

1977

Visits to Berlin and London; discussions with Lord Astor and Geoffrey Dawson.

41

British

My/colleague in Vienna during the entire period that I was there from the

middle of 1934 until the spring of 1937 was Sir Walford Selby. He was a man a few years older than I who loved sport, golf, riding and everything good about living. He had had a long and distinguished career in the British Foreign Office. He had been the private secretary to the Foreign Ministers I believe beginning with Earl Grey. His only post before coming to Vienna outside of England had been in Egypt, where he had been the principal secretary to Lord Allenby. He and his wife were charming people and he was extremely intelligent and he knew the situation in Austria very thoroughly. I had met few men in Europe who so thoroughly understood the danger of what was happening in Germany and of the objectives of Germany. In a word, he was completely understanding of the whole situation and certainly more understanding than anyone I had met in the British Embassy in Berlin during the four years that I had been stationed there before coming to Vienna. We became very good friends. We had so much in common that this was not difficult.

It was in the spring of 1936 or 1937 (I shall have to refer back to my records to determine which) that my wife and I returned to Washington on a holiday. Before leaving I got word from the President, that is from President Roosevelt, that he wished me to stop in London before going on home. He wished me to talk with Lord Astor and also with Geoffrey Dawson, who was then editor of the London Times.

As we had to pass through Berlin on our way to Hamburg to take the steamer, I decided to spend a few days in Berlin. Selby did everything he could to persuade me to stop over, as he wanted me particularly to talk with Nevil Henderson, who was then British Ambassador in Berlin. I told Selby I had no desire whatever to talk with Henderson because I had known of him in the Argentine and I had very low regard for him, and that certainly, in view of his actuation in Berlin, I had no desire to have any conversation with him as I knew we had no common points of view whatever and I considered it utterly useless to talk with him. He seemed to

Peter - Marion recalls Selby's headquarters being
me at his home - Ambassador in 1936. President
wanted me to stop in London to see people and
hear them. They were in order.

me as prejudiced in one way as the Nazis were in theirs. Selby said he agreed with me in every respect, except that it would not be useless to talk with Henderson. At least an effort had to be made. He said that while he completely differed with Henderson in every way with regard to his appreciation of the European and German situation, that they were old school friends. They had gone to the same public school and he had a certain affection for him and he wanted me to see him. As a matter of fact, I did not tell Selby but it didn't require any persuasion to stop over in Berlin as I was going to stop there anyway as I wished to see some of the people in the Nazi regime whom I knew, principally Goering and General von Fritsch. I was particularly anxious to know before I returned to Washington as to what the actual situation was in the Army and to what degree the party had infiltrated the Army. ~~XXXXXX~~

One of the first people with whom I got in touch after I got to Berlin was Bella Fromm. Bella Fromm was the wife of a German Army officer and a Jewess. She had been obliged almost from the beginning I think of the time that I was in Berlin in 1930 to make her living as a newspaper reporter, and she was working for the principal Berlin German newspapers as a society reporter. She was a very good looking young woman and very attractive and vivacious. Everybody liked her. Although she was a society reporter, she was really very much more than that. Many of the highest officers of the Army, such as General von Fritsch and General von Schleicher and men in that category trusted her implicitly and had as a matter of fact a great deal of respect for her. They talked to her very freely. Many of the Berlin diplomats, including the French Ambassador, talked to Bella very freely. She moved around so much among all kinds of people in literary, artistic, theatrical, musical circles that she had a good cross section of opinion always. Her association with the old line German diplomats was close. Of course when the Nazis came in these did not know very much. Her relationships with high officers of the Army remained, however, close after the Nazi regime came in, because as is almost known the Army retained its independence/until the later stages of the period before

the beginning of the war. Bella was often at our house and it was there that I saw her most. She heard from someone in the American Embassy in Berlin that I was coming up from Vienna on my way to the United States, so as soon as I arrived in Berlin she indicated that she would like to see me and said that she had arranged for an evening party the evening of my arrival at her home. It was difficult for me to give up an evening, but as my wife and I were very fond of her and as I really wished to see her and as I knew that she would know a great deal of what was going on in reality, we went out to her home for supper. When I arrived she told me that the guests would be very largely younger officers from the Army, lieutenants, captains and majors and perhaps a few colonels. She said she wanted me to hear what these young people would say. She said that I should talk freely to them because I would find that they were already completely intoxicated with the military power of Germany and felt that Germany was being menaced on every side by all of her neighbors and by the United States and England, and that she must do everything to rearm to defend herself from this aggression from the outside. She said it was all so ridiculous, but it was important for me to see this because it differed so much from what had been the situation in the Army when I had last been in Berlin.

