

CAN GERMANY BE DEMOCRATIC AFTER THE WAR?

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AS the contours of victory over the Axis become more and more definite, the discussion of the German problem rightly increases in volume and intensity. Pre-war isolationists and sympathetic friends of totalitarian ideas have tried to convince the American people that Japan is the main enemy of the free world. It is certainly no coincidence that many former "America Firsters" have now become "Japan Firsters". The people who labored for over eight years, from 1933 to 1941, to convince this nation that President Roosevelt and Great Britain constituted the main danger to our liberty, rather than Hitler and the Nazi drive for world domination, have chosen to persist in this attitude although we are now fighting Fascism and Nazism in the battlefield. They have failed in their campaign to befuddle the American people. The major strategical decision of the United Nations—to get Germany out of the war first, and then to concentrate on Japan—is the result not only of purely military considerations, but also of the realization that Germany represents ideologically a threat to the western world, whereas there is little danger that Shintoism and the god-worship of the Mikado will spread among the free nations.

Discussions about post-war Germany are often based on the assumption that she will be democratic after the war. Some people hope that the Germans will learn their lesson this time, repent, and elect the democratic system of government. Others are less optimistic, and frankly doubt whether this change would be a change of heart, or just an act. As a consequence, they would not hesitate to *impose* self-government upon the German people.

Psychologically, it is easy to understand why almost everybody thinks of post-war Germany only in terms of republican regeneration. By experience we know that democracy and peace thrive on each other. The more intense our aversion to, and fear of, more wars in our lifetime becomes, the more will we be possessed by the wishful hope that Germany will go democratic after the war. According to recent public opinion polls, over eighty-five per cent of those questioned generally predict future events in accordance with what they would like to see happen. Where the future event is of vital importance, the tendency to

wishful thinking will be even more irresistible. This is the impasse of our thinking about post-war Germany. It is so disconcerting to envisage a non-democratic Germany after this war that we refuse to think rationally about such an eventuality.

This article argues, on the contrary, first, that we have to consider a non-democratic regime in post-war Germany as a *probability* or *certainty* rather than as a possibility. Second, that contrary to the prevalent opinion, this in itself need not be looked upon as an irremediable catastrophe to the peace and freedom of the world.

The view that democracy can be achieved in Germany by outside force can be disposed of quickly. The one and only thing in the world that cannot be forced by anyone anywhere in the world is voluntary action. *Everything can be imposed except the will to do something voluntarily.* Democracy is, in its truest meaning, a way of life in which people act and think voluntarily most of the time. For that reason democracy is also the only system of government that cannot be imposed upon a people, but has to be accepted freely. To discuss seriously the feasibility of forcing democracy upon Germany is like debating whether two and two, if they cannot be made to add up to six, could not at least add up to five.

What about the chance of Germany voluntarily adopting liberal political institutions after the war in anything like the near future?

In talking about democracy too many people forget that it is more than a system of government. In an inarticulate realization of this fact we speak of the "American way of life", rather than of the "American system of government", as the basic characteristic of our country. Democracy as a way of life is not a constitutional document, but a varied aggregate of traditions and habits of human beings. If a constitutional document turns out to be devoid of such traditions and habits, then it proves to be nothing but a piece of paper.

The German constitution of 1919 was undoubtedly one of the most democratic charters ever devised. Yet democracy failed in Germany. The charter revealed itself to be a useless piece of paper, when over twenty million Germans openly expressed their hatred of democracy, tolerance, and peace. Of course, it was somewhat naive to expect Germany to develop democracy in fourteen years, when the English, a people of the highest political genius, have been at it for six hundred and twenty-eight years, and are still far from perfection.

The most important single fact about the whole of German history is that Germany is the only major country in the world that has never had a popular revolution. The peasant rebellion of 1525 was the only genuine mass revolt in German life, and it was quickly suppressed by the princes. None other, incidentally, than Martin Luther exhorted the princes to crush the rebels regardless of the cost in blood and suffering. Since then Germany has never escaped from *Ordnung* and *Disziplin* as the two main pillars of her social order and political government. The seventeenth century is the century of the great English revolutions, the eighteenth of the American and French revolutions, the nineteenth of the Italian *Risorgimento* and the great popular revolutions in Latin America, and the twentieth century has witnessed two of most colossal popular revolutions of all time, the Russian and Chinese revolutions. The one country that is conspicuously absent from this list of great popular revolutions is Germany. We shall understand next to nothing about German civilization and politics before, during and after Nazism unless we remember this fact.

Nazism has accentuated this tradition of authoritarianism in Germany. First came the physical liquidation of whatever liberal and progressive elements the government could lay its hand on. Those who could escape abroad may never come back. The intellectual and propagandist campaign came next. This was not as difficult as is often assumed in foreign countries. Even before the Nazi dictatorship, over two-thirds of the German voting public had voted for parties that were frankly totalitarian in thought and action. It is also too often overlooked that while Nazism is not confined to Germany, that country was nevertheless the only one in the world where it was voted into power. In view of the fact that the Nazi and Fascist parties in such countries as France, Holland, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark and Norway never polled more than one or two per cent of the vote, the implications of the pre-Nazi German vote are sinister enough.

But the most important impact of Nazism on German life is one which is not dramatic in appearance, and therefore little discussed: the enormous reduction of the size of the German middle classes under ten years of Nazi rule. In my recent book *The Nazi State* (Farrar and Rinehart, publishers, New York) I have given the facts and figures which prove the decline of the middle classes in German life, socially, economically, and politically. As labor became scarce in the total German war economy long before 1939, more and more small businessmen

and artisans were turned into factory workers. Taxation and other forms of government pressure completed this process of proletarianizing the German middle classes. Before 1933 the Nazi party had posed as the saviour of the German middle classes against the double menace of Big Capital and Big Labor. Whether the Nazi promises to the middle classes were sincere or not at any time, is immaterial. The logic of Nazi imperialism and the permanent war economy was stronger than those promises.

History has shown so far that liberal democracy was originally created and later sustained by the efforts and ideas of the middle classes in countries like England, France and the United States. By partly proletarianizing the German middle classes, Nazism has further softened the psychological resistance of the German people to outright totalitarianism.

If my prediction is correct—that Germany will not be democratic after the war in a reasonably near future—does that necessarily imply that another German war is around the corner? By no means. It is not true that non-democratic governments are *ipso facto* a threat to world peace. Most of the Latin-American countries are ruled by dictators, or by veiled party dictatorships. There are also countries in Europe (Portugal) and Asia (Turkey) that are ruled by a decidedly non-democratic type of government, yet do not engage in wars of conquest and enslavement. Why not? First, because these people are not haunted by the master race megalomania. Second, because these countries have not the industrial resources to wage war under present conditions.

A non-democratic Germany will therefore represent no threat to world peace and world freedom, provided the Germans will voluntarily abandon the collective mania of the *Herrenvolk* complex, and—just as important—if the Germans will not have the resources to make war.

The first of these two conditions, the giving up of the master race mania, depends solely upon the decision of the German people.

Whether the Germans will be left again, as in 1918, in possession of the industrial resources to wage total war, will depend on the United Nations.