

**LEON TROTSKY**

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**WHAT  
HITLER WANTS**

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**No. 35 • The JOHN DAY Pamphlets • 25c**

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THE JOHN DAY PAMPHLETS—No. 85

## WHAT HITLER WANTS

by

LEON TROTSKY

*"A sound analysis of the present and probable future of Fascist Germany."*

—Sidney Hook.

"When Hitler asserts with indignation that the great German people has been transformed into a second-class nation, and that this conflicts with the interests of international solidarity and the principle of equal rights for all peoples he is simply talking for effect. The whole historical philosophy of National-Socialism proceeds from the supposedly fundamental inequality of nations and the right of the 'superior' races to trample upon and to extirpate the 'inferior' races. Needless to say, the Germans occupy a preëminent place among these superior peoples. Taken as a whole, the Hitler program for the reconstruction of Europe is a reactionary-utopian medley of racial mysticism and national cannibalism. It is not hard to submit it to an annihilating criticism. However, the realization of this program is not the first aim of the Fascist dictatorship, but rather the *reëstablishment of the military power of Germany*. Without this it is impossible to talk of any program whatsoever. It is only from this standpoint that Hitler's disarmament speech offers any interest whatever.

"Hitler's program is the program of German capitalism, aggressive but bound hand and foot by Versailles and the results of the World War."

