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READ BY AMBASSADOR (W E Dodd)

Vienna, September 24, 1934.

No. 180.

SUBJECT: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE STRUGGLE OF THE GERMAN CHURCHES TO AVOID COMPLETE COORDINATION IN THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY IN GERMANY AND SOME COMMENT ON THE MAJOR POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH PROBLEM.

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to bring to the attention of the Department the following observations on the present situation in the struggle which the German churches are carrying on to prevent complete coordination into the structure of the National Socialist Party, and also some comment on the major political aspects of this struggle. This struggle of the churches in Germany is naturally arousing considerable interest in Austria as well as in other countries throughout the world, and the Department may be interested in the observations which I am able

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to make at this time on the basis of my experience in Germany and on the information which I get from well informed persons in Austria and from Germans whom I have the opportunity to see here.

The opinion of well informed observers who have been following the general situation in Germany seems almost unanimous that the present Government will not be able to last. Opinions, however, differ materially as to the factors which will bring about a crisis resulting in a change in the Government, as well as to the time when this crisis will come. The well informed persons with whom I have contact are of the opinion that the crisis may come through any one of the four following situations, or through a combination of several or all of them:

1. The larger number of well informed observers are of the opinion that a crisis in the German situation will arise through the economic pressure on the masses resulting from the failure of the supply of raw materials, increase in commodity prices and cost of living generally, through the drop in wages and family earning power, and through decrease of exports, coupled with the failure to secure foreign credits.

2. A much smaller number of well informed observers are of the opinion that the internal rivalries in the Party among the primary leaders, and the difficulties between the primary leaders and the secondary leaders will bring about a break down in the Party.

3. A still smaller number of observers are of the opinion that external political pressure and the isolation of Germany, coupled with the complete failure of Germany's foreign policy will bring about a break down in the Party. These point to the failure of Germany's foreign policy in Austria, what will be the almost certain failure of her policy for political over-lordship in Southeastern Europe, the uncertain results of the plebiscite in the Saar, and the instability of the arrangement with Poland.

4. Well informed observers who hold to any one of the above opinions seem to consider the struggle of the Church with the Party and the State may become the decisive factor in bringing about a change in the Government. These observers

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feel that the real nature of the struggle of the Church with the State has been underestimated outside of Germany and that the intransigeance of the Party in this matter will prove to be its undoing.

There is, in my opinion, little question concerning the primary importance of the struggle which the Churches are carrying on with the State in order to prevent the complete co-ordination of the Church into the State and into the Party. It is one of the primary principles of National Socialism that the Churches shall be unified and brought together into one German Church who shall become an instrument of the State. The declarations of the Party have been consistent and constant to the effect that the State is the Party and the Party is the State, and that all public opinion forming means must become an instrument of the State, that is, of the Party.

One of the first steps which the National Socialist Party took on assuming the power in March 1933, was to emphasize this principle that all public opinion forming means must become an instrument of the State. The press, the radio, universities and schools, the film, the theatre, authors and publicists, and all public opinion forming means were brought together in the so-called Reichskultur, and definitely controlled by the State. The process of coordination in all these public opinion forming means has been carried through relentlessly since March 1933, and there has been no let up whatever, but a constant tightening and making more effective of the regulations. The Church is the only public opinion forming organization in which this coordinating process has not been completed.

All public officials were early after March 1933, required to take an oath to the Party and to the State, and more lately to Hitler. As the coordination of business, the professions, and every aspect of German life has continued in the last eighteen

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months, the point has now been reached where practically every person in Germany in any position of responsibility has taken an oath of allegiance to the State and to the Party, and in most cases a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler. The Church and the Army were able to resist this movement. Since June 30, 1934, the Army has taken the oath of allegiance not only formally to the head of the State, but personally also to Hitler. The process of coordination therefore has been carried through until only the Church retains a degree of independence.

If surprise should be expressed in the neighboring States of Germany and in other parts of the world that in a country of 65,000,000 people such a process of coordination and subordination can be carried through in so implacable and in so effective a manner, it is only necessary to appreciate that with the mass force which the Party has been able to exert and with the brutal manner in which this force has been used, the individual has no chance. Not only is his livlihood but that of his family is made dependent upon his complete subordination, physically and mentally, to the Party. Any sort of independence has been suppressed by the taking away of personal liberty, with the removal of the means of making a livlihood, and with the inflicting of sufferings on family and friends. As long as the physical force of the Party is unbroken there can be no reassertion of independence of thought or action.

Anyone familiar with National Socialist doctrine and with the leadership of the National Socialist Party and with the implacability and definiteness of its actions, realises that in this matter of the coordination of the Church the Party can and will not make any compromise. In order to clarify the situation it must be appreciated that to the National Socialist Party the coordination of the Church into the State and Party means that there is to be only one Church, the so-called German Church, which is to be completely under the control of the State and Party and set as its subservient instrument.

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No matter what palliating and conciliatory, and at times conflicting, declarations may be made, it is the intent that the Catholic and Protestant Churches as such shall disappear and that all Germans shall belong to the new German Church. During the time that I was in Germany I had the opportunity to discuss this Church problem with many of the leaders of the National Socialist Party. They did not make any concealment whatever of their ideas with regard to the Church. They were definite in their statement that the organizations of the Catholic and Protestant Churches must disappear and that only one Church modeled after their ideas, could be tolerated, just as all the other political parties had been dissolved and only one party permitted, which has become the State. No matter what may be said from time to time by responsible leaders of the Party to the effect that the Catholic Church is to be permitted to remain and that the present structure of the Protestant Churches is to be allowed to continue, those same leaders will in private conversation affirm the definite determination of the Party to completely finish the coordination process.

I have in a despatch which I addressed to the Department while still stationed in Germany, brought its attention to a statement which was made to me by one of the responsible leaders in the Government to the effect that the Concordat with Rome was "merely a temporary measure". I indicated to this individual in conversation one day that I could not understand how they could make this arrangement with Rome when it seemed to me they had no intention of abiding by it. He merely smiled and said that the Concordat was a temporary measure made necessary by circumstances. The developments which have taken place in the Church struggle since that time do not indicate any change in this cynical attitude of the Party towards a matter involving the religious convictions and the deepest feelings of the German people.

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In order to appreciate the inflexibility as well as the cynicism of the Party with respect to the Church, it is necessary to keep in mind some of the individuals who are carrying out these measures. Dr. Buttmann, who, when I was in Germany, was a Ministerial Director in the Ministry of the Interior and dealt with problems connected with the Church, is apparently still undisturbed in his position. He was on at least one occasion sent to Rome in connection with conversations growing out of the Concordat. This Dr. Buttmann is the same official who did not hesitate to endeavor to give me, on several occasions, absolutely inaccurate information with regard to the treatment of the Jews and of professors in the Universities of Berlin and Leipzig. I found him to be a man who not only deliberately tried to give me incorrect information, but who proved to be entirely unreliable in the contacts which I had to have with him officially. Nevertheless, this is the man whom the Government and the Party sent to Rome to discuss with the Catholic Church specific problems involving the future of the Church in Germany.

The racial experts who handle racial and religious questions in various Ministries and whose inflexibility, cynicism, and implacability are known to the Department, are apparently still there in their positions and have in no sense changed their actions. Bishop Müller, the head of the new German Church and to whom the German people are to look as the spiritual head of the Church, is a man whose personality leaves much to be desired. He has, I am informed by those who know him, all the undesirable qualities of a second rate politician without having the good ones so often possessed by those men.

Baldur von Shirach seems to remain firm in his position at the head of the Hitler Youth in spite of the fact that his undesirable personal qualities are undeniably known to Hitler himself and to the primary leaders in the Government. Streicher, the Jew baiter, is apparently more strongly established than ever and was permitted

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to make an address at the recent Party Meeting in Nuremberg. Just a few days ago Wilhelm Kube made an address in which he characterized Streicher as a worthy member of the Hitler Front.

The Department is fully informed to the effect that the Party is determined that all Youth organizations in Germany must be dissolved with the exception of the Hitler Youth. The Department is aware that the Catholic Church has made every endeavor to preserve the Catholic Youth organizations intact, but that although given promises from time to time, it is clear that the Party is merely temporizing and has no intention of permitting those Youth organizations to continue. This is [redacted] in line with the policy which important leaders of the Party from time to time pointed out to me. They stated that in view of the deep religious convictions of a part of the German people they realized the difficulty in doing away with Church organizations as they had done away with political parties, but that by destroying and prohibiting all Youth organizations with the exception of the Hitler Youth, the coming generations would be theirs. This suppression of the Youth organizations therefore is an essential part of the program of the Party in the coordination of the Church. Although concessions have been made here and there, they may, I believe, be properly considered like the Concordat itself, that is as temporary measures.

If there are those who have any doubts as to the intention of the Party and the State with respect to the Church, a careful reading of Bishop Müller's speech at Hanover on September 19 will destroy those illusions. Bishop Müller said that there must be one State, one people, and one Church. He emphasized that there must be complete freedom from Rome and that the struggle against the Jews must be continued. The press in the last few days has carried news to the effect that the Police President von Levetzow of Berlin has issued

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an order which makes Jewish Youth organizations practically an impossibility. They can wear no uniforms; they cannot go out as a body; they can have no meetings; they cannot carry on athletic activities as a group in the open. These declarations by the Bishop of the new German Church and by the Police President of Berlin, who is a former Admiral in the German Navy, are made at a time when the representatives of the German Government are endeavoring to secure credits and moral support of the Government on the grounds that it will follow a more conservative policy.

