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Strictly confidential.

Vienna, March 9, 1936.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE GERMAN MILITARY
OCCUPATION OF THE DEMILITARIZED RHINELAND
SOME AND UNILATERAL DENUNCIATION OF THE
LOGANO TREATY ON MARCH 7, 1936.

Perhaps the most important single basic factor disturbing Europe today is that facts are not being generally faced and given the interpretation which common sense dictates and met with the action which elementary prudence obviously requires. This applies whether the facts be political, economic or fiscal.

The greatest danger and the one which threatens to destroy Europe is not facing the facts with respect to Germany and Italy, particularly with respect to Germany, in which the situation is essentially more dangerous, because of its nature and the potential power of the forces behind it.

The facts with respect to Germany are known, but they have not been consistently faced. In some countries there has even been an effort through press control, entire or partial, to keep the facts from the people, and Europe is now hampered in facing facts through an unprepared public opinion. Even in some of the best informed foreign offices and in some well informed financial and industrial circles there is a tendency to hold to illusions and to hopes which the facts and any common sense interpretation show are without foundation. The fundamental fact which Europe has to face today is that the National Socialist regime in Germany is based on a program of ruthless force, which program has for its aim, first, the enslavement of the German population to a National Socialist social and political program, and then to use the force of these 67 million people for the extension of German political and economic sovereignty over South-Eastern Europe - thus putting it into a position to dominate Europe completely and to place France and England definitely in the position of secondary powers. From this position of vantage the National Socialist program contemplates that Germany will be able to dictate its policies to the rest of the world. Fantastic as this program may seem, it has been and is the program of National Socialist Germany, and the action of Europe in not facing the facts and meeting them with the necessary decision has so far facilitated the various steps in the German program, which has up to now proceeded according to plan.

Anyone familiar with German policy before the war must know that it was always one of getting concessions without giving an equivalent. Whether Germany was responsible for the last war has become an academic

question, for whatever the true answer may be, we know now that although she came out of that war defeated and prostrate, ever since the end she has been winning victory after victory. If the present progress of fulfilment of the National Socialist program continues, she will become the most powerful country in Europe and its dictator, without striking a warlike blow. This policy of getting concessions without equivalent has only been accentuated since the end of the world war, and the record since 1919 is one of successive concessions to her, and whatever promises may have been given by her have not been kept. Through monies poured into Germany after the war, the German industrial and military structure have practically been built anew. Step by step the loads which Germany carried as a defeated enemy have been removed. Her being released from reparations was followed by a practical denunciation of or refusal to meet other foreign obligations. In not a single instance have her counter-promises, even when entered into voluntarily, been kept.

Now we have the most flagrant violation of all. The Locarno agreement, freely entered into, has been torn up at the moment believed to be opportune. At the same time the final act in the destruction of the Versailles Treaty has been played. With its usual cynicism the National Socialist régime and Hitler tear up the agreement which relieved the Rhineland of foreign occupation before the term set in the Versailles Treaty, as well as the Locarno Treaty, and offer to the partners in that same agreement a new one which starts with the provision for the establishment of a demilitarized zone on both sides of the western boundary - knowing full well that this would involve the destruction of the fortifications so laboriously and expensively built up on the French and to a lesser degree on the Belgian side. To appreciate the cynicism of this offer as well as what lies behind it, it is necessary to know, as some do know, that these fortifications are the major thorn not only in the side of the Nazi party, but of the German Army also. They offer practically an invincible barrier to German attack or advance on the west, and this from the military point of view is one of the greatest hindrances which Germany knows exists to its expansionist plans. The general belief in Germany and elsewhere that the first stages of the next war would be principally in the air does not in any sense lessen the importance which German party and military circles give to the removal of these obstacles to advance in the west. Germany has no intention of taking French territory for the present, not even Alsace and Lorraine. This is something way down in the program, and other things are to be accomplished first. But it knows that

behind this line of fortifications France, and perhaps Belgium, are fairly free from German advance, thus giving France a greater freedom of action. The height of cynicism is reached by this offer of Hitler Germany, which must be appraised at what it really is - a step by which the defense of the western powers towards German aggression in all directions is to be weakened.