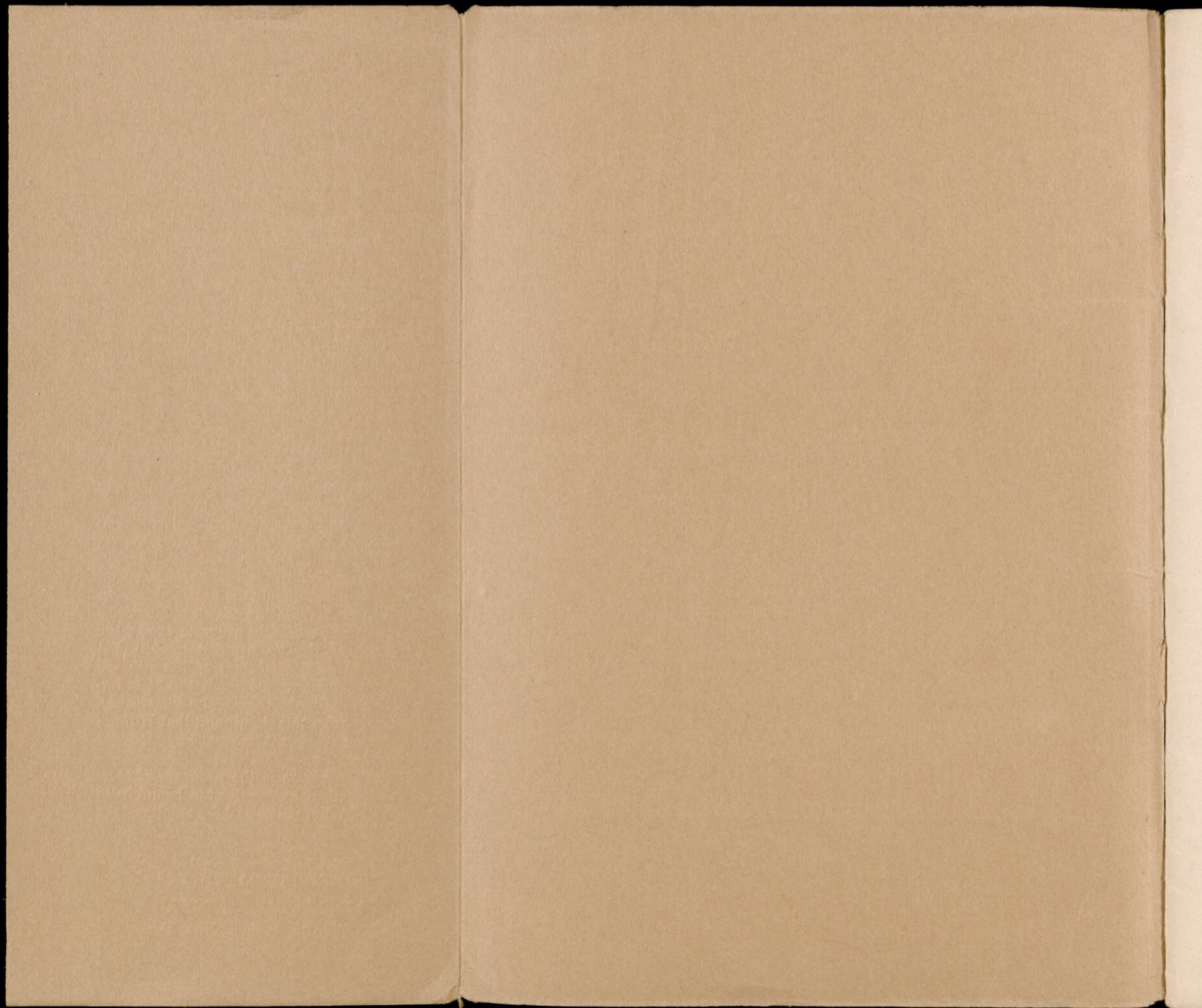
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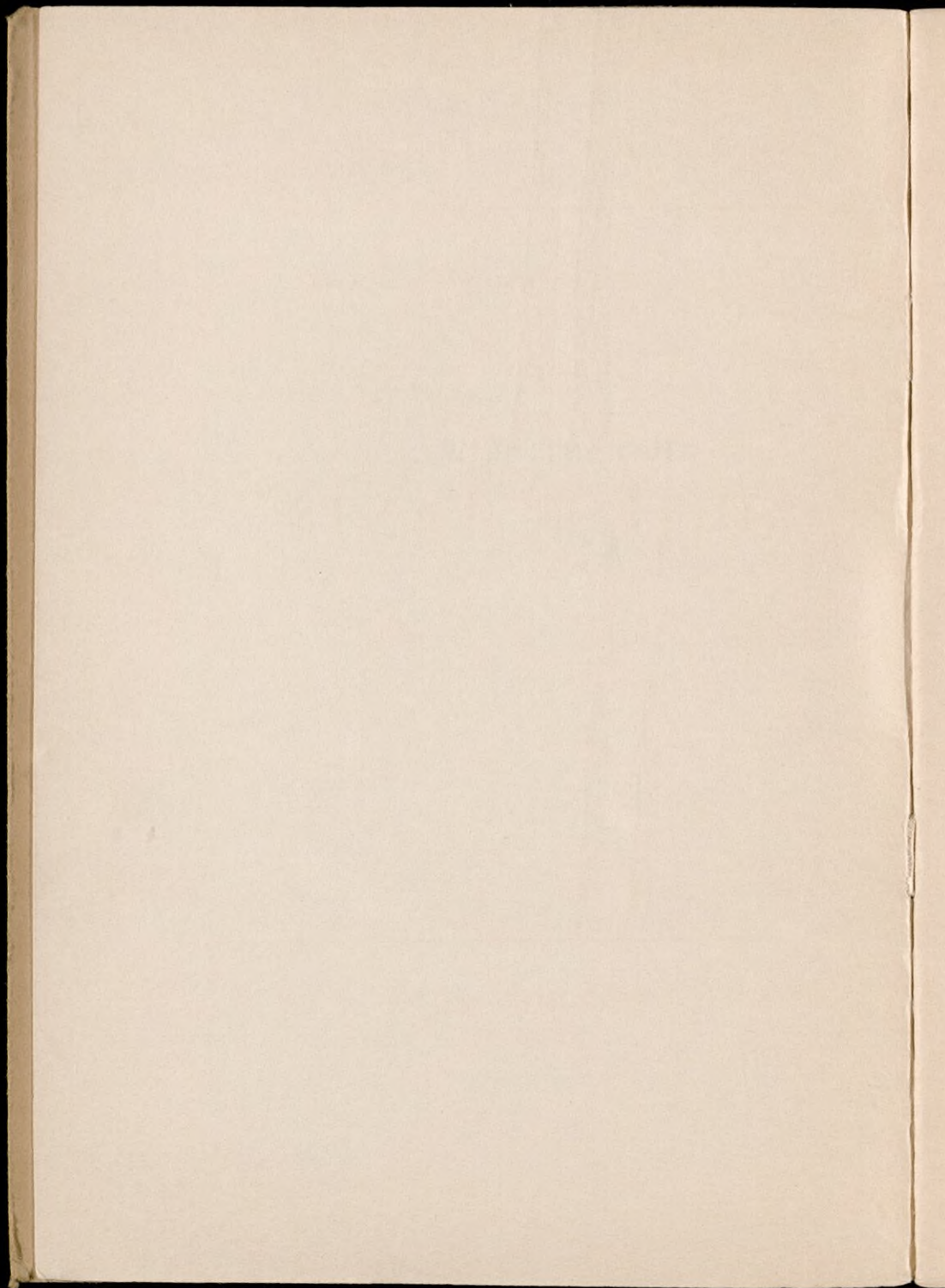
JOHN DAY PAMPHLETS

**THE JOHN DAY COMPANY, Inc.**

386 Fourth Avenue, New York



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THE JOHN DAY COMPANY

*New York*

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**D**IPLOMATIC routine has its advantages as long as events move in old ruts. Faced with new great facts it is lost. It is most dangerous to underestimate an enemy just because his system goes beyond the limits of routine. Simply to say that Hitler is a demagogue, an hysterical person and an actor is to shut one's eyes so as not to face the danger! It takes more than hysteria to seize power, and method there must be in the Nazi madness. Woe to those who do not awaken to this fact in time! The leaders of German working class organizations refused to take Hitler seriously: considering his program as a reactionary and Utopian one they proved incapable of estimating its force of action. To-day, as a result of their ghastly mistake, their organizations have been shattered to bits. The same error might be repeated in the field of world politics.

On May 17th Hitler replied to Roosevelt and the Powers in his peace speech to the Reichstag. Up to that time many thought that Hitler would

violently attack the Versailles Treaty, attempting to deal with Europe as he had done with the Reichstag building, Marxian literature, and the Jewish department stores. Nobody really knew where the lightning would come from and where it would strike. Would any one have predicted twenty-four hours in advance the crushing of the trade unions according to all the rules of a gangster assault upon a bank? What was to be expected now? Then, of a sudden, the cooing of a dove.

Hitler's speech in the Reichstag staggered everybody with its unexpected pacifism, and so attained its most immediate aim. It is always advantageous to take an opponent by surprise. Hitler there developed his first success and fairly embarrassed his adversaries. Highly experienced diplomats allowed themselves to be at least half-way assuaged by a few well-calculated pacific sentences, after they had been frightened to death by Papen's blood and iron shouting. John Simon gratefully noted in the Chancellor's speech the moderate tone of a statesman. So did Austen Chamberlain. Contrasting Hitler to Papen, the *Morning Post* discovered in the declaration the "soft accent of the South," and the entire press

declared that the whole atmosphere had suddenly become less tense. At the same time they analyzed and explained these unexpected soft accents in something like these terms: the shrewd diplomat Mussolini had brought Hitler to reason, the pressure from Washington had doubtlessly not been without influence, and consequently the chances of the disarmament policy have manifestly improved. What a flagrant blunder! The psychological secret of the hubbub is simple: whoever expects to meet a madman brandishing an axe and encounters instead a man with a Browning hidden in his hip pocket cannot fail to experience a feeling of relief. But that does not prevent the Browning from being more dangerous than the axe.

There is no lack, on the other hand, of distrustful people who see in Hitler's declaration only an episodic maneuver occasioned by the unfavorable echo to the speech of Papen: it is enough, at least for a few weeks, to deceive public opinion, and then one will see. An all too simple explanation! The menacing harangue of Lord Hailsham provoked by the speech of Papen may, it is true, have served as the impulsion to

Hitler's intervention. But all this relates to the order and to the tone of political declarations; that is, it touches only the technical side. Behind the diplomatic fencing, however, are concealed much deeper factors and plans. It would be just as false to take Hitler's pacifism at its word as it would be to dismiss the declaration of a "demagogue" without penetrating into its sense. The political problem consists in establishing the inner relationships between Hitler's declaration and his real plans, that is, to try to understand by what ways Fascist Germany hopes to attain those ends which it cannot and will not name. The past must already have adequately shown that if there is fantasy and delirium in the policy of National-Socialism, this does not mean that Hitler is incapable of weighing realities: *his fantasy and delirium are in expedient conformity with his real political aims*. That is our point of departure in the appraisal of the internal as well as the foreign policy of National-Socialism.

The guiding philosophical and historical ideas in Hitler's disarmament speech are truly pitiful in their pretentious mediocrity. The idea proclaimed by Hitler of the necessity of re-adapting

the State frontiers of Europe to the frontiers of its races is one of those reactionary Utopias with which the National-Socialist program is stuffed. Present-day Europe is decomposing economically and culturally not because its national frontiers are imperfect but because the old continent is cut up in every direction by customs prison walls, separated by the disorder of inflated monetary systems, and crushed by the militarism which Europe requires to insure its dismemberment and its decadence. A shifting of the internal frontiers by a few dozens or hundreds of miles in one direction or another would, without changing much of anything, involve a number of human victims exceeding the population of the disputed zone.

