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AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL,  
Berlin, Germany, April 5, 1933.

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH  
REICHSMINISTER GOERING.

On Saturday, April 1, I lunched at the home of Col. Herring, Attache for Air of the British Embassy, and among the guests was Staatssecretaer Milch who is the active head of the Luftverkehrs Ministry of which Reichsminister Goering is the titular head. Dr. Milch was formerly connected with the Lufthansa in an important capacity and is an intimate co-worker of Minister Goering. During the conversation after lunch when the ladies had left the dining room, Dr. Milch, who is undoubtedly a very intelligent and very temperate and thoughtful person, engaged me in conversation and was particularly concerned with the apparent effect in foreign countries, particularly in the United States, of what was passing in Germany, and this led to very careful comment on my part as to the concern which all thinking people must feel both in the United States and Germany, as to the possible and almost inevitable effect on public opinion of certain aspects of the German situation. He was very much interested in my comment which seemed to present a new point of view to him, and expressed the opinion that what I had said to him would undoubtedly be of real interest to his chief, Minister Goering.

On Monday, April 3, I received a telephone call from Staatssecretaer Milch, stating that Minister Goering had expressed the hope that I would be able to come to see him on April 4 at 1:30 o'clock, as he would like to have the opportunity of talking with me for about twenty minutes. I stated to him that I appreciated the Minister's invitation and would be very happy to come if it were understood that my visit was entirely unofficial and personal and would be considered so by the Minister, and that no publicity whatever would be given to it. I stated that I could in no way speak for my Government on any subject without authorization, and in the ordinary course such a conversation would be through the Charge d'Affaires at the Embassy. He replied that he understood perfectly and that

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no publicity whatever would be given and that the Minister simply wished to see me in a personal way. I was embarrassed by the invitation when I received it over the telephone but had to make an immediate decision, and in view of the importance of Minister Goering in the Government and in view of the existing circumstances which are so well understood that I need not go into them here, I felt that a refusal to come if I had adequate assurances of the personal nature of the interview, would be misunderstood.

I informed the Charge d'Affaires, Mr. Gordon, of the circumstances surrounding the making of this appointment and while we both appreciated the irregularity of the proceeding, we realized that under the existing situation a refusal on my part to go or an endeavor to avoid the conversation would be definitely misunderstood and that if I had adequate assurances that the interview was personal and unofficial and would not be given any publicity, some good might be accomplished by the conversation.

I therefore called on Minister Goering at 1:30 on April 4 at No. 68 Behrenstrasse which is the Air Ministry and which was formerly the DANAT Bank. It is interesting to note that unusual precautions are taken to protect Minister Goering as I first had to pass in the lower lobby several National Socialist guards to whom I had to make it clear that I had an appointment with the Minister. I was then led by an S.A. man to the second floor to the end of a corridor where two stalwart guards in a blue uniform stopped us in a quite peremptory manner and my S.A. man was ordered to take me into the common waiting-room although I explained to the guards that I had an interview with the Minister for 1:30. I had the distinct impression that the two guards outside of his door viewed me with rather poorly concealed hostility when they saw that I was an American. Almost immediately, however, an S.A. man took me from the common waiting-room to the Minister whose promptness in meeting the appointment was quite exceptional in view of the waiting which I have been subjected to in other Ministries since March 5.

With Reichsminister Goering was Dr. Milch, and he received me in a courteous and friendly way. I began the conversation by stating that I was very glad to come but that the Minister appreciated, as Dr. Milch had already informed

him



him I was sure, that I was there in an entirely personal way and could in no sense speak officially and understood that there would be no publicity whatever. The Minister stated that I could be tranquil in that respect. He thereupon began to talk about the Diplomatic and Consular Services in general and asked many and searching questions with regard to the way our Ambassadors, Ministers and Consuls are appointed, what salaries they receive, what allowances they had and what happened on changes of administration. He seemed on the whole quite well informed and I answered his questions with regard to our procedure. I gathered that his interest in this matter was prompted by what is the undoubted interest of the National Socialist Party in the German Foreign Office and Foreign Service, as it is now commonly understood that the Party desires to take the same action in this Ministry which it has already taken in others. This part of the conversation had no particular interest from our point of view but was significant as showing that the question of Germany's foreign representation and the Foreign Office in Berlin are matters very much on the Minister's mind; and he laid a good deal of stress on the idea that from the beginning Ambassadors had been more or less a personal representative of the Chief of State. I gathered the impression that he felt that the higher officers in the Diplomatic branch could be moved or eliminated, particularly Ambassadors and Ministers, without seriously affecting the conduct of foreign relations of a country. I informed him that in our practice we found it just as important to have good Ambassadors and Ministers and trained men in the Diplomatic branch of the Foreign Service as to have such trained men in the Consular branch.

The Minister then opened the way for a discussion of the alleged anti-German propaganda in the United States. I told him that in this respect I might be able to give him some interesting background if he were interested, which he asked me to do. I said that it seemed to have been no longer taken into account in Germany that the American press and the many organs of public opinion as well as the radio, were entirely free in the expression of opinion and that our Government did not exercise any control over the press and I doubted whether it could do so except in time of war or great emergency, and that even then I doubted whether such a control would be possible as that which was being exercised in Germany at this time. I called attention to the pronouncements of the National Socialist Press and of the press in

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general in Germany, to the effect that if the anti-German propaganda in the United States and other countries did not cease, the boycott would be continued and in a more pronounced form. I said that in the first place we had no information to the effect that there was anti-German propaganda in the American press and that the articles which the Minister called attention to with respect to cutting off of hands and violating of cemeteries, had appeared at the most in a few newspapers and that so far as we could learn and were informed, the American papers had endeavored to report quite objectively on what was passing in Germany. I stated that the, in many cases, ill-concealed threats of retaliation which appeared in the German press if the anti-German propaganda did not cease, could have little effect even if such anti-German propaganda existed, as control could not be exercised by any Government in the United States at this time in such a matter. The Minister responded in a rather cynical tone but in no way unpleasantly, that he thought it was a weak Government which could not control the press. He said: "Do you mean that your newspapers can publish anything about the Government they want, or about individuals?" I said that this was by no means so; that so far as individuals were concerned the newspapers were and had to be extremely careful because the law provided the proper remedy, and through the courts any person who would be injured by the irresponsible press had his remedy. As to criticism of the Government, I stated that it was free as long as it was in a restrained and proper tone and that if it was not in a restrained and proper tone the public took care of that itself and no such newspaper could live. Here Dr. Milch stated that what I said was undoubtedly correct and that he was sure it was interesting for the Minister to know.

I took the opportunity to tell the Minister that it was not only the newspapers which came into question in the United States, but our many magazines, weekly and monthly, which had a great deal to do with forming public opinion as even the serious ones of which we had an unusually large number, were widely read and that the men who wrote in them were for the most part objective and unusually well-informed persons, a good part of them having been in Germany and who knew Germany well. I stated that these men had sources of information with regard to what was passing in Germany and would have their individual reactions thereon and would undoubtedly give expression to them in these more serious magazines. I said that the attitude of these



men could in no way be influenced by the threatening tone of the German press at the present time and that there was reason to believe that if the press here did not change its tone, it would form a very unfavorable background for these men. I pointed out that the absolute censorship of the press which no one here denied, would be very repugnant to writers and public opinion in general in the United States and probably elsewhere, and that this already created a very unfavorable background for what undoubtedly were useful things which the present Government here intended to do. It was worth while considering whether the attitude of the press in Germany and of the authorities in back of it was not prejudicing in a material way the press reaction in other countries to what the Government was trying to accomplish. I pointed out that outside of the technical publications in Germany, there were practically no such periodicals of opinion published in Germany as these to which I referred as being so widely read and so influential in the United States and that this consideration had probably escaped their attention. This seemed to interest the Minister very much.