There must have been some 40 or 50 younger army officers. They were a fine looking lot of young men. After they had had their supper Bella got them into one room and had her own way of starting the conversation going along the lines that she intended. I was really appalled. I did not find one of these younger men who did not think that Germany was being menaced on every side. France was rearming at a tremendous pace so as to get ready to attack Germany. Belgium and Holland were doing the same. The Scandinavian countries were doing it. Of course Czechoslovakia was even worse. There the attack was imminent. The same way with Poland. The same so far as Russia was concerned. So far as Austria was concerned, they spoke of Austria being completely pro-Nazi but that the population was being held down by a very small minority of 15% to 20% of anti-Nazis. Austria

should be annexed immediately by Germany because the Austrian people wanted it.

Bella egged me on to talk and I said something about what was happening in the rest of the world, which I said I knew. There was no such thing as all this arming in other countries directed against Germany. It was because of what they were doing in Germany that the rest of the world had to take notice and increase its armaments. The situation was completely contrary to what they had been led to believe. It was no use. Sufficient time had already passed so that these young men were really thoroughly indoctrinated and absolutely convinced of this tremendous menace which was building up all around Germany and which was directed only against her. When I left that evening Bella said she wanted me to see this and she thought it was worth my while spending an evening in the way that we had. It gave me an idea of what had happened in the army so far, at least so far as the lieutenants, captains and majors were concerned, and she said a good many of the colonels already were affected. I told her I was really amazed. I asked her if her friends among the higher officers of the army were familiar with the situation. She said that she was sure that they were familiar with the situation and I would learn that before I left Berlin for home. She had a little smile on her face when she said this and I gathered from that that she knew from some of her friends in the army that I was going to see them the following day.

The next day I saw General von Fritsch in the home of a friend. He was very sad. We had a long talk about developments in Germany and in Europe. He was terribly disturbed over the trend of events. He was afraid that the Nazi party would bring the country into war not only with her neighbors but with the rest of the world, and in fact the whole world. We had a very long conversation and I do not think it is useful to go into all the details. I asked the General what he thought the situation was with regard to the army. Had the army been able to withstand the penetration of the SS and the SA and the pressure of the party? He said, "I can put it to you in this way. When I last spoke with you here, the Major sitting outside my office could still trust the lieutenant. Today the

Major can't trust the lieutenant sitting outside of his door, the colonel can't trust the major sitting outside of his door, and a good many of the generals can't trust the colonels sitting outside of theirs. So far as I am concerned, I don't know whom I can trust." He then went on to speak of several of the generals, more particularly General Brautisch and others who had completely fallen for the Nazi line. He spoke bitterly of men like General Keitel, who had become really a part of the regime. He was very hopeless about the situation in the army. We reminisced with regard to the early stages of the Nazi regime when the army was absolutely sure that it would be able to keep out the Nazi elements. We spoke of the way in which the army insisted on doing its recruiting and selecting its own men for the ranks, so as to prevent infiltration of the Nazis from the bottom. He spoke with pride of the ^{success of their} efforts in keeping the recruiting in their own hands. All that had long since passed. The worst of it was that even up to the colonels so many of the officers had become obsessed with the idea that the rest of the world was arming against Germany and did not realize that Germany was arming against the world. He made it clear that the army could not any longer be counted as a bulwark. He said that the real influence of the army generals was definitely lost, so far as determining policy was concerned, at the time the German army moved across the Rhine and France and England offered no resistance. He recalled to me that the army staff had been definitely against this adventure, as the higher staff was completely certain that England and France would not permit the movement against the Rhine. Hitler had insisted that there would be no resistance. The army had maintained its stand. The army had insisted that Germany was not ready for any such conflict as this and that it would have to draw back. Hitler finally agreed that the movement should go ahead but that if there was any resistance the army would move back. Von Fritsch said ~~bitterly~~ with bitterness that I recalled what had happened. There was no resistance. After that, many of the higher officers of the army who

had been so definite in their resistance to all Nazi doctrine and policy and infiltration in the army began to look on Hitler as a god, just as the rank and file of the SS and the SA looked upon him. They began to look upon him as a god and as someone who could not err and who had some strange, mystic instinct which enabled him to tell what others would do and would not do.

What General von Fritsch said in this connection recalled to me vividly the intimate knowledge which I had of what the army had endeavored to do to prevent Nazi infiltration. The German army, which for so many years had been held down by the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, naturally welcomed under the Nazi regime the opportunities to build up a new army. I am thoroughly convinced now, as I was then, that in this respect the higher officers of the German army had no desire to build up an army to use it against anyone. They had learned too much from the first World War. It was quite natural, however, that they should at least tolerate a regime which enabled them to build up the army. They had their pride in their profession and in the old German army. The fact that Hitler and the Nazis gave them this opportunity to build up the army did not affect in any way their feelings with regard to Hitler and Nazi doctrine. Some may read this with scepticism but it happens to be the fact. The army felt that the stronger it got the more able it was to resist the infiltration of Nazi doctrine among the young people, or at least a part of the young people in Germany, and the better able it would be to prevent any unfortunate military adventures by the Nazi regime. The higher staff recognized from the beginning the dangers of infiltration. Goering and Himmler, and of course Hitler, appreciated from the beginning the necessity for such infiltration. The efforts of the army were successful and it really was acting as a brake on the regime until, as General von Fritsch said, there came the fatal adventure of crossing the Rhine which met with no opposition.

It was clear to me from my conversation with General von Fritsch that he was quite convinced that the army would no longer bulwark against military adventure.

Some of them must continue to do the best they could, but it looked like a hopeless task. General von Fritsch was not only a great general and a great strategist, but he had many qualities of a statesman. He did not think that Germany could win a war in which, as he considered, the world would be against them.

On the day of my arrival in Berlin I received a telephone message from a Secretary of the British Embassy saying that the Ambassador would be very glad to see me while I was there. He understood I was going to be in Berlin only a few days and that he would meet my convenience so far as a conversation was concerned. The least that Henderson could have done would have been not just to ask me to call at the Embassy to talk with him but to have invited me for lunch. In a way I was glad he did not because I preferred very much not to sit at the table with him, I felt so strongly about the harm he was doing not only in Germany but in his own country and in the rest of Europe by the complacent and approving attitude he was taking with regard to German designs in the South East of Europe. I called on Henderson at the old British Embassy behind the Hotel ^{Adlon} ~~Madeline~~. The building was rather a dreary one and had ^{been} the British Embassy for many many years. It was in the morning and it was quite cold. I was shown into a cheerless and damp and cold drawing room. Henderson came in and gave me his hand and I felt I was holding the tail of a fish. We sat on a sofa and without practically any preliminaries he said that he had had a letter from his friend Walford Selby in ^{Varna} ~~Berlin~~ and understood that I wished to see him. I told Henderson that I thought there must be some mistake and that while I appreciated that he might have had a letter from Selby, I wished him to know that it was not I who had sought the conversation with him but I understood that Selby had wished me to see him and that he, Henderson, wished to talk with me.

Without any kind of explanation or further reference to this he started out by saying that I was doing a good deal of harm, as was Selby, by the reports that

we were sending in from Austria. Selby was sending in reports from Austria to the Foreign Office in London which ^{gave an} entirely wrong picture of the situation in Austria. I was doing a great deal of harm, Henderson said, by sending the same kinds of reports to my government. Selby and I had a completely wrong impression of the situation in Austria. He said that we were reporting that the great majority of the Austrian people were against the Nazi regime in Germany and did not wish any Nazi infiltration into Austria. It was just the contrary. At least 70% to 75% of the Austrian population were overwhelmingly Nazi and were eager for immediate union with Germany. He said that a small, small group of Austrians were preventing this union, to the disadvantage of Austria and the world.

