

THE PRISONER OF OTTAWA:
OTTO STRASSER

by

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I am taken captive, and I know
not by whom, but I am taken.
SENECA

If you wish to be someone, dare
to do something worthy of
banishment and imprisonment.
JUVENAL

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EXORDIUM

Early in 1940 I sat at a Devonshire window that overlooked the English Channel and wrote a book about a German, Otto Strasser. I had for many years written against time, so that the waiting presses might have their daily record of violent historic events that consummated themselves around me, and once more I felt in me the familiar urgent need to complete my story (this time a book) before an invasion prevented me (I had finished two others, *Insanity Fair* in 1938 and *Disgrace Abounding* in 1939, just ahead of such armed incursions). Thus I scanned sea and sky, between writing lines and chapters, for the oncoming shapes of German ships or aircraft. However, I hoped that Germany would lose and my native island survive the Second War and was immensely curious about the shape which the later future would take in that happy event; chiefly for my own sake, no doubt, for the years after the war, if I survived it, would probably include the second half of my own lifetime. I looked ahead, and wondered whether the Second War would restore peace and equilibrium to the world in the second half-century, or whether the Gadarene process of 1914-39, which in my adult years I had watched and described, would be resumed after it. That, my experience told me, would depend mainly on the treatment of Germany after Germany's military defeat.

With such thoughts in mind I wrote my book about Otto Strasser at a time when few, if any friendly books were being written about a German, Germans or Germany. I believed that the only wise course for the military victors would be to restore Germany to the care of men who had proved themselves to be the unpurchasable and incorruptible enemies of the Revolution of Destruction in either of its guises, National Socialist or Communist. Otto Strasser was the sole apparent candidate of importance who fulfilled such conditions. He had fought Hitlerism and Communism impartially (he knew them to be the same) in Germany and from exile for ten years, from 1930 to 1940. On that verifiable record he was a man in whom a truly peace-seeking outer world might put confidence. In him, I judged, men of goodwill everywhere might at last find what they so long had sought: a German ally who would recreate, rebuild, restore, pacify; anyway, no other offered with equal claim to a chance of self-justification. Moreover, he had a great following in Germany and had retained this despite difficulties hardly to be imagined, even when they are described, by people far from the central turmoil.

I thought the story of such a man might be of use and showed him as a candidate in the wings, who might well appear centrally on the German stage when events gave the cue. This was logically to be expected, too. After the First War the victors (at least until Hitler appeared) had upheld their allies, succoured their friends, honoured their bonds, and protected helpless civilian populations thrown on their mercy. In 1940 a man could still hope that that course of honour and prudence would be followed again, and this time be pursued to the end.

For two years after I wrote that book, until 1942, the shape of the war and of Otto Strasser's political fortunes conformed to that earlier pattern. After many years of perilous adventure he was in an extremity of danger helped to escape his Nazi pursuers and to reach Canada; his very life, probably, was then saved by British and Portuguese help. He was everywhere accorded the respect and sympathy due to his ordeals and to his achievements as the only leading German politician who had long and *actively* fought Hitler. High responsibility in Germany clearly beckoned to him, once the fog of war had cleared. Thereafter he would justify himself or fail, on his own merit or demerit and the reaction thereto of the German people.

An abrupt reversal in the behaviour of his hosts towards Otto Strasser came after Hitler and Stalin fell out in 1941; his prospects, and in my opinion the hopes of the entire West, then suddenly darkened. The great picture of the war from that instant began subtly and ominously to change; it was as if a new painter superimposed the evil outlines of Calvary on a canvas of the Resurrection.

Where the scene had been that of the redemption of Europe it was transformed into one of the crucifixion of Europe between two thieves, the fighting-men of the Christian West being cast merely for the part of Roman soldiers. In the sequence things happened such as never stained the story of 'Western civilization' since it began, and in outline they may be recapitulated here because they form that whole, of which Otto Strasser's story is but a part:

Fifteen thousand Polish officers were massacred, but in this case no 'war crime' was adjudged by British and American justice at Nuremberg. Ten thousand Frenchmen were shot with British or American weapons donated to French Communists; only seven years after the war's end was their number even established, and then casually included among the lesser 'news items', and no 'war crime' was ever seen in this holocaust. A dozen European countries, and then half of Europe, were thrown to Asiatic wolves, and at the end soldiers from remote Mongolian or Tartar lands were halted outside German villages only while they listened to the broadcasts of a harangue recorded in Moscow; in it an alien writer incited them particularly to fall on *pregnant* women. These things were made possible by the *unconditional* surrender of money, arms and political support to the Communist rulers by Britain and America. The political leaders there lent themselves to such deeds, as they later affirmed, from fear of losing the war, which they thus could only lose, politically. They submitted equally to the infestation of their own administrations by the agents of the Revolution of Destruction. In the American President's entourage such agents, later exposed, drafted the plans for destroying Europe, and with almost lifeless fingers he signed. Corrupted men appeared even in (and later disappeared from) the British diplomatic service, and in the most secret laboratories of all Western countries other emissaries garnered information to help the future misdeeds of their distant masters. Where Germany and Europe might have been redeemed, a bisected Germany and a chaotic Europe were left. History never saw such a shambles made of an honourable victory. The pieces were rearranged on the chessboard in the order which had enabled the Second War to begin; the world was left in a state of permanent warfare, the climax of which, a Third War, was made as inevitable as any human event can be. Germany was abandoned to the constant temptation (to which Hitler had betrayed it in 1939) to seek revenge and recover lost ground through the help of its natural foe, barbaric Asia; the Communist Empire was given the means to use German hopes and fears at every stage in its design to destroy all Europe. Equally it became probable that the course of a climactic Third War, if one were professedly begun to amend this situation, would similarly be diverted to further the aims of the Revolution of Destruction.

