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AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL,

Berlin, Germany, August 26, 1933.

SUBJECT: Widely spread propaganda in Germany which seems to be in support of measures which the German Government desires to take, to increase various types of aircraft equipment.

THE HONORABLE

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

WASHINGTON.

SIR:

I have the honor to refer to the reports which the Department has received through the press and from its establishments in Germany, with respect to the alleged flight of foreign aircraft over Berlin on the afternoon of June 23, 1933 which were said to have dropped Communist printed matter over the city. It will be remembered that the Berlin and German newspapers of June 24, 1933, give wide publicity to the alleged flight over Berlin of foreign aircraft which dropped these Communist leaflets over the Alexander Platz. The "Berliner Tageblatt" for example, of June 24, in its account of the alleged incident commented: "Yesterday's event shows in a significant way the altogether unbearable situation in which Germany and more especially the capital, Berlin, find themselves as a result of the absolute lack of all kinds of defence against air attacks". The "Berliner Tageblatt" of June 24 carried an article to the effect

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that the alleged aircraft had also been seen over Thuringia where they had also dropped Communistic leaflets. The "Tageblatt" goes on to say:

"The population has been placed in a situation of great disturbance as a result of this flight over the city, and the Oberbuergermeister, Dr. Salm, has sent a telegram to the Prussian Minister President and to the Chancellor, to the effect that yesterday's event shows that foreign airplanes have flown over the city and can come again and that this has caused the greatest unrest among the population, demanding also in the name of the population of the city that the Chancellor and the Minister President do all in their power to make impossible repetitions of such an event."

The Department is aware from reports in the foreign press, that had it not been for the reports in the German newspapers and the declarations of the German authorities with regard to the alleged flight, the population of Berlin and of Germany would have had no knowledge of it. The inquiries of the Consulate General at the time showed that there is every reason to believe that no foreign airplanes flew over the city and that no Communistic leaflets were dropped over the Alexander Platz and over Thuringia. The most energetic efforts of the American and foreign newspaper men in Berlin failed to reveal any one who had seen such planes or who had seen a copy of the alleged Communistic pamphlets, and the inquiries which the correspondents at that time directed to the authorities for a copy of the leaflet, were without success. There is every reason to believe that this incident was entirely a manufactured one for the purpose of arousing public interest in the program which the

Government

Government had in mind towards raising sentiment to support a policy of increased civilian aircraft activities as a preliminary to the demand for recognition of the right of Germany to maintain a military air force.

I may say that to me one of the most significant features of this incident was the fact that Oberbuergermeister Salm of Berlin should have made a statement to the effect that the population of Berlin was greatly disturbed over the flight of these foreign planes over the city. That a man of his standing and personal worth should lend himself to a legend of this character and should so deliberately convey an unfounded impression, is significant and must be borne in mind in connection with the general discussion of this matter which will be given in this despatch.

As the Embassy has undoubtedly reported on the endeavor of the German authorities to purchase pursuit planes in England, I shall not go into this matter further here except to state that it is interesting to note that this endeavor to purchase pursuit planes followed very shortly after the alleged air raid over Berlin. The categorical refusal of the British authorities either to sell or to countenance the sale of pursuit planes, is known to the Department.

The Department is aware from the despatches of a number of the consular establishments in Germany, of the extensive program which is being carried on in practically every German city, which is intended to teach the

civilian

civilian population how to protect itself from an enemy air attack. In order to make this educational propaganda as effective as possible, "air attacks" have been carried out over various cities and the civilian population, together with the authorities, put through a series of exercises which, under the guise of teaching the population how to defend itself, have really had the intent of making the people feel that air attacks are imminent, that the population is defenceless before them, and that one of the most urgent problems before the German people is the provision of proper defence against imminent foreign attack from the air. In this connection, as illustrative of the work being done in various cities, I may refer to a copy of a letter dated July 3, 1933 addressed by the Consulate at Breslau to the Ambassador, of which a copy was in due course transmitted to the Department.