I told Henderson that I did not see Selby's reports to the Foreign Office and therefore did not know what he was saying to them. I did know Selby and I knew that he understood the situation in Austria thoroughly and had so many sources of exact information that I was confident that whatever he said to his government was based on close observation and knowledge. I further said that Selby, I had found, was not only an intelligent but a judicious person and a very understanding one with a great deal of experience and that therefore whatever interpretation he might give to developments in Austria based on the facts that he gathered from day to day must be very sound and should be useful to the Foreign Office. So far as my reports were concerned, I wished him to know that what he had said about my informing Washington inaccurately was objectionable and that I wished him to know that I did not appreciate any remark of that kind and considered it an improper one. I said that what I said to my government was my business and that of my government. If it did not like my reports, it could always remove me from there. I repeated that what I said to my government was not a matter of his concern and that he should not have made any reference to it whatever. I was really ready to leave. The room was cold, Henderson struck me as being a most unpleasant personality, I saw no purpose in the conversation.

Henderson then went on to give me a lecture on South Eastern Europe. He told me that all of South Eastern Europe was the natural sphere of influence of Germany. He said that Germany was a strong country economically, financially and in a military way. She was a country that could not be held down. They in England and we in the United States must recognize this. Russia was the real enemy. What we should do in England and in the United States was to let Germany absorb South Eastern Europe, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Rumania. It would mean a good deal for them to have the benefits of German rule. Germany would get into eventual conflict with Russia. There wasn't any doubt that Germany would be able to take care of Russia. This would take off the heat from the rest of Europe. It would prevent a war in which the West and the United States would be involved. He said that the Ukraine was just as much a sphere of German influence as South Eastern Europe.

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ I said to him, "And what about Turkey? Will they stop at the Turkish frontier? What about the Straits, that is, the Dardanelles?" Henderson blandly replied that the Nazis would stop at the Turkish frontier. I was amazed. I knew so thoroughly what, from my own conversations in the past with ^{high} members of the Nazi regime, ^{what their} ~~there~~ objectives were with respect to ^{Turkey} ~~Germany~~ and the Straits. He blandly replied, "They will stop at the frontiers of Turkey." I said, "What makes you think that, Mr. Ambassador?" He replied, and apparently with complete sincerity, "They will stop at the frontiers of Turkey because they have told me so." Whatever I had heard with regard to Henderson's actuation in Germany and in Berlin, whatever I had heard concerning what he was saying to Hitler and the principal people in the Nazi regime, whatever I had heard concerning the ideas which he held, all were justified by the remarks which he made in this conversation. I felt that no purpose was to be served by continuing the conversation. I said to Henderson that I had to leave, as I had very little time ~~left~~ for the things that I had to do in Berlin before I went to Hamburg to take the steamer for a holiday at home. He began to repeat some observations with

regard to the danger of the wrong appreciations which I was giving to my government of the situation in Germany and with regard to the situation in Austria. I made no comment but got up and held out my hand and shook hands with him and left. Henderson's pitiful book which he wrote some years afterwards was about the thinnest apology for a mission badly carried through that I can imagine. I sometimes wonder whether Henderson was only doing what Chamberlain and his bosses told him to do and whether he really believed in what he was saying and what he was doing. Unless Henderson himself was a man with a distorted mind it is incredible that having lived so close to things and being so close to the men who were doing all this harm and planning so much harm in Berlin for the rest of the world, could be unaware of it. If he was aware of it and carried through instructions contrary to what he knew was in the interest of his country and of the world, then our estimate of Nevil Henderson must even be lower than some of us have put it.