Until Hitler and Stalin came to blows, and this master-plan for the Second War slipped smoothly into gear, Otto Strasser was on all hands given the status due to him as a distinguished German exile and proven foe of Hitler and Hitlerism. He was by deed and avowal as constant an enemy of Communism. When the Communist Empire, being attacked by Hitler, was elected part of 'the free world' by the wartime propagandists of the West, the bait of puppet-employment in Sovietized Europe was dangled before Otto Strasser by an emissary of Moscow. He refused it; thereon his second persecution began, which continues to this day.

It was persecution, this time, by the governments of the West, which connived in it until the end of the war and for more years thereafter than the war lasted! He was in their territory, and they lent their aid as, step by step, from 1942 onwards, his political extermination was attempted. First, he was forbidden to speak publicly, communicate, write or publish, and by such bans, which deprived him of his livelihood, was driven to ever remoter and humbler dwelling places and to that brink of destitution and starvation where a man can only save himself by natural ingenuity. When the fighting ended, in 1945, these bans were nominally raised, but in their place another, openly unscrupulous one was imposed which has made him, for the last eight years, the Man in the Iron Mask of mid-century politics. He was in effect forbidden to return to Germany! Hitler first drove him from it and deprived him of its nationality. The Western Governments, acting in concert at

some unacknowledged behest, availed themselves of that useful law of 'the wicked man' to keep his foremost enemy expatriated!

The reason (only admitted many years later) was that in spite of all persecution Otto Strasser's following in Germany, notwithstanding his long absence and the bans, remained large and cohesive; and that someone desired his continued exile. Had he returned to Germany he would have assumed there the political place, whatever it might prove to be, to which his native talents and record entitled him; he would at length have been able to demonstrate his true level, high or low, in his own country. Evidently it was thought, in the curtained quarters whence the enmity to him derived, that his place there would prove to be a very high one, for the natural process was dammed. The American, British, Canadian, French and West German Governments have performed this service, from 1945 to the present day, for those who do not desire his return or the public test of his quality. The might of the effort which has been put forth, through the compliant Western Governments, to keep this solitary man out of his own country is at least proof, convincing enough to surprise even me, of the accuracy of my estimate of his standing in Germany, as I stated it in my book of thirteen years ago.

The campaign against him began on the day, at the turn of the years 1941-42, when he refused the invitation from Moscow to assume the leadership of a 'Free German Movement' under Communist auspices. That fact throws up the obvious question: why do the Western Governments continue to lend themselves to such courses? This question, again, leads into the whole dark complex of events from 1941 to the present day, which also need brief elucidation here for the reader's better understanding of the motives behind the persecution of Otto Strasser:

From the moment when the Communist Empire was by Hitler's act, and not by any better impulse of its own, transformed from his ally into his enemy, Moscow pursued one war aim which was from the start crystal clear (in contrast to such rhetorical professions as those of the Atlantic Charter, which were at once belied by private communications behind the political scenes, and by the ultimate deeds in Europe and Palestine). This aim was perceptibly more important to Moscow than the destruction of Hitler or of Hitlerism itself; indeed, the substance of Hitlerism, being identical with that of Communism, was not meant to be destroyed. This, plainly dominant Soviet aim was: to prevent the rise to power *after* the war, if possible in any country, of patriotic leaders who had gained large national followings through their distinction in the fight against Hitler. Lenin's dictum that all wars must be turned into *civil* wars was strictly followed; Moscow always fought the men who might succeed Hitler in Germany, or his *Statthalter* in the occupied countries, more vindictively than it fought Hitler himself. This was patently the motive for the massacre of the Polish officers, for the betrayal of the Polish Resistance Army at Warsaw, and for the vendettas pursued in all countries against patriotic leaders, such as General Mihailovitch, General de Gaulle, the King of Greece, General Bor, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and all the others. The aim was the obvious and logical one of destroying legitimate claimants to the succession, and of thus leaving in the various countries a chaotic vacuum in which Communism could seize power. The great question, never answered, remains: why did the Governments of London and Washington lend themselves to the promotion of this aim during the war, and after it until the present time?

Otto Strasser was a man of this, to Moscow dangerous type, a proven patriot, a Christian one to boot, a leader with a following, and an undeniable claimant, in the legitimate line, to some eminent responsibility in Germany, once Hitler was gone. His return to Germany would have been a serious setback for Communism. The political leaders of the West prevented it. By that time they were publicly parading in the sackcloth of repentance for their misplaced confidence in 'Uncle Joe', but their deeds, as distinct from their words, showed no genuine reform. Some occult influence continued to mould policy in the West in the shape desired by the tsars of anarchy in Asia, or at least to impede its correction. Long after the fighting in Europe ended the course of events, so

puzzling to the masses, first in China and then in Korea pointed to this. The publicly unknown case of Otto Strasser clearly proved it. His treatment was in the straight, or crooked line of those strange and secret wartime arrangements made at Moscow, Teheran and Yalta, in respect of which the Western leaders concerned, by the nineteen-fifties, were crying, 'We have erred! We have most grievously erred!'

For eleven years now Otto Strasser, a man without a stain on any political records save those kept by the Nazis, the Communists and their heirs, the World-Staters, has been in effect kept captive in Canada. Thus his story today has been transformed into something different from the one which I wrote thirteen years ago, and into something then unimaginable. In the tale of human sorrow which has filled the last decade his personal tribulations are but a grain of sand and I do not tell this altered story chiefly on that account, although it is a *cause célèbre* in the annals of human injustice. I tell it because my experience informs me, in 1953 as in 1940 and 1938, that all our tomorrows depend on Germany. Today they depend on the amending, in some form, of the almost incorrigible deed of 1945, in the consequences of which we all might yet be engulfed. If it is to be undone, the undoing will need the help of a man or of men in Germany of the type of Otto Strasser. It cannot be undone with the help of puppet politicians and puppet governments, and even less, unless the central issue be faced, by means of bogus and enforced amalgamations of rump Germany with other remaining European States.

Therefore I think that once more a true record of this man may be useful to a wide range of readers, who will not be allowed to read one unless I write it, and whose own future is involved in the destiny of such as he and of Germany. Apart from all that, it is a most fantastical tale in its own right, even without the moral that I draw from it. We of the twentieth century lead interesting lives, worth any tale-teller's time and pains. Those who follow us might even envy us the excitements and hazards which we have known, for they may be spared the bitter taste of dishonour and betrayal which spoils them for us of today. Otto Strasser's life thus far is exceptional even in this age in its range of adventures and perils survived, in its extremes of perseverance and adversity, in its colours of courage and good humour. It is the story of a German, of Germany, of Europe, and ultimately of the entire West, either on the edge of oblivion or on the threshold of revival; that is to say, it is the story of us all, in the Western world, as we stand at this mid-century.

DOUGLAS REED

Ottawa 1952-53

PART ONE

1897 – 1918

Chapter One

FIN DE SIÈCLE

A mystic moment impended for the Earthlings. For the nineteen hundredth time since the event by which many of them measured time, the infinitesimal mote, Earth, hurtling through boundless space at sixty-six thousand miles an hour, was about to complete its journey around the insignificant star, Sun. The end of another of their centuries was at hand, one of constantly improving stability, security and prosperity. The Earthlings, on their beginningless and endless voyage between nonentity and infinity, had never felt so firm on their spinning planet or so confident of its place in the universe. The whizzing whirligig seemed to them to be a vehicle set on a fair and propitious course.

It was a good time to be born on Earth, better than any of the eighteen earlier centuries' eves. That, at least, may have been the thought of any bewhiskered Papa of that day, in his good broadcloth suit, and of becorseted Mama, in her flounced gown, as they gazed fondly on a cradle, while at the door Nurse waited for its occupant and in the street the carriage and pair, for themselves. Had they but known, the babe in the cradle would achieve much if it merely survived to manhood, let alone to middle age, in the new century, for this was to be a tick of time of quite a different sort from the one in which they had been born and grown. Most mothers shed a tear of premonition at the thought of those mortal tribulations which await even the luckiest of the small beings born of their travail. The mothers of that particular moment had more cause than most for that prescient pang amid their happiness.

Papa, possibly, might not have flinched, had something of the future been revealed to him, for many men of his age then complained that life was become too secure, humdrum, dull and adventureless. It had not changed very much since the horse was first harnessed and the first wheel invented, save for the violent interruption in France, which seemed to have raged itself out and dissolved like a summer thunderstorm. The first motor cars had been made, but hardly anybody had seen one. Some contraption, rumour said, had lifted itself into the air for a few yards, but few could vouch that they had truly seen space between it and the ground, and the thing was generally disbelieved. The accelerating speed of the daily mortal cruise between nowhere and nothing was yet to come. The conquest of the air was still almost inconceivable and the conquest of space a notion nearly blasphemous; probably most people still felt in their hearts, even if they could answer questions about the movements and measurements of the solar system, that Earth was the centre of the universe.

The affairs of mankind, being ever better conducted, were visibly improving. The dignity of man, during the century nearly done, had become more and more widely recognized, established and protected. Serfdom, then slavery, had gone. The absolutism of kings was ended, and now they ruled on the bit and bridle of constitutional and parliamentary restraint; how admirable a balance had thus been achieved!

There had been wars here and there during the century, true; but they had been fought with chivalry and concluded with forbearance (save for the American civil one; and as for that the outer world knew little and understood less of the barbaric vengeance wreaked by the North on the South). The French Republic, like a courtesan become genteel, seemed to be expiating in maturity the rapine and bastardy of its birth. The American one appeared to be exclusively devoted to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness between the Atlantic and the Pacific (for the *Maine* had not yet been, though it soon would be mysteriously sunk in Havana harbour; an event as mysterious and momentous as certain assassinations and arsons of the century to come).

During those ten decades Western man had honoured law and order, legality and legitimacy, too; for that reason his affairs were in good shape. Attempts at violent upheavals, of the French kind, when they occurred throughout Europe at the mid-century and in Russia towards its end, had everywhere broken limply on public hostility and resolute resistance. The mortal concern, it seemed, was gaining experience and being ever more prudently run, and Western man assumed from what he saw about him that this ordered progress would continue in the century about to begin.

The great age of institutions and of rulers alike helped to implant this suggestion in the public mind. The Widow at Windsor and the Old Gentleman at Schoenbrunn had occupied their ancient thrones longer than most people could remember; they were in themselves potent symbols of reassurance and continuity. The Young Man in Berlin was no longer so young (he had already been Kaiser for a decade) and appeared to be mellowing. The Sick Man on the Bosphorus retained only a toehold in Christian Europe and in the lands whence he had been expelled churches, once hidden below ground, now raised their cupolas to the freed heaven. On the most vulnerable boundary of the West, the one that faced Asia, the semi-barbaric Tsardom was becoming Christianized and constitutional; parties and a parliament were taking shape; and the Russian peasants were at last coming into their own land.

The West, the area of Christian civilization, never looked so strong, so united in its deepest and most life-giving beliefs, or so secure against outer assault. In the West the dignity, liberty and enlightenment of man seemed sure to increase, and from the West to spread eastward, not to be driven back. If, among the myriad stars, the puny planet Earth was destined to shine more brightly, the West was clearly to be the source of that greater radiance.

At that interesting moment the subject of this book, its writer, and many of those who will read it were born.

Chapter Two

... FATHER OF THE MAN

Otto Strasser was born on September 10th, 1897, at Windsheim in Bavaria, the third of four brothers. That was the heyday of the virile, rising and ambitious Reich, founded on military prowess and aspiring to naval might, over which the young Emperor in Berlin ruled with his lieges, the Kings of Bavaria, Saxony and Wuerttemberg and the many hereditary princes and grand dukes. All these lesser rulers were soon to be swept away with the superior one, leaving a gap never yet filled: their blood and domains, and consequently their interests, were also those of their peoples, who thus were happier then than now. Their passing was part of a German drama apprehended by Goethe, when he became engrossed with the theme of Mephisto and Faust, and by Wagner in his thunderous foretellings of Germanic calamity.

Goethe and Wagner were not very long dead, in 1897, but their presentiments were still beyond the range of ordinary minds, and Frau Strasser, in that halcyon time, was probably spared any foreboding of what awaited her four sons in the coming century. The eldest, Gregor, was to be killed by a man called Hitler; the youngest, was to be conscribed into the same Hitler's army and to vanish in Russia. The central two, Paul and Otto, were to be hunted from country to country by this unimaginable Hitler's emissaries and to save their bare lives only by going into exile on the other side of the world. If any chance at that time took Frau Strasser across the Austrian frontier, which was not very far away, and through a village called Braunau, her glance may have fallen indifferently on a nine-year-old boy in the street there who was this Adolf Hitler.

The child is father of the man, but what makes the child? Heredity first, and then the time in which he lives, which expresses itself in his environment, experiences, upbringing and associates. Not enough has yet (or may ever) become known about Hitler's blood and the associations of his formative years for his being to be assayed; he may have been anybody's agent. Everything is known or can be learned about Otto Strasser (subject to the qualification that every man is, ultimately, a mystery, even to himself).

He inherited at birth three things: German blood and an ancestral German homeland which he loved; a deep religious feeling; and strong Socialist convictions. These are the three influences which formed him and have been strengthened by all the experiences and ordeals of his life. Only the third of them needs clearer definition, especially for those many who do not read but merely scan a book, and this one aims to make Otto Strasser's Socialism clear, as the half-century has shaped it. A patriotic and religious man cannot be a Socialist of any of the varieties, from Lenin to Hitler, Mussolini to Stalin, Laski to Tito, or Trotsky to Blum, which these fifty years have produced.

