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Vienna, November 16, 1935.

No. 610.

Subject: WITH REFERENCE TO THE ACTIVITIES OF
COLIN ROSS.

CONFIDENTIAL.

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to transmit the following information with regard to Colin Ross, a German citizen, which I believe has some interest for the Department. It may be found advisable to bring at least a part of this information to the attention of the Department of Justice and to the Department of Labor for their confidential files

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and possible future reference. There is reason to believe that Colin Ross is an agent of the German Government.

Colin and Fritz Ross are brothers. Both of them are at present residing in Austria and claim to be refugees and unable to return to Germany. Fritz Ross was formerly one of the leading members of the board of directors of Ullstein, for many years one of the leading publishing houses in Germany. He married the daughter of Hans Ullstein, and in this way assumed a very important position in Ullstein affairs. When the National Socialist Government came into power, Fritz Ross became persona non grata and left Germany, and has since resided in Austria. Although the Ullstein publishing house and all its interests have been taken over by the present National Socialist Government, and only a ridiculously small sum given to the Ullstein family for this valuable business, the proceeds have been sufficient to permit Fritz, as the husband of one of the daughters, to lead a retired comfortable life on an estate in Lower Austria. So far as I am able to learn, he devotes himself entirely to running his estate and is not engaged in any political activities. He is characterized by one who knows him well as "dumb and bold". I have known him for a number of years and have found him to be the usual type who marries a rich wife.

When Fritz Ross became a predominating member of
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the Ullstein business, he began to favor his brother Colin, who has had a rather variegated career. During the war Colin was an officer in the German army and was put on "special service". His particular duty was to put Germany in a good light during the war, and he proved to be an able propagandist. When the revolution came in Germany in 1918, with several other of his officer associates he became a Communist. He was one of the leading spirits in the so-called "soldier councils", which he really organized. One familiar with his career states that he believed that the time had come to make himself a Napoleon. This failed, and he was arrested and confined for a time. He then disappeared from the scene for some time, as he was considered wholly unscrupulous, a self-advertiser and a turncoat by all with whom he had been associated.

When his brother Fritz assumed this important position in the Ullstein concern above mentioned, he sent Colin on many trips abroad, which carried him to the United States, South America, and to the Far East. The subsidies given him by the Ullstein concern were very considerable, and his travel articles appeared in the Ullstein papers. His earnings from lectures when he returned to Germany were large, and his chief aim was always to make his lectures interesting and spectacular. Accuracy and truthfulness were never essential features of his lectures and articles.

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When Fritz Ross left Germany on the coming into power of the National Socialist Government, Colin also refrained from returning there. Although I had known Fritz Ross for some years, I did not know Colin until September of this year, when Fritz Ross told me that his brother was giving a lecture in the Urania in Vienna on "America's Hour of Destiny", which he said I would be sure to find interesting, and pressed me to go. I went, and for an hour and a half he delivered to a large audience what impressed me as being a deliberate misrepresentation and distortion of the situation in the United States. The war of independence he pictured to his audience as a purely selfish struggle on the part of the colonies and took out of it all semblance of heroism. Democracy and liberty, he said, had never really existed in the United States. If it had once been the land of opportunity, it was certainly not that now. If poverty and suffering existed in Europe, they were nothing to that existing in the United States. America was a country in the hands of a small group that had known how to make the people believe they were governing themselves. For our judicial system he found words of contempt. For all that could be criticized in our institutions he found ample time in his lecture, but for all that could be said in favor of our country he found the time too short. The United States, he said, had interfered in the World War in an unwarranted and unjustifiable . . .

unjustifiable manner, although through our Monroe doctrine we made it clear that we would brook no interference, no matter how justifiable, in the affairs of an American state. We were a volatile people and a sentimental one. He gave the distinct impression that Europe had better beware and realize that we might interfere in her affairs again in an equally unjustifiable manner. Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and Roosevelt were mentioned in the same breath as dictators, leaving the impression that there was little difference between them. The United States prided itself on being an Anglo-Saxon country, when as a matter of fact this was a myth, and he grew lyrical over the part which the Germans had played in the development of the country. It was high time, he said, that the American people recognized this. He spoke of the disappointment of others in America and of the disappointed aliens who had gone there, looking on it as a land of unlimited opportunity and finding only disappointment and despair. Immigration had been encouraged for years, only because we needed cheap labor.

