

WHERE DID WE GO WRONG WITH GERMANY?

WORLD IN TRANCE. By Leopold Schwarzschild. Translated from the German by Norbert Guterman. Printed by Simpson and Williams, Christchurch, for Hamish Hamilton Ltd., London.

(Reviewed by Harold Miller)

WHAT are we going to do with the Germans? It is a ticklish question. We don't want to be soft and we don't want to be hard, and above all, we don't want to land ourselves in another world war. What are we to do? Well, we had this problem on our hands before and we made a mess of it; where precisely did we go wrong? It is a question that deserves very careful study; and fortunately for us it has been studied by an uncommonly clear-headed man in one of the best books of recent years, Leopold Schwarzschild's *World in Trance*. It consists of a brief examination of the Peace Settlement of 1919, a statement of what the writer regards as the cardinal error of the democratic leaders, and a very clear narrative, carefully documented, of the steps whereby a succession of German Governments evaded the provisions of the Treaty and prepared for another war.

According to Schwarzschild the chief mistake of the democratic leaders and of the democratic peoples was in allowing themselves to be deluded by the Wilsonian idea that the enemy peoples were blameless and that all would be well if only their wicked leaders were overthrown. If only the autocracies were destroyed and democracies established, all would be well, they argued. Actually a democracy was set up in Germany and immediately began to prepare for war. Most of this book is given up to a recital of the steps taken by Germany in preparation for another war.

Resistance to the settlement had begun before the Treaty was signed; for, rather than hand over the fleet (as was required by the terms of the Armistice), the German officers scuttled their ships in Scapa Flow. Then came the trial of the war criminals. We waived our right to conduct the trials ("you mustn't humiliate the new democratic leaders of Germany") and handed in to the German courts a list of 900 alleged offenders to start with. What happened? Only 12 were ever put in the dock and of them only six were convicted. Were we satisfied? Yes. ("There are always atrocities in war.") Then within a year

came the Kapp Putsch, the first attempt to overthrow the democratic republic. It failed. The army didn't support it, but took advantage of it to deal with some of its enemies. Already public opinion was moving to the right: in the 1920 elections the Weimar coalition was overthrown and the socialists disappeared from the Government. In the midst of these upsets the disarmament clauses of the Treaty were not enforced. They were originally intended to be carried out in three months, but they were not very popular: a factory manager who reported hidden arms was sentenced to life imprisonment! Nothing was done, except on paper. ("We're not disarming, why should they!") Oh, but we were screwing enormous sums out of them by way of reparations for war damage. But were they really so enormous? They certainly seemed so at the time; but we have lived to see Hitler squeeze out of the German people in a single year for re-armament as much as the Allies planned to get by way of reparation over tens of years. And what in fact did we get in the end? Nothing. The Germans borrowed from England and America more than they ever paid in reparation and then defaulted. They were not doing badly; fleet scuttled, war criminals let off, the 'reds' suppressed, the Weimar Coalition destroyed, disarmament evaded, reparations cooked—all in two or three years. (Actually the evasion of reparations took longer, but it was already well on the way.) Then in 1922 came Rapallo and the agreement with 'red' Russia, from whom they were to learn a great deal more than the artillery science and aeronautics that German officers henceforth were able to study in Soviet military schools. The army was beginning to show its hand. In this same year Rathenau, the foreign secretary who had undertaken to fulfil the Treaty, was blown to pieces in the street and a full-blooded reactionary, Cuno, came in as Chancellor. But this was going too fast. (After all the Treaty was still only three years old!) In 1923 when the Government announced that it was about to default on its reparation payments, the French marched into the Ruhr. A grim fight followed: it was the first (and only) real attempt at a showdown. The French won and a 'miracle' followed: Stresemann replaced Cuno, overnight Schacht stabilised the mark, and six years of reasonableness and order and prosperity followed. It's wonderful what you can do, when you try!

There followed (1924-1929) a return to illusion: the bad child had clearly learned its lesson and was going to be good—for ever. The bad child was certainly on its good behaviour, but it had its own reasons for this: the going now was good, the burden of reparation had been lightened (by the Dawes Plan), money was pouring in from English and American investors (£1,500,000,000 in five years!), artillery officers and pilots were being trained in Russia, and above all the democracies were ready to swallow anything! They swallowed Herr Stresemann. How they were deceived about Herr Stresemann! While the English editors were busy building him up into a good European, Stresemann was writing to the Crown Prince that for

the present "Germany must be subtle" and that entry into the League would allow her to stir up no end of trouble, not only in Europe but also among the colonial dependencies of the imperialist powers. When Austin Chamberlain prepared a plan for an Anglo-American guarantee to France, Stresemann countered with an absolutely "voluntary" offer to do what in fact Germany had only promised to do! Thus began the era of promises. Always, of course, at a price. Germany would guarantee the status quo in the west, but she must be allowed a free hand in the east; she would enter the League, but only if Poland and Spain and Brazil were not allowed permanent seats in the Council, and so on. She went further still: she obliged the League states to cover up her violation of the Treaty of Versailles! No enemy state could enter the League, unless the disarmament officials reported that she had fulfilled her obligations; when the officials in the case of Germany reported otherwise, the report was suppressed. Germany, it must be allowed, was doing well. Even when Field-Marshal Hindenburg (No. 1 on the list of war criminals) was elected president, all went on as before. In 1929, six years before the due date, the victors of 1919 agreed to evacuate the Rhineland. The leaders of the democratic countries were certainly accommodating.

And were the people any wiser than their leaders? Alas, while their enemies were preparing for war, they were going pacifist as fast as their legs could carry them. War was too terrible to think of! The thought that one of the defeated peoples was rapidly re-arming for another fight was so extraordinarily disagreeable that it couldn't possibly be true—anything rather than that! Simple people in all lands were really the same: all they wanted was to be left alone. So it was believed.

Well, by 1929 nobody could say that Germany had been harshly treated.

Ten years after the last world war (says Schwarzschild) . . . Germany was a respected, much-flattered member of the family of nations. Her living standard was higher than ever. Her economy was flourishing. She had been flooded with foreign money. The reparations had been reduced to a token. Interference with her internal administration had ceased. The military control had been abolished, and now the last foreign soldier had left German soil. The democracies were paralysed by the mere thought of war; they had passed a law against it. All they wanted now was to kiss and be friends. Surely the simple-hearted German people, who loved nothing so much as peace, could be trusted not to make trouble.

Alas, the real trouble was all to come—the simple-hearted German people had heard the voice of Hitler and in a year or two would be out for blood. In 1932 Hitler polled 15,000,000 votes and in 1933 he was in office. The rest of the story we don't need to be reminded about: ever-mounting armaments expenditure, introduction of conscription, Italian attack on Abyssinia, militarisation of the Rhineland, intervention in Spain, annexation of Austria, invasion of Czechoslovakia—all in four short years—and then the deluge.

Where did we all go wrong? According to Schwarzschild, in two ways—in



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PROBLEMS OF THE PEACE, by Wilson Harris, 4/7 posted. An important book dealing with topical questions—frontiers, the trial of war criminals, the Peace Conference and reparations.

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