I had a few other talks with old friends in Berlin, some of them in the Nazi regime and others among those still bitterly opposed to it. I think Dodd was in Berlin and that we had a conversation at the time, I will have to look at my papers to determine whether I did see Dodd. If he was in Berlin of course I did. So far as my memory serves me without consulting my papers, I did see him and I recall that it was already obvious to me that the senility which became so clear very soon thereafter, had already set in. In any event, my recollection of him at that time is that of an utterly ineffective and futile person. He was a man frustrated, bewildered, wandering in his expression and conversation, and unable to concentrate adequately. I think he was so thoroughly appalled by everything that was happening in Germany and the dangers which it had for the world that he was no longer capable of reasoned thought and judgment.

We went to London and the first thing I did was to get in touch with Lord Astor, whom the President had asked me to see. Astor was in the country and I reached him by telephone at his home in the country and he said he would be in

the following Monday morning and be glad to see me at 10 o'clock at his home. ~~THE~~
~~Following Monday at 10 o'clock~~ We were staying at the Carlton and his London
house, Carlton House, is just back of the Hotel Carlton. He was just getting
out of his car as I approached the door of his house. We had met each other in
Berlin and I shall make a memorandum covering the conversations we had in Berlin
some years before. We sat down in front of the fire in a small drawing room in
the front of the house and he gave me no chance to make any conversation or to
carry through any of the things that I was expected to ask. He immediately began
to give me a lecture on South Eastern Europe.

It is really not fair to say that he gave a lecture. He talked very in-
terestingly about the situation in South Eastern Europe and in Europe in general.
He said he was very glad to have this opportunity to talk with me, as he recalled
very pleasantly the time we had met in Berlin some years before when he had been
there in connection with the Christian Science churches in Germany. He had
always appreciated the help that I had given then.

He went on to talk about the importance of Germany in Europe. He talked
about the great virtues of the German people, he talked about how hard working
they were. They were really the best workers in Europe. The economic strength
of the country was great. Its military potential was a great bulwark against
Russia. It had been a mistake in policy of England and France to stop the anschluss
of Germany with Austria. The South Eastern part of Europe was really the natural
hinterland of Germany. He kept speaking of all the countries to the South East
as the hinterland of Germany. It was the natural field of expansion. Germany
would have to expand. If she were permitted to expand in South Eastern Europe
it would relieve the pressure on the West. A good part of Czechoslovakia was
really pro-Nazi and the Sudetenland was German. Austria was 80% Nazi and wished
the anschluss to take place. It was a small minority in Austria that was keeping
down the population. German supremacy and influence in Yugoslavia, Rumania,

Bulgaria, Hungary would be a tremendous thing for these countries because they would benefit by German techniques and by German government. It would bring peace and order into that disordered part of the world which had given so much trouble. It was a mistake in policy of Britain and the United States to endeavor to prevent Germany from this natural expansion to the South East. I asked him why he thought Germany would stop at the Turkish frontier, as from what he was saying he was taking for granted that Germany had no aspirations with respect to Turkey. He said that was correct. He said the Nazi government had made it entirely clear that it wished to leave Turkey alone. He said that there were definite assurances from Hitler and the German government that they had no aspirations with respect to Turkey and the Straits.

Lord Astor then went on to say that the food situation in Germany and South Eastern Europe had always been unsatisfactory. It had been one of the causes of instability. For that reason he thought the German aspiration to take over the Ukraine was a natural one. The Ukraine could be the bread basket of all of Europe. He did not know, if Germany made any moves into the Ukraine, whether it would provoke war with Soviet Russia or not, It was most probable that it would. In that case, there wouldn't be any doubt as to who would be the victor. This would keep Germany occupied with Russia. The whole world could breathe more tranquilly, Order would be reestablished in South Eastern Europe and in Central Europe and the pressures on the West would be relieved for many years to come. He kept on saying that he thought it was a mistake in policy of the United States and England, he did not speak much of France, to endeavor to oppose the Nazi regime in its objectives in South Eastern Europe and in the Ukraine.

Lord Astor spoke with conviction and with apparent sincerity. I knew of course that he was expressing these views, which we knew very well he had, with the idea that I would repeat them at home. He had obviously been informed, I do not know how, that I would be coming to see him. He was most courteous throughout the conversation. He repeated practically everything that Nevil

Henderson had said in Berlin a few days before, but in a much more sincere and correct manner. His attitude was completely correct. He made no reference whatever, as Henderson had done, to the reporting which Selby and I were doing from Vienna. He did, however, make it clear what his convictions were.

