

To draw the conclusion: I hardly know Fritz von Opel and am, therefore, not in a position to make any statements against him or in his favour. As for his wife, Margot von Opel, whom I know fairly well, it ^{does not} ~~seem~~ ~~exceedingly unlikely~~ to me that she should have anything to do with the Nazis or pro-Nazi intrigues.

Klaus Mann,
118 East 40th. Street, NYC,
March 3, 1942

IN THE MATTER OF
M A R G O T V O N O P E L

State of New York
City of New York
County of New York

} S.S.

My name is KLAUS MANN, I am by profession a writer. My father is Thomas Mann, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1929, recently appointed ~~senior~~ ^{on} advisor ~~for~~ German literature to the Library of Congress.

I was born in Munich, Germany, which country I left in March, 1933, when Hitler came to power. I have not been there since.

From 1933 to 1935 I lived mostly in Amsterdam, Holland, where I was active as the editor of a literary and political magazine called Die Sammlung ("The Collection") which became a spiritual center of the prominent anti-Nazi refugees. Besides I fought the Hitler régime in my books, public speeches, and in many articles published all over Europe.

The Nazi Government "expatriated" me (i.e. deprived me of my German citizenship) as soon as 1934. Subsequently I was granted citizenship by the Government of Czechoslovakia.

- I came to this country in 1936, and have stayed here since, except for two voyages I made to Europe, in 1937 and 1938.

I am active here as an author, journalist, editor and lecturer. The American editions of my books have been published by such houses as Alfred Knopf, Boni & Liveright, Houghton, Mifflin & Comp., etc. Since January, 1941, I am running a literary

monthly called DECISION, among whose sponsors are President Benesh of Czechoslovakia, Robert Sherwood (the Coordinator of Information), Stephen Vincent Benét, Vincent Sheean, etc.

I met Mrs. Margot von Opel when she arrived in this country, in 1940, accompanied by a great friend of mine, Madame Annemarie Clarac Schwarzenbach, a Swiss girl married to a French diplomat. Miss Schwarzenbach (to use her maidenname) is descended from one of the best families in Switzerland and has a fine reputation as a writer and journalist. Her ardent anti-Nazi feelings are beyond any doubt: in fact, she has been for years one of the most active anti-Fascists in Switzerland.

Miss Schwarzenbach wanted me to meet her new friend, Mrs. von Opel, whose acquaintance she had made in St. Moritz (Switzerland) and who had been exceedingly kind to her when she (Miss Schwarzenbach) was in a poor state of health.

I admit that I first was somewhat reluctant as to meeting Mrs. von Opel; for I did not like an interview Mr. von Opel had given, some time before, on occasion of his arrival. On the other hand, I knew that Mrs. von Opel was an old friend of the anti-Nazi writer, Erich Maria Remarque (the author of Nothing New From the Western Front) and ³/_{also} trusted the human and political instinct of my friend Annemarie, who kept assuring me that Margot von Opel was an excellent person and felt about Hitler as we do. Finally I was presented to Mrs. von Opel by Miss Schwarzenbach and then saw quite a bit of her during the months to come.

About January, 1941, Miss Schwerzenbach returned to Europe, from where she subsequently undertook an extensive journey to Africa, as a correspondent ~~of~~ several Swiss newspapers. Yet I continued to see Mrs. von Opel, if only with considerable intervals. I always enjoyed being with her. She is charming company - very intelligent, broad-minded, lively and cosmopolitan. It was stimulating to have chats with her about various matters, including politics. Her political views show an acute, candid mind and a good deal of common sense. She is definitely pro-democratic and passionately opposed to the Nazis, according to innumerable statements I have heard from her since the beginning of our acquaintance. In her letters as well as in her conversation she stressed again and again her implacable hatred of the Hitler régime. (I enclose herewith the original text of a letter Mrs. von Opel wrote me recently from Palmbeach. The last sentence indicates that she, Mrs. von Opel, would "hardly survive the victory of Schicklgruber" (i.e. Adolf Hitler.)

My contact with Mrs. von Opel was cordial and informal. She asked me several times for drinks and twice or three times for supper in her apartment at the Pierre or, later, at the Delmonico. I don't think she led a very social life in general. At any rate, I did not meet her friends, except an English gentleman, Mr. Pattley, about whom I have no information. Once I took a personal friend of mine up to her place, and on another occasion spent an evening with Mrs. von Opel and a young man whom I found at her table in a restaurant. His name is Sergius Sax; I used to know him, many years ago,

in Munich. I have no information as to his present activities.

Mrs. von Opel is, as far ^y ~~as~~ know, not only a cultured and liberal woman, but also unusually helpful and generous. I had the opportunity to watch her patience and delicacy in dealing with a friend, namely Annemarie Schwarzenbach, whose state of health was apt to cause many worries. I also happen to know how very kindly and generously Mrs. von Opel behaved towards a Jewish refugee girl from Vienna, Miss Erika Anderson. - When I told Mrs. von Opel about some financial trouble I had on account of my magazine, she promptly lent me the amount of hundred-and-fifty Dollars to meet an urgent bill. I promised her, at the time, to refund the sum before long, but then could not manage to do so. After a certain while Mrs. von Opel suggested that we may as well forget about it. I accepted this proposition - made to me in the nicest, most casual fashion: under the condition that I may pay her back as soon as the financial status of the magazine or my personal affairs will have somewhat improved. However, I felt, and still feel, that she made this gesture, not only out of personal sympathy, but also for the sake of the cause to which the magazine is devoted. At any rate, it was in this spirit that I understood and appreciated her friendliness.

As for Mr. von Opel, I know him but casually: in fact, I have seen him on just two occasions. I am, therefore, not in a position to make any statement against him or in his favour. However, I know Mrs. von Opel fairly well and do not consider

it likely that she is involved in any pro-Nazi activities or other attempts to endanger the security of the United States.

Klaus Mann.

118 East 40th. Str. NYC

Sworn to before me
the Fourth Day of March, 1942: