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ACTION GROUPS IN GERMANY

With the fall of the Hitler regime and the disappearance of Gestapo controls, leftist and conservative groups with divergent aims have assumed active roles in defeated Germany. The anti-fascist groups formed about left-wing nuclei, some of which appear to have been in existence prior to Allied occupation, have appeared in industrial communities but lack mutual contact and are local in character. They advocate a radical Nazi purge and hope to achieve a coalition of genuine anti-fascists regardless of former political affiliations and to prepare for a future democratic German government. The conservatives more or less willingly allied themselves with Nazism and were able to maintain contacts and exchange ideas under the Hitler regime. Since the fall of the Nazis they have retained or received the most important positions in German society. They do not share the Left's anti-fascist attitudes, oppose any increased power for labor in business and public administration, and hope by exploiting friction between the Western Powers and the USSR to preserve their present dominant position and retain what is potentially valuable in the shambles left by the Hitler regime.

The activities and programs of the anti-fascist groups are presently more concerned with the basic needs of daily life than with political issues. Defeat, destruction, and total occupation have temporarily subordinated normal political questions to denazification and the problems of minimum economic reconstruction. Despite these preoccupations, however, in several cases these anti-fascist groups have engaged in activities at variance with Military Government's prohibitions on political activity and some have attempted to act and be recognized as the provisional local government.

The conservative groups have similarly but more subtly sought to influence the selection of officials for public as well as business administration, and in certain cases have offered themselves as transitional regimes. Generally, however, they appear unwilling to accept public office but prefer to operate as pressure groups attempting to influence the decisions of municipal authorities and Military Government. Their main strength lies in the fact that many of them hold key managerial positions in important industrial enterprises.

Anti-Fascist Organizations

In widely separated localities, under a variety of names, and with no apparent interconnection, "united front" anti-Nazi movements appeared shortly after the collapse of Nazi rule. In some cases, notably in Leipzig and Bremen, these groups are reported to have a membership of several thousand, though many of these members for the time being may be

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merely passive sympathizers or supporters. The organization in Leipzig has assumed the name of "National Committee Free Germany"; in Bremen it is called the "Fighting Society Against Fascism." Other such anti-fascist societies or committees have been reported in Erfurt, Duesseldorf, Riederwald (a suburb of Frankfurt am Main), Ammendorf (a suburb of Halle), Marburg, the Ruhr, and Munich.

Available evidence suggests that the groups in Leipzig, the Ruhr, Munich, Duesseldorf and Riederwald existed prior to Allied occupation. Activities under the Nazi regime in most cases were limited to individual acts of sabotage and slow-down, dissemination of anti-Nazi propaganda, and preparation for the post-surrender period.

Despite their lack of mutual contact, these groups display a remarkable similarity in composition and program. Their leadership nuclei are composed of members of pre-1933 labor parties. The groups do not regard themselves as political parties but as emergency coalitions of anti-Nazi forces formed to deal with the problems which Germany has inherited from 12 years of fascism and war. These groups share and seek to realize the following goals in post-surrender Germany: a radical purge of all Nazis and Nazi sympathizers from public and business life; the seizure of Nazis, Nazi funds, and Nazi records; the preclusion of a Nazi underground; the amelioration of food problems; the organization of a coalition of genuine anti-fascists regardless of former political affiliations; and preparation for a future democratic government, administration, and education. While apparently agreeing on these broad aims and short-range goals, these organizations as groups have not taken a stand on such problems as the precise form of the future German state or the degree of public ownership of public resources. Moreover, some disagreement exists between political groupings within these organizations as to the definition of a Nazi and the extent to which a radical purge should be prosecuted. The Communists, for example, appear to demand a more exhaustive purge than the Social Democrats.