If such a man is to be understood it is not even enough to say that he inherited 'German blood' and 'an ancestral German homeland which he loved'. He was born not only in Germany but in Bavaria, and not only in Bavaria, but in the Franconian part of it. If there is any central stronghold of the West's two-thousand-year old struggle against the destroyers of Christian civilization, it is Franconia. It was the home of the great Emperor of the West, Charlemagne, who first set Christian civilization firmly on its feet in Europe, drove the invading Arabs back into Spain, and founded that enlightened Empire, based on the best achievements of Rome, which lasted a thousand years, until the destructive revolution emerged again in France. Not far away is Vienna, where the Turkish tide reached its high water mark in 1529 and again in 1683 and which the Mongol and Tartar tide has reached again today. No man whose forefathers dwelt in Franconia, unless he be a corrupted one, can have any doubt about the need to keep barbarians out of Europe.

The words 'The West' mean much more to a man born in Franconia than to men born in Brittany, Gloucestershire or Illinois, just as the words 'the trenches' mean more to a soldier in the front line than to his comrades in the reserve ones or at the base; yet the destiny of all of them is equally involved. Western Man, as he grew out of the darkness into an identifiable figure, and the best the planet has yet evolved, is by any definition a product of Western Europe. He could never have founded, and could not today live well and safely in Vancouver and Washington, Melbourne and Cape Town, Auckland and Houston if Western Man, who remained behind, had not through the centuries held that Eastern bastion in Franconia, around Vienna and on the Baltic shores. If that bastion falls, he may not long continue to enjoy his inheritance in those far distant cities oversea, but may sink to the level of a subordinate breed. A man does not need to learn this lesson if he was born in Franconia; it comes with the bloodstream; this is heredity.

Franconia itself is the material inheritance of that heredity. It is as lovely as any countryside in Europe and contains towns as noble as may be found anywhere there. It is a period piece, preserved for the instruction of twentieth century man, of what the West was, and again could be, at its best. Rothenburg,^[1] the finest surviving example of a medieval town, lay within its walls and towers a few miles away from Windsheim. Otto Strasser's mother came from Dinkelsbuehl, which in beauty vies with Rothenburg, and grew up there in the famous wooden Deutsches Haus, for her father had an inn in that ancestral home of a Bavarian noble family. He was a well-to-do peasant and owned a brewery. In England good connections with beer have sometimes brought the accolade or the patent of nobility. In Bavaria, though they did not lead to such heights, they were a source of high esteem because of the respect in which the beer itself, deservedly, is held; it is supreme of its kind.

Simple and substantial folk, then, at the turn of the century, and devout Catholics all, the Strassers, their kith and kin, and their neighbours. They were cut to a pattern which had proved its worth. If they differed in any detail from the pattern, as a man's jacket in the 1950s may vary slightly from that of his father's in the 1900s, it was in their Socialism. However, Socialism in the 1900s did not mean what it means in the 1950s, when its survivors from the 1900s might wring their hands, if they are men of probity, to see the shambles they have helped make of the West.

The world and its problems seemed simple to mend, at the start of this century. It was a simple calculation in black and white: merely take away 'feudalism' and 'vested interests' from 'the haves' and 'the under-dog', and the resultant sum would be happiness for all. If the bough of a tree enshadowed your house, cut it off, but sit on it before you began to saw. As property was ill-distributed, abolish the right to property, and then all alike would have none. All men being inherently equal, 'classes' were sinful; therefore, incite the under-privileged class against the over-privileged class until the classes changed places, and, the lower becoming the upper, sinlessness would be achieved.

The great masses of people were only beginning to be literate and these primers of political science were adequate to their needs. Throughout the West Liberal parties, already strong, preached this gospel of self-enslavement and called it one of liberation. In their wake came the vanguards of the growing Socialist parties, singing more threatening psalms more loudly. They were both but the bailiffs of the real mortgagor who pressed on them from behind, resolved to foreclose: Communism. They played Faust to the red Mephisto; they were put through the Western window, Oliver Twist-like, to open the door to the Communist Bill Sykes. By the mid-century the Liberal Party was but a mumbling wraith, clanking its chains in the haunted house of oblivion; the Marxist one, with one foot over that same threshold, still tried to look as if the morrow belonged to it.

These developments of the fifty years to come were not to be foreseen in 1900. Men wanted changes. Feudalism, seignury and privilege in fact were dead or dying and only traces and trappings of them remained; but mature men habitually fight against what aggrieved them in youth,

not what injures them in maturity (demagogic politicians of the 1950s, when they become eloquent, often explain that they are determined to redress wrongs which embittered, but vanished with, their own long-vanished childhood). To this habit of mankind the Liberal and Socialist parties of the West probably owe their transient blooming of the twentieth century. (*see note, below.*)

Thus Otto Strasser's father, in 1900, may have been embittered less by the conditions of that time than by those of 1850. Perhaps he felt cramped by the influence of the Court, and by the continuing power of the purse, of family and of position in Bavarian life. Anyway Peter Strasser was a revolutionary Socialist in 1900; whether he would call himself so, could he survey the West in 1950, one cannot guess. He was the son of a countryside where political thought and discussion are endemic. Franconia has supplied more famous German politicians than any other German land, among them Stein, Metternich, Baron von Dahlberg, Franz von Sickingen, Ulrich von Hutten and Florian Geyer. Peter Strasser was outwardly a diligent, middle-rank civil servant in the judicial service. His mind was discontented with the things he saw, at a time when that eternal human trait, sycophancy, still attached itself to courts (because courts still survived) and he wrote and published under a punning pseudonym, Paul Weger, a book called *Der Neue Weg*, which set out his ideas for A New Germany. Nearly all Germans, then as subsequently and still, were thinking about new ways and a new Germany.

It was his last published book. He wrote another, but his wife intercepted it. The premonitions of women may often be well founded. She rose, as in defence of her young, against anything that might endanger the secure, pensionable life to which her husband might look forward if he kept his views to himself. Peter Strasser, a man of peace, locked his manuscript away. The course of the twentieth century might have been different, had more women thus prevailed on more husbands, or it might not. In any case, this particular source of household dispute goes back to the start of time. The selfsame controversy repeated itself in the life of Otto Strasser and had the opposite outcome; he parted company with his first wife rather than cease from political fight. In his own home, despite the unpublished second book, he and his brothers inevitably absorbed their father's views and grew up in an atmosphere of lively political thought.

That, then, is the background of his earliest years: a South German homeland deeply impregnated with the feeling of Europe's fight for survival against the barbarians; a religious upbringing; and a political interest both inherited and developed from childhood on. It was a time of hard work for little money; good food and drink at cheap prices; diligence, thrift and security; rigid social gradations vexing to the ambitious; stout roofs overhead even for the humble; uniforms and bands; pomp and etiquette; ritual and sycophancy. It was good and bad, like all life at all times; but it was, or seemed, well founded, strong and enduring. It was, by any standard, good in comparison with what was to come.

Otto Strasser, like many men in many countries at that time, felt cramped. He read avidly, underscoring and annotating every third or fourth line (as he still does), thought, talked and seethed with ideas. When he was sixteen he left school. Gregor was at the university and Paul at a grammar school; Peter Strasser could not afford fees for his third son and Otto became an apprentice in a textile factory. That was in 1913, and he remained there a year, six months in the counting house and six months in the workshops. In the counting house he learned only to fill the inkpots, copy the letters, stick stamps on envelopes and fetch food for the clerks and workmen at ten o'clock. In the factory he learned merely packing and today still can 'make a wonderful parcel'.

In spite of all that has befallen him, his family, his home and the world in the forty years that have passed he says reminiscently that it was 'a terrible year'. For the writer of this book, whose memories of 1913 are somewhat similar, those three words cast a brilliant light on the minds of the young men of that time, in all countries. The humdrum corridors of daily life cramped and

restricted them and their spirits impatiently awaited release. The tedium of peace lay heavy on them; the monstrous tedium of war they had yet to learn, and when they had learned it they would be unable to impart the knowledge to their sons, so that the process would continue. There is, perhaps there ever was and long will be, in robust young men an impulse towards war just as strong and inquisitive as the first stirrings of a girl's heart towards young men. This will not be denied by those who recall the eager haste with which the youths, on both sides of the conflict, ran to offer themselves in 1914. The words, 'first fine careless rapture', are, or at any rate then were, as true as the later disillusionment was complete; but the disenchantment was never yet bequeathable, and those who profit by war have a useful tool at hand in this recurrent instinct of the young male animal.

Thus the words, 'a terrible year!' uttered as the speaker's eye looked back across four decades at 1913, illuminate something of the human mystery, of our time and of all times. By all rational standards, 1913, contemplated from 1953, might call forth from any Western man the heartfelt cry, 'A wonderful year! May we soon look on its like again!' for no year ever so clearly marked the end of an era in which so much was good. The confident present and untroubled future, the cheapness of home and the ease of travel, the good manners of men and decorum of women, the strength of institutions and the trustworthiness of justice, the spreading dignity and liberty ... ah, life was very good then!

But men are not so. By a divine instinct, men's minds mistrust ensuing danger, and so men, even today, feel it their destiny to press on, heedless of the past, perhaps to a harder future, but anyway: On! On!

Otto Strasser's 'terrible year', like the 1913 of so many millions of other men, was but an interlude. In September 1914 he was to have resumed his studies, for which the fees had become available. In June the event occurred (as mysterious in its origins as the sinking of the *Maine*) which was to change the lives of most people who will read this book and the whole shape of the twentieth century. The Archduke was shot at Serajevo, and on August 2nd, 1914, the First War began. None of us today, not even those who then were yet unborn, can guess what our lives might have been but for that. Otto Strasser's life then truly began.

