

"Lebensraum" - Hitler's Fraud

By Sidney J. Abelson

In the amazing catalogue of historic frauds there is none more beguiling than Hitler's ululant cry for **Lebensraum**—none more persistent nor more hypocritical, and at the same time more capable of being given an air of plausibility. A nation must live, and if her own lands are unfertile or restricting, has she not every right to seek additional "living space" elsewhere?

Do not even the most virtuous men assert they would steal if need be to stave off the starvation of their dear ones? Why then berate Hitler for applying on a national scale those desperate measures seemingly justified in simple morality? Specifically, has not Hitler the right to obtain for his people the basic necessities of life?

The answer to such special pleading is, categorically, that the German people have a right to life; not only to the necessities of life, but to an ever higher standard of living—as have all the other peoples of the earth. And, all the howling of Nazi propaganda to the contrary, Germany, more than almost any other nation, has the power and the opportunity to achieve a high economic standard—with even the allegedly limited resources she had in the past war period, and before the annexation of Austria.

I propose to prove (1) that Germany's lack of raw materials is grossly exaggerated and that her domestic resources are more than adequate for a high standard of living; (2) that Hitler's demand for colonial territories is based on a perversion of economic facts; (3) that the fundamental economic problems of the German people are the same as those of all other peoples in the world today, of the "have" nations and the "have nots" alike—i. e., lack of free access to domestic resources and artificially impeded domestic and foreign trade; and (4) that if Germany were capable of normal commercial

relations with the rest of the world she could, in a short time, bring prosperity to her people.

Inasmuch as these aspects of the German economic situation are closely interrelated they need not be discussed one by one. The aggregate of facts reveals the correlative nature of Germany's problems, a correlation, of course, which attaches to the economic problems of all nations.

The Nazi point of view is expressed by Drs. G. K. Johannsen and H. H. Kraft* in "Germany's Colonial Problem": "No country is more dependent upon others for its supply of agricultural and industrial raw materials than Germany."

This bold statement, unsubstantiated by facts, has been repeated so many times in so many different ways that it has come to be looked upon as a truth of almost axiomatic power. Statesmen tremble before the spectre conjured up by this supposition that Germany must expand or explode. Confronted with it, the professional "economists" take on a knowing look and begin to rationalize Nazism, or else seek refuge in Communism as a blood and thunder antidote. After all, "We must be practical and face realities."

What is the truth? Dr. I. Bowman, in his authoritative "The New World," states, "No other country of Europe has so inviting a situation as Germany for conveniently reaching profitable markets or so large an endowment of natural resources. Among a limited number of essential plant foods the rarest are nitrate and potash. The potash deposits of Germany are the largest in the world, the nitrate production through use of lignite as a cheap fuel is the largest in the synthetic field. (1913—91,500 metric tons; 1926—661,500!) Given these two rarest plant foods in abundance, Germany can manage to feed herself while expanding industrially."** (Emphasis mine.)

These antithetical points of view expressed by the German propagandists and by Dr. Bowman represent, largely, conclusions as such; let us see

upon what specific facts these conclusions are based.

The "New York Times" recently commented editorially that the "trouble with statistics is that they tell us what, but often do not tell us why." Statistics are indeed dangerous, and comparisons are often odious, but fortunately the statistics I shall adduce presently are nothing more than simple facts which are too obvious to require mathematical wizardry to unravel; while the comparison I employ is one which is fair and to the point:

Switzerland, like Germany, has no colonial empire. This land-locked democracy has to depend for her well-being upon trade with the outside world. Yet Switzerland has maintained a standard of living comparable in many respects to that of the United States. Her people are relatively well-off and happy. Now it is true that Germany's population per square mile is greater than Switzerland's, but—and here is an example of the dangers of statistics—these gross figures give no idea of the real situation. Actually Germany is vastly "underpopulated" as compared with Switzerland, for the Reich has a population of but 811 for each square mile of arable land, while the cantonal Confederation has to support 2,111 persons on the same basis.

The population of Germany (prior to the unhappy adventures of 1933-1939) was approximately 16 times that of Switzerland. But Germany, in 1933, produced 35 times as much wheat as did Switzerland, 515 times as much barley, 279 times as much oats and 278 times as much rye! Need Germany totter on the verge of starvation? For a highly industrialized nation, capable of producing vast surpluses of manufactured goods for exchange in foreign markets, her domestically produced food supply suffers a ridiculously small deficit. The Foreign Policy Report on "Germany's Controlled Economy," dated March 1, 1939, says, "The wheat and rye crop (in 1938)

yielded 13,965,000 tons compared to a consumption of only 10,566,000 tons in 1937-1938. The yield in field grains amounted to 11,836,000 tons—almost equal to the 12,031,000 tons consumed in the previous year." The livestock census (1937) shows that Germany has 24 times as many horses as Switzerland, 26 times as many sheep, 12 times as many cattle, 25 times as many swine and 12 times as many goats.