The Government and the Party have evidently determined now that the coordination process is completed except with respect to the Church, that the Church must be brought into the picture. Attention is to be concentrated on the Protestant clergy and the Catholic Church will be for the time being probably more tolerantly treated. It is a principle of National Socialism not to attack in some of these problems on all fronts at the same time. In view of the approaching Saar plebiscite it is not unlikely that the Catholic Clergy and the Catholic Church as a whole will be treated more tolerantly for the time being. There are indications, however, that emphasis is to be laid on the Protestant problem and it be made to appear that the coordination of the Church into the new German Church is to include only the Protestant elements. It is estimated that out of some 17,000 Protestant clergymen only some 6,000 have not yet taken theoath to the new Church which practically includes one of personal allegiance to Hitler. It is in this direction that the pressure is now likely to be exerted.

According to information which has appeared in the press and which seems to be substantiated Protestant clergymen and their Bishops who have remained outside the new German Church have addressed a memorial to the Government and that Hitler himself has expressed

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the opinion that the unification plans of the Government are unconstitutional. This itself is indicative of developments which may be expected in the Church struggle.

There have been a considerable number of people in Germany who have felt that the Government and the Party will not persist in their endeavor to destroy the present structure of the Catholic and Protestant Churches and to bring them under the new German Church. This feeling existed until recently particularly among some of the higher Catholic Clergy and Bishops who, while wishing to keep the Catholic Church within Germany intact, have been in favor of a German Catholic Church entirely independent of Rome. As I have in a previous despatch indicated to the Department, some of the chief Catholic Bishops already before the War were in favor of an independent German Catholic Church. It is increasingly evident that these Catholic clergy who were directly or indirectly giving support to the Government and the Party in the Church problem now realize that they have been helping in their own undoing. From the information which I am able to secure, the Catholic Church in Germany is more solid and more of a unit than ever now in its determination to resist the coordination process. Considerable sections of the Protestant clergy have recently been more open in their resistance to the coordination process. It is increasingly evident that those who have bent under the will of the Party and of the State have done so only to retain their parishes and their means of livlihood, and there are indications that those who believed in a conservative political position with respect to the Church now realize that they have disregarded the facts, have failed to read events and interpret them as they are, and have failed properly to take into account the personalities in the Government involved, many of whom are mentally sick, cynical, and essentially uninterested in religion

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except as the Church may be an instrument of the State.

I have taken the liberty of bringing these considerations in the Church problem to the attention of the Department as there are indications that the momentum of the National Socialist movement is implacably bringing the Church struggle to a crisis. There are undoubtedly elements in the Government and in the Party who realize the dangers in the coordination policy with respect to the Church and who would like to see this process toned down if not altogether stopped for the time being. There are those in Germany and in other countries who have felt that both with respect to the Church and the discriminatory treatment of the Jews there would be a more conciliatory policy. An examination of the situation, however, shows that these hopes are illusory. As has been pointed out, Hitler as the head of the Government, has expressed the opinion that the coordination policy is constitutional. Bishop Müller, von Ehrach, and Streicher are apparently as firmly entrenched and as vocal as ever at a time when Germany is endeavoring to conciliate public opinion outside the country. The fact is that the momentum of the National Socialist movement cannot be stopped in this religious question, as has been shown it cannot be mitigated in the economic field, in spite of the dangers which are obviously ahead within and without the country. The important thing, it seems to me, is that in this Church problem there must be a definite recognition that National Socialism has not changed either its ultimate aim or its definite action towards achieving it. The German people are a patient people and essentially still for the most part a religious people. There are many well informed observers who believe that the continual wounding of the religious susceptibilities and convictions of the German people by the State and the Party will bring about the destruction

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of the Party itself. I am unable to determine what weight and what respective importance can be placed on the Church factor in the German situation, but from my experience during my recent assignment in Germany and from the developments since then I believe it to be an important one. I am nevertheless inclined to the opinion that the most important factor tending towards the disintegration of the National Socialist Party in Germany is the increasingly dangerous economic situation. This factor, coupled with the Church problem, may be the two major developments which will eventually precipitate the crisis leading to a change in the Government.

In transmitting this comment to the Department on the development in the Church situation in Germany I have in no sense desired to transgress on the field of our establishments in Germany, which I am sure are keeping the Department adequately informed of developments. I have merely wished to present to the Department these developments in the Church situation as they appear from this capital, as it is possible that these reactionsmay be of interest to the Department in connection with reports which it has already received.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith.

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