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MEMORANDUM

ARTICLE BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE  
SPRUILLE BRADEN IN THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY  
APRIL 1946 ISSUE

TOP SECRET

public opinion in the United States has been continuously inadequately and inaccurately informed with regard to developments in the Argentine during the period of the war and since the end of the war. While this is in some respects natural because of certain circumstances of war psychology and also because of certain developments in the Argentine, a situation has been created which is most unhappy and which is now serious because the opinion which has been built up among many of our people in the United States offers a certain obstacle to the composition of the relationships between the two countries, which composition is essential in the interest of both the United States and the Argentine and of this hemisphere.

During the war, there was a good deal of irresponsible reporting by correspondents from the Argentine to the United States based on the war atmosphere which always creates lack of objectivity. Even officers of our Government in the Argentine and in surrounding countries under the influence of the war viewed certain developments in the Argentine with a lack of perspective and reports were colored by lack of objectivity in some cases. Since the end of the war some of the acts of the de facto government were not such as to create greater confidence. Since the elections and since the inauguration of the constitutional government in June 1946, the same lack of objectivity on the part of many reporters and commentators has continued.

To enter into this in detail requires documentation which is not possible in connection with this memorandum but any examination of the United States press during the last eight or twelve months will show that reporting has been anything but objective and editorial comment in a good many United States newspapers which is based on such reporting inaccurate and ill-considered. It is the purpose of this memorandum to call attention to an article which appeared in the Atlantic Monthly, April issue, 1946, entitled "The Germans in Argentina" by Mr. Spruille Braden.

The article occupies the first place in the April issue of the Atlantic Monthly which is considered by American readers as one of the responsible, conservative, and dependable periodicals in the United States. It must be recalled that when Mr. Braden contributed this article to the Atlantic Monthly, he was Assistant Secretary of State

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heading up the section in the Department having to do with our relations with the other American republics. It will also be recalled that before assuming this post, he was for a period of some five months immediately preceding United States Ambassador to the Argentine. The footnote to the article on the first page thereof calls attention to this and, therefore, to the serious reader of the Atlantic Monthly this article by Mr. Braden carries practically official approval of our Government as any responsible reader will assume as a former Ambassador of the United States to the Argentine and Assistant Secretary of State at the time the article is written would not make any mention in the article except of facts and that any interpretation in the article would be well-considered.

An analysis of the whole article will not be entered into in this memorandum, but certain statements which are not adequately based in fact and which cause serious misunderstandings will be briefly mentioned.

On page 39 of the issue in question in connection with the settlement of the Chaco dispute, there appears this statement. "Agreement was reached despite obstacles thrown in the path of peaceful settlement by German and Italian diplomats". There is no doubt that a peaceful settlement of the Chaco dispute was not desired by Germans and Italians. There is good reason to believe that whatever obstacles German and Italian diplomats could have placed in the way they would endeavor to impose. There is no evidence, however, to show that any activities by German or Italian diplomats in the Argentine or in the other American republics had any influence whatever in the way of placing obstacles in the way of reaching a settlement of the Chaco dispute which was happily arrived at.

The statement, therefore, that "Agreement was reached despite obstacles thrown in the path of peaceful settlement by German and Italian diplomats" creates an impression in the mind of the serious American reader which is not adequately based in fact.

The most important statement, however, in the article and to which particular reference is brought is the one which appears on page 39 of the issue of the Atlantic Monthly in question. Mr. Braden states, "President Ortiz, aware of the menace with which he must deal, outlawed the German National socialist Party in Argentina by presidential decree in 1939. streets no longer echoed with the boots of marching storm troopers; the cry 'Heil Hitler!' was stilled; the swastika banners came down. There was silence - an ominous silence. The Nazi Party had gone underground." This is a very serious statement and all except the first sentence is inaccurate. It is correct that President Ortiz of the Argentine did outlaw the German National Socialist party in the Argentine in 1939. This measure, however, was taken not because there was an active National Socialist party operating in the Argentine but as a measure of government more to prevent any such activities from developing in the Argentine. President Ortiz was a democrat and opposed to all sorts of totalitarian ideologies.