While Switzerland is dependent almost entirely on importations for her raw minerals, Germany (in 1937) produced 184,512,000 metric tons of coal, 184,681,000 tons of lignite, 40,896,000 tons of coke, 8,522,000 tons of iron ore and 15,957,000 tons of pig iron—a sizable base on which to build a modern economy.

Why then does Switzerland prosper while Hitler bemoans Germany's fate and cries out for *Lebensraum*? Is the answer that German industry is inferior to Swiss? The question is ridiculous, but I ask it so that no possible clue to Germany's problem shall be overlooked. The New International Year Book for 1939 states, "No less phenomenal (than Hitler's usurpation of Austria and the Sudetenland) was the way in which Germany, by utilizing to the utmost her manpower and natural resources, attained a rank second to the United States in industrial output." Surely the explanation of Germany's plight does not lie in the index of industrial activity. We shall have to look elsewhere.

In the matter of foreign trade Switzerland has had an "unfavorable" balance year after year, so there is no advantage which the Confederation enjoys over the Reich in this respect.

However, it should be remarked that "favorable" or "unfavorable" trade balances may not in themselves reveal the true situation. For example, Switzerland trades abroad under the most advantageous conditions possible, considering present tariff barriers. But "in carrying out its policy of 'buying only from those who buy from us,' the Reich often had to pay higher prices for its raw materials and foodstuffs. Germany could no longer sell in the dearest market and buy in the cheapest," the

Foreign Policy Report states. (Emphasis mine.)

However, it is Germany rather than Switzerland which is favored by unique advantages. "In war," writes Dr. Bowman, "(the Reich) may be 'ringed about by enemies,' but in peace she is ringed about by customers. A short haul and her products are in all the markets of central Europe. Thirteen nations touch her borders. There are 18 cities with a total population of 4,000,000 in a belt of country 300 miles wide outside the German frontier . . . Germany's resources give her a commanding position with respect to many of the vital wants of these cities and their supporting country."

It is obvious that in proportion to natural resources and productive capacity of foodstuffs Germany has, if anything, an advantage over Switzerland. No one familiar with the development of German industry will deny that the Reich is at least equal in this category with Switzerland, on a basis of ratio of population. In technical training, in physical energy, in business talent, the Germans are surely on a par with the Swiss. What explanation, then, is there for Germany's failure to hold her own in the struggle for economic stability?

Apparently there are considerations other than natural resources and technical and commercial advantages which affect economic progress. Somewhere in the monotonous beltline of material production a human element takes its place.

"In Switzerland," says the Statesman's Year Book, "there is complete and absolute liberty of conscience and of creed." Of Germany, however, this same source reports, "A law was promulgated . . . giving absolute powers in church matters to the Minister for church affairs." Freedom, in all departments of human belief or faith, is more than an ideal for Utopians; it is an absolute condition of progress. Is Germany's plight explained by her policy of Teutonic chauvinism?

In a deep sense, yes; but arising from this chauvinism come factors which are more meaningful. For one thing, taxation took 33.5% of the national income, in 1937. Here

again the bald statistics do not tell the full story. According to Herr Brinkman, Reich Assistant Minister of Economics, as reported in the New International Year Book of 1938, "if the expenditure of all other public bodies 'which fulfill social tasks and satisfy collective requirements' are added to the amount of taxes and other public levies, public expenditures in the year 1937-1938 reached . . . about one-half of the country's national income."

These figures "tell us what, but they do not tell us why." The "why" is rearmament, plus a politico-economic policy which restricts domestic production and stifles foreign trade.

Hitler's tremendous war machine is gobbling up the fruits of production. Switzerland manufactures watch movements and delectable cheeses—coin not merely of the realm but of the universe. Germany, however, is making ordnance, not for the world's exchanges nor for normal domestic consumption; not for production, but for destruction. "Large sums have been spent on land reclamation and improvement, but the acreage affected has been smaller than the area taken for airports, roads, buildings and purposes connected with rearmament." (Foreign Policy Report.)

Now the world we live in is a vast market-place. Ours is an exchange economy. Civilization itself is made possible by man's capacity to higggle, to exchange what one does not want for what one does want. Hitler has throttled the conduits of German economic life. He has perverted the purposes of production, setting armaments as the goal, instead of the gratification of human desires.

Of course Germany needs *Lebensraum*. But she already has all the "living space" she requires. Within her borders, given an economy based on production for exchange, not for power, Germany, with her natural resources, her technical and industrial skill, her intellectual energy, could bestow upon her people a cornucopia of economic goods.

*Scientific Assistants to the Hamburg and Bremen Chambers of Industry and Commerce.

**Dr. Bowman's book was published in 1928. Since then Germany's productive facilities have increased considerably.