

1960

24

Commentator

Subject: "Attack on Kaltenborn, the American columnist, in Berlin".

Almost without exception, the American correspondents in Berlin, at the time that the Nazi regime came in in January 1933, were excellent men. They were fearless men and intelligent men and good correspondents, and they did not hesitate to report adequately and fully to their newspapers and to their agencies in the United States, and our press reported adequately and fully on developments in Germany. There were, of course, people in our country who could not believe that the things which were happening in Germany were actually taking place. They thought that the picture was being overdrawn by the correspondents. They thought that our newspapers were inadequately reporting. Among this small group in our country was Kaltenborn who was, at that time, one of the more widely listened to ^{radio} ~~newspaper~~ commentators in our country. He gave a new comment I think almost every evening of the week and it was very widely listened to.

Early in the Nazi regime it was, it was certainly in the first half of 1933, Kaltenborn and his wife and son arrived in Berlin and stayed at the Adlon Hotel. Several days after his arrival he called me on the telephone to say that he wished to come in to see me. I told him that I would be glad to see him at any time; we had known each other in the United States. Kaltenborn came in and we had that first day pleasant conversation. He then went on to say that he had been in Berlin for four or five days now and that he was satisfied that the reports that I was making to Washington on developments in Berlin and on the acts of the Nazi party and regime were exaggerated and, in many cases, inaccurate and overdrawn. I asked him if he had seen any of my dispatches and reports, and he said that just before coming over on this trip he had been ^{permitted} ~~commissioned~~ by the Department, as a matter of information and background, to read some of my dispatches. He had been con-

fident before he arrived in Berlin that they were overdrawn and inaccurate. Now ~~that~~ he had been here these four or five days and he was sure of it. Whatever my sources were, they were not correct. It was a very harmful thing to report inadequately on such an important matter. I said to Kaltenborn that I was quite sure that he was speaking sincerely; he was a German by origin and he couldn't believe that Germans could carry on and do things that were happening every day and every hour in Berlin and all over the country. I quite appreciated this but I thought he ought to stay and find out what the real situation was. I really had a good deal of regard for Kaltenborn because his news commentaries over the radio in the United States were, as a rule, interesting and he took great pains to inform himself accurately. He was inclined to be pompous and was speaking too many times as though he were talking from Mount Olympus but he meant well. I told him that I thought it would be a good thing if he would get in touch with some of the American correspondents whom he knew and most of whom I was sure he respected. He would find substantiation of what I had said in my reports among these people. He ^{replied} ~~said~~ that, ~~like myself~~, he found they were prejudiced, *as I was.*

I reminded Kaltenborn that he had a large audience over the radio in the United States and that there were many people who had confidence in him and that I thought he should stay in Berlin for some time in order to find out what was going on. He did not have to go further than Berlin, it was not necessary for him to travel to other parts of Germany. He did not have to make too long a stay in the country, I knew that he was anxious to get back home to his radio work.

It was the following day, or not more than a few days later, that Kaltenborn called me on the telephone in the morning to say that

he was returning to the United States from Bremen on either the "Bremen" or the "Europa". He said that the train was leaving for Bremen around midnight that night. He was sorry he could not come in to see me before he left but he wanted to tell me that he thought that I was really doing wrong in not presenting the picture in Germany as it really was. He had been able to find no substantiation, that is, what he considered substantiation, of these attacks on American citizens that we were speaking of and writing about. I told him that I was amazed because even the Nazis themselves did not deny that these things were taking place. About twelve o'clock noon Kaltenborn called me on the telephone and said he was speaking from the Ablon. He was terribly excited and could hardly talk coherently. He asked me to come ^{immediately} to the Ablon. He said that he had been attacked by ~~the~~ some Nazis and some SS men or SA men on the street, very close to the Ablon. His son had been knocked down; he wished me to come immediately.

I told Kaltenborn that I was very sorry that I could not leave the Consulate General at that moment. I said that what had happened to him was happening to all sorts of people all the time all over Germany and with much more serious consequences. It just so happened that I had to be at my desk for the next hour or so; I would be very glad to ask Raymond Geist,, who was my principal assistant, to go and see him. I called in Geist and told him briefly what had happened and asked him to go to the Ablon to see Kaltenborn and his family.

When he returned he told me that Kaltenborn and his wife and son were safely in the Ablon and that he would see that they were accompanied to the station that evening when they took the train for Bremen, from which place they were sailing shortly after midnight or in the early morning. He said that Kaltenborn had told him that after he had

telephoned me in the morning, he and his wife and son had gone out of the Hotel as Mrs. Kaltenborn wished to make a purchase in one of the leading jewelry stores and silvershops near the Apollon on the Unter der Linden. They had come out of the shop and were going back to the hotel when they saw that a Nazi parade, that is, a parade of SS and SA men, was passing along the Unter der Linden. Everybody was standing on the edge of the sidewalk and saluting. He and his wife and son did not wish to do that so he told them to turn their backs to the street and look into one of the shop windows. Several SA men, as well as several people in civilian clothes, came up to him and wanted to know why he was not standing on the edge of the sidewalk and watching the parade. Kaltenborn, in his good German, said that he was an American and that they were just on their way back to the hotel. They began to insult him and menace him. Two policemen were standing not more than ten feet away; Kaltenborn said he called to them for help, they made no move. Kaltenborn and his wife and son endeavored to move on towards the hotel. One of the SA men hit his son; Kaltenborn vainly tried to get the police to give him assistance. He repeated that they were not more than ten feet away. They acted as though nothing were happening. Finally one of the passersby spoke to the SA men and said that after all this man was an American and they should let him go to his hotel. They did not molest him and his family further and he returned to the hotel and immediately called me. Kaltenborn left that night for Bremen and for home.

It was ironical that this was just one of the things which Kaltenborn said could not happen; one of the things that he specifically said I was incorrectly reporting on was that the police did not do anything to protect people ~~in~~ against attacks. I am sorry that all this happened to Kaltenborn and his family because they must have had a

1960

- 5 -

rather bad experience but did not suffer any real physical injury except that the boy was struck by this SA man. It was on the whole, however, a good thing that this happened because if it hadn't been for this incident, Kaltenborn would have gone back and told his radio audiences how fine everything was in Germany and how badly the American officials were reporting to our government and how incorrectly the correspondents in Berlin were picturing developments in the country.

/dfa