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DAILY EXP

10 years ago I walked out on Hitler

by

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WHEN I was a small boy at school in Berlin the great day of the year was January 27.—the Kaiser's birthday.

The headmaster would put a green laurel wreath on the white plaster bust of Wilhelm II, make his speech, and we would all sing "Heil to thee in the victory wreath, Hell Kaiser!"

Then we would go and play marbles for the rest of the day.

Now April 20 is the day of days in Germany. Any one except members of the Hohenzollern family celebrating January 27 is liable to prosecution for treason.

Instead of "Hell Kaiser!" it is "Hell Hitler!"

Even the gaudiest of the Kaiser anniversaries, even that twenty-fifth jubilee of Willie's reign in 1913—when Herr Koerner, our next-door neighbour, like other loyal Berliners, hung his best carpet from his balcony—looked pale and prosaic beside the preparations I saw them making for today in Berlin when I passed through there on Sunday on my way home from Belgrade.

AS I drove down the procession route through the Tiergarten and saw them putting up the white

losing a soldier's life or firing a cannon shot—except in Spain.

That first glimpse was ten years ago.

I was passing down Berlin's Potsdamerstrasse when outside the Sports Palace I saw a hoarding: "Adolf Hitler, Reichleader of the National Socialist Party, speaks here tonight for the first time since the lifting of the ban forbidding him to speak in Prussia."

I knew little of Hitler beyond that he had failed in a coup d'état in 1923 and was one of the people referred to as "Nationalist hotheads."

I WENT in past the brownshirt sentries and stood for a few minutes at the back of the hall listening.

It was difficult to hear what the man with the flushed face and hoarse Highland voice was saying. There were no loudspeakers, and the crowd in front of me was thick and excited.

He was talking about oranges. "We Germans," I heard, "must not eat oranges. We must consume no fruit, no food which we have not grown ourselves."

That was enough. I made my way out again and forgot about Hitler.

It was a bad mistake. The Rhineland was evacuated. Germans began to feel stronger and more confident in themselves. In the elections of 1930 they voted for the party that recommended a stronger, more confident, more aggressive policy.

"I watched him in his airplane ... he would sit there sunk into himself." These pictures were taken by Sefton Delmer in a plane flying from Berlin to Frankfurt. Beyond Hitler is Hanfstaengl, then Foreign Press Chief. The hand holding the paper (in which there is a portrait of the ex-Kaiser) is that of Goebbels.

Bolshevism had spread chaos.

I cannot say that on this occasion or at any other of my many meetings with Hitler—when I was



triumphal pyramids and the gold eagles, floodlights and all the rest of it. I thought I had set eyes on Adolf Hitler, the new hero, the man who in six years of rule employed and increased the forces secretly built up by his peace-preaching predecessors so skilfully that he has completed the Prussianisation of Central Europe begun by Frederick the Great and Bismarck, and has prepared positions for a new attempt at German world hegemony, all without



"But see him get out of the plane. It was a different Hitler . . ."

Hitler increased his twelve seats in the German Reichstag to 107. Next time Hitler spoke in Berlin I attended his meeting, sat as close to him as I could, and stayed from beginning to finish. I don't remember what he said. I watched with fascination his staring, hypnotic eyes popping out of his head, the perspiration pouring from his face, as he worked on the crowd.

His starched collar became wet and limp, then the dye from his cheap blue serge suit came off on the collar, staining it a delicate purple.

I watched his effect on the audience.

He galvanised these peaceable, middle-class citizens into a state of aggressive heroism.

It was terrific.

When at the end of it all they stood singing the "Deutschland Uber Alles" song and I did not put up my hand to the Nazi salute with the rest, a tiny little fat man beside me wanted to knock me down.

NOT so long after this Ernst Roehm—you remember he was the commander of the stormtroops and was shot in the purge of June 30, 1934—invited me to look over the Brown House in Munich and introduced me to Hitler.

We had the first of many talks. It was in Hitler's own cream and red study, designed by himself, and we sat in deep red leather chairs.

It was not really a conversation. Hitler then was still too shy and socially uncertain of himself for ordinary conversation.

He harangued me. Every question I put to him was like a heckler's interruption.

