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Germany's Home Front In The War. Civil Life In Wartime Germany... By Max Seydewitz.

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What They're Reading



From force of habit, these German women and children "hoil" a truckload of captured Nazi soldiers.

Germany's Home Front In The War

CIVIL LIFE IN WARTIME GERMANY: THE STORY OF THE HOME FRONT—
By Max Seydewitz. The Viking Press, New York; 3.50.

Max Seydewitz is one of those Germans who think that Hitler is bad but that the German people are fine. A Social Democratic member of the defunct Reichstag, he left his homeland when the Nazis came to power and went to live first in Czechoslovakia, then in Norway, finally in Sweden. All these places have been excellent listening posts for news from inside the Reich, and Seydewitz evidently lent an attentive ear whenever he was there. His book is a sympathetic, well-organized compilation of the many facts and data gathered during these years of exile. It is true that much of Seydewitz's manner of presenting it is at times pedantic and repetitious. Yet his thorough survey of conditions and events in wartime Germany contains a good deal of sound information and instructive details.

According to Herr Seydewitz, the Nazi dictatorship owes its existence mainly, if not exclusively, to the intrigues of a reactionary clique of Junkers and industrialists led by men like Fritz Thyssen and Franz von Papen. Only 20 percent of the German people were confirmed Nazis when Hitler became Chancellor, the author says; 30 percent were convinced opponents, and the remaining 50 percent were "the wavering masses." Nazi rule could easily have been overthrown in its early days, he adds, but nobody gave the order to strike the blow, so fighting spirit dissolved and Hitler clinched his hold. Herr Seydewitz does not really explain why all the German political parties and other organized groups yielded to the Nazi gangsters without even a token resistance, nor does he tell us why those millions of determined anti-Nazis allegedly available in Germany had to wait for orders and proved unable to take the initiative.

Herr Seydewitz charts popular German reaction during the past five years about as follows: At the outbreak of the war, no enthusiasm, considerable gloom; general relief when Poland is quickly conquered; enthusiasm over the blitzkrieg success in France, many doubters won over; discontent over delay in making peace, allayed by Balkan triumphs; consternation and fear of prolonged war when invasion of Russia begins, then exultation over initial victories; new wave of depression as promised collapse of the Red Army fails to materialize; transient relief over Axis victories in North Africa; then a stunning blow to morale in the Stalingrad disaster; further blows in Allied North African landings, Rommel's defeat, invasion of Sicily, fall of Mussolini, the air war on Germany and subsequent developments; wide discontent, production setbacks, low morale at home and in the Army, with 70 to 80 percent of the people opposed to the Nazis, by September, 1944.

The author's principal concern is with the economic aspects of the German situation. He deals elaborately, and often competently, with such subjects as the distribution of manpower,

the production of armaments as opposed to civilian goods, prices and profits, housing and transportation. In each of these fields he shows that, in spite of the supposed socialistic program of National Socialism, it was the little man in Germany—the workers, the middle class and small businessmen—who had to pay for Hitler's total war, while German big business, as represented by the cartels and feudal nobility, kept making enormous profits.

The Nazi regime, Herr Seydewitz insists, is essentially hostile to the interests of labor. It is a system of social retrogression and exploitation, and has

always been hated as such by the German proletariat. But even though the first part of this thesis is correct beyond any question, we cannot help wondering why the German workers, for all their hatred of the Nazi slave-drivers, did such a remarkable job in building up and maintaining Hitler's complex and formidable war machine.

Herr Seydewitz uses the word "crisis" again and again in referring to labor and production problems, implying that something was about to break down. Yet Allied Supreme Headquarters officials as recently as six or eight months ago said that German aircraft production, for instance, was increasing.

Two interesting chapters are devoted to the opposition of the German generals and to the officers' revolt of July 20, 1944. "From the beginning of its totalitarian rule," Seydewitz says, "the opposition to the Party in high military quarters has been a frequent topic of discussion. Rumors regarding differences between Hitler and the generals were rife following his defeats in the winter of 1941-42, and became concrete with every military crisis, and particu-

larly after the fall of Mussolini. The fact that the Italian coup d'état by which the dictator was overthrown in legal form unquestionably made the Nazi leaders nervous, and since then they have suffered from a Badoglio complex."

"So long as Hitler scored successes," we read, "the differences with his generals were not serious. Opposition in military circles only bestirred itself when he experienced his first setbacks." And again: "The generals are not against the Nazis because they launched a war to conquer Europe, but because the attempts failed through Hitler's amateurish military performance."

Yet Herr Seydewitz maintains that "There is no doubt that the rebellious officers (who instigated the unsuccessful conspiracy of July 20) acted from patriotic motives. They realized that Hitler was prepared to drag Germany into the abyss with himself and his regime. They also recalled Hitler's statement that he would not shed a tear for the German people if they would not measure up to the test of this war of conquest. Precisely because they valued their duty toward Germany more highly than their oath to Hitler, they had done what no officer in former Imperial Germany would have ever done: they had raised their arms against the Supreme Warlord in order to establish a government with whom the enemy would be willing to deal. Their aim was to end a war that had become hopeless, before Germany was totally destroyed; and though they were not successful for the time being, their action was a grievous blow against the Hitler regime."

The failure of the generals' plot, Herr Seydewitz informs us, "was proof that no single opposition group was strong enough to overthrow the Nazi regime by isolated action unless military defeat was in sight. This was true for the generals' opposition as much as for that of labor and the churches. Even when the end approaches, a revolt of the home front can succeed in stopping Hitler's work of destruction only if all opposing groups and classes pool their forces in common action."

But now, with Germany's military defeat inevitable and imminent—can we hope for any such "common action" of the German anti-Nazi opposition? Herr Seydewitz does not seem to be in a position to make any definite promises or predictions. Yet he keeps speaking about the German "Underground" and the German "Resistance Movement" as if they were officially recognized, powerful institutions, and not nebulous notions based primarily on rumors and wishful thinking.

In his concluding chapter, "After Hitler, What?" Herr Seydewitz submits certain demands in the name of the so-called "anti-Nazi elements." These elements, we are told in rather harsh and apodictic terms, don't believe that it would be a good idea for the Allies to subject defeated Germany to any kind of military occupation. The German "Underground"—according to its self-styled spokesman, Max Seydewitz—wishes to run postwar Germany without any foreign interference and supervision. Immediately after Hitler's fall, "the way would seem open for the German people to join the family of democratic nations as a partner with equal rights and privileges. If it can do so, if it is accorded equal rights with other nations to decide on its internal structure, the nature and the spirit of the new Germany can be predicted with certainty."

This is how Herr Seydewitz justifies his demand: "The Moscow Conference of 1943 provided for the establishment of an international organization at the earliest possible moment for the common safeguarding of peace. Peace-loving states were called upon to join, with the assurance that the sovereignty, independence, and right of self-determination of their peoples would be guaranteed. A majority of the German people, at this closing stage of the war, is openly participating in the fight against the Nazis, and these assurances apply to them."

American soldiers, only too familiar with the fanatical stubbornness of German resistance even "at this closing stage of the war," will be surprised to hear that the Germans are not really our enemies but rather our Allies in the fight against Nazism.

As for Herr Seydewitz's own anti-Nazi feelings, they are undoubtedly sincere and laudable. But, for all his liberalism, he remains essentially a German nationalist. If his book has a certain value as a source of factual information, it is even more revealing as a document of German complacency and political blindness.

—Cpt. KLAUS MANN



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