

Former Prisoner of Nazis Returns to Germany— by Invitation

by

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TWICE in eight years I have crossed the Danish-German border—the first time by compulsion as a political prisoner in 1940 to spend four-and-a-half years in prisons and camps under the Gestapo. The second time was three months ago, of my own free will and at the warm invitation of the present democratic leaders of Germany.

As our car drew up at the border a figure stepped out, dressed in exactly the same uniform as our former prison guards, and raised his hand in what looked like the Hitler salute. All the old feelings of frustration and of being hemmed in returned with a surge—feelings I thought I had forgotten. However, it was not long before I and my friends were laughing about it as we drove through the beautiful autumn morning air.

In Hamburg

SOON we were in Hamburg. The last time I had seen it was from a crowded prison train in which I had been for six days through Germany. It was in September, 1944, after the incendiary raids which caused 80,000 casualties in one week-end. We had watched the people then, standing on the station platforms, as they looked at us with expressionless, haunted faces.

Now, in October, 1948, the faces looked the same—as if, behind the eyes, only a vacuum existed. Everything seemed grey; the faces, the clothes, the streets, the ruins. Great Communist slogans were splashed along the walls, competing with those of the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party. People moved slowly. Disturbing incidents happened. Twice we were misdirected by young men who still had the stamp of the Hitler Youth. Once we asked a young policeman the way to a certain square. He seemed not to know until a friend in the car said, "It used to be called the Adolf Hitler Platz." Immediately his face lit up with more than recognition.

Hamburg, as the second largest port in Europe, is said to have regained its pre-war wealth, but it has incurred the bitterness and resentment of the surrounding country by not sharing it. I was surprised to see the numbers of cars about, far more than you see in Britain. Seemingly, anyone can get a "People's Car" at three weeks' delivery for 5,000 marks. The shops seemed full and beautifully decorated.

For all these signs of plenty the recent currency reform is responsible. In fact, many people say that since the new mark was introduced the whole moral backbone of Western German democracy has straightened and strengthened.

I HAVE said that this time I was invited to Germany. It was to take part in a tour through the American and British zones with 260 friends from 20 nations, showing the Moral Re-armament Revue: "The Good Road." At the Moral Re-Armament training centre in Switzerland this year, 32 out of the 54 Cabinet Ministers of the nine Western Laender had seen this revue. They had at once said: "This must come to Germany — this shows us what democracy really is."

Within a week of receiving the full backing of Generals Clay and Robertson, of the American and British zones, we were in Germany with full facilities provided and military personnel from General Staff level deputed to help us.

To come in such a manner for such a cause was for me especially fascinating. I had seen Germany right through the war; I had been in touch with the underground; I had listened to a secret radio; I had seen the Hitler Youth march past our prison gates with their minds as regimented as their feet; I had seen the worst the Gestapo could do—yet I had talked to and met different Germans then—men who were in prison because they believed passionately in a Christian faith and a democratic way of life—one man had been a Cabinet Minister for 12 years and now is one again.

Now I was taking part in bringing to Germany an ideology for their new-found democracy. They live in an ideological world. National Socialism, which ruled so long, has been defeated. They fear Communism. Only a Christian ideology for democracy can give them a sure foundation to build on.

Great Response

THE response to the revue was amazingly deep and fast. Germans of every kind, Nazis, Communists, or the ordinary lost man, responded—so quickly that when friends returned to Frankfurt a week after we had given four packed performances to the top German leadership, the Military Governor said: "We have given three years and millions of dollars trying to do what you have done in three days."

In Essen, which is 88 per cent, destroyed, one man who had seen the revue three times, said: "You see miles of ruins in our cities, but what is more important is the ruins in our hearts and minds." We saw that ruin being restored, performance by performance, one especially for the 700 members of the German National Coal Board and 300 leaders of the Mineworkers' Union. Many touching incidents occurred.

I stayed with an industrialist in Duesseldorf. There were three other bombed-out families in his home. He had been a keen Nazi and had lost three sons in the war. He saw the revue and underwent a deep change of heart, even to the extent of making restitution to his workers and to the British authorities for 800,000 marks he had made on the black market, which would take all his savings.

We left, conscious that through a change of heart Germans were beginning to understand and fight for democracy and also that the leadership was in good hands. Dr. Karl Arnold, Minister President of the North Rhine Westphalia, which contains the Ruhr and has 16,000,000 inhabitants, described it when he wrote: "Germany is hard pressed and grievously wounded, spiritually and economically. I know what the forces which are being mobilised by moral rearmament mean for Germany's health. It shall be our firm resolve so to work that God's image, graven on every human heart, shall decide our future way of life."