The assurances given by the National-Socialists that they renounce "Germanization" do not signify that they renounce conquests, for one of the central and most persistent ideas in their program is the occupation of vast territories in "the East" so that a strong German peasantry may be established there. It is not by accident that the pacifist declaration, having suddenly and unexpectedly left the ground of the "ideal" separation of the races, warns in a half-threatening tone that

the source of future conflicts may arise out of the "over-population of Western Europe." Hitler indicates only one way out of the over-population of Europe, primarily of Germany, and that is the East. When, lamenting the injustice of the German-Polish frontier, he declared that one could without difficulty find "in the East," the solution capable of satisfying alike the "claims of Poland" and the "legitimate rights of Germany" he simply had in mind the annexation of Soviet territories. The renunciation of Germanization signifies, in this connection, the principle of the privileged position of the Germanic "race" as the seignioral caste in the occupied territories. The Nazis are against assimilation but not against annexation. They prefer the extermination of the conquered "inferior" peoples to their Germanization. For the time being, fortunately, this is only a matter of hypothetical conquests.

When Hitler asserts with indignation that the great German people has been transformed into a second-class nation, and that this conflicts with the interests of international solidarity and the principle of equal rights for all peoples he is simply talking for effect. The whole historical

philosophy of National-Socialism proceeds from the supposedly fundamental inequality of nations and the right of the "superior" races to trample upon and to extirpate the "inferior" races. Needless to say, the Germans occupy a preëminent place among these superior peoples. Taken as a whole, the Hitler program for the reconstruction of Europe is a reactionary-Utopian medley of racial mysticism and national cannibalism. It is not hard to submit it to an annihilating criticism. However, the realization of this program is not the first aim of the Fascist dictatorship, but rather *the reëstablishment of the military power of Germany*. Without this it is impossible to talk of any program whatsoever. It is only from this standpoint that Hitler's disarmament speech offers any interest whatever.

Hitler's program is the program of German capitalism, aggressive but bound hand and foot by Versailles and the results of the World War. This combination of potential strength and actual weakness accounts for the exceedingly explosive character of the aims of National-Socialism and explains the extreme prudence of the most immediate steps towards the attainment of these aims.

Hitler may speak to-day of loosening and gradually untying the knots, but not of cutting them asunder.

Any revision of the treaties, especially of the system of armaments, would signify a change in the present relationship of forces: Germany would have to grow stronger, France weaker. Outside of this, the very question of revision has no meaning for Germany. On the other hand, it is quite clear that the rulers of France will accept no changes that would weaken its position to the benefit of Germany. That is why the Nazis regard as illusory and fantastic any policy calculated upon an improvement of the international position of Germany through agreement with France. It is from this conviction which, as will be seen farther on, runs through all the political activity of Hitler, that flows the inevitability of a new conflict between Germany and France. But not to-day, nor yet to-morrow. It is precisely this "correction" with regard to time that Hitler makes in his declaration and, in this sense, it is not a mere "deception." When Goering set fire to the Reichstag he risked nothing but the heads of his agents. The premeditated firing of Europe is a

more ticklish enterprise. In its present state Germany cannot make war. It is disarmed. This is no phrase; it is a fact. Bespectacled students and unemployed wearing a swastika band are no substitute for the Hohenzollern army. To be sure, here and there Hitler can partially violate the obligations dealing with armaments. But he will not resolve upon any open measure on a large scale which would involve him in a direct and flagrant conflict with the proscriptions of Versailles. Only some "fortunate" circumstances, in the form of complications between the heavily armed States of Europe, could permit National-Socialism to take drastic steps in foreign policy in the near future. In their absence, Hitler will be forced to confine himself to grand diplomatic combinations abroad and to petty military contraband at home.

The struggle of the Nazis in Austria and in Danzig does not, in spite of all its sharpness, conflict with the program of action outlined above. In the first place, the growth of National-Socialism in Austria is an inevitable fact, especially after the victory in Germany. The reactions abroad against the Hitlerization of Austria will only strengthen the Fascist tide. In winning Aus-

tria from within, Hitler creates for himself a fairly important auxiliary support. The international complications that will grow out of it will not easily be reconciled with the Versailles Treaty. Hitler evidently knows that besides arguments out of a text, there can also be set up against his policy arguments of force. He must be able to beat a retreat in case of need and he will always have time for that, converting his positions in Austria and Danzig into money of exchange for international agreements.

Potential strength does not liberate Germany from her present weakness. If the Germany of the Hohenzollerns set itself the task of "organizing Europe" in order thereafter to undertake a new partition of the world, present-day Germany, thrown far back to the rear by the defeat, is forced to set itself once more those tasks which Bismarck's Prussia solved long ago: the attainment of the European equilibrium as a stage in the unification of all the German territories. The practical program of Hitler to-day is bounded by the European horizon. The problems of continents and of oceans are beyond his field of vision and can be of practical concern to him only in

so far as they are interwoven with the internal problems of Europe. Hitler speaks exclusively in *defensive* terms: this corresponds entirely to the stage through which renascent German militarism must pass. If the military rule—the best defensive is the offensive—is correct, then the diplomatic rule—the best preparation for the offensive is to take care of the defensive—is no less correct. In this sense, Brockdorf-Rantzau, who had a taste for paradox, told me in Moscow: *Si vis bellum para pacem*.

