ZERO HOUR

A Summons to the Free

by

STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT
ERIKA MANN
MCGEORGE BUNDY
WILLIAM L. WHITE
GARRETT UNDERHILL
WALTER MILLIS

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II

DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES

I

CONVERSATION ON THE TRAIN

The young American who made the trip from Chicago to Los Angeles on the same train as I, was about twenty-one years old. Wherever I saw him, in the club car, in the dining car, in the observation car, he was reading. He had brought with him a whole stack of newspapers and magazines, but apparently did not strictly adhere to any particular political viewpoint. He read the Nation and the New Republic with the same detached interest which he gave to the Hearst papers and the Saturday Evening Post. He had dark hair, and bright, friendly eyes; every now and then two thoughtful lines appeared between his thick brows.

On the second day of going through the desert, we started to talk. He had noticed the European stickers on my luggage as he strolled by my seat. “You come from over there?” he asked—and shortly a conversation on the political situation was in full swing. He asked me many questions, that well-read young man, and his interest in my answers was sincere. Of course, he had never been “over there”—but he knew and loved French paintings and literature, and German music; he had relatives in England.
“So many great, beautiful and stimulating things have come from Europe,” he said, “even in those last few years. That’s why the collapse of worlds which is going on there now comes as such a surprise and is so impossible to explain.”

“I know what you’re going to say,” he kept me from interrupting with a motion of his hand, “but that is really no explanation. You want to say that Germany lost the war and therefore had to wage a war of revenge; you want to say that the victorious democracies were satiated, tired and worn; that they had bad consciences because of the Versailles Treaty; that they were afraid of Russia and because of that fear alone would do nothing against the Nazis; that the Nazis proceeded step by step and that each single step appeared bearable to the democracies—until ultimately came the sum of all the steps which was unbearable. That’s what you were going to say, isn’t it?”

I shook my head. “Not exactly,” I said. “But what you said is absolutely true. Only it seems to me little is gained by the diagnosis of a disease if you can’t at the same time propose a cure. Perhaps the disease is incurable, once you catch it. But as long as it still rages only in the immediate neighborhood, means must be found to prevent its spreading.”

The young man glanced up sharply. “In the neighborhood? Is Europe our neighborhood? Isn’t the Atlantic Ocean between us? But even without the ocean; some people are immune to certain diseases. I believe that we in America are immune to Nazism. First of all, we have not lost a war; second, our democracy is not of yesterday, just as Hitler’s dictatorship is not of yesterday. The German tradition...”

Now it was I who stopped him. “I know what you are going to say.” No doubt: he was going to conjure up Washington and Lincoln and contrast them with Frederick the Great and Bis-

marck. He was going to say that anti-humanitarian tendencies have always existed in Germany; yes, that all “great men” in German history have been anti-humanitarian, anti-democratic, “authoritarian” and militaristic. But in America, freedom was at home. America was immune to any disease whose first symptom was the destruction of freedom.

I said, “Wait a moment. And let’s take one thing at a time. In the first place, as regards your ocean—the other day somebody called it the Maginot Ocean, and that’s not such a bad name.”

The young man sat up. “Maginot Ocean?”

I nodded affirmation. “Of course,” I continued, “there’s a great difference. You didn’t dig the ocean yourselves and fill it with water. You received it as a gift from God. But otherwise, the situation’s pretty much the same. For, in the first place, until recently, you relied entirely on your ocean just as the French relied up to the last moment on their Maginot Line. And, in the second place, it is not inconceivable that you might get the same sorry surprise as the French. The ‘Maginot psychology’ is ruinous. There is no security for anyone who wants nothing but security.”

“France!” the young man said, and looked at me angrily, “France broke down because fascist and communist treachery within the country made its defense impossible—and not because of your ‘Maginot psychology.’ That couldn’t happen to us. We are immune to some things.”

I said, “One and the same disease can have different causes. I’ll grant you that lack of democratic traditions and lack of love of freedom will hardly be the cause here. It’s more likely that the very overabundance of your freedom could become dangerous to you. Moreover, isn’t it true that your inclination to standardization and uniformity, your delight in spreading of
half-true slogans, in simplification and popularization of ideas, might also become dangerous? Isn’t it true that you have a certain predilection for all kinds of religions, sects, faith-healers, radio priests; further, you are virtually the inventors of modern ‘propaganda’? Your racial psychology, the unsolved Negro question—they could also become the breeding place of the disease.”

The young man looked out of the window. “And unemployment,” he said without turning his gaze away from the desert, “and lynch law—the unpunished acts of violence that run through our history. And the fact that we worship success…”

He looked like a child who has been scolded and knows why, but remains nevertheless stubborn.

“For we do worship success,” he declared and his head went up, “we admire success. We think it’s a goal in itself. I don’t think that a lot of Americans like Hitler. But many, very many, admire him because of his success.”

The steward came bringing a telegram to the young man. He asked politely if he might read it. “From England,” he then explained. “My sister would like to come over here with her little children. It is getting too hot for them there since the crackup of France.”

There they were again—European politics. Even the little interruption—the steward with his tray—did not lead us away from them.

“The crackup of France,” the young man repeated. “I still can’t believe it. And no ‘explanation’ can make it understandable. It is exactly as if someone very close to you suddenly died and every morning you woke up and simply refused to believe it. How could it have happened?” he asked and looked intently at me. “How could it happen so terribly fast?”

I said, “The resistance did not function.”

“Obviously not,” he said and smiled bitterly.

I said, “But you have to know what that means: ‘the resistance did not function.’ It means more, much more than military failure and political treachery in the last hour. It means a general breakdown of all forces of resistance and morale—of all the mental and psychological forces. And this general breakdown did not begin just on September 3, 1939. It was apparent as early as the winter of 1918–1919, at about the same time as we in Republican Germany began noting our first mistakes. But, dear God, how much others could still learn from our failure!”

The young man made a little sound expressing his disagreement. At this moment, his face was interested, child-like, and at the same time a little out of sympathy, a little supercilious, and removed; he held his head cocked on the side, like a hunting dog, listening to distant, disturbing noises.

“Others?” he finally asked. “Does that mean us? Do you seriously believe that we here could learn much from the destruction of worlds over there, beyond the ‘Maginot Ocean’?”

I said, “I am thirty-four years old.” This was no answer and so the young man waited patiently to see if I had anything more sensible to say. I continued, “Thirty-four years. That means I am twelve or thirteen years older than you are. But in reality, there is much more between us than those thirteen years. Because first—and my smile asked his forgiveness for the platitude which I was about to bring forth—‘first, I come from a much, much older continent. Young Americans are younger than young Europeans. Second, these twelve or thirteen years are more today than they were, let’s say, during the last century. And third, I must repeat it, we have made so many mistakes during that time and we have seen so many mistakes with
our very eyes that we are older by decades. Sometimes we feel like ancients who see generation after generation pass before them, each one refusing viciously to learn from what the preceding has experienced and suffered.”

The young man shrugged his shoulders. “There isn’t much we can learn from you,” he said. “Europe is not America and our conditions here are basically different from yours.”

“But that’s exactly what we said,” I answered heatedly. “Germany is not Italy, we used to say, and we were quite right. Yet the horror came upon us too, despite the difference in our conditions. How different were the French conditions from ours. And yet France is lost and might have saved herself had she but wanted to learn from our mistakes. The final causes of failure are the same in all democracies; and they will be the same with you.”

“Excuse me,” the young man retorted, and his bright eyes took on a grey-black color. “We have not failed yet. And may I say, there is no indication that we will fail in the near future.”

I was remorseful, but I continued steadfastly. “No,” I said, “you have not failed yet. But will you not fail eventually? The similarity between your situation today and the German situation at the beginning of the thirties is striking, and terribly disturbing. By the way, it was the same in France and England. There, between 1933 and 1939, all the mistakes we made prior to 1933 were repeated. You will not believe,” I added, and noticed that my tone was a little too intense, “you can’t imagine how painful it is gradually to discover that no country, no nation, no youth has wanted to draw a lesson from our dreadful example.”

“Perhaps,” the young man said coolly, “but one shouldn’t demand too much. You can’t expect us to get wisdom from the spectacle of other people’s misfortunes and to learn from their mistakes. We want to make our own mistakes and, if need be, learn from them.”

He crushed out his cigarette with a quick, short motion of his hand. It was as if he were looking forward with grim joy to all the mistakes he was going to make in the near future.

“Besides,” he added stubbornly, “the whole thing ‘over there’ is really none of our business. We have other worries. We have, for instance, our great and pressing worry about the survival of our democracy and our social achievements. For our democracy,” he emphasized and looked at me pointedly, “is really in danger. But not because of the Maginot Ozean and the attractive successes of Mr. Hitler—or rather, only indirectly because of them. While we are making all efforts to become ‘strong’ so that at some later time our ‘resistance’ may function, we are in danger of a voluntary renunciation of those things in the defense of which that ‘resistance’ is built. Civil liberties!” he exclaimed. “Freedom of speech! The rights of labor! The two-party system. Why, we are facing dangers from the ‘inside’ which might easily prove fatal because of the wanton exaggeration by certain interested groups of the dangers from the ‘outside.’”

I caught myself nodding as if hearing in a dream an old, somewhat worn melody. “Oh, yes,” I murmured, “of course. Of course.”

But the young man was undaunted. “We have grave and numerous problems here,” he continued. “And no side-tracking, no ‘preparedness program,’ no ‘state of national emergency’ can invalidate them. We’ve got to solve these problems of ours, no matter what goes on in Europe. I will admit that we would pre-
fer England to continue running the show over there. We criti-
cize England a lot, you know that. But somehow a certain way
of living together has grown between us and the Empire. But if
England fails and Germany takes over the whole darned show,
then it’s not our fault and we will have to find a new way of
living together—with Germany. After all, these things work
themselves out and history goes on.”

He interrupted himself. “It’s funny,” he said, “but I talk dif-
fferently, too. Sometimes, it seems to me that we ought to do
everything, everything to prevent a victory by Hitler. At such
times I think that there’s probably no way of living together
with the thing called Nazi Germany, the thing called Nazi
Europe; and no life in what would be called Nazi World. But
in the end, I ask myself what does it mean ‘to do everything’?
And what for Heaven’s sake are we to do? What can we do to
prevent a Nazi victory? It seems to me,” he said and smiled
charmingly, “that you are right and our resistance does not func-
tion in the right manner.”

I nodded to him as if he had said something quite encour-
ging. “You see,” I said, “now we are entirely agreed. But please
don’t believe that your domestic worries of today have no resem-
bance to Germany’s worries of yesteryear and Europe’s of yester-
day. I can see among them many problems which absorbed
us in Germany ten years ago. It is easy to recognize them. They
have familiar faces and they have never been far out of my sight.
I saw them in every European democracy, all of them, and with
no changes after 1933. But over there, no one wanted to admit,
either, that they were beset by the very same ancient problems
which beset us. ‘These are new problems,’ people insisted, ‘and
therefore we can learn nothing from the inadequate ways in
which you dealt with your old problems.’”

The young man said, “If only the things which we want to
defend had progressed a little further, were just a little closer to
perfection, then the resistance would be better and more perfect.
We are a little skeptical, you know. We’ve lost a bit of our faith
in the ‘values’ for which we are supposed to fight.”

“A little skeptical?” I exclaimed. “Only a little? But you are
very skeptical. Down deep, you are skeptical, and even in that
you resemble us like peas in a pod. Do please remember that
the disillusionment of youth after the first World War was
identical in all countries. Only Germany had lost the war; that
is true. But we all lost the peace. You, as well as we. The deep
and discouraging disappointment in the fact that the world
was by no means safe for democracy was common to all of us.”

“I know that,” the young man returned somewhat impa-
tiently, “but outside that, try as I may, I don’t see much that we
have in common. Please tell me where is the similarity between
Germany of 1931, England and France of 1938, and America of
1940? Where are the common sources of failure? What did you
Europeans do to get yourself into such a mess? And what are
we supposed to do to stay out of it? Could you tell me that, as
briefly and easily as possible?”

I had a pencil in my hand and drew little figures on the back
of the telegram from England which lay between us on the table.
The young man watched. I had drawn a big “D” and a swastika
and a hammer and sickle. “D for democracy,” I explained.

“Briefly and easily?” I then asked, feeling somewhat appre-
hensive. “Let me see. I am to give you a report of all our mis-
takes, faults, and crimes of omission. Furthermore, I am sup-
posed to show you that (a) Europe, instead of avoiding them,
has copied all mistakes, faults and crimes of omission from
Republican Germany. And that (b) America is also not far from repetition of those same mistakes, faults and crimes of omission. I am to explain why 'resistance' did not function, first in Germany, then in the rest of Europe, and finally, foretell whether it will not function here either. Is that the idea?"

"Pretty much so," the young man answered, "except for the last part. Not foretell. You can't foretell. Partially because you don't know us, because you haven't had the opportunity to know America intimately enough yet to interpret our actions and reactions exactly. Please—just the report. I'll pick out of it what seems to me convincing and true."

It sounded a little supercilious as he said it. He was like the rich man who listens to one who squandered his fortune explain what it's like to be poor but never realizes that, after all, his own wealth may not last forever. Nevertheless, I liked him. His superciliousness, I thought, comes from great reserves of power; it comes from a feeling of security which is inborn and has nothing to do with the "Maginot Ocean."

I was still doodling. "It is late," I said, "and the task assigned the 'pupil' is anything but easy. I'd like to put my thoughts in order and not rush them. Do you know what?" I suddenly said, and put my pencil determinedly in my pocket, "I'll write it down for you. I'll try to solve the problem on paper. If I scribble all day tomorrow, I'll finish it, that horrifying picture. Then, before getting off the train, I'll make you a parting present of it."

With a little bow, the young man accepted the offer.

Outside the window, the desert stretched endlessly. "Our country is big," the young man said and with his slightly skeptical smile, he added, "or isn't that true either, and perhaps tomorrow you will write that our country is small, poor and weak?"

To that I gave no answer. I only said, "I will make the greatest effort to be thorough and sincere and I shall attempt to tell nothing but the truth."

"The truth," the young man said slowly, "is complex and can be looked at from so many sides. Isn't there a subjective and objective truth? And what was true over there—must it also hold true here?"

Suddenly he seemed older than I was. That came from the weary callousness in which he now took refuge. He pretended that I was trying to concern him with remote things, which, although perhaps interesting, possessed no reality for him whatever.

"At any rate, I'm sure what you're going to write will be very interesting," he said. "Perhaps I'll learn something from it all—for later on."

I thought: For later on? My God, it is later than we think. And how easily could it happen here—how easily, here again, it might be too late! But I said nothing.

The young man suddenly leaned toward me across the table and looked into my face wide-eyed, serious, his expression questioning.

"There is only one more thing I would like to know before you start," he said. "With all your warnings, and parallels, are you concerned about Europe—or about this country? What I mean is would you like us to 'save' Europe, or are you thinking primarily of America?"

"I will write it down for you," I repeated. Again that was no answer, but he seemed satisfied by the tone of my voice.

"All right," he said. "How about a drink?"
2

REPORT TO A TRIP COMPANION

1. Symptoms of Decay

This task which I am attempting is not easy. Now that I sit alone before my window, and this country in its undeniable grandeur and strangeness rolls by, it seems to me it would have been much easier to talk to that young man. Certainly, his retorts often confused me. Not because he held a different opinion, but because on the really decisive points, he did not seem to have any opinion at all; and because he believed truth to be so many-sided and bottomless, that it would be a futile undertaking for us even to attempt to get to a bottom.

But there is only one truth, as there is only one morale, the morale of the individual. And, with all due honor to the richness of the nuances, “good” and “evil,” “right” and “wrong” do exist. The absolute exists. That is what he should know, that young man. That is what he must believe.

Can I expect him to take my word for it? Of course not! Do I want to preach to him? Not that either. I am not smarter than he, and probably less self-assured. But I have had more experience. And the fact that I know the symptoms of the disease which endangers all our lives gives me, perhaps, the right to speak.

In my talk with him, I understated the importance of “diagnosis.” Without diagnosis, there is no cure. Nor is there prevention without diagnosis.

But what constitutes the disease? Fascism, Nazism, dictatorship, defeat? No! Because they already are Death. The “disease”—that is the inability of the body to resist Death. The decay of the organism, the breakdown of resistance, that is the disease.

Europe was ailing after the first World War. But although the disease appeared only sporadically, and not all of its symptoms were obvious everywhere at the same time, it nevertheless attacked all countries alike.

Incidentally, many of the symptoms in France were exactly the same as those in Germany and Italy. Even England and America were not spared.

After the War, there was deep disillusionment everywhere, and a “nihilism” created by this disillusionment. Everywhere was the feeling of having been cheated. Everywhere youth sought compensation for the privations and hardships of the “great times” just passed. Everywhere they plunged into violent pleasures and excesses. New and wild music coming from America was an intoxicant. But it was no longer an intoxication for a “cause” (as for instance, the patriotic intoxication for the “fatherland”). It was intoxication, in general, admittedly and emphatically for no cause at all. In order to intensify it, all methods were permissible; music and alcohol, marijuana, morphine and cocaine. In the back rooms of Berlin’s night clubs, narcotic poisons were sold just as in the harbor saloons of Marseille or in the night clubs of Harlem, New York.

The “inflation”—devaluation of all values which took place in Germany and France alike—had its moral equivalent in all countries of the world after the War. Everywhere, what had been valid yesterday was no longer so. One had been cheated by this War. Too long had its laws been obeyed in good faith. All that was over. Of a sudden, everything and anything was permissible.

Even in art, everything and anything was permissible. Ex-
pressionism paid no attention to form at all. It shouted, it raged, it banged the cymbals like a jazz orchestra. Authority, Law, had lost out. All expressions of that time were exciting and at the same time cynically aggressive. In Germany, a whole literature came into existence dealing with father-murder. But “Father” was also nothing else but the personified symbol of authority and law which had lost out.

Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis gave a scientific explanation resulting even in a glorification of this psychological process. The “unconscious” and the “repressions,” the “complexes” and “traumas” were the craze, and openly acknowledged by all the world.

Girls wore skirts which showed their knees, if they did not prefer to dress like young men in the evening. It was considered chic to be erotically perverted, to have just some slight peculiarity. But most of all, it was considered foolish, if not indecent, to believe in something, in anything. “We have been so terribly cheated by this War,” young men all over the world cried out. “From now on, we just won’t believe in anything.” And they were proud of their chic nihilism.

That was the atmosphere of the twenties and it is important to recall that it was the same everywhere and not only in defeated Germany.

The inordinate love of pleasure on the part of the young, life-thirsty, post-war generation, purposely overlooked the greatness of the tasks before it. And the generation of parents seemed exhausted and weary from fighting. Neither did the victorious democracies see that nothing decisive was gained by the destruction of Imperial Germany, that nothing was “settled”—nor did Republican Germany wish to recognize how weak the legs were on which she stood. Here, as well as there, the reins were slackening. The wounds which the War had inflicted upon the peoples were deep. Where neither apathy nor weariness ruled, wound-fever broke out. But the hectic and super-animated activity which it created was misunderstood. Because in some places there was feverish energy, it was thought that productive regeneration was in full force. Even the restless and curious lust for travelling which came upon us at that time was looked upon as a “new will for understanding” among the nations.

Everywhere, there were meetings, congresses, international gatherings. The students, the writers, the women’s organizations got together in the capitals of Europe. By the thousands, Americans flocked to Paris where they met with thousands of Germans, Russians, Italians, Englishmen. They held discussions, ate, drank—they enjoyed peace and freedom. But did they actually learn to know each other? Did they have a living insight into each other’s problems? Did they try jointly to solve those problems? Hardly. Everything was most interesting, most stimulating and pleasant. On the speakers’ platforms, from speakers’ tables, people were seized by fever when they spoke of the League of Nations, as “the new and impregnable fortress of peace.” But it was unfortified, this fortress. America had refused to become a part of its defense and Europe alone did not have the power to defend it. The “fortress of freedom” had neither power nor respect. If it had not existed at all, it would have been much better. The deceptive and dangerous idea of security stood on a fake foundation.

The deceptive and dangerous idea of security! Of that first and foremost, I must speak to that American young man. Be-
cause that was what, in infinite forms, thrust Europe into disaster, and that is what might become dangerous to America.

The democracies went to war “to make the world safe for democracy.” Now after they had won it, their thought at first was that the world was automatically safe for democracy. That was dangerous, and before long, it became obvious that, at the least, it was not right.

There was no security and security was all that was wanted. But instead of realizing that peace was indivisible and that the security for all was in the interest of all, each single country insisted only on that which it thought best for its own protection. The attitude of the individual countries was absolutely asocial. England’s concept of English security, the balance-of-power idea, robbed France of the chance to assume the leadership in Europe. And France, this highly civilized country, should have been leading in the interest of security for all. But England thought herself safe only if there was no leader. On the other hand, France gladly renounced such a role. In order to be absolutely secure, France thought, one must not “lead.” “Leading” creates enemies, and France, which wanted no enemies, was as if hypnotized by the idea of “sécurité.” All one had to do to obtain security, absolute security, was to build impregnable fortifications and pay no attention to what was going on outside these fortifications.

“Collective security?” “Indivisibility of peace?” “European Concert of Powers?” No one was really serious about it. They wanted to protect themselves and only themselves. And thus they brought danger on themselves and others.

The “Maginot psychology” of which we had spoken yesterday, that young American and I, was general.

The mental Maginot Line which might have been able to safe-guard the continent, the world, remained non-existent. The moral fortifications of the earth which alone held prospects of security were never built.

These are general truths; undeniable, it seems to me. Even my partner of yesterday would not have denied them. Perhaps he will utter his little mocking laugh when he reads this and say “That’s obvious.” But he should remember that these truths, general and obvious as they may be, form the basis of our situation today. I will summarize them here briefly.

1. The world was disappointed, skeptical and discouraged after the War. It was weakened and bled out and unable to cope with the enormous tasks which presented themselves.

2. A certain hectic stimulation and activity which was felt was no symptom of recuperation. It was feverish and did not serve for the regeneration of the wounded organism but rather for its destruction.

3. The skeptic and discouraged, but at the same time feverish, world had in its weakness no other thought but that of security. But as it was unable to create real security, real appeasement, because of the short-sighted egotism of all concerned—lack of spiritual and moral foundations—it fell under the spell of the “Maginot-Psychologie,” the fatal “Maginot mistake.”

How did that develop—in Germany and elsewhere? Did we have no eyes for what was coming? Why did our “resistance” fail so completely?

I had promised the young man to give him a picture of our mistakes and our omissions. And I had contended that he would recognize some of our mistakes and omissions in his own country.

Well, then, what was it like? What was our situation during that period “before Hitler”? And, inasmuch as it is I who have
to deliver this report, what, more particularly, was my situation?

2. A Non-Political Actress

I wanted to become an actress. I was set on it body and soul. It was my good fortune to live in our capital and have the privilege of going to Max Reinhardt's school. Berlin was the best, the most stimulating theatrical city on the continent.

When I finished studying, I acted in plays by Shaw, Strindberg, Pirandello and the modern German authors. Nothing was so important to me as the lines which I had to say and the steps and motions which I had to make. Despite an intense desire for pleasure, the passion with which I clung to my profession gave me a certain earnestness. Furthermore, the contents of those plays forced one to think about all possible social and political problems. Of course, I was a "pacifist." War was shameful; war was impossible—there would never be war again. I was convinced of that without doing anything on my part to work for peace. Such things were decidedly none of my business. I loved the anti-war poems by Werfel and Ernst Toller. I learned them by heart and gave evening recitals of them. Young intellectuals and my friends from the "Youth Movement" were in the audience, and applauded. To the "Youth Movement" belonged the many young Germans who wanted to go "back to nature" because they despised the pleasure-seeking cynicism of the big cities. The "Youth Movement" rejected even bourgeois clothes; they wore loose frocks and sandals and spent their nights around campfires instead of the night clubs of Berlin filled with smoke and jazz. Girls slept with boys; boys with boys; girls with girls; teachers (who called themselves "comrades") with male and female pupils. For the Youth Movement, too, had thrown overboard all traditional laws; neither authority nor the family should have voice in the counsel of the young. But the young ones were free to do anything. The individualism of the Youth Movement, their intoxication with Nature and their anti-bourgeois pathos had a different character than our anti-political and non-political callousness. But by no means was it less asocial or more conscious of any responsibility.

Yet with the growing misery, poverty and unemployment in Germany, even we could not avoid occasionally thinking about "politics" which, however, we always ended up by deciding was none of our business. The ruling middle parties were worried by the radical parties on the "Right" as well as those on the "Left." Especially did the Nazis appear to be growing dangerously in force and momentum. That caused the middle parties to create some few technical measures of safety (Maginot psychology). But it did not make them put up a forceful, spiritually and morally unassailable, united and fighting defense front against the aggressor.

In the early summer of 1931, I was asked to recite a poem at a meeting. The great French woman pacifist, Marcelle Capi, was scheduled to speak. I was to recite some lines, pacificist in character.

The great hall was filled to capacity. Women made up most of the audience. But there were also the "intellectuals" with horn-rimmed glasses, the young people of the Youth Movement in frocks and sandals, and, in smaller number, representatives of the "progressive students."

Marcelle Capi spoke well and convincingly. The audience was impressed with the material she presented to prove that the peace which we all wanted was not yet secure; it was still in danger. The international armament industry was at work to
endanger it. But, on the other hand, such a meeting as this was proof that "we" were at our posts and were not going to let ourselves be cheated for the second time.

While waiting in the wings for my entrance, I was thinking: Strange—all she says is true and I agree with her. Why then doesn't she move me, why doesn't she really inspire me? She is logical, sincere, and intelligent. The things she defends are certainly worth defending. But obviously, "defending" in itself is not a grateful task. In the first place, it is thankless to defend something which admittedly is imperfect and defective. One should try to better it in order to make oneself able to defend it with greater force. One should be more constructive, and more militant, and perhaps then one could arouse more enthusiasm.

Marcelle Capi had finished. The audience applauded, politely and respectfully. But I was not uplifted by her message even at the end. She had sounded a warning, that was true. She had given us food for thought about the existence of a danger; but how to fight it, she did not tell us. Besides, I was not even sure that she did not underestimate the danger. Was it only the "criminal interests," only the "armament industry" which did not want this peace any more? Or was it not rather that all those who were badly off did not want it? That all the dissatisfied, disappointed and rebellious in our country wanted something new, something else than this peace?

My name was announced on the stage. I made my entrance.

Marcelle Capi had spoken in French. That had erected some kind of barrier between her and her German-speaking audience. I was at an advantage, for I was to recite a German poem. I felt that my voice sounded convincing and I tried to give it some militant quality while I spoke those pacifistic lines.

But after a short time, there was evidence of restiveness in the audience. A few youngsters in the gallery booed and yelled. Women in the orchestra hissed for quiet. I was not daunted and kept on reciting, although the noise disturbed me considerably. Then came a greater, more ominous noise from outside. Apparently, a fight was going on there between the ushers and a group of people demanding admittance.

The doors were flung open. Thirty or forty young men in brown shirts of the National Socialist Storm Troops rushed into the hall.

I stopped, waiting until the young men should find their places and keep quiet. Efficiently, and skillfully, they spread out all over the hall.

I continued. "War"—that was the gist of my words—"is unworthy of humanity. It is shameful and a crime. . . ."

One of the bownshirted lads had come close to the stage. To this day I can still see his face distorted by hate, with the narrow forehead upon which fell a greasy lock of blond hair.

"Do you hear that?" he suddenly shouted and turned to the audience. "Did you hear how she insulted our glorious fighters? Our soldiers are 'criminals,' she said, and 'it is a shame to die for the fatherland.' . . . You are a criminal, yourself!" he shouted and made a move as if to attack me. "Jewish trairess! International agitator! Gets up here together with a Frenchwoman. . . ." he yelled and there was a chasm of hateful contempt in the word "Frenchwoman"—"with the eternal enemy of our nation. . . ."

Soothingly and admonishingly, I raised my hands. I spoke, I argued. "I did not insult the soldiers," I cried. "What are you talking about? Besides, this poem is not even by me. Please listen," I begged.

But the noise was too great; I could not surmount it. The men
in the galleries began to fight. Six or eight of them beat up one young man, apparently a Jewish intellectual. I do not believe that he, on his part, had done anything to irritate them. They just didn’t like his face. Or perhaps he had applauded after Marcelle Capi had finished.

In the hall, everything became a mad scramble. The Storm Troopers attacked the audience with chairs, shouting themselves into paroxysms of anger and fury. Their numbers seemed to grow. Part of our audience took sides with the attackers whose conviction they could not possibly have shared. They were simply infected with the mass madness. Women fled, crying. Some of the “progressive students” defended themselves effectively. Fist fights sprang up everywhere in the hall. The chairman shouted “Police, police!” But there were no police around.

Finally, the hall emptied almost entirely. On the street, the still fighting groups were finally dissolved by police. Gradually the noise subsided. Peace—in the defense of which this meeting was called—was restored. The meeting, however, was over and finished. It was disrupted by those who branded as “traitors of the fatherland” those who spoke of “peace.” To them, every Frenchman was a hereditary enemy.

I remained alone in the darkened hall. It was not safe to venture outside too early. First, the streets had to be cleared.

What madness! Nothing could have been less provocative than this meeting, less provocative than the poem which I had begun to recite. Was it possible that those men hated peace? Did they want war? I could not believe it. I rather got the impression that they were desperate and that they hated—no matter whom or what! But why, of all things, did they choose us and our harmless meeting? That could be no coincidence. And

why did they lie so? It was impossible that they misunderstood what I said.

Not with one word had I insulted the soldiers. They had called me “Jewish traitress.” They knew that I was not a Jewess and that I had said nothing traitorous. Was it impossible to talk sense to them? Was it hopeless to attempt to convince them?

To a halfway reasonable and sensible person, it is an uncanny, yes, even an unbelievable experience to meet beings entirely unapproachable by arguments of logic and reason. I thought: If I had said to those men “The sea is deep,” or “The snow, white,” they would have replied, with all the hatred and distortion of their fury, that I was an internationalistic liar; that the sea was shallow and the snow brown.

And while cold shudders ran down my spine, I knew: Many of those in the hall believed the furious insistence of those Nazis, nonsensical as it was.

Those men, as a whole, whatever the reason might be, possessed the passion of madness. My audience, as a whole, whatever the reason might be, was disunited, skeptical, prone to experiments, and, moreover, easily frightened by such men who, in contrast to them (the audience) knew exactly what they wanted. Of my audience, some would have fallen under the spell of the fanaticism with which those Nazis affirmed their nonsense. Others might have known that what they heard was nonsense, but they would have wavered as to whether in certain moments even nonsense did not have its basic reasons. Again, others would have simply been afraid to contradict. All in all, I was by no means certain whether in face of such aggressive madness, I would have been able to hold my place even with such a contention as that the sea was deep and the snow white.

I swayed. I was sick at the pit of my stomach.
A few days of bewilderment and restlessness followed. The fact that I found myself insulted in the *Völkischer Beobachter* as a “flatfooed peace hyena” hardly surprised me. Even the fact that the theatre at which I had been engaged for the coming summer festival tore up my contract, I bore with equanimity.

The Nazi Party, the director explained to me, stutteringly, had threatened him with a general boycott of all performances should I appear even in one. Of course, I would understand that he had to yield. I understood. “The sea is shallow,” I said, “and the snow is brown.” The man must have thought that I had lost my senses. But I was just about to acquire some sense.

I sued the theatre. I demanded not only my salary but also a relatively high indemnity. I sued the men who disrupted the meeting, and I sued the writer of the “flatfooed-peace-hyena” article.

All this would have as much result as the building of a tiny little wall against the Deluge. More, much more had to be done.

But was I not “non-political”? Did I not get into this political meeting somewhat by mistake? And does not he soil himself who touches dirt? Was it not enough if I washed off the dirt and rendered the dirt-mongers harmless by suing them?

It was by no means enough. I realized that my experience had nothing to do with politics—it was more than politics. It touched at the very foundations of my—of our—of the existence of all.

I had to bring this new viewpoint to the knowledge of my friends. They had to know what was brewing and that our whole, our passionate fervor was needed to repulse the attack. Then and there, we must unite on a defense program which should be constructive and militant and not just nice, conventional, and half-comprehensible.

3. A Political Meeting

The room in which the following scene took place was small, and consequently seemed crowded although not more than seven people were gathered there.

Scene—My room at the Hotel am Zoo, in Berlin.

Cast:
- Hermann—Social-Democrat and trades-union man; intelligent, good-natured face; pedantically clean, a little threadbare, typically bourgeois clothes; quiet, reasonable manners.
- Petrus—publicist and writer; long hair, horn-rimmed glasses, a tic-like twitching of the right eye; belongs to no party.
- Heini—very young, some twenty years old, sportsman type, good-looking, carefree, non-political.
- Georg—member of the Communist Party; blond, slim, quick; surprisingly assured in his demeanor; a trained speaker and keen debater. Middle thirties.
- Alvin—convinced pacifist, Christian-humanitarian in tendency; gentle, and brunette; in his late twenties.
- Siegfried—good-looking, elegant, obviously rich young man;
son of a banker. Pleasant, cultured personality. Twenty-five years old.

Myself—twenty-four years old, a young actress who has found out that it was not enough to mind one’s own business.

That was the meeting. Of those present, Hermann, the Social-Democrat, Siegfried, the son of the banker, Petrus, the writer, and Alvin, the pacifist, were my personal friends. Heini, the very young and carefree one, was invited by Siegfried and had brought along Georg, the communist, whom he seemed to admire in a patronizing manner, which seemed strange, considering his age.

The room was full of smoke, even before we started to speak. There was nothing to drink, I wanted us to keep clear heads. I had bought a few small cookies which I served nicely arranged on soap containers and ash trays.

I was excited—and also hopeful. I examined the faces of my friends and found that they all looked kind and reasonable. I saw again the face of the Nazi with its hate-distorted mouth and shallow forehead onto which greasy hair fell. I thought: even if only in a small way, we’re basically better than he. We have the better, the more human faces.

In my little opening speech, I reported to them my experience at the peace meeting. I had known very well, so I assured them, that somewhere in the country things like that happened every day. But now they had happened to me. And that, strange as it may seem, was “something else.” I spoke of my doubts, about our weary, unconcentrated defensive attitude, and of my fear that the enemy might become stronger and more dangerous; and most of all that he might be closer than we thought. I also spoke of my own dislike of “politics” and of the fact that I had much rather act and read good books than “meddle.”

“But now, we must ‘meddle,’” I said, and looked challengingly around. “Because it is no longer ‘politics’ that is being played here. That which is coming upon us, if we let it come upon us, is the end. The end of all of us...”

I stopped, because I felt the eyes of my friends resting upon me with a slightly amused disapproval. “I don’t mean to say,” I finally said, and my voice sounded unsure, “that we all will be killed without much ado should ‘that’ come into power. But I do mean that we shall no longer have the right chance to live. Do you believe they will let us go on if they come into power? Do you believe your trade unions will continue to exist, your rights accepted? Do you believe we will be able to print what we like or live as we please? I, for my part, do not believe it. As we are sitting here, we might just as well pack up. Even the air we breathe will be exhausted as far as we are concerned. For that which is coming up here is vicious barbarism. It hates decency and reason with a passion of which we are not even capable—neither for the so-called ‘good,’ nor against the so-called ‘evil.’ But we must—”

Again I was confused. My friends, I knew, were more experienced in politics than I. They certainly saw things more realistically and felt that I was spinning tales and exaggerating in a childish manner. By no means must I ruin everything from the beginning of our meeting by suggesting panic. I controlled myself and said calmly and with conviction that the small circle which had gathered there was representative of nothing; it did not possess any power, no direct political influence. “But, if only we too would know exactly what we wanted, if only we could be united, and from tomorrow on, from tonight on, act together, then that would be important; it might even be decisive. Each one of us has friends; he belongs to a group, to a party.
Each one of us has his own professional and social class; his colleagues, his acquaintances. All those we must awaken! With all those we must work together! Believe me,” I cried, “we all must ‘meddle,’ here and now. Or else everything will go wrong.”

A short pause followed after I finished. Then Siegfried, the banker’s son, asked for the floor. He said, “A purely technical question before the discussion starts. As far as I can see, we have representatives here of different political convictions. As a matter of fact, of almost all important convictions. There is no Catholic here, but Alvin represents the Christian viewpoint, and I know he represents it well. There is only one thing that strikes me. Why haven’t we invited a National Socialist?” He blushed. “Not that I would like to see one,” he continued. “Who would like to see one of those ‘vicious barbarians’?” His ironical glance swept over me. “But it seems to me that opposition belongs in every democratic meeting. One should at least listen to what they have to say.”

I said, “That is a misunderstanding, Siegfried. We are here to hold a democratic war council, not a democratic election meeting. And no one has ever yet invited the enemy to a war council.”

Siegfried shrugged his shoulders. “Isn’t your choice of the enemy somewhat arbitrary?” he wanted to know. “Aren’t there people present who wish to destroy the democratic order much more manifestly than your ‘enemy’?”

He did not look at Georg, the communist, as he spoke. But it was clear nevertheless who was meant.

I took refuge in my role of hostess and asked that the discussion not be made uncomfortable from the beginning by personal attacks.

Now little Heini spoke up for his friend and protégé, Georg. “Children,” he said, and grinned in a friendly manner, “you act as if you were the League of Nations and had God-knows-what to decide. Your pseudo-seriousness is amusing, but it’s all right with me. Only I brought Georg along and he is much more amusing than all of you together. You’d be lucky, Siegfried, to stand for half as much as Georg and be able to tell stories half as excitedly as he does.”

Hermann, the Social-Democrat, who apparently had prepared some sort of a statement and was about to deliver it, cleared his throat. He had a sheet of paper in his hands.

“Oh,” I said, hopefully, “Hermann wants to continue with the business before this meeting. Go ahead.”

Hermann read:

“In all domestic as well as foreign matters,” he said, “the trade unions have always followed a policy of constructivity and peace. We have made great strides in Germany; the standard of living and the cultural level of the laborers have risen considerably. With good cause the Social-Democratic Party is leading and will remain leading. That we have opponents, despite our advances made in these difficult times, is not only natural, it is even necessary in the interest of our democracy. Besides, we know of much more dangerous enemies than the Nazis, for the Nazis will eventually destroy themselves through the irresponsible and unintelligent nonsense which they propagandize. In any case,” he said and looked up from his script, “in any case, I am absolutely opposed to the curtailment of the right of free speech and action of the opposition. The discontented must have voice, because then they feel better. Don’t create martyrs! Nor deadly enemies! Social democracy is liberal and pacifistic, but it is also patriotic. We can, at least, understand the patriot-
ism of the Nazis. We want to bring around the better and more sensible elements among them and win them over for our own cause. And because of that alone, we do not really want to ‘fight’ them.”

Most of those present nodded in agreement. Only Georg uttered a short, derisive laugh and exchanged an understanding glance with little Heini.

I thought that Hermann was a little too smug and too satisfied with the successes of his party. It seemed to me that he was wrong in thinking the Nazis would “destroy” themselves through “the nonsense they propagandize.” Nonsense, I thought, is exactly what the people want to hear when their own unemployed, unhappy lives cease to have sense. But I said nothing of the kind. Instead, I turned questioningly to Georg who obviously disagreed also.

I said, “Well, so we have come right to the point and have put up for discussion the question of free speech.” I looked at Georg. “I was often told,” I continued, “that your party intends to achieve its goal in an evolutionary manner within the frame of the existing order. It therefore must be interested in defending the existing order. Don’t you think that certain liberties of the past should be curtailed so that the liberty of the whole be maintained?”

Georg shook his head.

“No,” he said, “I don’t think so. And I only laughed because those ‘sozis’ believe that they will gradually be able to win the Nazis over to their side. If anyone can accomplish that, we’re the ones, for in their own way, the Nazis are revolutionaries too, entirely misguided revolutionaries—of course—but revolutionaries just the same. But as far as the curtailment of liberty proposed here is concerned, I am absolutely against it. For, in the first place, under the bourgeois system, any curtailment of freedom will work against us, the Left, and not against the Right. Only the revolutionary state, only dictatorship of the proletariat, has the right to curtail freedom for the good of all. The spirit in which such a thing would happen here would be retrogressive, reactionary. The reactionaries would win the upper hand even more so than now and we could see what we’d be in for. In the second place,” he continued, and smiled shrewdly, “we certainly don’t want a revolution now. We want, as you rightly said, to get to our goal within the frame of the existing order. But, if the existing order, rotten as it is, should fall apart by itself, if it collapses without our taking a hand in it, we will certainly be glad of that and welcome it. The National Socialists steal our ideas and twist them hopelessly. They call themselves ‘socialists’ and attempt to misguide the class-conscious laborers. In that they will not succeed; not in that. The fact, however, that they undermine the ‘existing order’ is to be appreciated. There is no doubt that the future belongs to us and to International Socialism. Everything that helps to bring about this future earlier is fine with us. And if the Nazis wish to hammer at the gates through which only we will storm in the end, so much the better!”

I was somewhat taken aback. Georg’s argument made an impression on me. But it seemed to me that one had to be stronger, less in danger, more firmly established than our democracy, to risk such an experiment. He expected a disintegration of our general system through the burrowing of the Nazis and thought that we all would be better able to plow the ground once it had been loosened than in its present hard and unyielding state. But the ground was not hard and unyielding. It broke through as soon as one stepped on it. It was a weird moorland upon
which we stood. We must reinforce it, not undermine it, and primarily, we must not allow the enemy to do the burrowing.

Heini, who had listened to his friend Georg with admiration and amusement, chuckled with satisfaction.

"At any rate, one thing we must take credit for," he said, "we're not dull. Something is always happening. Something is going on incessantly. Don't you think," he exclaimed, turning to the group, "that it is most amusing, our Germany? Political tension, which in the final analysis does not, God knows, interest me in the slightest, has at least resulted in a stimulating variety of turbulent activities in all fields. Take, for instance, the peace meeting at which our most honored hostess became aroused. How boring, how unnecessary would such a peace meeting be! We have peace—we're living in the middle of peace. And it is undescribably dull to go on chewing that monotonous fact over and over again. But, Dieu merci, a few youngsters in brown shirts come tearing in and bring life into this drab peace meeting. We should be grateful to them—and I personally am very grateful. I am grateful to you too," he said gaily and made a little bow toward his friend Georg. "You communists, too, bring some color into the drabness. To be frank with you, I like you better than those fellows in brown shirts, because you put such a scare into the bourgeoisie. It is incredible how much they fear you, and yet, fundamentally, you are as mild as lambs—or are you?"

