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Blind Loyalty, Cowardice Make Germans Fight On.

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1945-03-29

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Blind Loyalty, Cowardice Make Germans Fight On

The Germans realize that they are losing the war; yet they go on fighting. Nobody knows how much longer they will continue a struggle which has long become senseless and suicidal for them; but the stubbornness of their present resistance—a resistance against all hope and hope, at tremendous costs—is in itself one of the most extraordinary, most puzzling facts in world history.

Why don't the Germans quit?

They have no illusions about the extreme gravity of their situation. Their own propagandists speak a remarkably plain, straight-forward language. A German political commentator, Dr. Rudolf Semmler, told his countrymen in a recent Home Service broadcast that the crossing of the Rhine by British and American troops had—as he put it—ushered in a new and uncontestedly most serious phase of the war. He went even further. "This crossing," he said, "has brought the war to its critical and undoubtedly decisive climax."

What, then, are the Germans waiting for? Do they still expect a miracle?

WISHFUL THINKING

Some months ago, there may still have been quite a few German soldiers and civilians who believed in the existence, or at least in the possibility, of new German weapons which might bring about a sudden change of the whole war situation in favor of the Reich. But by now this fantastic faith has practically vanished and should be ruled out as a morale-boosting factor in the German Army or on the German home front.

After having talked with many German PWs, and having followed rather closely the trends and slogans of Nazi propaganda during the past few weeks, I would say that the main reasons for continued German resistance are the following ones—listed in their order of importance:

1. Physical fear of the still formidable Gestapo and other instruments of terror at the disposal of Heinrich Himmler, who is today the most powerful figure in the Third Reich.

2. The curious lack of political initiative and imagination which is typical of the German mentality. This absence of any revolutionary instinct and tradition, indeed,

of any political realism and common sense, seems to have now assumed the character of absolute indifference and apathy. Another aspect and manifestation of the same fundamental attitude is the famous Germanic "sense of duty" which compels the Germans to obey orders, even if they realize that the orders are nonsensical or pernicious. The very courage a German may display toward his enemy results from his innate cowardice toward his superior.

FADED HOPES

3. The German sense of guilt, and the resulting fear of Allied revenge and reprisals. Most Germans know (whether they admit it or not) that they are responsible for unforgivable crimes and outrages—either as individuals or at least as members of a guilt-laden nation.

They expect to be treated about as roughly by their victorious opponents as they used to treat their own victims. All the gruesome and fantastic Goebbels stories about Soviet atrocities in the occupied parts of Eastern Germany are readily believed. Moreover, Goebbels goes out of his way to prove to his countrymen that the Anglo-Americans are at least as bad as the Russians.

Out of the same collective bad conscience comes the fear of national annihilation which would inevitably result from a German military collapse. General Kurt Dittmar echoed the leading theme of the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda when saying the other day: "It would be necessary for us to fight on, even if the situation were hopeless. For a terrible end—namely, to die in battle—is preferable to the unending terror which would be the consequence of unconditional surrender."

GUILTY CONSCIENCE

4. The hope for dissension between the Allies. This is indeed the very last hope left to the despairing Germans—the last comforting touch Goebbels has to add to his sinister prophecies and warnings. If you keep fighting just a little longer—the eloquent little doctor tells his war-weary, discouraged nation—our enemies will start quarrelling among themselves!

In his last speech he quoted a Spanish paper as having said: "At present an exciting race is going on between the military crisis for the Germans and the political crisis for the Allies."

A flimsy comfort, indeed, for the bombed-out, panicky citizens of the crumbling Third Reich! For, at the bottom of their hearts even the most stubborn, most blinded ones among them must know that the "political crisis among the Allies" is a clumsy Goebbels invention—the last, desperate swindle of a bankrupt demagogue—while their own military crisis is an overwhelmingly acute reality.

—Cpl. KLAUS MANN

They Say...

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