

GERMANY
AFTER HITLER

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WILL GERMANY CRACK?

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I. The Case of a Retarded Democracy:

BLACK records as well as white records of entire nations, as they are usually turned out in wartime, give but little enlightenment. At best they are sentimental clichés, pretending to be historical truths. They interpret history emotionally. There is little in them on which to base political strategy or on which to achieve future security.

Are there two Germanies? The black record denies it emphatically. The white record, on the other hand, is obviously guilty of presenting too pious a picture. We shall find a hard-boiled answer only by restudying the history of Germany's retarded and interrupted democratization. Few people realize that Germany's problem has always been the problem of a country situated not only geographically, but also politically, between the West and the East, between the more modern and the more archaic world. For centuries she lagged behind the nations of the West. After a fresh start at the close of the last war she suffered the Hitler setback. In the meanwhile even Russia had advanced. The present Germany has thus quite naturally developed an affinity to Japan, a country in which modern and archaic societies find a classic form of co-existence.

If we examine history we discover that a basic conflict has existed in Germany for a long time. The archaic Germany, which was beaten in 1918 and restored to streamlined design under Hitler, has never ceased to exist. Germany's quick, superficial modernization in the second half of the nineteenth century did not wipe it out, and the postwar period did not wipe it out. In this respect Germany shows a marked similarity to Japan where the most modern economic and technical development was grafted on to the ancient society of the Samurai. Of course, the cases are not identical. Germany even now stands somewhere between the nations of the western world and Japan. In common with other western nations, her old feudal institutions underwent a degree of democratization before her industrial revolution. Germany's industrialization started later than England's, but once it started it went on at a breath-taking pace. Its speed had the effect of accentuating her inner conflicts, not liquidating them. Even more stormy was Japan's industrialization. Beginning still later than Germany, she thrust herself out of her medieval calm into an aggressive program of modern industrial imperialism. Technically modernized, her roots remained unbroken in her feudal past. The feudal past of Germany has been shaken. But her privileged castes and cliques, like the Samurai in Japan, have survived and reached out into the new world as a relic of ancient absolutism.

This is the background of the existence of two Germanies.

In modern times, the conflict between the two Germanies has gone on unremittingly. One Germany had roots deep in the democratic movements and in the growing drive for emancipation from absolutism that stirred the western world. The other Germany was the unbroken archaic Germany of predemocratic absolutism. During the modern industrial period, the leadership of the first Germany passed to the labor movement, the strongest in Europe at that time. However, like the German liberals of earlier periods, German labor challenged but never broke the power of the feudal castes and cliques which, in fact, gained strength by the addition to their ranks of the new industrial barons. The inner conflict continued until the defeat of Germany in the last war. Then, for the first time in modern history, aggressive imperialist Germany, led by the surviving medieval German Samurais seemed to be broken. Unfortunately, it was in appearance only. The social and economic position of Germany's privileged castes was only touched by the revolution of 1918. They abdicated politically for a time. After their restoration they helped Hitler into power.

The present Germany has often been compared to France of 1800, Hitler to Napoleon, and Nazism to Bonapartism. There is, indeed, a fascinating parallel between France at the beginning of the nineteenth century and Germany today

which calls for an explanation. In both cases, we have societies in transition from feudal absolutism to democracy, both went through previous revolts against absolutism. In both cases, early immature democratic forces were overrun by counterrevolutions. In both cases, the counterrevolution was not simply reactionary but the bastard of revolutionary and reactionary forces. In both cases, the chief aim was nationalistic expansion. The youth of France of 1800 was fascinated by the messiah Napoleon as the German youth of 1933 was fascinated by the messiah Hitler. The glory of Napoleon's early victories seduced the French people no less than the glory of Hitler seduced the German people during the period of the Nazi blitz victories. Napoleon became First Consul in 1799 and submitted his newly fabricated "Constitution" to the verdict of the people. He received an affirmative vote of 3,011,017 against the votes of only 1,567 Frenchmen who openly opposed him. This is strongly reminiscent of the 99 per cent Hitler vote of a few years ago. Both Napoleon's and Hitler's forces were cruel and ruthless. The reputation of Napoleon after the lapse of more than a century is not as bad as Hitler's today. But to contemporary Germans, Russians and English, he was the "tyrant, the anti-Christ, the murderer, the liar, the public nuisance, the enemy of mankind." Napoleon's guards went through an early training in a period of white terror, the terror following the overthrow of the Jacobins. The Hitler

guards received their training in a period of white terror, the *Fehme* murders following the mild revolution of 1918 in Germany. The pattern of aggressive nationalism in each case was built upon the same foundations. Even the symbols—the eagles and the mass production of field marshals—are identical. And similar, too, is the legacy of hatred left in the hearts of the victim nations.

These similarities in appearance could not exist without a more fundamental parallel. The twentieth century, of course, is very different from the early nineteenth century. There is little in common between the late capitalism of contemporary Europe and the early capitalism of the France of one hundred and fifty years ago. Different groups and classes played historic roles in the two periods. The relative strength of the European powers is different, and so too is the national character of the French and the German people. And the two wars are different—the one provoked by the forces of Napoleon and the other by the forces of Hitler—different in dimensions, in character and in consequences. But the parallel which exists is too obvious to overlook. We shall understand its basic characteristics after a more concrete analysis of the history of Germany. We shall see that history as a classic example of delayed and retarded democratization, so that Germany today is a country much closer to Japan than to its western European neighbors, and therefore really again, as under the Kaiser, in a Bonapartist phase.