I felt that as Astor was showing such a reasonable attitude that I should do everything I could to make it clear to him what the situation was as I saw it after my many years in Germany and my tour of duty in Austria. I told him he was entirely mistaken with regard to his concepts about the situation in Austria. I told him that I had a very good staff in Vienna. I said that not only my staff but I myself got all over the country. I said that I made it my business to know all kinds of people in Vienna. I thought that I was in a position to know really what opinion was in all kinds of circles in Austria from the top to the bottom. He had the figures about Austria completely reversed. At least 85% of the population were bitterly opposed to anschluss and to any Nazi infiltration. I told him about the pressures which Nazi Germany was constantly bringing on Austria. I told him about incorrect and altogether improper procedures that they were using in the country. I gave him chapter and verse. With regard to Czechoslovakia and Hungary and Rumania and Bulgaria, he had certain basic concepts which I considered too narrow. He was attributing the political disorder which had existed there for so many centuries to too simple reasons. The cure was not as simple as he had in mind and certainly was not in subjecting these people to the control of Nazi Germany. With regard to his idea that the Germans would stop at the Turkish frontier, I thought that he was not only not taking into account historical facts but also known facts about the Nazi regime. I said that it was really a puerility to think that they would stop at the Turkish border. Their objectives with regard to Turkey were just as definite as those with regard to the rest of South Eastern Europe. They wanted not only Turkey but the control of the Straits. They were saying in Berlin to the British government that the Nazi government had no aspirations with regard to Turkey. They were only doing this

to calm British fears. With a government which had shown such complete lack of ~~insincerity~~ as the Nazi regime had constantly shown, it was really puerile to take their assurance that they had no objectives and aspirations with respect to Turkey. It was a grievous political error to accept any such statements by Hitler and his people.

I said that I must take the liberty of stating that my own views with regard to the danger of Nazi Germany to all of Europe and to England and to us in the United States had not changed in any way from the early days of 1933. I said that their objectives were clear. They had started out with the idea of domination of Europe. They had now broadened their position and were out for domination of the world. Britain was their first objective and we were the last objective. They wanted to get Britain out of the way so that we would be an easier prey. It all seemed like a crazy dream, and it was a crazy dream, but it was a crazy dream that would drive the world into the worst war that it had ever experienced. There was still time to stop it, but this took a definite attitude not only on the part of England and France, but of my country. I thought that in my country we were increasingly understanding and aware of the situation, but unless England and France took more determined stands it would be impossible for the United States government to take the stands that it was prepared to take.

We had a good deal of discussion but on his part it was a reiteration of well fixed points of view which he kept repeating, and on my part none of the information which I adduced as to actual events and developments seemed to make much of an impression. It was clear that Lord Astor and his associates in the Clivedon group, or the Clivedon set as it was known, were really the dominating influence in the British government.

I said to Lord Astor that I didn't have to make mention of what seemed to be the treatment of the Times to the news from Germany and Central Europe. I said that the Times was a great institution and had a great tradition. I said that not only the news policy but the editorial policy of the Times had become increasingly

disturbing in my country and in many other countries. The Times was really losing its influence and its prestige by the unrealistic attitude it was taking towards developments in Germany and Central Europe. I spoke of Ebbutt, the London Times correspondent in Berlin. I said that Ebbutt was one of the greatest correspondents whom I had known, and I had known a great many not only of my own country but of Great Britain and other countries. Ebbutt had an extraordinary knowledge of developments in Germany. His reporting, as far as I could see from the articles which from time to time he let me see that he sent to the Times, were really extraordinary. The American newspapers had some first-class men in Berlin at this time. I mentioned some of them. I said that they were doing a wonderful job. I said that Ebbutt was really one of the best, if not the best, of the correspondents then in Berlin. I said that I understood that Ebbutt had recently had to go to the South of France because he had a nervous break down and that it was very probable that he would not be able to return to work. I said that was a personal tragedy but that the tragedy of the Times I thought was even more serious. Ebbutt had shown me the text of articles which he had sent to the Times and I had of course seen the articles as they had appeared in the Times. They were completely different and gave an entirely different picture of happenings in Germany from that given by Ebbutt, who was telling his people the truth. I took the liberty of mentioning the editorial policy of the Times and how unrealistic it seemed to me. It seemed to have a complete lack of realistic approach and seemed to disregard the dangers in which Britain really ~~was~~ faced. I took the liberty of making these statements to Astor because he was I believe the principal shareholder and owner of the Times. With regard to what I said concerning the Times, he made no defense and in fact made no comment. I could understand this as he had made clearly known in the first part of the conversation what his views were with regard to the whole European question and what the British attitude should be and that after all was what was being reflected in the news as it was published in the Times and in the Times' editorial policy.