It is known that National Socialist Germany holds as one of its primary doctrines that agreements are only entered into as a means to an end, and that they must be denounced ruthlessly when they have served their purpose. Although this is a fact of which major party leaders themselves have made no concealment in private, the western powers have not accepted it as a fact, and England entered into a naval agreement, on her side in all good faith, and is apparently still interested in an air agreement. France, which knows what the situation is, has been prepared to enter into conversations with Berlin for some time past, as though the agreements arrived at would offer any security. What is the reason for all this? It is the fear which Europe has of war. Europe knows that it lives at a time when war is still an instrument of policy which has to be reckoned with, particularly by Germany. It recognizes this by building up war machines, but when the moments come when the machine so expensively built up must be used, the fears which dominate Europe prevent action. It is this fear which Europe has of war which National Socialism has been, is and will continue to capitalize.

Just as National Socialism is appealing within Germany to all that is most base and at times to what is best in the German character, so without Germany it knows how to play upon the fears of Europe as well as on the better feelings of its people and governments. National Socialist Germany knows that Europe, with the memories of the horrors of the last war, does not want another. It knows that the veterans of the last war in every country, with the horrors of that war still so vivid in their minds, are inclined to listen to and to support peace moves from Germany. It knows that the German population, with an equal horror of war, will support the régime that apparently moves so strongly for peace, although at the same time that régime is feverishly building up a war machine that can only be meant for aggression. National Socialist Germany knows, too, that the military forces of the western powers do not want war, for while it is their job to fight, these forces know, too, well what fighting means. The policy of National Socialism of a series of faits accomplis towards the gaining of its ends is, therefore, based on this idea that the fear of war outside of Germany will keep off actual war against Germany or definite

action against her until Germany herself is ready to strike the crushing blow.

In this belief and policy she has had a certain encouragement. It is no secret in Germany that the French had decided to strike should a National Socialist régime come into power in Germany, and they know that when that régime did come, no action was taken. They know that when England saw herself threatened in her communications with the East by Italy, she sent her fleet into the Mediterranean, and the removal of certain units later was as usual misconstrued in Germany as an act of weakness rather than appraised at its real value as an act of British moderation. Every action which National Socialist Germany has taken which could have been used as the basis for determined action against the régime was met by protests. This is what National Socialism is counting on, and that in spite of the lack of a determined stand outside there are still elements in Germany who are against this program is, therefore, all the more astonishing.

The external pressure on Germany and the internal pressure of the economic and financial situation as well as certain aspects of the social problem have brought about a position within Germany when another spectacular step was necessary. The internal situation is really bad, and the power of the party among the people really weaker. Just as the re-establishment of obligatory military service, contrary to the provisions of the treaty, was immensely popular in Germany and undoubtedly increased popular morale, so the present disturbed situation in Europe is to be used by the party as a new element to rebuild morale through the reoccupation of the Rhineland. That this has involved the tearing up of what was left of the Versailles Treaty, as well as the denunciation of Locarno, Germany hopes that the powers will show the same inaction before this fait accompli as when faced by the others, and if she gets away with it, her position internally as well as externally will be correspondingly temporarily strengthened. The disregard which the National Socialist Party has of its acts in a disturbed world is again shown. The fate of the party is the primary consideration, and it is particularly significant in this respect to note that in his Reichstag speech on March 7 Hitler made it clear that whatever happened within Germany and whatever Germany chose to do within Germany concerned her alone. This statement is not in itself so obnoxious, but those who heard the statement realize that its significance lay in the tone and the spirit behind it rather than in the words. It was the arrogant expression of the attitude of the National Socialist Party that it is a law to itself in all matters, and it is this which has made it an international outlaw.

The ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact with all that it involves is a real blow to German aspirations in South-Eastern Europe. As a final measure to avoid its effects and to tear away England from France, Germany denounced Locarno, to which both England and France cling, and properly so, and offers to England's popular opinion an air pact and return to Geneva - knowing that both these offers, vague as they are, will find a response in widely divergent British circles. If Germany gets away with the tearing up of the Locarno agreement, the situation in South-Eastern Europe will gradually become hopeless so far as resistance to Germany is concerned. Versailles and St. Germain were not popular in some parts of South-Eastern Europe in many ways, and the tearing up of the Versailles Treaty could be looked upon in some of these countries with a certain complacency, if not satisfaction. The tearing up of Locarno, however, without adequate reaction by the western powers will be interpreted by South-Eastern Europe to mean that the road through them and to their absorption is open. If England and France permit Germany to get away with this fait accompli, certainly the Austrians will realize that if the next fait accompli is in this direction, England and France will be even less likely to do anything. They will know here that the tearing up of Locarno is a definite and direct threat to England and France and that if this is not met, then certainly a fait accompli in the direction of Austria, which would be a less definite threat to England and France apparently, but which is as real a one in fact, would also not be met.

It is difficult to forecast what the effect of the Rhineland occupation and of the tearing up of Locarno will be, but anyone who heard the Hitler speech will realize what it means. To read it is not enough, and it was necessary to hear it to realize what it means. Anyone who heard it and who knows the real temper of the party and of its leader must realize that the words of the peace offer mean nothing and that it was full of veiled threats in every direction. It was a peace speech held in a warlike tone, and there were moments when the enmity and bitterness broke through. Hitler's references to the need of room for expansion for the German people and the comparison which he made in the speech relative to the amount of territory per person were meant to play upon what has been made a popular desire for colonies. While he deliberately left the inference that the next move would be in the direction of colonies, information from party sources would indicate that the next item on the program is in reality Austria. The remark which Hitler made about having no territorial aspirations did not sound convincing to those who knew, and it was one of the few statements which he made on which he did not expand.

At least four months ago, it was known what the next German move would be and that it would be the reoccupation of the Rhineland. It was known that this move would be made, and at the first opportune moment. This information came from party sources, and time has shown how correct it was. The same party sources indicated at that time that after the reoccupation of the Rhineland the next step would be the absorption of Austria. If Hitler endeavored to divert attention in his speech from Austria to colonies, it is only one of the characteristic moves of the Hitler régime.

The consternation which this move by Germany will cause in South-Eastern Europe will be hidden for the present behind a certain calm, but the consequences are going to be real and may be disastrous. The people throughout South-Eastern Europe have already a deep-seated fear of German military and economic power and a real respect for it. They see National Socialist Germany as the only country in Europe with a definite program, which in spite of great internal difficulties and passive resistance from the outside, it is carrying through point by point. Unwillingly this has earned a certain respect for the power of Germany, no matter how harshly the régime itself may be condemned. If now these countries see Locarno torn up and this recent action met only by words, by conversations with Berlin, and perhaps by more agreements, which they know Germany will tear up just as ruthlessly as those already entered into, the spirits of the people in this part of the world will be prepared for what so many already feel is after all inevitable. The real resistance to German advance which has been built up in Austria and in these other countries will gradually inevitably disappear, leaving the way open for advance and absorption by Germany.

The conversations between Berlin and Rome which preceded the Hitler move on March 7 were apparently fruitless. They were fruitless because Italy was not prepared to burn her bridges behind her and hopes to get as a price for non-participation in the tearing up of Locarno the fulfilment of her major aims in Abyssinia. If Italy does get out of this move of Hitler's satisfaction in Abyssinia and enters into a concert again with France and England, the position in Central Europe will be improved, but the Italian question will not be settled, for she will have won her aims by international blackmail, and this is a precedent and a habit which when once established is not easily eradicated.