Hitler is counting upon the support of Italy and, within certain limits, this is assured him, not so much because their internal governments are similar—the purely German Third Reich is, as is known, a frankly Latin plagiarism—as because of the parallelism in many of their foreign aspirations. But with the Italian crutch alone, German imperialism will not rise to its feet. Only under the condition of support from England can Fascist Germany gain the necessary freedom of movement. Therefore, no adventures, no declarations which smack of adventure! Hitler understands that every blow against the West (a blow against Poland would rebound against the West)

would promptly bring closer together England and France and would oblige Italy to show great caution. Every imprudent, premature, risky act of revenge-politics would lead automatically to the isolation of Germany and—given its military impotence—to a new humiliating capitulation. The knots of the Versailles Treaty would be drawn still tighter. An agreement with England demands a self-limitation. But Paris—and Paris is just what is involved—is well worth a mass. Just as the agreement with Hindenburg, through the medium of Papen, permitted Hitler to accomplish his *coup d'état* in the form of an interpretation of the Weimar Constitution, so an agreement with England, through the medium of Italy, is to permit Germany “legally” to ravage and to overthrow the Versailles Treaty. It is within this framework that the Chancellor’s pacifist declaration to the Reichstag on May 17th must be viewed. Hitler’s pacifism is not a fortuitous diplomatic improvisation, but a vital part of a grand maneuver which is to change radically the relationship of forces in favor of Germany and to lay the bases for the European and the world offensive of German imperialism.

However, this is but one part of Hitler's program and only the negative part. To refrain from premature attempts at revenge is in essence the continuation of the Stresemann policy; it does not suffice to guarantee the *active* support of England. The declaration of May 17th contains a clear indication on the other, the positive, side of the Nazi program: the struggle against Bolshevism. This does not concern the dissolution of the German proletarian organizations but rather means war against the Soviet Union. In close connection with the program of the drive towards the East Hitler takes upon himself the protection of European civilization, of the Christian religion, of the British colonies, and other moral and material values, against Bolshevik barbarism. By assuming this crusade he hopes to obtain for Germany *the right to arm itself*. Hitler is convinced that on the scales of Great Britain the danger of German Fascism to Western Europe weighs less than the danger of the Bolshevik Soviets in the East. This evaluation constitutes the most important key to the whole foreign policy of Hitler.

The most important, but not the only one. The National-Socialist dictatorship will not only play

upon the contradiction between the West and the East, but also upon all the antagonisms of Western Europe and there is no lack of them. In opposition to the resurrection of Austria-Hungary, Hitler pledges the special attention of Germany to the "young national States of Europe." He seeks auxiliary levers to reestablish the European equilibrium, proposing to the small and feeble States to rally around the vanquished and not the victor. Just as in its domestic policy National-Socialism has assembled under its banner the ruined and the desperate in order all the more surely to subject them to the interests of monopoly capital, so in his foreign policy Hitler will strive to create a united front of the vanquished and the injured in order all the more pitilessly to crush them in the future under the weight of German imperialism.

If Hitler has so eagerly accepted the English plan for armament reduction, it is only because he counted in advance and with full certainty upon its failure. He did not need to take upon himself the odious rôle of the grave-digger of pacifist proposals; he prefers to leave that function to others. For the same reason Hitler is not niggardly with

his "warm thanks" to the American President for his declaration in favor of armament reduction. The more broadly and extensively the program of disarmament is presented before the whole world, and the more inevitably it ends in a collapse, the more incontestable will be Germany's right to rearmament. No, Hitler is not preparing to overthrow Versailles by violence—for violence one must have power! But he is counting firmly upon the prospect that, after the failure of the British program which he "supports," England, together with Italy, will support with all their might the right of Germany to strengthen its defense . . . against the East. Nothing but defense, and only against the East! A fortunate accident has supplied a political document of extraordinary value which makes much of this clear.