As I was leaving I said to Lord Astor that I had often felt that perhaps one of the greatest mistakes that I had made in my life, and certainly the greatest mistake that I had made in Germany during my tour of duty there was that I had helped to have the Christian Science churches reopened when he and Mr. Braithwaite^{te} and another member of Parliament had come over to that end. I recalled to him that at the time that the churches were reopened that I had told him that they would be reopened only because he and Braithwaite^{te} and this other member of Parliament were considered important people in Germany and the German government wished to make a gesture to show that it was not so radical and arbitrary as it was being represented in a part of the press and to make a gesture. The churches had been reopened only as a gesture in order to gain the friendship of Astor and the Times and ~~other~~ members of Parliament. I felt at the time that it was a great mistake and it had proved to be a great mistake, because it was quite obvious that he believed still in the sincerity of the Nazi regime and that it would keep the promises that it had given. This was extremely dangerous. A few days later I called Geoffrey Dawson on the telephone and said to him that I would like very much to see him during my stay in London. He said that he would be very glad to see me at his office, but that he would also be very happy to come to my hotel. In fact, he insisted that he would come to see me. I therefore told him that I would be very glad to see him at the Carlton, where we were staying. Mr. Dawson came. He was a short, stocky man who was I think at that time around 60 and I had always had a great deal of respect for him as a great editorial writer. During the last year or more, however, the editorial policy of the Times was really appalling. To anyone who had known Geoffrey Dawson and his talents and capacity, it seemed impossible that he should be writing editorials of this kind or permitting them, written by others, to appear in the Times. He was the one who was at least ostensibly responsible for the editorial policy of this great paper which had fallen from such a high estate.

We had a very pleasant conversation about the situation in Europe generally

and in Germany and South Eastern Europe in particular. Mr. Dawson was a charming, extraordinarily intelligent man. He talked as well as he wrote. To me it seemed incredible that this conversation should be taking place in the terms that it was, for his appreciations of the situations in Germany and Central Europe and what it all meant for the rest of the world and particularly for Britain and my country seemed to be just about the same. ^{as mine} After a while I took the liberty of saying to him that I wished to say a word with regard to Ebbutt, and I spoke briefly of what a great correspondent Ebbutt was, that he was perhaps the best of the foreign correspondents in Germany, and that he was really doing a tremendous job. I said that I understood that he was in the South of France with a nervous break down, as a result of the treatment that his articles received in the Times. I knew what Ebbutt was writing and I knew what the Times was publishing, and I was sure that some of the articles of Ebbutt would not be recognized by him, when they appeared in print. I spoke of the unhappy effect that the news policy of the Times with regard to Germany was having, not only in other parts of the world including my country, but also in Germany itself. A great many of the people in the higher ranks of the Nazi hierarchy already felt that they had complete friends in the British government, which was not going to do anything to stop what was happening in Europe. To lull Britain into a sense of security was just what they had in mind. They felt that they were succeeding 100%. I could see that what I was saying with regard to Ebbutt was causing Mr. Dawson great distress. I nevertheless felt it was my duty to say it. He made no comment.

I then said that it was difficult for me to understand the editorial policy of the Times. I had always had such high regard for him and his understanding, which was a proved thing. If he did not write some of these editorials in the Times I still could not understand why they were published. It was a matter of great curiosity to me.