Heini's cynicism made a generally unpleasant impression although it was disarmingly sincere. It was best to pass over his remarks in silence and to catch up with the discussion where Georg had concluded it. Siegfried seemed to be willing to do so.

"You all know," he said, "how much sympathy I feel towards the working classes. My father has given great sums for public education and the 'turnvereine.' I, myself, am most interested in our progressive, social theatre; that is also known. From the National Socialists I am, for obvious reasons, pretty far removed. Nevertheless, I prefer that movement in many respects to that of the communists. The National Socialists don't want a world revolution, they don't even want a 'revolution' in Germany. They want to correct certain mistakes which undoubtedly have been made. In the field of national and social problems they ultimately intend no evil. The fact that they employ rather crude methods and are seeking for all possible scapegoats in order to arouse and convert the masses is not very pleasant. But as the saying goes, 'You don't eat things as hot as they are cooked.' With time, those young billy-goats will dull their horns."

Heini chuckled. "The 'young billy-goats!' Siegfried—you are wonderful! And 'all possible scapegoats!' It is too bad the Nazis are so terribly anti-Semitic. You'd better admit that you would actually like them if it were not for this one 'scapegoat' upon which those 'young billy-goats' center their ruthless attacks. Does your father finance the Nazis too—or only the proletarian 'turnvereine'? It might not be a bad joke if he gave money to all his enemies—out of pure goodness and wise foresight."

That was going too far. Siegfried's face turned red with anger and embarrassment. "It is impossible to talk with you," he said, "you have not one ounce of seriousness."

Heini was absolutely without seriousness. He was a rich youngster who had no worries and who considered politics a terrific nuisance. Spoiled, and smug, it gave him great pleasure to compromise his family by showing himself everywhere with Georg, a communist. Incidentally, his father considered his son's improper friendship with a Leftist a sort of insurance in case the "Reds" should ever come to power. So he closed both
his eyes to it. As for his real opinion, it was an open secret that Heini's father sympathized with the Nazis whom he considered the best bulwark against communism.

Heini's father, just as Siegfried's father, the Jewish banker, went so far as actually to finance the Nazis. So Heini had nothing to reproach Siegfried for on this point.

I thought that our meeting was losing ground, and tried to bring the group back to the subject at hand.

"Up to now," I said, "we've heard the voices of the Left center—Hermann; for the Radical Left, Georg; and the liberal capitalist voice of our friend Siegfried. Moreover, there was the voice of Youth—Heini's, if we wish to recognize Heini as its representative."

"No, he isn't!" everyone exclaimed, but Georg said, "He is, to a certain degree. He is inquisitive, careless, skeptical and ignorant. Many, very many, young people are like that in this country."

Heini accepted that as a compliment. "You see?" he exclaimed, "I am absolutely representative."

I said, "Be that as it may. Till now, any readiness for action here has not been great. For various practical reasons, reasons of political tactics, our friends have refused to form a strong, united front of defense against the rising tide of barbarism. Alvin," and I turned to the religious pacifist, "what is your stand in this matter? According to your whole attitude, only ideals affect your decision. Don't you think that we should act in order to retain our peace and freedom?"

Alvin nodded in agreement but at the same time, he shrugged his shoulders in a strange manner. He said, "You are both right and wrong. Of course, it would be horrible if the National Socialists should gain power here."

"But they have power," I interrupted him, "they already have."

And I told them that my contract for the summer festival had been cancelled just because the Nazi Party threatened to boycott the theatre. Alvin smiled gently and wisely.

"That is very, very sad," he said. "But I do not think it is to be wished that such things be given great publicity. If we exaggerate and build up the danger and the ruthlessness of those foolish young people to the outside world, to our English and French friends, we only endanger our peace work and our cooperation with the well-meaning of all nations. Insofar as the defense fight within the country is concerned, may I say that phrase is utterly repulsive to me. We do not 'fight.' We do not want to fight ever again. What is much more necessary is to spread the knowledge that fighting and war have never, never brought betterment, that they are not a solution. 'Fighting' is not our cause. We want to enlighten; not to be 'victorious.' Of course, it would be better if the political parties of the center had not gone so far away from Christianity and its teachings. One can be a political realist without losing sight of morality. No doubt our democracy would be more convincing to the youth, if it offered them a more attractive morale. That should be the aim of our national and international peace associations. Of course, a long time will pass before our work will bear fruit, but in the end, those fruits will be mature and even you, the political realist, will eat of it."

I said, "But do we have so much time? Do you believe that they will leave us the time we seem to need? I don't know, but it seems to me we are all falsely assuming that the danger is not great, not very imminent, not very 'dangerous.' I wish I could agree with you. In fact, to a certain extent I did agree inwardly
with each one of you as long as he spoke, but the sum of everything said offers no program. Why is that?"

It was noticeable that Petrus, the writer, had been absolutely quiet, absolutely passive, until now. His right eye twitched, and he continuously ran his slender, hypersensitive fingers through his long hair. From time to time, he looked at the ceiling as if in desperation and shook his head. But he said nothing. And I knew that he had a most pertinent way of expressing himself when he wanted. Now suddenly he rose from his seat.

"Yes, why is that?" he repeated. "I will tell you. We have no program because we have no convictions, and we have no convictions because we have been lied to and cheated since we were able to say 'Mama'! We have no convictions because everything that was placed before us was bad and rotten. Look at me," he cried out, and looked down at himself with sincere and at the same time a somewhat self-indulgent sadness, "Look at me. I am a typical product of our times. I look talented, don't I? And no doubt, I am talented. I have a tic in my right eye, but that doesn't mean much and is only natural. I got it in the Great War. My hair is long and my clothes shabby. That is natural too. I don't have the money to take care of myself because I don't get money for my talent. I write poems which are too good for the popular magazines and articles which are too sharp in their criticisms of the powers that be. The small periodicals in which they're published are hardly read. I am not willing to make the necessary concessions to any powers. Moreover, as I belong to no party, because all parties are bad and rotten, no one helps me and no one supports me. I am a 'pacifist,' naturally. I wouldn't like to acquire a tic in my left eye. But your peace as it is, isn't worthy of survival. I am a 'socialist,' naturally. I would like having a part of the money taken from the rich so that I might have a chance to have my hair cut. But a religion which sees its whole heaven in the socialization of production is not my religion. I don't care whether the ruling archangels are all-powerful by the right of nature and birth, or whether a 'state god' endows them with their power. Blessed are the simpletons," he cried, and ran his fingers again through his hair, "blessed are those who believe that everything will be for the best, and that our wonderfully liberal social-democracy will take care of everything. But blessed also are those childishly striving who believe that a democratic defense front against the rising barbarism will finally save us from destruction. No one can save us and nothing can save us. We are doomed." And his right eye twitched nervously.

Those present were silent and bewildered. Petrus with a short, sudden bow said, "I enjoyed hearing what you had to say. I will confess you somehow moved me. But don't be afraid," he said, and spread his arms in a Christ-like gesture, "the great chaos will come. It must come. And it will be a salvation after this God-forsaken 'order' which is our lot now." He went to the door. "And thanks for the little cookies," he said, changing his expression. He turned around and left.

The meeting, so it seemed, was over. Despite different arguments, they all were agreed on one point: for the time being, nothing should be undertaken. It was unnecessary, inopportune, unpacifistic, unchristian, premature, or simply hopeless to undertake anything. It was against the "program" of the various parties to join together with the "program" of other parties. It was impossible to create a unifying program. We could have no "convictions" because we had been cheated too often. And was the "enemy" who had thrown such a scare and excitement into me really the enemy? Couldn't he be placated and won over?
But even should that be impossible: it takes two to fight and because we didn’t want to fight, no fight could begin. If only we did not irritate the enemy, and didn’t make a martyr out of him, then we would be secure. Not to speak of the fact that we were much stronger than the enemy. Besides, we had so many other worries. We must not endanger our democracy through an undemocratic curtailment of freedom. We must be on our guard for other enemies, the communists, for instance, against whom those Nazi-enemies were a welcome counterbalance. And finally, from the standpoint of communists, the enemy was only aiding in the undermining of a bad social order. Because the existing order was bad. Of that, not only the communists were convinced. Petrus, the writer, had pointed out in strong words how bad it was. Only that in its stead, he wanted chaos which he vaguely thought to be frightful, while the communists already had a new order in readiness.