We refer to an "Open Letter" of Hitler to Papen, published in pamphlet form on October 16, 1932. Rather sharply controversial in tone, the "Letter" remained unnoticed outside of Germany. The leaders of National-Socialism talk and write too much! Still, it should have found a place on the table of every diplomat or journalist who occupies himself with the present-day foreign

policy of Germany. Let us recall the political situation at the time when this pamphlet appeared. Papen was then Chancellor. Hitler was in expectant opposition—between August 13th, when Hindenburg refused to appoint him head of the government, and January 30th, when the Field Marshal was forced to yield the command of Germany to Hitler. The "Open Letter" was not intended for the masses, but for the ruling classes, and had as its aim to prove to them that the social régime of Germany could not be saved solely by bureaucratic methods; that only the National-Socialists had a serious program in foreign policy; finally, that he, Hitler, was as far removed from spineless resignation as he was from adventurism. The letter was anything but sensational, but on the contrary was a most sober document. To-day, it may be assumed, Hitler would gladly burn his pamphlet in the furnace. All the more attentively should his adversaries examine it.

"It is absurd to think," Hitler explained to Papen, "that the power which disarmed us, will to-day seriously also disarm itself without being forced to do so." In other words, it is just as ab-

surd to wait for France to agree some fine day or other to the rearmament of Germany. Its enormous military preponderance relieves France of the necessity of an entente with a vanquished foe on the basis of equality of rights. Any attempt to propose a military agreement to France in return for armaments will not only be very coldly received but will immediately be brought to the attention of the State against which it might be aimed: Hitler is alluding of course to the Soviet Union. It is possible for Germany to gain the right to arm itself only by means of "a genuine reestablishment of the European equilibrium." England and Italy are interested in the realization of this goal, but in no case and under no conditions is France. "It is inconceivable to think that the lack of intimacy and of concordance with England and Italy can be made up for by the establishment of better relations with France!" The fundamental thesis of the foreign policy of Hitler, which dismisses as moribund the ideas, or if one prefers, the illusions of Locarno, leaves nothing to be desired in the way of clarity. In the declaration of May 17th we shall not of course find so clear an exposition. But the declaration

in no way contradicts the "Open Letter"; on the contrary, it develops and applies its program for a definite stage.

The goal of German policy is the reestablishment of the military sovereignty of the State. Everything else is only a means thereto. But it is not at all necessary that the means be constructed in the image of the goal. Under no circumstances must Germany present itself to the world with a rearmament program of its own, even less so to this Disarmament Conference. For two reasons: no conference is able to adopt a decision which would radically change the material relationship of forces; the very demand for the right to armaments, while remaining a purely platonic demonstration, will nevertheless permit France to suppress the question of its own disarmament and, what is worse yet, bring England closer to France.

This latter result, according to Hitler, is already obtained to a certain degree as a result of the thoughtless policy of Papen. England is forced to support France much more than it wants to. It must be recognized that the criticism addressed by Hitler to the "Gentlemen's Club" and to the Chancellor of the Reich himself as a dilettant and

an adventurer, is not merely biting but also quite convincing. The "national" barons and bureaucrats have no foreign policy at all. The rattling of an inexistent weapon is dictated to them by domestic considerations: they are ready to utilize the nationalist movement while arresting at the same time its further growth. Undoubtedly taking his inspiration from Bismarck, Hitler does not recoil from a blow at the last Hohenzollern: Papen and his colleagues are only the inheritors and imitators of the theatrical policy of Wilhelm II, with this fundamental difference, that the Kaiser had a first-class army, whereas they have only the memory of it. Hitler hits a bull's-eye here.

It is not hard, after this, to understand how badly mistaken was that part of the press and of diplomacy which sought to discover the real program of the present German Government in the rhetoric of Papen on the peculiar charm of death on the field of battle. It must not be lost sight of that Papen, whom the Nazis during the brief period of his rule treated as a Captain of the dragoons, feels himself among them like a man who is constantly on probation. On May 13th he

adopted an unusually loud tone so as to put himself in harmony—but he was mistaken in his calculations. One may have his own opinion about the tastes of an elderly Captain of the dragoons who, between taking a dose of urodonal and drinking down a glass of Huniadi-Janos water, propagates among young people the advantages of shrapnel over arteriosclerosis; but one thing is indisputable: behind Papen's discourse is concealed no program. The "pacifism" of the present Chancellor is much more dangerous than the bellicose flights of the Vice-Chancellor.

In passing, we find the explanation for the sharp contradiction between Hitler's declaration and the previous policy of Neurath, Nadolny and others. Hitler became Chancellor at the cost of accepting a ministry of barons and privy councillors. The camarilla round Hindenburg consoles itself with the idea of pursuing also *its* policy under Hitler. In all likelihood it is only the threatening repercussions abroad of Papen's speech that gave Hitler the possibility of finally taking into his hands the helm of foreign policy. It is not Wilhelmstrasse which dictated the declaration of May 17th to the new Chancellor. On the

contrary, it is Hitler who subdued the fantasies of the barons and the privy councillors of Wilhelmstrasse.