NOTE:

I like to construe the misuse of the name 'Liberal' in this century, and the consequent extinction of the 'Liberal' parties, as the fulfilment of prophecy: 'The vile person shall no more be called liberal', Isaiah xxxii, 5. D.R.

Chapter Three

TO THE WARS, MY BOY ...!^[2]

If greatness is size, not excellence, the Great War was truly great (and for horses it was the war to end wars). Never before had so many young men fought each other over so large an area, and never again, possibly will so many fighting men be destroyed in action (the Second War, its child, brought massacres of defenceless civilians on a scale never before known or imagined to be possible in the future). If greatness is quality, not quantity, the Great War was great only in one respect: the staunchness of the soldiers, in all armies, who endured its ordeals, which today are hardly to be believed even by those who experienced them.

Men who are now in their fifties, when they look at the pictures of those battlefields, may ask themselves incredulously how they, and millions like them, supported the burden of their existence in ditches, potholes and mudholes under constant bombardment, where they merely awaited death or wounds, without the incentive of action, for years on end. The withdrawal of the horse in favour of speedier means of attack, the incorporation of the petrol-driven engine in machines of war on the ground and in the air, brought a war of immobility, a long artillery duel with infantrymen for sitting targets. It remains the unbelievable war and the fortitude of those huddled, anonymous figures in the pulverized ground must remain for ever astounding. They were the young men of 1914, experiencing war. They could not, on either side of the line, guess to what purposes their courage and patience would be put.

Somewhere among them was Otto Strasser. On August 2nd, 1914, when he was not seventeen years old, he became the youngest soldier in the Bavarian forces. The brave or brilliant uniforms of the past were being put off for the last time; they only survive today in the State pageantry of one or two countries. Possibly the memory of them made Strasser apply first for the light cavalry (those long overcoats, shining sabres and clanking spurs!) but after being locked in a riding-school with three hundred other forgotten recruits for three days he broke out and was accepted (on six weeks' probation, because he was weakly!) by the Fourth Artillery Regiment.

This brief period of his life is important for his political thought because he retains from it a vibrant hatred of the fat, red-faced and bullying sergeant-majors of that day. The masses of other countries were at the time also instructed to dislike these traditional figures of the Germanic parade-ground and the tales that Otto Strasser tells of them show that they were tyrants indeed.^[3] Strasser considers these illiterate sadists to be an eternal type and holds Hitler's SS-men to have been of the type. 'The SS spirit,' he used to say during the Hitler years, 'was born on those parade-grounds, and I have a hatred of these people which nothing can kill.' Such men are the backbone of any secret police state, Nazi, Communist or other. (Otto Strasser himself, at the front, was driven to draw a revolver against one such tormentor and at his court-martial was acquitted, the sergeant in question being punished; later in the war he was by chance sent to a battery which Otto Strasser was then commanding and, being caught at his old tricks again, was tried by court-martial, degraded, and sentenced to five years' penal servitude.)

Like the other young men of 1914, Strasser feared that the war would end before he saw action, and thus it came about that during its first few weeks he was successively light cavalryman, artilleryman, and then, at his own request for transfer, infantryman-in-action. The Sixth Bavarian Reserve Infantry Division consisted of four regiments, the 16th, 17th, 20th and 21st. Otto Strasser, just seventeen years old, was posted to the 20th and went into the trenches in Flanders, to find first the Sikhs and then British troops facing him, at Wytschaete and Warneton. A barrack-room lawyer

named Adolf Hitler was in the 16th, not far away; however, he was a headquarters orderly, well behind the front.

This was Otto Strasser's first action and it is, or was, a legendary one in Germany, comparable with the baptisms of fire of the Honourable Artillery Company and the London Scottish on the other side. Many of the German volunteers were students of his own age or little more and they went into battle singing *Deutschland ueber Alles*. Strasser's company lost seven-tenths of its men to the British fire at Warneton.

Thereafter his part in the Great War was similar to that of many men, on either side, who served at and not behind the front. In March 1915 his battalion was sent post haste towards the Russian front and then rushed back again to hold the British attack at Neuve Chapelle. He was re-transferred to the artillery, awarded the Iron Cross after a British attack at Armentières, seriously wounded by a shell splinter in May 1916, promoted warrant officer in May 1917 and artillery lieutenant in October 1917.