The statement,

The statement, however, even in the first sentence above-noted would leave the impression that there was an active German National Socialist Party in the Argentine which was not the case.

The statement "Streets no longer echoed with the boots of marching storm troopers" leaves the impression in the mind of the serious reader of the Atlantic Monthly that until this action by President Ortiz, the streets of Buenos Aires had rung with the echoes of the boots of marching storm troopers. A careful examination of the facts will show that although there were German societies here, some of which were pro-Nazi in the attitude of a good many of their members, there was no drilling even in private halls such as took place in the United States in that period. There was no wearing of uniforms and no such organization of storm troopers or anything similar to it in the Argentine. The statement, therefore, creates an utterly and extremely dangerous picture of the Argentine in the mind of the American reader which has no basis in fact whatever.

So far as the statement "the cry, 'Heil Hitler!' was stilled" is concerned, a careful examination of the facts will show that no person in the Argentine, American, British, or Argentine has any knowledge of having heard the salutation of "Heil Hitler" on the streets of the Argentine. If there was any "Heil Hitler" in the Argentine it was within the rooms of certain German societies and the Argentine Government took steps to stop that.

The statement "the swastika banners came down" leaves the impression that swastika banners were common on the streets of Buenos Aires and other Argentine cities. A careful examination of the facts will show that no responsible person can be found who ever saw a swastika flag on the streets of Buenos Aires. If there was display of the swastika it was in the rooms of some of the German societies and this was far more common in the United States than it could ever have been in the Argentine.

It has not been possible to determine whether the swastika flag was ever displayed by the German Embassy while it was still functioning here, but if it was, it was a procedure to which the Argentine Government could not have taken objection as long as it maintained diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany. It is to be emphasized, however, that it has not been possible to find anyone among responsible persons in the Argentine who recalls having seen the swastika displayed by the German Embassy on the exterior of the building.

With respect to the statement "There was silence - an ominous silence", it is difficult to determine what is meant by this except to give a certain atmosphere to add emphasis to the previous statements.

It must be recalled that this article in the Atlantic Monthly appeared in April 1946 over the name of Mr. Braden who at the time was Assistant Secretary of State and who lent his name to statements for which there is no foundation in fact.

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On page 40, there appears the statement "Were it not for the tragic consequences in American and other lives lost, in aid an comfort furnished a deadly enemy, and in a nation turned against its own best traditions, this chapter might be almost comic". There has been a great deal said with respect to shipping and lives lost as a result of intelligence which came from German agents in the Argentine, but so far as this Embassy has been able to learn no actual facts and figures have ever been adduced and in this connection the records of our Army and Navy and of the British Army and Navy would be the only basis of determining whether there is any truth to this statement which, if not true, had a certain value during the war, but which can hardly be repeated at this time if it does not have basis in truth.

As said before this memorandum is not intended to be an analysis of the article "The Germans in Argentina". The most dangerous and most significant statement in the whole article is the one which gives the impression to the reader that storm troopers were a characteristic sight in the streets of Buenos Aires, et cetera. This statement is without basis and appearing in an article written by an officer who was Assistant Secretary of State at the time the article appeared it represents something which is unique in the history of the Department of State.

To what degree Mr. Braden himself wrote this article it is difficult to say, but whether he wrote it or sponsored it would seem to be the same so far as the public effect is concerned, as so far as the public is concerned Mr. Braden wrote the article. The article itself is very reminiscent of a person named Sax Bradford who worked for a time in the Embassy in Buenos Aires on Axis activities and wrote a book which appeared in 1943 entitled "The Battle of Buenos Aires". It is believed that he was a newspaperman prior to his association with the Embassy and there is a possibility that after leaving the Embassy in Buenos Aires he may have been for a time in the department, but this has not been checked as it has nothing to do with the matter in fact. For the record Mr. Braden is responsible for the article in the Atlantic Monthly and the statements made therein.

George S. Messersmith

Buenos Aires, Argentina,  
December 16, 1946

GSM:clp