But let us return to the "Open Letter." With unusual brusqueness it attacks the slogan launched by Papen on naval armament. Even if Germany had the means—and it hasn't, the pamphlet declares—it would not be permitted to convert them into warships and it would be powerless to violate the prohibition. The slogan of military armament alone drove England to the side of France. There, says the pamphlet, you have the results "of your truly fatal leadership in foreign policy, Mr. von Papen!"

The struggle for the arming of Germany on sea and on land must be based upon a definite political idea. Hitler calls it by its name: the need of "strengthening the defense *against the latent dangers of the East* is comparatively easy to motivate." Sympathy for such a program is guaranteed in advance on the part of "clear-visioned persons" in the West—obviously not in France. It is only from the standpoint of "the defense necessary for us in the East," with regard to the Baltic Sea, that England can be persuaded to accept "corrections"

also in the naval paragraphs of the Versailles Treaty. For it must not be forgotten that "at the present time it is important for the future of Germany to have an attitude full of confidence towards England."

The German national movement can and should demand armament, but the German Government must in no case expound this demand. To-day it must insist only and exclusively upon the disarmament of the victors. Hitler considered it self-evident that the Disarmament Conference is condemned to failure. "There would be no need at all," he wrote three months before his advent to power, "for the German delegation to participate interminably in the Geneva Disarmament comedy. It would suffice to expose clearly before the whole world the wish of France not to disarm for us thereupon to quit the Conference, stating that the peace of Versailles has been violated by the signatory powers themselves and that Germany must reserve for itself under these circumstances the drawing of the corresponding conclusions."

The declaration of Hitler, as Chancellor, only serves to develop this melody. The refusal of the

victors to disarm would signify the "final moral and real liquidation of the treaties themselves." Germany would interpret such conduct as the desire "to remove it from the Conference." In that case it would be hard for it "to continue to belong to the League of Nations." Truly, the "Open Letter" is indispensable as the key to the strategy of Hitler!

The departure of Germany from the League of Nations would be accompanied by a disaffection between France, on the one hand, and England and the United States, on the other. The first pre-conditions would be created for the reestablishment of the "European equilibrium" in which Germany must occupy a growing place. With the concordance of Italy and England Hitler would acquire the possibility of rearming Germany, not by petty contraband measures but by big "corrections" in the Versailles Treaty. Parallel to this would be developed the program of "defense" against the East. In this process a critical point must inevitably supervene: *war*. Against whom? Should the line against the East not prove to be the line of least resistance, the explosion might take place along a different direction. For if it is

still possible to discuss to what degree offensive means are distinguished from defensive means, it is already beyond dispute that the military means suitable for the East are equally suitable for the West.

Hitler is preparing for war. His policy in the domain of economics is dictated primarily by concern over the maximum economic independence of Germany in case of war. To the aims of military preparation must also be subordinated the service of obligatory labor. But the very character of these measures indicates that it is not a question of to-morrow. An attack upon the West in the more or less immediate future could be carried out only on condition of a military alliance between Fascist Germany and the Soviets. But it is only the most turbulent sections of the White Guard emigration that can believe in the possibility of such an absurdity or can seek to make a threat out of it. The attack against the East can take place only on condition of the support of one or several powerful States of the West. This variant is, at all events, the more likely one. But here too the preparatory period will not be measured by weeks or by months.

The four-power pact, deciding nothing fundamental in advance, can only organize the mutual contact of the largest States of Western Europe. It is a guarantee against hazards of a secondary order, but not against fundamental antagonisms. Hitler will strive to extract from the pact all the advantages for the attack against the East. The regulations of the pact predetermine no more than ten per cent of its future destiny. Its real historical rôle will be determined by the actual relationships and the groupings of its participants, their allies, and their adversaries.

Hitler is prepared for the next ten years not to undertake any military actions against either France or Poland. In the declaration he fixed five years as the term during which genuine equality of rights for Germany in the matter of armed forces must be accomplished. These terms need not, of course, be invested with a sacred significance. But they outline the bounds in point of time within which the leading circles of Fascism confine their plans of revenge.

Domestic difficulties, unemployment, the ruination and the distress of the petty bourgeoisie, may, of course, push Hitler to premature actions which

he himself by a cool analysis would regard as harmful. In living politics one must base himself not only upon the plans of the opponent but also upon all the entanglements of the conditions in which he is placed. The historical development of Europe will not meekly obey the order of march worked out in the Brown House of Munich. But this order of march, after the seizure of power by Hitler, has become one of the greatest factors in European development. The plan will be altered in conformity with events. But one cannot understand the alterations without having before him the plan in its entirety.