The dominant political elements in each group appear to vary from community to community according to special local circumstances, but the Communists seem to form the most active and often the strongest element. In Leipzig and Riederwald, Communists clearly are the driving force; in Marburg and Duesseldorf the outstanding figures are Social Democrats; in Bremen a Communist is the leader though both Social Democrat and Socialist Labor representatives hold key positions in the local anti-fascist society. The extent of middle-class participation likewise varies. Among the reported 4,500 members of the Committee in Leipzig not more than 500 are active bourgeois participants. In some of the other groups middle-class intellectuals and clergy are more prominently represented.

These left-wing anti-fascist movements have so far appeared only in industrial communities and seem to flourish only where representatives of the former working-class parties have succeeded in sinking their differences and uniting behind a single short-range program. Moreover,

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there appears to be some connection between the degree of disruption from bombing and evacuation and the emergence of organized political activity.

Each of the anti-fascist groups which has emerged appears to have been formed exclusively on the initiative and under the leadership of purely local forces. Despite the conformity of their structure and programs to the principles of Free Germany, the influence of the Moscow Free Germany Committee appears to have been very slight. The Leipzig group, as its name suggests, considers itself a part of the Free Germany movement, but its decision to "affiliate" was reached only after the various Leipzig activists had come together and decided to establish a Committee. German leftists generally appear to regard the Moscow movement as a propaganda instrument, and distrust the military figures among its leaders.

Already a number of these groups have engaged in open political activity beyond the immediate aim of eliminating Nazism. In several cases these anti-fascist groups undertook independent Nazi purges and demanded to act and be recognized as the provisional local government. In conformity with Allied occupation policy all these anti-fascist groups, therefore, have been officially dissolved by Allied authorities and recruiting of membership has been forbidden. In spite of this prohibition these coalition groups apparently continue to exist.

Conservative Activities

The pattern of activity among German conservatives is much less well defined than among left-wingers. This is partly because the elements concerned—civil servants, businessmen, and military leaders—already occupy positions of actual or potential influence and hence feel less need for organization. Under these circumstances, activity takes diverse forms and is not always readily apparent.

The most spectacular example of conservative anti-Nazi initiative was provided by the Bavarian Freedom Action, a movement comprised of several loosely connected groups of divergent tendencies. Several of these groups are middle-class and right-wing liberal in character. All of them operated under the cover of General von Epp, the Governor of Bavaria. Von Epp, who was instrumental in Hitler's rise to power and delivered Bavaria to Hitler in 1933, together with a small number of *Wehrmacht* officers and Foreign Office officials a few months prior to the German surrender reportedly formed a Bavarian "opposition" group. Acting as a traditional nationalist and as a Bavarian federalist, Von Epp entered into negotiations with Von Rundstedt and later with Kesselring for a surrender to the Western Powers which would leave his movement in control of Bavaria. One of the constituent groups of Bavarian Freedom Action actually tried to effect a *coup* in Munich, though not at the direction of Von Epp, who held back when Kesselring refused to take part.

In the Rhineland, industrial firms formed skeleton forces under "reliable" plant managers to look after the interests of their companies

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in the early stages of the occupation. In Herzogenrath, near Aachen, businessmen assembled to elect their own mayor and chief of police, who they hoped would be recognized by the Allied authorities, but who were rejected after investigation. In Krefeld, old chambers of commerce, which had been reformed and integrated into the Nazi economic control system, were quickly revived after Allied occupation to look out for the interests of businessmen. In Kassel, leading industrial and commercial figures, though they declined to accept public office, formed themselves into an informal advisory council in order to impress their viewpoints on the municipal authorities and Military Government.

The keynotes of conservative activity, whether it takes the form of Bavarian separatism or of local economic bodies, are the preservation of continuity in German social and economic life and the avoidance of change. With the Nazis gone, these right-wing elements occupy the most important positions in German society and wish to keep them. They clearly intend to utilize and exploit any antagonisms and friction between the Western Powers and the USSR to safeguard their position and their properties. They will also oppose any efforts by labor to gain a greater voice or power in business or public administration. Concurrent with their efforts to exploit the "Bolshevist menace," the conservatives are attempting to prove that the workers were responsible for the Nazi rise to power.

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