He referred to the so-called "horror" stories which some of the American correspondents here had sent out and I told him that I did not naturally know what the American correspondents sent out but that I knew most of them and that for the most part I thought they were most meticulous in sending out only substantiated stories. I said that the Minister would probably have to consider that any correspondent of any paper here who did not send out substantiated news would not last long and that therefore the correspondents who reported substantiated stories could only be considered as doing what they thought was their duty towards their principals. I said that to my personal knowledge many of the correspondents used particular caution in verifying everything they did send out.

The Minister then said that too much emphasis was being placed on what had happened to individuals; that one must not forget that this was a revolution and a very real one, and that never in history had a revolution of so far-reaching a character been carried through with so little bloodshed. He said that if at the beginning of the revolution there had been great bloodshed and for a few days wide disorders, the foreign press would have accepted this as a necessary incident to a revolution and it would soon have been forgotten. Instead they had tried to carry it through without bloodshed and it was extraordinary how few people had actually

suffered

suffered rather than how many. He stated that it was regrettable that foreigners including Americans had in some cases suffered, but that he saw no way this could have been avoided much as he regretted it. He said one must not emphasize the importance of single cases. I said that I thought there was no doubt but that public opinion in the United States would understand that a revolution must be accompanied by inconvenience and in some cases injury to foreigners; but that if I understood the American people at all, it was not what had happened to a few individual Americans which caused their surprise and questioning at what was taking place in Germany, but what appeared to be to the outside world a wholesale persecution of Jews. Hereupon the Minister spoke with energy and emphasis for a few moments on the preponderant part the Jews were playing in Germany life and upon the deteriorating influence which they had exercised. I said that if a declaration of policy had been made by the authorities and an orderly program set forth and carried out with some consideration for these persons who had lived in Germany for so many years, there would have been better understanding abroad of the action against the Jews. It was the wholesale clearing out of Jews from the Government, professions and now from business which for instance in the United States would not be understood as it would be considered as an unnecessarily harsh and ruthless measure on the part of the German people, and one difficult to understand.

I told the Minister that during the past few years particularly the patience and endurance of the German people had aroused much admiration and sympathy and that the general feeling for Germany and the problems of her people was one of understanding and sympathy, and with a good part of the people, with a real desire to help. The Minister stated that even in the United States the Jews were discriminated against and that there was a prejudice against them. I stated that he might have a wrong conception or only a partial conception of our attitude and that although there might be social prejudices on the part of some against the Jews, that I had never heard of anyone suggesting any interference with their completely equal rights in the Government, in the professions and in business and before the law. I said what American public opinion would not be able to understand was action against any race or the people of any religion in such a great country as Germany, as long as they did not break the law and conformed to the life of the country.



I said that one of the aspects of the question which was probably of greatest concern, was what the rest of the world would consider the subordinating of the courts to a party. The wholesale removal of the Jewish judges from the criminal, civil and business tribunals which was now practically complete, would have a disturbing influence on foreign firms and on persons intending to do business with Germany. I pointed out that it was not so much a question of the removal of the Jewish judges which would destroy confidence, but that a political party on assuming power displaced judges and interfered with a branch of Government which was invariably undisturbed by politics. In this connection I pointed out the case of the Gillette Company which has a patent case pending on behalf of its German factory and that the "Angriff", the official organ of the National Socialist Party in Berlin and the organ of the Party in Slingen where the factory is situated, commenced a campaign against the American company at a time that the case was about to be heard. I said that for the continuance of business relations the inviolability of the courts and confidence in them was indispensable; for no business man in any country could make contracts with German firms or any engagements unless he felt that he would have a fair hearing and judgment in the German courts. I recited a few incidents which have already been reported to the Department, where a judge was removed from hearing a case because the defendant claimed possibility of political prejudice. I said that under no circumstances would it be possible to keep information like this from reaching the outside world and that the almost inevitable result would have to be loss of confidence in the courts, and rather than take any risks people would divert their business to other countries. I took the occasion to point out that no country can tell its business men where to place their orders and that if, for example, American firms lost their confidence in the German courts, there would be no way in which they could be forced to continue business with Germany. I have gone into this aspect of our conversation at this length as I felt that the Minister was particularly impressed by this.

