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In Defense of Vansittart.

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Letters to the Editors

In Defense of Vansittart

Dear Sirs: The time has come for somebody in this country to say a word or two in defense of Lord Vansittart. No other political figure on our side is being so constantly misquoted and misrepresented in so light-headed and two-handed manner.

In his article "Germany: Economic Heart of Europe" (*The Nation*, February 12), Fritz Sternberg speaks of "helves of books and hundreds of articles" which like his have been produced in Britain and the United States during the past year, recommending the dismemberment of Germany proper. To prove that this is the only possible course, goes on Mr. Sternberg, it is explained that the Germans are by nature aggressive. Without at this time entering upon a discussion of the German character, Mr. Sternberg would merely remind the Vansittarts, high and low, that the Russians . . . do not demand that Germany be dismembered.

It may be that, by referring to Lord Vansittart in the plural, Mr. Sternberg means to accomplish what others achieve by alluding to "Vansittartism," rather than to the individual in question. When told that none of the "recommendations" attributed to "Vansittartism" have been made by Vansittart, they are apt to point out that the similarity between the noun and the name is almost purely accidental. Be that as it may, I should like to call Mr. Sternberg's attention to two facts: (1) Lord Vansittart—high or low—has never recommended the dismemberment of Germany proper; (2) nor has he ever accused the Germans of being "aggressive by nature."

All Vansittart has recommended, and keeps recommending, is that the early emergency after Hitler's fall of a peaceable, democratic, and trustworthy Germany be not taken for granted. To quote from an interview he gave me in the fall of 1941: "The peaceful and civilized elements which undoubtedly exist and always existed in Germany . . . are not, and never have been, capable of exercising any moderating influence. To rely on them, and again stake the fate of humanity on their ability suddenly to acquire such influence, would be suicidal."

That is about as far as his "recommendations" go, even today. Germany, he maintains, must be rendered harmless. "Unilateral disarmament," as postulated in the Atlantic Charter, must be closed out by the letter. This necessarily Allied suppression for some time of some of Germany's industrial output, its foreign trade, its educational system, its political system must disappear from the German schools and universities. We must do everything in our power to bring about in Germany that change of spirit without which no peace could ever last.

As to the political future of the Reich, Vansittart has not advanced any specific plan. He has, however, taken pains to show that the Germans are aggressive by nature. (There is no such thing as a free lunch, by tradition and tradition.) And although both "helves of books" and "hundreds of My Little Books" contain a number of passages which I find verbatim—to put it mildly—the last words of at least several of the "German chatter"—a knowledge of the fact of referring—as undeniable, the sincerity of his efforts to bring to focus the validity of Lord Vansittart's views.

No small effort can be devoted to the elucidating paraphrases of Mr. Sternberg's article, which thus remains inconclusive.

Ninety percent of the German people, he asserts, would be opposed to dismemberment. Why of course they would. They would be equally opposed to the cession of East Prussia to Poland, to unilateral disarmament, in short to each and every measure the United Nations may deem necessary. They are strictly opposed to losing Hitler's war.

"So it is to be hoped," winds up Mr. Sternberg, "that Germany will be allowed to remain undivided in its 1919 boundaries. Only on that condition will the progressive left forces which are capable of setting up a Socialist democracy (italics mine) be able gradually to win the upper hand. Nothing would so injure their growth or so limit their accomplishment as the rise of a new German nationalism, a development which would be greatly accelerated by any dismemberment of Germany." No proof whatever is offered for the contention that any "left progressive forces" whose very survival in strength would

have to be proved in the first place—are indeed capable. Despite strong evidence to the contrary, their capability is to be taken for granted.

I do not know whether dismemberment would be advisable in the event of a less imperfect peace. Nor could I say whether Mr. Sternberg is right in assuming that Britain and the United States may be toying with the idea, whereas the U.S.S.R. is afraid to do so. But I venture to doubt that German nationalism which, according to Mr. Sternberg, would be so stimulated by dismemberment, is much in need of any such stimulus. It seems above all kicking-and-playing havoc with the souls of German Nazis and anti-Nazis, leftists, rightists, and centrists alike. It is not new, though. It is old.

BERKA MANN

New York, February 11