In the "Berliner Tageblatt" of July 15 is given a description of the measures which are being taken by the police in Berlin for air defence and these, I am informed, are paralleled in other cities of Germany. In order to make the individual householder feel that air attack is imminent and preparation for defence against it essential, the police divisions of the city have been instructed to send officers to all houses in their respective districts in order to examine the attics and the roofs. The roofs are to be cleared of all debris and unnecessary objects which might catch fire in case of an air attack. All old furniture and the usual material that accumulates

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in an attic is to be cleared out as a further measure against the spreading of fire. The police are to examine also the cellars of the houses in order to determine how well they are adapted and how they may be adapted to serve as shelter in case of air attack. This program is in process of being carried through in Berlin, and while I have no information directly to that effect, in view of the other measures which are being taken in the other cities of Germany, there is reason to believe that similar measures are being taken throughout the country.

The Department is aware from other reports of this Consulate General that the Government is giving special assistance to house owners who are making repairs, in the way of money advances at very cheap rates. This is a part of the program to decrease unemployment. The "Boersen Zeitung" of August 22 carries an article to the effect that at the instance of the Minister for Air, the Minister of Labor has declared himself prepared to set aside special funds which are to be given to house owners for the purpose of building "Luftschutzraeume", that is, rooms or cellars for protection against air raids.

There has been organized the so-called "Reichsluftschutzbundes" which is a national organization to which all Germans are invited to become members. It might be known as "Federal Air Protection Society". The main branches of the national organization are first of all, the provincial groups, that is, separate organizations for each separate unit in Germany. These are divided into

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district groups, local groups, and police precinct groups. The immediate headquarters therefore of the organization, are in the police precinct quarters in every city and town of Germany. Responsible to the local police precinct group of the "Reichsluftschutzbund" is the so-called "Hausluftschutzwart", that is, the house air guardian in every single house in the city. In all apartment buildings, therefore, it is to be assumed that the concierge is to be the house air guardian who is responsible for all the steps necessary to keep the house as safe as possible against air attack. I have outlined this organization of the Federal Air Protection Society to show how complete it is and extends so definitely from the national organization down to a single individual in each house who is responsible for defence against air attack.

In order to make propaganda for the Federal Air Protection Society, a poster has been placed in every apartment house in Berlin by the Berlin branch of the Society. This poster, freely translated, reads as follows:

**"SUMMONS TO ALL PERSONS LIVING IN THE
POLICE DISTRICT - INDISPUTABLE FACTS**

The danger of Germany from day to day grows. Foreign countries in spite of all international agreements are more strongly armed than ever. Thousands of war planes stand ready for action all around Germany. Against this formidable force all defence by Germany is forbidden.

World equality of armaments exists only on paper.

Every

Every German city can be reached by bombing planes.

The city of Berlin with its millions of inhabitants is open to attack by all types of bombs.

What are the consequences? Incalculable damage to life and property if the proper steps are not taken at once in every house.

Therefore it is necessary that there should be immediate building up of civil air defence; to make known that air defence is a life and death question of the German people; that air defence means proper education and training of the people; that air defence means strengthening of the moral fibre of the population; that air defence means defensive measures which can help.

The Reichsluftschutzbund has been charged by Minister Goering with the carrying into effect of all the necessary measures.

The understanding cooperation of the whole population is necessary for success. He who becomes a member of the Reichsluftschutzbund, who untiringly helps the cause, who supports it with money, helps to protect homes, himself, his family and his property, and serves the Fatherland.

The air bomb threatens every one, old and young, worker and employer, man, woman and child, in the same degree.

This poster is issued by the Reichsluftschutzbund and ends with an appeal to every German to immediately become a member of the organisation and to contribute to its support. It closes with the statement that it cannot be removed before the 1st of October and that any person removing or defacing the poster will be punished.