And what did I myself want? Was I satisfied with the success of my little undertaking or was I disappointed? I did not know for sure. Partly the arguments of my friends appeased me, partly it seemed to me that they were short-sighted, egotistic, self-satisfied, and not very courageous. Even the passionately aggressive speech of my friend Petrus had not been free of smugness and egotism. And he wasn’t basically very brave. And what about Alvin, the pacifist? And little Heini? Refusing to fight, I thought, does not mean that you escape fighting. It means nothing but leaving the choice of the moment of attack to the opponent who wants to fight. As far as Heini was concerned, to him the whole thing was a game, a joke and a spectacle. One had only to be on the watch and to look out that the joke wasn’t carried too far. One shouldn’t trust the tricks of the actors. One shouldn’t let oneself be taken in.

DON’T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES

On the whole, there was no reason to get excited. Even Siegfried, the banker’s son, saw no immediate cause for alarm. It was extremely sad that the Nazis have chosen just this particular scapegoat—the Jewish scapegoat—and everything must be done to sidetrack that particular phase. But that would probably change by itself. Anti-Semitism was a demagogical trick which would be dropped as soon as it fulfilled its purpose. No, there really was no cause for alarm.

I opened the window which had been kept closed in order not to disturb our neighbors. In thick waves, the cigarette smoke floated out and formed little clouds in the mild air of the summer night.

They are probably right, my friends, I thought as I looked down on the bustling and well-ordered traffic on the Kurfürstendamm. “I’ve let myself be made nervous and frightened by those rowdies, the other day at the meeting. We mustn’t lose our heads. We mustn’t become hysterical and make an elephant out of a gnat. I should have done better to look around for a theatrical job for the summer and to mind my own business than to sit here at the Hotel am Zoo and act the politician. After all, our politics are in the hands of professionals who know their craft.”

And I decided from now on, as far as I was concerned, not to do anything any more. For the time being, I wanted to sleep.

Before I took refuge in unconsciousness, I let the faces of my friends once more pass before me. It was strange: their familiar features appeared vague and blurred. They dissolved bewilderingly into one another. They were friendly faces; but one seemed just like the other, so formless were their outlines, so vague their expressions. Then another, a strange face came between my friends and me . . . I didn’t know it, I refused to
recognize it. Over a low forehead, fell greasy, crumpled blond hair. Mouth and eyes were wide open. The mouth yelled, even the eyes seemed to shout. But there was nothing vague, nothing formless in this face. Of course, there was nothing friendly in it, either. That face hated; it was stamped and distorted by hate. It burned with hate. But while it seemed to shout senselessly, it knew well how to weigh its words. Behind this stupid low forehead, thoughts sharpened by hate crouched dangerously. The horrible face was a living lie. The words of that face distorted the truth as hate distorted its features.

I did not want to see that face any more, nor hear its lying words. I let myself slip deeper into the darkness. But it followed me even there. It shouted; it burned; it grew. It filled the room with the horror of its inhuman hate. Where were the faces of my friends?

4. The Resistance Fails

The end came sooner than anyone thought. In August, 1930, we had still been betting as to whether the Nazis would have as many as fifty, or considerably less than fifty, representatives in the Reichstag after the elections. But in September, they walked into it with 107 representatives. The Communists also made gains. After this catastrophic defeat of the democratic center, the headline of the leading liberal papers in Berlin read: “Parties In Power Still Leading.”

At any rate, everywhere people were a little uneasy and frightened. But did they unite? Did the church fight side by side with the middle parties? Did the moderate and radical left fight together? Did Capital come to the support of the defense battle?

Nothing of the sort happened. As before, each group, each party, pursued its special interests, its special business, and each group and party, moreover, hoped to use the enemy for its own special purposes. As before, each group and party thought: Maybe the enemy is wild and vicious. But, in the first place, he is not my personal enemy. He hates the Jews (for whom I do not care much myself); he hates the Communists (whom I hate too); he hates the western democracies (whom I do not like myself); he hates our government (against which I have much to say myself); I, myself—my class, my religious beliefs—were not actually endangered by the enemy. And, besides, the enemy is far away. An ocean of time lies between us.

Everyone thought so. And all their discussions and preparations had a theoretical, absolutely unreal quality. It was as if they winked at each other and said: Of course, it is right and purposeful for us to talk now about what will happen on a far-away day when the enemy shall turn against us. We are farsighted and, theoretically, we do not think that this is out of the question. But it is apparent even now that there will be time enough then for us to seek help. Collectively, we are stronger than the enemy.

They were stronger—they could have been stronger.

Short-sighted egotism, lack of imagination and insight into the psychology of the enemy, false love of peace, lack of moral feeling, lack of voluntary discipline, lack of responsibility for the whole, a crippling mixture of skepticism and vague gullibility and a lack of spirit—all these dug the grave of democratic Germany.

Not the strength of the enemy, not even the strength of his henchmen, his German financiers and international bosses
helped the enemy to victory. The resistance had failed! The fortress was ready to fall!

On the 30th of January, 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of the Reich. On February 28, the Reichstag in Berlin burned down and all the opponents of the Nazi regime (for it still had opponents) were accused of having set fire to it. On March 5, general elections were held which resulted in dictatorial powers for the Chancellor even in Bavaria, the stronghold against Nazism.

But even now, while anyone in Germany remained who had the slightest power, the slightest influence—above all, while a coalition of all powers, and sum of all influences might have become dangerous to him, the dictator carefully avoided starting a general attack. Carefully, strategically, absolutely familiar with the psychology of his enemy, he rid himself gradually of one after the other. He began, as is generally known, with the unpopular minorities. No one could resent it much if he got rid of the Jews and Communists. When he started his fight against the Church, he rightfully counted on the calm indifference of large parts of the nation, especially when he pretended that it was not religion which he wanted to destroy but only the corrupt, sexually pathological and politically stubborn and unpatriotic priests misled by Rome. The war against the freedom of spirit was also not dangerous. Outside the victims themselves, no one seemed to take this war seriously.

Everything went step by step. Group after group, class after class succumbed. In the meanwhile, the rest just sat and waited. They remained neutral. The security of anyone who exposed himself carelessly for "others" was endangered.

After they all were individually defeated: heavy industry,
Nazis, or waits hopefully in some “unoccupied area” for a Mexican visa.

Petrus committed suicide. The “chaos” from which he expected salvation from an imperfect and evil order engulfed him. The “chaos” that came was so much lower, so much more miserable and mean than he had envisaged in his bitter resentment against the existing order; it was a bureaucratically and sadistically organized “chaos” which he, in his innocent radicalism, could not possibly imagine. He jumped out of the window of his furnished room on the night of June 30, 1934—after the carnage which the Fuehrer of the Germans had staged for his friends and intimates. Many hundreds of such friends and confidants had been murdered by the Fuehrer on that day. Petrus, the writer, the outsider, the skeptical anarchist with the twitch in his right eye, was by no means directly affected by that general purge. He was in no danger at the time; he could have enjoyed the fact that “salvation through chaos” was so obviously on its way. But he jumped out of the window. News of his death reached us long after his poor, limp body had found rest under the earth.

The friends . . . the friends of that time . . . the participants in that meeting. . . .

Heini, the twenty-year-old youngster and cynical connoisseur who had been grateful to the Nazis as well as to the Communists because they brought some life into “this drabness” —what has become of him?

As far as I know he is doing well. He became a flyer and was one of those heroes who, in September, 1939, turned helpless Warsaw into a shambles. Later on, thanks to the excellent connections which his wealthy father has always maintained with the Nazis, he was sent abroad. Once he turned up in the United

States. Somebody I know met him at a party. How had he managed to come over, he was asked—and how was it possible that he, a Nazi flyer—passed unhindered through the British-controlled Gibraltar? As an answer, he drew his passport proudly from his pocket—it was a German Jew-passport with a fat “J” on the first page. He, the hundred percent Aryan, had received it at home so that he might serve the Reich as an émigré. Later on, I heard that he went to South America in order to do his part in bringing some “life into the drabness.” I can’t believe that he is very happy in his position. His sense of humor can’t be satisfied among the Nazis. Moreover, he was not really cruel by nature and probably will realize eventually how vile the life is to which he has sold himself.

Of his friend Georg, the communist, I’ve lost sight. For a long while, he was in the concentration camp at Oranienburg; we knew that this was one of the worst camps. He was beaten and badly mistreated. He survived and even was promoted to a higher position as a “group commander” in the camp. After two years of imprisonment, he was released as “converted.” Since then, he has become a Nazi—only as a “pretext,” as pure “deception,” so his former comrades now in Belgium assured us. But inasmuch as shortly before the outbreak of war, he accepted a splendid and well-paid position in the Hermann Goering Works and, voluntarily or involuntarily, cut off every contact with all of us—I am not sure whether he is still only “pretending” or whether he really has been converted.