It is true that her economic system, her industrial technique, her social organization is western, but so is that of Japan. Germany is the most highly developed country in the Axis coalition. Her scientists are able to smash atoms and to produce synthetically many of the commodities which nature did not place in her soil. Her technicians are excellent. Her industrial organization before the war could only be compared with the most modern American organization. There is a modern industrial proletariat, with a political history of a seventy-year struggle for emancipation. Its organizations have been smashed, and its leadership beaten and broken. Even under Hitler, with German labor robbed of its privileges, Germany has conserved a good part of her social reforms and a modern system of social security, developed during seven decades of rapid industrialization and technical modernization. But like Japan she had never fully liquidated the vestiges of feudal absolutism.

The first democratic republic in Germany failed under the attack of the alliance of her medieval landed aristocracy, her great industrialists and the military cliques. The same combination of forces supplied the motive power for the aggression of the Kaiser Reich. Only recently it has been pointed out how surprisingly "Hitlerite" the early imperialistic period of Germany was. Pan-Germanistic documents that were published during the nineties have been found to contain in

nucleus almost everything which we have come to know as Nazi doctrine. The Pan-Germanist school was not identical with the reactionary coalition ruling the Kaiser's Reich but it supplied the ideologists of German imperialism. In their books you find anti-Semitism, antiliberalism, antiunionism. These men are not the ideologists of a capitalist and bourgeois age. They are the spiritual relics of feudal philosophy. You find them sprinkled through democratic countries too—all have their Ku Klux Klans, their Christian Frontists, their Huey Longs, their racial discrimination. Hardheaded monopolists and colonial imperialists everywhere are fond of the same ideas as the reactionaries of Germany. But in the democratic world the outmoded ideas are balanced and overbalanced by democratic institutions and the established traditions of a modern society.

In the Axis world and especially in Germany the ancient society survived the spring storms of the democratic revolutions and the reforms of the last two hundred years. It created a modern power machine and fastened it onto the surviving base of feudal absolutism. In this respect Germany resembles Japan more than it does the West.

The reasons for the delay in the development of German democracy will be clearer when we compare the German process with the developments in the West. The process of democratization in western nations was based on the achievement of national unity, the establishment of civil liberties

and popular democratic rights, and the liquidation of feudal privileges, special prerogatives and castes. All of these achievements came in Germany one hundred, sometimes two hundred years, later than in the western world. The conflicts of Cromwell's time plus Napoleonism plus modern aggressive imperialism characterize the Hitler period.

National unity was achieved in Great Britain around 1700. The first parliament of united Great Britain was elected in 1707. That was long before the industrial age. National unity was achieved in France under the Bourbon kings. It was completed during the Napoleonic period around 1800. The thirteen colonies in the New World declared their independence and thereby made the first step toward national unification even earlier. The first step toward national unity was achieved in Germany, and only partially then, through the *Zollverein* in 1832, a second through the Prussian sword under Bismarck in 1866. Even in the last war, Bavarian, Saxon and Prussian armies maintained a separate military organization. The National Assembly of the Weimar Republic was unable to overcome the separation of the ancient states expressed in the *Laender*. In fact, it was Hitler who completed national unification, but only as a means towards forging a weapon for world conquest. At the time of the American Declaration of Independence Germany was far from being a nation. She was more like India today, a territory of 350 odd principalities ruled

by dwarf despots. The shadow of the medieval Holy Roman Emperor sat on his throne in Vienna, presiding over a predominantly non-German empire. His rival was the King of Prussia, then a puppet of one or another of the great powers, France, England, and Russia. Possessed of great ambitions, he inflicted a costly militarism on a poor and small country.

In the western world, democratization was generally achieved before the industrial age. The British parliaments fought persistently through many centuries against British autocracy until finally, with the passage of the habeas corpus acts and the Declaration of Rights in the late seventeenth century, British democracy was firmly established. The decisive factor in democracy's victory was the emancipation of the middle classes. Since then in England democracy has had its ups and downs. And democracy is never perfect and never completely safe. New dangers and threats come up in nearly every new crisis and with every new and important social change. But it is a characteristic of established democracy that it is able to adjust itself in every new crisis and that has been the case in Britain for nearly three centuries. If Britain should go socialist it would remain democratic.

The French development came at least a hundred years later than the English. The last absolutist period in France was between 1600 and 1789 ending in the French Revolution. Since then

there have been temporary setbacks—Napoleon, the restoration of the Bourbons, the second Napoleon, Boulanger, the reaction during the Dreyfus affair, and today, in Hitler's shadow, Laval. But these are temporary recessions. French democracy is a living reality, as has been attested for a century and a half and is attested today by the existence of the Free French Committee and the well-organized French underground in France itself.

The first short German democracy came in 1918.

Some democratic developments had occurred, of course, in the nineteenth century. There were reforms in 1812 during the fight for liberation against Napoleon. There were reforms during the latter part of the nineteenth century. And for fourteen short years, the first German Republic of Weimar was the freest but also the weakest of all the democratic states. Meanwhile, the enemy waited in ambush. German democracy came into existence only after the defeat of 1918 and was imposed from the outside rather than developed from within. It remained immature and weak. Fourteen years after its inception the revived reactionaries joined forces with Hitler and overthrew it.

In sentimental expositions of the two Germanies, the liberalism of the constitutional monarchy before the last war is very often held up for admiration. Surely, compared with Hitler's tyranny, the Kaiser's Germany appears to old-timers like