Verbundkatalog Kalliope

German. State of mind.

Mann, Erika

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proEVENING STANDARD LONDON

Last week in Germany, a number of bets were lost - and won - by allied correspondents. The subject: would there be organized revolts in the course of the winter - yes, or no? The prophets of rebellion had picked the month of January as the most promising and declared themselves ready to pay, if all had remained quiet by February first. With no instance of open rioting, nothing in the way of coordianted trouble having been reported, non-believers in German insubordination cashed in. (The abortive attempt to liberate Goering and Co. would have, even if it had been "on time", not counted as it was strictly an S.S. venture, unrelated with the man on the street.) Those who lost their bets, had made two basic mistakes:

1.) They underrated the allied determination and ability to keep the Germans from either starving or intolerably freezing.

2.) They over-estimated the German readiness openly to attack their masters, whoever they might be.

By and large, conditions in the Reich are better than even the occupying powers would have dared to predict. In certain lands, such as in Bavaria, they are downright good. Except for the housing situation in heavily blitzed cities and the disturbing influx of evacuees from the east, Bavarians have very little to complain about. Yet they complain in the most heart-rending fashion. Nor does the non-occurence of organized upheavals mean that the good people of Bavaria are not trying their best to disturb, anger and damage the "invader".

Although, in his presence, no large scale campaign, even of the propaganda type, could be staged, the citizens of Munich, Nurnberg Dinkelsbuehl and other places talk and act as if commanded from some underground headquarters. However, contrary to the theories developed by some allied observers, this uniformity is not the fruit of any systemized effort, but the expression of a state of mind common to the vast majority of all Germans.

Take, what certain allied circles call the German "pity-campaign". By deliberately exaggerating their sufferings - it is said - the Germans hope (a) to improve their lot under the occupation, while (b) enlisting the active sympathy of the world outside. There is nothing deliberate about this prodigious self-pity. The Germans honestly believe - each for him- or herself and without having to conspire with each other - that their agonies defy description. They also believe - some 90 % of them - in the innocence of the German people. The precious few who concede a measure of collective German guilt, insist that the victors are virtually equally guilty.

A new star which has risen on Germany's literary sky - a poet by the name of Werner Bergengruen and the pride of the so-called "inner emigration" - is highly typical of this "better German" attitude. The most famous of his poems, contained in the volume "Dies Irae" of which it forms the crowning finale, is entitled "To the Peoples of the Earth" ("An die Voelker der Erde"). ~~In it, Germany is depicted as carrying the cross, bleeding in the place, and for the benefit, of all humanity.~~

"Peoples", cries Bergengruen, " We've suffered also for you and your transgressions, suffered on Europe's ancient stage of fate, repenting IN YOUR PLACE AND for all of you.....Peoples of the world, the treachery was yours as well.... Curiously you smelled the fire's exciting breath; YET what was burning here, was the occident's heart-shield..... Seduced by the lethargy of your hearts each of you thought 'Fate will not touch me'.... But, fattened by our blood, the demon broke out and into the world.... Peoples of the earth who are sitting in judgment today, do not forget that we all are wanted before the bars of justice!"

Another German singer, the poet Ernst Wiechert, is less OUTSPOKEN in his criticism of others. An early sympathizer with Nazi ideologies, he disapproved of the reality of the "Third Reich" and even spent some time in a concentration camp. His countrymen, he maintains, knew what happened there

and anywhere. They were co-responsible of Hitler's crimes; they are guilty. Their guilt, however, gave birth to a tragedy without parallel; Never since man's creation was there such icy loneliness; never such hatred fostered upon a nation; unprecedented, the darkness; unheard of, the depth of Germany's fall.

While on this, the highest available level, the post-Hitlerian German flatters himself and his countrymen by dramatizing the enormity of their common unhappiness, the ordinary citizen is busily engaged in making his plight less pitiable. What he is trying to achieve, is (1.) a minimum of effort and hardship to himself; (2.) a maximum of annoyance and harm to the "enemy". Allied, as well as German authorities concede that they meet with considerable passive resistance, whenever the Germans are called upon to perform some public duty. Even for so essential an undertaking as the so-called "wood-action", only a handful of volonteers could be found; finally, "purged" Nazis had to be forced to cut the wood needed to warm their compatriots. Here as in other instances the latter considered their own well-being an allied responsibility and saw no reason to lessen this burden.

The Bavarian peasant, accustomed to the most stringent (Nazi) rules and experienced in breaking them, finds the American control an easy thing to get around. What he is supposed to surrender these days is far less than it was under the Nazis; by withholding and selling on the black market the greatest possible amount of "controlled" food, he not only pleases himself, but also cheats the Americans who are "forced" somehow to replace the missing goods from stocks of their own.

Acts of sabotage, though less isolated than generally assumed, are a dangerous and hence unpopular means of damaging the foe. Here are two examples of how he may be hit in a more satisfactory and less tangible manner:

A recent broadcast, emanating from Radio Stuttgart and designed for children, proposed - in the words of the speaker - "to take you on a wondrous voyage, out of our ruined cities and the daily misery of our lives, to a far away country, which, however, will remind you in more than one way of our own dear Germany."

And off they go, clear to China. They see, how the valiant Chinese, a people of great culture and the greatest endurance, are invaded by a barbarous enemy; how their cities burn and their innocent women die with their small children; how the whole country is on the move, fleeing before the unprovoked onslaught; how hard working scientists, determined not to let their secrets fall into hostile hands, hide in the farthest corners of the land to continue their work under inhuman conditions.

Even without the introductory remark, this educational presentation would not have lacked in clarity. Every insult hurled against the Japanese (never mind the late Axis!) struck at the allies, and every bouquet flung at the people of China landed in its proper German place.

Another incident witnessed by this correspondent, took place at the House of German Art in Munich where the Third U.S. Army were throwing a party. The decoration of the rooms, as well as the composition of the program had been entrusted to a group of Munich artists in whose merry-making talents one had full confidence. But if even the parades and processions of the early evening hours were devoid of gayety (GORY skeletons walked with hollow-cheeked beggars and macabre cripples and devils), later offering bordered the scandalous. There were above all the airraid sirens. Howling in ever shorter intervals and ever increasing strength, they sounded shockingly true, disgustingly genuine. To many Americans present they were nothing but a big noise; to others - and particularly to the German personnel - they were a nervous ordeal of the highest order. Allegedly the "joke" - a symbol of American tactlessness and brutality, as far as the Germans were concerned - was meant to highten the spirits. The more the latter rose - in spite of the banshees - and the less the Americans were therefor likely to protest, the bolder the program

grew. In the end there appeared a group of corpselike jokers, wearing the striped suits of the inmates of Buchenwald. One of them, his eyes rolled back, carried the gallows on which he seemed to hang. Thoughtlessly a few American officers had themselves photographed with the masks. Their legs crossed they sat smilingly at the hanged man's feet.

Early next morning the story "broke" in the city. And what the people of Munich and surroundings told - and keep telling - each other about the "Amerikanerfest" surpasses in hostility anything that even the most brilliantly organized hate-campaign would be able to produce.

New bets may be made by allied correspondents. And the day may come when the Germans, stuffed with militant self- pity, and encouraged by the world-wide interest which their sufferings arouse, take to organized revolting. For the moment they limit themselves to passive resistance, a modest amount of sabotage and the effective expression of a state of mind which forbodes little good.

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