The author of these lines does not consider himself called upon to mount guard before the Versailles Treaty. Europe needs a new organization. But woe betide it if this work falls into the hands of Fascism. The historian of the twenty-first century will, in that case, inevitably have to write: The epoch of the decay of Europe began with the war of 1914. Called the "war of democracy," it soon led to the domination of Fascism which became the instrument concentrating all the forces of the European nations towards the aim of "the war for liberation" . . . from the re-

sults of the preceding war. Thus, Fascism, as the expression of the historic blind alley of Europe, was at the same time the instrument of the destruction of its economic and cultural acquisitions. Let us hope, however, that this old continent still has sufficient vital strength left to open up to itself a different historical road.

ALBERT BEAVER

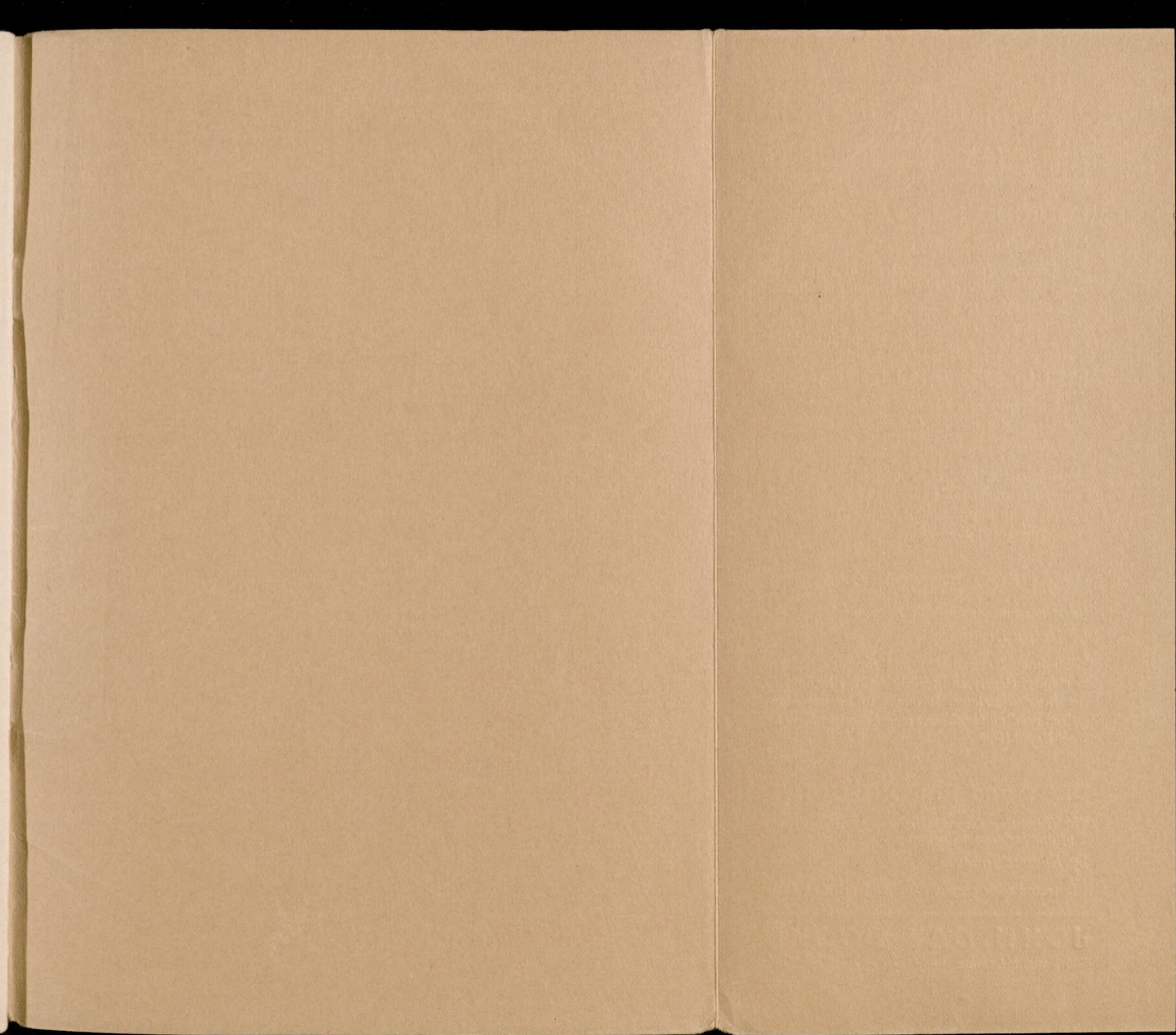
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