With respect to this question of confidence I raised also the question of possible effects on business and financial opinion in the United States of what appeared to be a policy of destroying the department stores. The Minister did not contradict that this might be their policy. I said that in this connection it would hardly be possible to leave out of account that in the Tietz stores there was at least 10 million dollars of American money and in the Karstadt stores from 15 to 20 million dollars and that if certain measures which seemed

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to be contemplated were carried through, these stores would be bankrupted. The Minister pricked up his ears at this as it was the first mention of money, and he became very energetic and said: "But what if we destroy these stores and carry out our economic plans and lose the friendship of other countries? All we lose is your friendship and you lose the money you have in these stores and in the rest of German industry." I said that in this connection it was worth while to consider not only the American and foreign capital invested in stores and in German business, but also that if these investments disappeared, at the same time German investments would disappear and that the American investments could disappear only with the breakup of the businesses themselves in which the capital was invested, and that this necessarily involved a general disturbance if not a breakdown, of the whole economic structure of the country. This point was discussed at length as it seemed to present a new phase to the Minister who had apparently been naive enough not to realize that the disappearance of the foreign capital would also mean destruction of German capital and disturbance of the economic structure of the country. I gathered the distinct impression that he looked with a certain amount of satisfaction upon the possibility of Americans and foreigners losing the capital they have invested in Germany but that it was rather a new point of view to him to realize that this loss was bound up with rather disastrous results for the country itself.

The Minister returned to a discussion of the so-called Anti-German propaganda in the American and foreign press. He said: "When the war broke out, Germans were trodden down in the streets and maltreated by the mobs, and the police could not offer them protection against the mobs." I asked the Minister whether he actually believed this and I must say that from his reaction I gathered that he sincerely believed the statement. I said that I was always afraid of making categorical statements but that I felt sure that if he had the archives of the Foreign Office consulted he would find no records of German diplomatic and consular officers who were still in the country, to this effect. I told him it was unfortunate that he had such a misconception as it undoubtedly would influence his own attitude, and that I was confident that on the contrary the Germans in the United States had been treated with every consideration.

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He then said: "We don't make a fuss in Germany every time a gangster shoots down innocent people in the streets of Chicago or some other

American



American city". I called his attention to the fact that this was an entirely different matter from uniformed men of the National Socialist Party attacking entirely innocent people who did no wrong except to hold a different political opinion or who happened to belong to the Jewish race. Our police might not always be able to get the gangsters but at least they tried; but that what public opinion at home could not understand was that the acts of the uniformed members of a political party against other persons on account of race or political opinion, had been covered by a general amnesty. I said I was sure he did not wish to compare the acts of gangsters to the activities of his S.A. men.

I took the opportunity to again, towards the end of the conversation, impress the Minister with the concern which many people felt regarding the tone of the German press towards foreign countries. Even in the papers which were not directly National Socialist organs, the writers of the Party in the editorial offices of these papers appeared to be writing in a manner as though public opinion abroad could be threatened. I said that it could only be feared that such intemperance, if not arrogance, would be seriously resented. I again pointed out at the end of the interview that the same propaganda methods which are used in Germany could not apply to foreign countries except with what would be undoubted disastrous results, for public opinion abroad - at least I could speak for the United States - was quite intelligent and well informed and that mere denials that certain things had not happened and mere affirmations that other things were so, would make no impression in the United States except to increase lack of confidence and understanding.

