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Mann, Erika

o.O., 1950-05-24

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Erika Mann

May 24th, 1950

Dear Mr. Buchwald.

If possible and at all advisable, I should want to sue Herr Dr. Karl Brandt (Stanford University) for libel, slander and damages.

The enclosed item will tell you part of the story. Of the habits and remarks the above named culprit attributes to me, the ones I adorned with a swastika are freely and impudently invented. Others - marked by a cross - are badly distorted. Dr. Brandt, moreover, craftily avoided to quote any one of my statements quite correctly. Just to give you an example: I never dreamed of complaining about the mildness of the sentences in the Blohm und Voss case (who would have expected justice to be meted out in the first place?). What I did stress in this context was the fact that Goebbels' top specialist for the staging of anti-semitic monster trials, Professor Friedrich Grimm, having been duly "de-nazified", appeared as counsel for the defense.

As a whole, Brandt's letter a digest of which was passed on by the D.P.A. to some 300 German newspapers is highly damaging - not only to my prestige in Germany (about which - entre nous - I don't care) but also regarding my chances to earn D. Marks (about which I cannot help caring).

In order fully to appreciate the deliberately slanderous character of Herr Brandt's denunciation you have to know the man's motives. Here goes: 1.) Last October, I spent a week at Stanford as a "Visiting Writer". I did a lot of purely "literary" class work, and I also delivered two full-fledged lectures, - one on "The Plight of the European Intellectuals", and the other on "The Continuing Crisis". The latter dealt with the current world situation and lasted 55 minutes 15 of which were devoted to the German problem. Dr. Brandt was present neither on this nor any other occasion. When both I and the applause had ended, a gentleman in the first row arose, and, addressing himself to the packed house, asked whether it was not a scandal that "one of our own faculty" had in this very theater recently delivered a speech which must be deemed neo-nazistic German propaganda pure and simple. While he, speaker, had been revolted even while listening to the trash, he felt certain that my "well documented presentation" would arouse "all of us" to the intentionally misleading nature of the professor's offering. - There followed some two minutes of wild applause, intermingled with derogatory noises meant for absent Herr Brandt. 2.) When the San Francisco chapter of the American Jewish Congress had issued its conference call, Dr. Brandt telephoned repeatedly to recommend himself as a speaker. He persistently alleging that he was a specialist on the issue at stake and in the possession of

first rate exclusive material regarding the "re-nazification" of Germany, he finally got himself accepted only to make a speech which constituted, of course, the exact opposite of what he had led the conference to expect. Rarely, if ever, have I seen an audience so furious. They wouldn't even permit him to participate in the question and answer period. Eventually, though, the chairman felt democratically compelled to let him put in a few "explanatory remarks" which he made, pale as a ghost, and his knees shaking with abject fear. Then I, as the key-note speaker, was asked to retort. In doing so, I carefully avoided to insult my predecessor but my reply wasn't flattering, either.

Small wonder the bloke dislikes me with a vengeance, and since there was nothing much he could do on the spot, he simply wrote "home", believing, I suppose, that in Germany he could slander me with impunity. Well, he can't, - or so I hope.

As for his allegation that I am "spending all my time damaging the Deutsche Bundesrepublik as best I can, travelling at top speed throughout the U.S.", be it stated that during the 1949/50 season I gave 14 lectures all told, and all in California. 5 of these dealt exclusively with issues non-German. In 6, about one quarter of the time (15 minutes out of 55) was given to the German situation; and only 3 addresses of 25 minutes each were indeed wholly concerned with developments in Western Germany - developments which recently prompted a great many protest meetings to be staged in all parts of the country. At three of these I appeared as the main speaker.

Needless to say, the San Francisco chapter of the A.J.C. would be delighted to testify to: the falseness of Professor Brandt's initial pretenses, the misleading and biased character of his speech, and his falsifications and distortions of my own remarks. In Stanford, too, witnesses could surely be unearthed who would a) duly characterize the professor's lecture, while b) confirming my contention that I've been libeled and slandered. Regarding the damage I claim, I should be able to obtain some actual proof from my publishers in Germany, Doctores Landshoff and Bermann-Fischer. The former, incidentally, wants me to give you his best. Besides, any number of vicious attacks have appeared - and keep doing so - in the German press, based, one and all, on Brandt's "revelations".

Please say quickly whether Brandt may be sued, and, if so, whether suit may be brought in New York, although the defendant resides in California and the crime was perpetrated in Germany - which it really was not, as the skunk prepared the incriminated document in the U.S. whence it was mailed to Hamburg. Also, I at least am still a legal resident of your fair city.

If - please God - the thing seems feasible to you, would you kindly give me an idea of your conditions etc. Perhaps I'd better admit in advance that my middle name is and remains church-mouse.

Please pardon this long letter. But then, I fail to see how I could have made it shorter and still told the whole story.

With warm personal regards,
yours very sincerely

ERIKA MANN

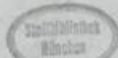
(who may be reached at the above address!)

P.S. How is Rossellini coming?

*Beurlaubt
zu Karl Brandt*

*Let's correct
24
K 50
K 11*

II/29



195/96