If, on the other hand, Italy does not get full satisfaction in Abyssinia out of the present disturbed situation, it will undoubtedly come closer to Berlin, but it does not seem likely that any agreement will

be made between Rome and Berlin which for the present will endanger the Austrian position. Even if Italy does not get satisfaction in Abyssinia, or full satisfaction, it is not likely that she is yet prepared to sacrifice Austria. As long as Italy sees a chance of holding to its position, it is not likely that she will sacrifice Austria or make a bargain with Berlin at Austria's expense. The Austrian position is, therefore, not so definitely threatened in the immediate future, and the German advance on Austria is at least for the present held up. This probable respite of some months does not in itself help the Austrian position in the long run, and the uncertain position is bound to have its repercussions within as well as without the country. The National Socialist movement is probably at its lowest ebb in Austria, but unless the German moves of March 7 are met in a way by England and France and the League which will show real determination and vigor, the Nazi element in the country will grow rapidly stronger, and a change of government may come from within which will throw Austria into the lap of Germany without a single aggressive step on the part of Germany. This internal movement will not take place unless definitely influenced by further developments from without, but if there is weakness or indecision in dealing with Germany now by the powers, the resistance within Austria will be tremendously reduced, and the currents against the Government strengthened. No one under these circumstances would be able to say how long Austria can last, and when Austria goes, the rest of the way through South-Eastern Europe will be easy for Germany. What is almost of equal importance is that parallel with the weakening of the situation in Austria there would follow a similar growth of Nazi currents in other countries of South-Eastern Europe, particularly Rumania and Hungary.

There is no question but that the situation in Europe has reached a very grave point as a result of the German action on March 7. One of the most important factors to be borne in mind is that Hitler in his Reichstag speech on March 7 repudiated the promises which he gave openly in the Reichstag at the end of last year and to various representatives of foreign states in Berlin since then - all to the effect that he would respect the agreements voluntarily entered into by Germany, including Locarno. Under these circumstances, what value do any future agreements which the present Government of Germany enters into have? Can anything more be needed to show that the often repeated statement that this Government in Germany has no intention to keep any agreements longer than it finds them useful is so absolutely true?

This impossibility to treat with the German regime as well as the still uncertain attitude of

Italy, which will desire to get out of the present crisis all that it possibly can, greatly complicates the situation. The task for England and France is as difficult as any by which they have ever been confronted. The only solution would seem to lie in their determined and complete common action expressed in such a way that it will be understandable to public opinion in Germany and throughout Europe and most unmistakably to those in control of the Nazi régime in Berlin. There is only one way to deal with the German régime of today, and that is to meet its brutal ruthless action by an equally determined stand. It is the only language which that régime understands, as it is the only language which it can talk. The German Government is by no means sure of its position, and the party within the country is weaker than it has been since it came into power so far as popular support is concerned. Although the reoccupation of the Rhineland will awaken popular approval, the majority of the German people will doubt its wisdom at this time and fear the consequences. If, however, this time the régime gets away with its fait accompli as it has in the past, who can blame an increasing majority of the German people for believing that after all Germany is invincible and has a mission to carry through by the domination of Europe? The majority of the German people still want peace and probably want it as much as the peoples in the rest of Europe. The National Socialist Party, which is deliberately preparing Germany for aggressive war, fears war now just as much as the other governments in Europe fear it, and perhaps even more so. Germany is not prepared for a war, even if it should have Italy on its side, and this is the factor which cannot be left out of the question by the powers in reaching their decision as to how to meet the German action of March 7. Certain factors within Germany are making her weaker, but these continued successes give new life to the party, which feverishly hopes that by these successful steps it may be able to sufficiently lengthen its life until it is able to itself strike the decisive blow. A determined stand by the powers now is almost certain not to lead to war, and it is the only thing which will bring to an end the series of faits accomplis which the German program provides for.

It is up to Europe now to decide whether it will face the facts, and there is still time. It is perhaps too much to say that this will be the last chance which Europe has to save itself from the ultimate catastrophe of a great war, but there are many indications that this is the turning point on which the future course towards war or peace will be determined.