It has been impossible to secure a copy of this poster to transmit to the Department; but because of its extraordinary contents and its inflammable nature, it is

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of primary importance and significance.

As of further interest there are transmitted herewith with the original of this despatch, two posters which can be seen all over the city. The first is a poster headed "Enemy airplanes over Berlin" and reads as follows:

"Friday, the 25th of August, 8 o'clock p.m.
Lecture with film.

WHY DO WE NEED AIR PROTECTION?

WHAT HAVE YOU TO DO?

AIR PROTECTION SOCIETY
Police Precinct Group 122 - Police Precinct
122, 24 Kantstrasse, Entrance fee 20
Pfennigs, Unemployed 5 Pfennigs."

Meetings are being held at regular intervals in school houses and other public buildings over the city, where army officers and others speak with respect to the necessity for immediate measures for protection against air attack. A specimen of one of these posters is transmitted herewith and the following is a translation thereof:

"INHABITANTS of POLICE PRECINCT 127

Thursday, August 24th, 8 o'clock
Lecture with film in the hall of the
school at 63 Kuernbergerstrasse on
the subject

WHAT IS DONE REGARDING AIR PROTECTION
IN OTHER STATES

Speaker: Major Doehne

It is the duty of every citizen to appear!
These lecture evenings which take place
will have fresh subjects with films each
time.

Entrance fee 20 pfennigs Unemployed free
Members 10 Pfennigs

Federal Air Protection Service
District Group Charlottenburg Police Precinct 127
House Air Guardians are trained free of cost."

I have deemed it worth while to transmit the foregoing picture of the situation to the Department, which I may say, startling as it is, is still inadequate to bring out with sufficient force the efforts which are being made to stimulate interest in aircraft and to lay the foundation for what will obviously be strongly pressed demands by the German Government for the right to build military planes. As a flier and as Minister for Air, Minister President Goering is very much interested in this matter. Undoubtedly a good deal of the pressure behind this campaign comes from him. He is apparently determined that Germany shall have a strong air force and if it cannot be got with the consent of the signatories of the Treaty of Versailles, it seems that he intends to use the popular opinion which he is forming as the background for taking measures without such consent. I have information from various sources to the effect that influential persons in the Government, including Minister President Goering, are of the opinion that a strong air force is the most effective weapon of offence and defence which Germany can develop quickly, and that with or without the consent of the signatories to the Treaty of Versailles it is the intention of the Government to develop this arm.

I have endeavored to determine to what extent the German population has been affected by the extensive propaganda of the past six weeks; but so far as I can learn it has up to this time had little effect. The constant dinning into the ears of the people that Germany is surrounded by enemy planes ready to sweep upon it, will

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by repetition have its effect on a part of the population. Even those who will not be convinced that Germany is surrounded by enemies and who may believe that air attack is not imminent will be affected by the constant appeal on the basis of the defencelessness of Germany and the fact that she is prohibited from taking so-called defensive air measures. The incessant appeal on this basis will probably bring about the effect which the campaign is intended to have, that is, to build up sentiment in the country which will support the building of an air force irrespective of sentiment or opinion outside of Germany and irrespective of treaty obligations. The continued propaganda through these posters, through the action of the police, through the building of shelters in houses against aircraft, through the constant examination of roofs and attics, the lectures in schools and other public buildings, the staged air attacks over the cities, will have a cumulative effect which cannot be disregarded. I think we must frankly face the fact that the German Government is deliberately building up public sentiment which will support it in breaking its treaty obligations and in building an air force which may be used as a threat. Well-informed persons in Germany, the number of which is growing fewer all the time, appreciate of course the mendacity and misrepresentations on such a great scale which lie behind this program; but the great mass of the people have no means of knowing whether or not what they are told is correct. The dangers in the new situation, therefore, are very real and cannot be ignored, and this propaganda for defence against air

attack

attack is an element of the German situation which is assuming a place of first importance.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith,
American Consul General.

Enclosure:
With original of despatch;
Two posters.

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