He told me, in his guttural mountaineer's voice, that he wanted to be friends with Britain; that he did not want colonies for Germany; that he wanted Germany to be given a free hand in the East to attack Russia unhampered by Western interference. Germany was to colonise Russia and restore economic order where

flying around Germany with him reporting his election tours I saw him every day, lunching and dining with him—I felt he had any compelling charm or personality.

He has not the magnetic sympathy that makes friends. He makes allies and converts.

What I did feel was his absolute and profound honesty. This man was no demagogue bent on winning masses of followers for his personal enrichment, power and ambition.

HITLER'S one purpose in life—and I am as convinced of it today as I was then—is to raise Germany out of the ashes of 1918, rebuild the Great German Reich and make the Germans bosses of the world, as he fervently believes they deserve to be.

To achieve this he is willing to sacrifice himself, his pleasures, his friends, his generation.

But, Mr. Chamberlain, if by any chance you should be reading this, don't think when I say Hitler is honest that this means he will keep promises he makes to you or any other foreigner.

He will keep his pledges just as long as he thinks it is in the interests of Germany that he should do so.

His honesty is strictly confined to his own country. Nor would any German consider the breaking of pledges to foreign Powers dishonourable.

Their propaganda has made them believe absolutely that the Treaty of Versailles was the result of a broken pledge, the non-enforcement of President Wilson's Fourteen Points.

I never had the impression that Hitler enjoyed being a public hero. He struck me as reserved and shy by nature.

I watched him in his airplane flying from election meeting to election meeting.

He would sit there sunk into himself—relaxed, loose-faced, apathetic. He seemed almost to resent his Secretary-Adjutant Schaub butting in on his privacy with an offer of cheese sandwiches or a hard-boiled egg.

He would read reports Goebbels handed him. But he read them perfunctorily.

BUT see him get out of the plane.

It was a different Hitler altogether. His chin squared, his shoulders martially pulled back. His eyes awake, no longer dreamy and remote, gripped the eyes of the lieutenants and local worthies who had come to meet him.

He was Hitler the Leader. And it is fantastic, that ease and rapidity with which he can change from being Adolf Hitler, the private individual, to Adolf Hitler, the Messiah.

I was sitting with him in a railway carriage in Coblenz waiting for the train to move off to Trier for the next meeting, having a chat about his favourite theme of economic self-dependence for Germany, when Brueckner, his Chief Adjutant, burst into the compartment.

"Two girls have run all the way from the stadium and want to see you. Can I bring them in?"

Hitler hesitated. Then he nodded.

He went out into the corridor. I



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heard a sound of hysterical sobbing and one of the girls bent down and kissed Hitler's feet while the other kissed his hand. I don't remember what he said to them.

Then he came back into the carriage. He was tremendously moved. He strode across to the window, threw up the blind and stared at the people on the station, pouring out again from his mesmeric eyes the emotion which the girl had poured into him.

From left to right his eyes swept the platform like a searchlight. Then, while the crowd on the platform cheered themselves hoarse, he pulled down the curtain again, sat down, and went on talking about the mar

THEY say Hitler has changed; that he has contracted a megalomaniac Napoleon complex.

I believe that he no longer finds it necessary to truckle to ideologists and generals as he did his early days when he depended on their support to help him in power.

I know that after the occupation of the Sudetenland he summoned his generals to him, said: "So of you opposed our entering Rhineland, some of you said I could not join Austria to Germany, many of you were against what you called the Czech adventure."

"You were wrong, all of you, was right. From now on I stand for no more opposition. I am Leader. What I say goes. Any man who opposes my commands forfeits his life. Is that clear?"

And the generals had to say was clear and shake hands on it.

But that does not convince me that this man, who every time I have talked with him, has impressed me with his intelligence and common sense, is, in a fit Napoleonic grandeur mania, going to plunge his country into immediate war.

I don't think he would hesitate to make war if he thought he had a reasonable chance of winning quickly. But he is wise enough to know that that is not the case.

There cannot be another Czech Slovakia in Rumania or a Jugo-Slavia. Britain will fight. And America will fight.

AGAINST these Powers Germany has a chance of winning.

Hitler knows this. He has said as much in "Mein Kampf."

Much better for him to try to establish his position in East-South-East Europe by peaceful penetration and commerce than by war.

Britain and America might be lulled into a false sense of security and relax into their lackadaisical attitude, giving Germany a chance.

For, believe me, because they do not fight now, does not mean that Hitler and the Germans are renouncing their objective of world hegemony.