Alvin, the pacifist, the Christian, gentle opponent of our “defense attempts” is dead. He belonged to an international Bible group which displeased the Third Reich and was arrested in the midst of his efforts for peace and understanding among men. Although, or rather because he was one of the most harmless in-
mates of the camp into which he was thrown, the Storm Troopers, eager for action, chose him as the particular butt of their jokes and educational experiments of all sorts. We know that he had been forced to beat his co-prisoners and that in the end, he himself was beaten to death because he refused to kneel before Hitler’s picture and to chant insulting verses against Christ. “As a matter of fact,” a camp-mate of poor Alvin later reported, “he didn’t really resist. By that time he was already far too weak to resist and far too weak to carry out the order. He simply collapsed and then they finished him. You must remember,” our friend added, shaking his head wearily, “that nothing arouses and infuriates the Nazis so much as gentleness and helpless goodness.”

Alvin is dead. He was very gentle, very helpless and very good.

Who else was there on that evening? Who else had in those days hoped that the enemy was no enemy at all, and that it was better not to undertake any unnecessary or even harmful steps? Siegfried—oh yes, Siegfried, the banker’s son, who would not have disliked the Nazis had they chosen any other scapegoat for persecution than the Jewish one.

Siegfried escaped. He lives in Palestine from where he sometimes writes us melancholy letters full of self-accusation and remorse. His father, who had spent so much money on the one hand for the proletarian “turnvereine,” and on the other, for the Nazi party, died of a heart attack—just at the right moment. And so the pogroms of November, 1938, could do him no more harm. Siegfried had written us of his passing away. “It was too much for him,” he wrote us from Tel Aviv, “and his disappointment was too great.”

They did not fare well, my friends who had met in my room on that evening; it hurts to think of them and perhaps it would have been better if I had not digressed from my report and awakened this old pain.

How great was our sorrow—on that March 10, 1933—when we left our house?

It was quite evident, it was not small. Nevertheless we were basically hopeful. We were free and the nightmare, that horrible ghost which chased us away, would in turn be chased away by the will, the united activity of civilized Europe.

What happened then, what gradually was repeated step by step with appalling thoroughness, I don’t need to describe. And anyway I am imposing upon my train companion, the young American, a reading of a story of suffering which, for the present, he is convinced has nothing to do with him. And he too knows, as well as I, that the resistance in Europe did not function. But what I must get over to him, nevertheless, is that the failure of resistance in Europe had the same causes as in Germany. Nothing was learned from our mistakes.

Ghastly! It was ghastly!

The talks which we had in those years between 1933 and 1939 with our friends in France and England, with the young Swiss, Dutchmen, Czechs, were all identical with our old discussions in Germany. Only now we were not so undecided, so unsure, soft and subject to influences. We at least knew what was happening. But we no longer had the power to put our knowledge to use. We were a scattered, homeless little group whose entreaties and warnings, whose every activity were met with suspicion as being inspired by resentment, as being maliciously or wantonly exaggerated, not objective, and not to be taken very seriously.

At any rate, so much was sure and so much we had to realize
to our greatest terror: For the time being, nothing, not the least thing, was to be undertaken in the defense of civilization. It was "unnecessary, inopportune, unpacificist, unchristian, premature, technically wrong, or simply hopeless" to undertake anything. It was against the "program" of the individual countries to join in with the "programs" of other countries. Europe was unable to feel any convictions. It had been cheated too much. And was the "enemy" really an enemy? Couldn't he be appeased, and won over and used to advantage? But even if that should prove impossible—it takes two to fight. Inasmuch as "we" refused to fight, there would be no fight. If he was only not irritated, the enemy, one was secure. All the more secure as nothing was left undone in the way of "technical" security, exactly as in Republican Germany. Moreover, the "enemy" was by no means aiming at France or England. Also, Holland, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia or Poland had nothing to fear. All he wanted was to stamp out communism and that was good. And if, one faraway day, he really should want more and different things—well, there was still time to get together and collectively the democracies would be much stronger than he. But to start anything unitedly against him now was superfluous. France had different interests from England—Poland had no interest whatsoever in Czechoslovakia.

"Our order is bad and rotten," the young intellectuals in the western democracies cried. "It does not pay to defend it."

"Criminal interest groups want a preventive war against Germany," the pacifists of all countries cried in international meetings. "We are about to be cheated for the second time."

"It is still very interesting and stimulating in Berlin," the young traveling foreigners cried after returning from their study or pleasure trips. And in order to give themselves a more serious air, they added, "One must only understand the Germans. Then we can live in peace with them."

"It is sad, very sad," the most humanitarian among our acquaintances in Zurich, London and Paris said mildly and wisely when we spoke of the horrible deeds which were being committed all the time in our lost country. "But it might be well to see the good, the hopeful and not only the evil. If we want to cooperate with Germany—and we must want it for the sake of peace—we must not exaggerate the danger and the ruthlessness of the young German government."

Our reason and our hearts were aroused when we heard such talk. It was an outrage of the reasoning power when thinking people denied what was proved and the eye declared the obvious, invisible.

Had nobody read Mein Kampf? Did nobody read the Völkischer Beobachter? Was the extent of the German rearmament unknown? Wasn't the German talent for organization, German shrewdness in the service of the new German government, a threat beyond belief? Was it not seen what was going on within Germany and was it not known that all those things were dress rehearsals for a world-wide "premiere"? They believed the peace talks and promises of the Führer. Had he not delivered these same speeches in Germany, given the same promises? And had not each one been cheated, one after the other? Was it conceivable, was it imaginable that the old anti-communist trick could work even in the international sphere? Europe was convinced that Nazi Germany would turn only against Russia and Jewry. Why was it convinced? Because Hitler said it would be so. But he had said the same in Germany.

It was a heartfelt blow to experience this calm indifference, this moral impotence with which the German misdeeds were ac-
cerpted everywhere in Europe. The failure of resistance up to September 3, 1939—the collapse of the European Neutrals after September 3, 1939—the Belgian treason—the French collapse—they all were consequences of that moral impotence, of that lack of real and spontaneous rage in the presence of wrong and barbarism.

Vainly did we plead that our fight against the Nazis, and our appeal for the sympathy of the world was not, or at least not primarily, motivated by the plight of our friends in the German concentration camps. And that not for ourselves did we wish sympathy. We deserved our plight, we thought, because we had failed. Our country was lost and destroyed because we did not see the danger in time and we did not fight passionately enough. “It is no longer just Germany that is at stake,” we cried out. “It is you—it is your countries—your democracies—your freedom—your lives.”

We already knew that the cause of morality, propriety, truth, justice, would not impel anyone to raise a finger where “tactics,” willingness to concede, and ostrich politics were all-powerful. It was senseless to expect our foreign friends to “fight for an ideal.” But, we used to say, the Nazis have killed everything in Germany that makes life worth living and that makes man’s living together possible. And whoever sees the murder with open eyes and lets it happen without interfering makes himself an accessory to the crime. “German rearmament,” we pointed out, and said, “Hitler wants to rule the world—your world!”

With slightly amused disapproval, the glances of our friends rested on us.

“Children, children,” our friends said, “you are of course furious to the core and you see everything black. But it is neither so dark, nor so simple as you see it. We must let things develop and give those young billy-goats over there a chance to dull their horns.”

An ocean of space and time seemed to lie between our friends and the danger. We fought, we argued. But our voices faded into nothingness. We were poor, ghost-ridden fools. Foolish, pathetic, hysterical in our misfortune. One shouldn’t let oneself be unnerved by us. One shouldn’t believe everything that we said and especially one shouldn’t let oneself be pushed by us into unpremeditated acts. One should wait, watch, gain time. And in doing so, they waited just the time which the enemy needed in order to prepare himself quietly. And step by step they lost position after position.

The victorious western democracies allowed the enemy to change their victory of the World War into defeat. So exactly did the German victors of 1918, the German Democrats and Republicans yield to the enemy. In actuality, strategically, the democratic western powers between 1933 and 1939 lost one fortress after the other, one spearhead after the other. Even worse, because they also began sliding down in the sphere of morality, they lost also one moral position after the other. They lost prestige in the outside world and self-assurance, power and moral backbone within.

The young French intellectuals were no longer saying only “Our order is bad and rotten.” They rather said, “Our order is miserable; it is not one iota better than the order in Nazi Germany which you want us to fight.”

But that was their fatal mistake. Already they had lost much through their own fault. Oh, they did not even dream how much more there was to be lost!

“We have given up Abyssinia,” they exclaimed dejectedly.