Without wishing to do so I had gone too far. All at once Mr. Dawson burst into tears. He sobbed like a child. I got up and walked to his chair and

put my arms on his shoulder and said that no matter what the Times published and what editorials he wrote, it was after all their business and I should not have made mention of it and I had only done it because, out of my great regard for the great paper he was with and also for him, ~~it was xxxxxx~~ what was happening in the Times was something I had not understood and I was keenly anxious to know what it was all about. After about two minutes or so Mr. Dawson quieted down and he said, "Mr. Messersmith, all that you have said is entirely justified by the facts." He said, "I am not responsible for the editorial policy of the Times. I am doing what I am told by the owners of the paper to do."

I felt very badly about it all because of my great respect for the man. I turned the subject to other things and we had a very pleasant conversation for another 15 or 20 minutes and Mr. Dawson left. I always felt very badly about it, but I had to carry through my mission. The editorial policy of the Times did not change for long afterwards, nor did the news policy of the Times change. Lord Astor and his friends were in control of the paper and were very strong in the government and the Times was their instrument with the British public.

I shall have to consult my papers, but if my memory at this time serves me accurately Bill Bullitt was in London at the time and we had a conversation, in fact a long conversation, with regard to the situation in Germany and in Central Europe. He told me of what Astor was thinking of and as I recall, he had practically told me verbatim what Astor told me afterwards and as already recorded in this memorandum. Obviously Astor was telling this story to everyone.

I had called at the Embassy to see Ray Atherton, who was then the Counselor of the Embassy. I think at the time he was Chargé d'Affaires as the Ambassador was absent. I told Atherton that Harold Laski had been in touch with me and had told me that Felix Frankfurter had been in touch with him and that he was very anxious, that is Frankfurter was very anxious that he, Laski, arranged for a dinner at which I would meet Attlee and Morrison and Bevin and Cripps and other members of the Labor Party. ~~I told Atherton~~ at the London School of Economics at 7:30 I believe the

Harold Atherton - 19 -

following evening, ~~and~~ that I would really very much like for him to go along with me, as I did not know too much what it was all about and in any event I would like to have him and he might find it interesting. Atherton said he would be very glad to go and I told Harold Laski over the telephone that I would be bringing Atherton with me.

The dinner at the London School of Economic was early. We had it I believe in a library of the school, for we had the dinner in front of a fire in what I recall as a big room which was either a reading room or a library. I know that Attlee was there and ~~XXXXX~~ Sir Stafford Cripps, Sir Walter Citrine, I feel also very sure that Morrison was there, I think that Bevin was there but I shall have to examine my papers to be exactly sure as to who was there.

The dinner was short and frugal and immediately after dinner we settled down in front of the fire in comfortable chairs and talked until well after midnight. The conversation was principally with regard to Central Europe, that is Germany and Austria and Czechoslovakia in particular. Obviously Felix Frankfurter and Harold Laski passed on the word to Attlee and to Cripps and the rest that I was in very close touch with the Nazi leaders in Germany and with the whole situation in Germany and in Austria and that it might be useful to talk with me. A good part of the evening was spent in their asking very searching and intelligent questions with regard to details concerning the important people in the Nazi government, with regard to personalities in the German Army, and they were particularly interested in having specific details with regard to the procedures of the Nazi party against the trade unions, the Communists, the Church, the press, etc. I was of course in a position to give them details about this, as also with regard to the efforts which the Nazis were making to infiltrate every aspect of Austrian life. I found their ^{questions} ~~answers~~ most ^{pertinent} intelligent and I felt that, and at least I hoped, that I was being helpful in giving them concrete information which they wanted. Towards the end of the evening the conversation turned to more general subjects and towards economic matters. I did not join in this part of

1977

- 20 -

the conversation. They were talking more about themselves. The evening was a very pleasant one and it was the first time that I had met any of these people, with the exception of Harold Laski.

I recall that when we were leaving and Atherton took me home in his car I said to Atherton that it had been a pleasant evening but that I hoped that I would not live to see the day when these men would be governing England. Little did I think that it would not be many years before they did.