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From Bad to Worse...

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FROM BAD TO WORSE...

By Klaus Mann

BERLIN, MAY

"You would like to know how many Germans have remained Nazis at heart? Well, I'll tell you how you could find out. All Allied troops should ^{be} withdrawn from German territory, or at least should make themselves invisible -- leaving behind a clandestine army of reliable observers. At the same time, a come-back of the Fuehrer should be staged, in the style of Napoleon's return from Elba. The next day, all those putting out Nazi flags or wearing Party insignias ought to be arrested -- and shot at dawn! You might have to liquidate 90% of our population..."

The man who told me this is a good German patriot and a good anti-Nazi, now serving as a high-ranking official in one of the German regional governments. At the time of the Hitler regime, he left the Reich and lived abroad for some months. He could not stand exile, however -- partly because of his longing for the Fatherland, partly ^{because} he did not get along with his fellow-refugees. "Frankly, I was irritated by what I thought their immoderately anti-German attitude," he said to me. "Some of them insisted that about 75% ⁶⁰ of our nation were loyally behind Hitler. At the time, that struck me as a wild exaggeration. Now I realize that their estimate was rather too optimistic."

My discouraged friend only confirmed what I had been told by many other trustworthy observers. There is no sense in fooling ourselves: things in Germany are going from bad to worse. If the prevailing mood during the first weeks and months after Hitler's

pro-Nazi feelings are now admitted openly again.
collapse was one of indifference and apathy. That is not to say that the sensible, decent Germans have died out altogether; but they constitute a weak, helpless minority.

A girl working as a gardener in one of the Berlin suburbs told me that she is boycotted by her colleagues on account of her political views. "The other girls know that I was in a concentration camp ~~account of~~ as an anti-Nazi," she said. "That's why they never talk to me. They have all been members of the B.d.M. (the Nazi organization of German girls), and most of them still believe that Hitler was a genius and a superman. A year ago, they wouldn't have admitted that they feel that way; but by now they have become quite outspoken and aggressive again."

One of Germany's outstanding artists, a sculptress of international reputation, stayed in Berlin during the whole period of dictatorship and war, even though she hated Nazism and was in official disgrace as a "cultural Bolshevik." -- "For a long time I indulged in illusions," she told me. "I had a few anti-Nazi friends, and I tried to believe that most Germans were secretly feeling the same way my intimates and I did. But gradually I found out how mistaken I was. The awful truth is that practically all my countrymen adored Hitler, and that they would be only too glad, even now, if they could get him back! It's too disheartening -- too sickening for words. Wherever you go in Berlin, you have to listen to the same obnoxious talk: That things were better under the Nazi regime, that democracy doesn't work, that Germany needs a strong man, that our nation will play a leading role in the coming war against Russia, and so forth. I am so tired of it all... I can't tell you how tired I am."

When I asked her why she didn't leave Berlin and go to the U.S. or some other country where she has influential friends and admirers, she answered, simply and sadly: "Because I am ~~shame~~ ashamed -- don't you see? I am so terribly ashamed of being a German..."

"It will take the Germans at least half a century to overcome their present moral crisis." This statement came from a professor of Berlin University -- an elderly scholar of liberal principles. "The process of ethical and political re-orientation has not even begun as yet. Right now, people here are more confused and stubborn than they were a year ago. I don't see any signs of improvement, especially as far as German youth is concerned. Most of the young men I am in contact with seem still to be under the spell of Goebbels propaganda."

"At least 60% of my classmates still believe in Nazism." This I was told by a 16-year old schoolboy and former member of the Hitler Youth, who now thinks of himself as an anti-Nazi. "As long as the war was on," he said, "all of us were for the Fuehrer -- naturally we were! Then, under the first impression of defeat, quite a few of us changed our minds. I'd say that in May, 1945, the majority of my classmates was fed up with Hitler and Hitlerism. But by now it has become fashionable in our school to be anti-Semitic, anti-democratic and nationalistic again. Most of my friends believe that the Anglo-Americans are going to fight the Russians, and that this will be our chance."

The same boy told me that none of his pals had seen a film on Nazi concentration camps now presented in one of the city's most popular theaters. "We don't believe in that kind of thing," he observed, contemptuously. "Propaganda -- that's what it is."

When I went to see the concentration camp film myself, I found the theater practically empty. There were about twelve or fifteen persons; some of them walked out in the middle of the show. An old lady sitting next to me kept making bitter remarks. "Those dead bodies up there on the screen," she hissed, "-- I wonder where they may have picked them up! In one of our bombed cities, perhaps..."

If the concentration camp picture is a complete failure here, the same is true of the anti-Fascist Swiss film, The Last Chance. A sensational success in New York, Paris and London, this moving drama of international refugees and escaped prisoners leaves Berlin audiences utterly cold and unconvinced. Their verdict can be summed up in one scathing word -- propaganda.

These are just a few samples and instances characteristic of the mood and atmosphere prevailing in the German capital, a year after the end of the war. It's a dark picture, all over. If the German disease is not incurable -- it is certainly far from being cured. Nor have we given any evidence that we know how to deal with this most difficult patient.