I emphasized to the Minister that it was the desire of all of us in the Government Service in Berlin to do everything we could to maintain the good relations between Germany and the United States; that we had in the past weeks done everything we possibly could in that direction; but that he would be the first to understand that it was possible for the Government here to make the task extremely difficult for us. In this connection I pointed out that the rights of Americans were being violated both by the police and the S. A. men and that our Government would eventually have to take cognizance of this situation if it was not corrected. I pointed out the case where two American students in Breslau had been arrested and put in jail for a trivial reason and

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where an American was taken off a train in Dresden for no real reason and put in prison over night; and that in these three cases the police refused the request of these men to see the Consul. I said that the same had happened in the last days in Berlin where, at the Polizeil Praesidium, two Americans had been refused permission to communicate with the Consulate. I pointed out that this was a violation of such a fundamental and well accepted right that the publication of such stories which we had so far been able to avoid would create a very unfavorable effect. I said that Germany and the United States were both countries which needed the rest of the world for their markets and that we not only wished to retain each other's good-will but that probably no country at this time needed the good-will and understanding of the world so much as Germany. The Party undoubtedly had plans for the reconstruction of German economic life but that if through one item of the program such as the anti-Jewish movement it lost the good-will of the world, it would be a serious handicap in carrying through the economic program.

The Minister asked me what I thought they could do. I told him that I could not possibly offer any suggestion but that I believed that it was of primary importance for them that the confidence in the Government, in the judicial, financial and economic structure, be maintained throughout the world as well as in Germany, and that in taking any action so far as the interior was concerned, the external repercussions of such action in modern times must be considered.

The Minister expressed appreciation of my having come to him and of my frankness, to which I replied that I could only have spoken to him at all in a personal way and that if it was to have any use I should have to speak frankly; but that he would understand that it came from a person who was filled with nothing but good-will towards his Government and the German people. I said that I wished to make it clear that anything I had said was not in any sense criticism, but merely an expression of what reaction there has been or may be to events in Germany. The Minister again thanked me for my frankness and what he called my kindness and hoped that he might have the opportunity of seeing me again.

When the interview was arranged through Dr. Milch and when I asked Dr. Milch how long the Minister would wish to see me, he had said "about twenty minutes". After the interview had lasted

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about half an hour, I showed indication of being ready to leave and as the Minister undoubtedly wished to continue, I left the initiative after that to him. After some three-quarters of an hour the Minister asked Dr. Milch what time he had his appointment in another building and he was informed at 2:35 p.m. He therefore continued the interview with me until 3:30. On leaving the room with the Minister, he showed a very friendly attitude, and in the anteroom there were at least a dozen people waiting to see him and with whom he probably had appointments. He threw up his hands and expressed regret and left. I remained for a moment to talk with Dr. Milch who thanked me sincerely for having talked with the Minister as I had and stated that he was sure that the Minister had found it "most interesting". I gathered the impression through the interview that the Minister was deeply interested and most of the subjects which arose were broached by him. His entire attitude throughout the interview was quite cordial and he gave me the impression of a man of much strength of character, real intelligence and on some subjects well informed but on others almost as naive as a child. He seemed to have the most elementary views on economic and business matters and it confirms the impression which I have had that many of the mistakes which the Government seems to have made are due to the fact that most of the leaders of the movement have practically no knowledge, at least no accurate knowledge, of the outside world and no real knowledge whatever of economic problems. In resume, I had the impression after the interview that it may have cleared up very definitely certain misconceptions which Minister Goering may have had with regard to public opinion in the United States and the means of influencing it; and also cleared his views on some other subjects. On some subjects I had the impression that the interview left him with quite a number of question-marks; on others I believe his views were absolutely unaffected. On the whole, however, there is some reason to believe that the interview was well worth while, for if it has done nothing else, it has at least given the Minister a proper understanding of the attitude of our officers in Berlin. This I base on the fact that Dr. Hanfstaengl has spoken to some one as having knowledge of the interview and of Minister Goering being pleased with it.

So far as I am able to determine, the fact that this interview took place is known to only a very few persons and no publicity has been given to it in any form.

George S. Messersmith,  
American Consul General.