After the lecture I simply turned to his brother Fritz and his wife, who were there, shook hands with them and without making any comment on the lecture stated that I could not remain to meet his brother, as he desired, as I had engagements elsewhere. The lecture was so objectionable that it was only because I could not leave the room without creating an incident that I did not do so.

I formed the impression from this lecture that Colin Ross is undoubtedly an intelligent man. He opened his lecture by saying that he had been in the United States this last time for two and a half years, had covered the whole country repeatedly, but had made his home principally in Chicago. His lecture was principally significant for his complete emphasis on destructive criticism and for his giving a completely unbalanced picture to his audience. I gathered the impression that it was deliberate misrepresentation, but it left me in the dark as to his object. I also gathered the impression of a somewhat mentally sick person.

As a result of this lecture I thought it advisable to inform myself further concerning Colin Ross, and I have secured the background given in the first paragraphs of this despatch. I have now also found a book of his entitled "Amerikas Schicksalsstunde", which was published in 1935 by the firm of Brockhaus in Leipzig. So far as I can learn, this book has not yet been translated into English or published in the United States. I have not had the time to read the book as a whole, but have read the introduction and parts of the book. This book, I believe, is worthy of attention, because of the distorted view which it gives of the United States and of its political and social institutions.

In the foreward he calls attention to the fact that although his name might indicate Anglo-Saxon origin, he is a German citizen and a German. The

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foreword pictures the Germans in the United States as a repressed minority, which is under Anglo-Saxon domination. Throughout the foreword and in the chapters which I have read there runs the constant note that the Germans in the United States have been the principal constructive element in the country, but have been persistently and consistently repressed. He pictures the Germans in the United States as a minority group, which because of its power must begin to feel and exercise that power. In this respect the book is definitely subversive in character.

Although Colin Ross is living outside of Germany and in some circles represents himself as a refugee, it is interesting that his book "America's Hour of Destiny" was published in Germany, and as no books are published in Germany today without the approval of the National Socialist regime, he cannot be persona non grata to the party. I am further informed that his articles are again appearing in various newspapers in Germany. In his book, also, all the references which he makes to the National Socialist Party and to the present Government in Germany are of a guarded but a eulogistic character. He emphasizes that the new Government in Germany is giving the country its place under the sun, and the note constantly runs through the book that the Germans in other countries, principally in the United States, must seize their opportunities . . .

opportunities to make the "German idea" control.

The book, therefore, seems to be an expansion of the theme of his lecture in Vienna, which I have given in resumé in a previous paragraph. Particularly interesting are the numerous illustrations which are found in this book, the object of which is to show the juxtaposition of wealth and squalor in the United States. The illustrations, too, are so chosen as to show that the United States is not a nation and that among the elements comprising it the German is the most virile and has for its destiny the shaping of the United States into a nation on the "German idea". By this latter he definitely leaves the impression throughout the book that the "German idea" is that of the Germany of today.

Colin Ross was during the war in the secret service of Germany and a part of the time a skilled propagandist. He is, I believe, a man utterly without principle and at the same time somewhat a mentally sick man. There is no question, however, of his ability as a lecturer and as a propagandist. There is also no question of his willingness to sell his pen and his voice. While direct information is lacking that he is an agent of the present German Government, it is significant that he should be representing himself as an exile and at the same time publishing a book in Germany and having his articles appear in the German press. Under the conditions existing in Germany today this can mean only one thing.

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It is, I believe, significant, because of the views which he has expressed in the book under reference on the importance of the repressed German minority in the United States becoming vocal and effective, that he has been spending the last two and a half years in the United States and making the center of his activities Chicago. I have not been able to get any definite information so far to the effect that Colin Ross is an agent of the present German Government. I believe, however, that the presumption that he is such is strong. I am informed that it is his intention to again return to the United States in the near future. In view of the information transmitted in this despatch, I believe that if he does return to the United States he should become an object of interest to the Departments of Justice and Labor, which may be interested in following his activities. By virtue of his gifts and his mental propensities, he is a man who is a potential trouble-maker of importance.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith.

GSM/LGW