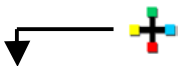




J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, "The German Outlook Today," *The Student Movement* 35, no. 2 (Nov., 1932): 31-2.

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Gissen is a smallish town in Western Germany, about fifteen miles south of Marburg, and its university bears the same kind of relation to that of Marburg as, say, Dundee to St. Andrews, or Newcastle to Durham; Marburg, that is to day, has the moonlight and the history, while Giessen has square buildings and teaches Medicine. But the enthusiasm of Professor Eiger was a stronger attraction than the moonlight, and so I.S.S. changed its plans and the German-British conference in September found itself in the palatial new hostel of which Professor Eiger is the Warden.

The conference was one of about fifty people, thirty Germans and twenty British, both delegations containing a good proportion of professors and other senior people. The German delegation included leaders of student thought of all political colours except bright red – an extremely interesting, well-informed and attractive crowd of people, who impressed one as being intellectually alive and alert. The British delegation was a much less strong group than the German, and included a much smaller range of view-point. It was fortunate, however, in its senior members, and especially in the chairman which it provided for the conference, Mr. Guillebaud, of Cambridge.

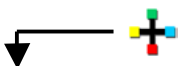
The conference lasted for a week, during which we worked fairly hard in the intervals of prolonged excursions, 'bier abends,' and official receptions from local potentates. We were warmly welcomed and richly entertained everywhere, and we learned something of the life of the German student, with his delightful wanderings from university to university, his scrupulous politeness of manner and speech, his aptitude for singsongs on all occasions, and his portentous capacity for beer.

The programme of the conference was concerned with three things: some understanding of the national problems of the two countries, a closer study of the nature and importance of their universities, and plans for cooperation between the universities of the two countries. In actual fact the thought of the conference was dominated throughout by the facts of the German situation. The Germans were not very interested in our political problem; they were profoundly sure that their own country was passing through a crisis, the issue of which would be decisive for Western civilization, and as profoundly sure that the nations of the west must make the effort to understand the nature of that crisis if the situation was to be saved. And so for the British members of the conference, Giessen was a voyage of exploration into an unknown country, an attempt to

understand ways of thought that seemed strange and even irrational. It was as though we had thought to visit some familiar part of the mainland and had found instead that an incoming tide had not only isolated it from us, but was rapidly blotting out the landmarks on every side.

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to recall the economic and political background of the present situation. War left Germany prostrate and bleeding; blockage deepened the horror of her sufferings, and then came the inflation which made fortunes for speculative financiers but ruined the middle classes, and by this beggaring the most conservative and stabilizing section of the nation made way for the unique factor in the present situation – the National-Socialist Movement. But for five years, 1924-9, it seemed that all was going well. American money was streaming into the country, great programmes of investment were launched, and the democratic system seemed to be taking root and flourishing. But in 1929 the abrupt cessation of American lending began to undermine the foundations of this economic structure with devastating rapidity. The reparation system became unworkable, and in face of the almost incredible stupidity of the creditor countries German credit and industry began to collapse. In that collapse the whole imposing façade of German democracy has been involved, and two words which seem to us to represent indispensable elements in any right thinking – *democracy* and *internationalism* – have become associated in the mind of the German student with everything that he most deeply distrust and loathes. Why is this?

The revolution of 1919 was too violent a swing over from German traditions not to leave behind it large bodies of opinion which remained bitterly opposed to it, and strongly attached to the old monarchist tradition. Indeed the political parties which received power under the Weimar Constitution were too deeply divided on fundamental issues to make real democracy possible, and the efforts of governments to buy unity and support for themselves by programmes of expenditure which Germany could in reality ill-afford had deeply discredited German democracy even before the storm of 1929 broke and revealed the rotten foundations on which the structure was built. Furthermore, one of the strongest elements in the thinking of modern Germany is a deep distress of the individualism which is felt to have been dominant in the democratic-capitalist civilization of pre-war Europe, a feeling after authority and authoritative forms of government, and a conviction that a man's worth is not just in himself but finds its



expression only in a group. This idea is caught up in the conception of *Volkstum*, the conception of the folk or people as the God-given group in which the individual finds his true worth. This passionate “folk consciousness” is the dominating thing in German thought today – a feeling of the oneness and greatness of the German people, and at the same time a burning sense of the humiliations to which that great people is being subjected. Against this stand all so-called international forces which seem to stand for the levelling down and subjugation of the rich distinctiveness of national life. Communism, international trade and finance, the Jews – are lumped together as the enemies of the German people.

Linked with this rejection of individualism is the growth of the desire for planning and control in industry and commerce, as against the anarchy of present-day capitalism, and it has been the triumph of Hitler to wed together these two forces – nationalism and socialism – into the movement which he leads.

It is impossible to do justice in a short article to any of these forces which are moulding the destiny of Germany. Let us suffice to say this: these are not the irrational imaginings of demagogues and hooligans. There are big elements of crudity and violence, but there are also the seeds of new life for western Europe. And if the good is to outgrow the evil it is necessary that Europe should abandon its attitude of stony aloofness and make the effort to understand the crisis which Germany is facing and the spirit in which she is facing it.

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