This marked another stage in his life and in the development of his thought. That was the first war in which masses of men, in all the armies engaged, who had grown up in a world where officers represented a superior caste, themselves all unexpectedly became officers. Otto Strasser has never swerved in his Socialism, which, however, is distinctly *his* Socialism, and excludes class, religious or national prejudices and resentments. Together with his hatred for the bullying *Unteroffizier* of that time, his respect for the German Officers Corps has survived all the events of these forty years. He found in it in many ways a truer democracy than he had encountered anywhere else. He likes to give this example of its working:

'No candidate was admitted to the Officers Corps, that is, to the rank of lieutenant, without the *unanimous* agreement of all officers in the unit; this rule was most jealously kept, and without such unanimous support the King of Bavaria himself could not appoint an officer. A Bavarian Minister of that time was much annoyed that his son, the ensign Count X., was not made an officer. The colonel of the regiment asked our battery commander, Count von Hertling (a nephew of the German Chancellor of about that time) why he would not propose Count X, and Hertling replied, "He is incapable, cowardly and useless." Then came an urgent message from the aggrieved Minister in Munich saying that His Majesty wished to make Count X an officer at Christmas. The colonel called a meeting of all officers, hoping to have Count Hertling voted down. He addressed them, saying, "Now, gentlemen, this is the son of a leading Minister and it is the express wish of His Majesty. Count X may be all you think, but this is causing an uproar in the Court at Munich." Count Hertling answered, "The lives of the soldiers whom Count X would command are more important than the feelings of Court circles in Munich," and the officers assembled thereon by large majority endorsed Count Hertling's view. The King and his Minister were left no choice but to find Count X a lieutenancy in some obscure regiment with a very low number, like the 46th. The First Bavarian Artillery Regiment, however, ranked with the Guards. Combatant officers and soldiers of many armies might feel in themselves a sympathetic response to that anecdote.'

The King of Bavaria, his Minister, Ensign Count X and Otto Strasser were soon to have quite other problems forced upon them, for now came the last great convulsions of the Great War. Russia collapsed, and the alien Communists sent there from New York and Switzerland chastised the wretched Russians with scorpions worse than any Tsarist whips. The curtain of the future was impenetrable, and the events in Russia then seemed a blessing for Germany. The German rear was set free, Ludendorff threw his whole strength against the British Fifth Army and once more the German tide flowed towards Paris. On that day, March 21st, 1918, Otto Strasser was in the front wave of the attack, south of Saint Quentin. As a forward observation officer for his battery he took command of some ground troops and captured a British battery, and later a British brigade staff,

receiving the Bavarian Distinguished Service Order and a recommendation for the Max Josef Order. This was the rarest German decoration for valour, more highly coveted even than the Prussian Pour le Mérite, and carried the predicate of nobility with it, so that Otto Strasser nearly became Ritter Otto von Strasser, as John Brown may become Sir John Brown, K.C.B. (the recommendation vanished, with much else, in the German collapse).

In those days, for the last time, the young Germans of 1914 seemed to be near to victory; but the advance slowed down, the tide turned, the Americans began to disembark in great numbers at French ports, and on August 25th, 1918, Otto Strasser, who had been falling back from position to position with his battery, saw before him the shape of defeat:

'We had no mail, no trustworthy communications with headquarters or with our flanks. We dug ourselves in by a bridge over the canal near Soissons to hold up the black French Colonial troops whom we expected while the main body of our men retired. Some hours passed and to our surprise we saw no sign of the enemy. With an orderly I rode cautiously across the bridge and into no-man's land, which was a mile broad at that point. Suddenly I saw in front of me, about half a mile away, turning a tree-hidden corner in the road, endless marching columns of troops. Their equipment was brand new from their steel helmets to their boots, and they sang. Four years earlier we had marched off to war looking like that. For the first time fear rose in me, that we should lose the war. Our shells and machine guns mowed down these incautious lads, just as we had been mown down by the British in Flanders in 1914. But of what use was it? This human torrent was so mighty, so relentless, that we were bound to drown in it.'^[4]

This was his first sight of the newly-arrived American armies, which, in that war and the next, marched towards a victory which was to be turned into political defeat. As the last months of the war passed he fought one rearguard action after another and brought his guns back home. In September he was so ill from the effects of a wound that he could neither walk nor ride. A sick man on a stretcher returned to a chaotic Germany and as the German collapse drew near he lay in hospital in Munich. On November 6th, 1918, a veteran of twenty-one, he was allowed out, on crutches, for the first time to visit his parents, who were then at Deggendorf. Returning to Munich on November 7th, he heard the roar of a mob and as the train drew into Munich station the rioters swarmed aboard it, arresting all officers save Strasser (because he was crippled). They tried, however, to tear off his officer's shoulder-straps, so that he drew his revolver. At that moment a man unknown to him, who wore the red armband of the revolutionary Soldiers', Sailors', and Workmen's Council, intervened and escorted him to an hotel.

It was a different homecoming from the one which the German soldiers, on the strength of those three victories in the preceding century, had pictured: the traditional, triumphal welcome of flower-tossing maidens, cheering crowds, bands, bugles and beer. The Germany of 1900 and 1914 was crashing and crumbling around him; the future was a wall of fog.

Not only for this man; not only for the other Germans; but also for those who thought they were the victors. Behind the smoke and smother of the Great War ulterior purposes had been pursued which were to breed another war, and of that one, none yet knows what may come, though all can now see that its end was more ominous than the conclusion of the first one.

A strange new world dawned in 1918. Not only the kings and hereditary princes were gone but, with them, the statesmen! In the great American Republic an ailing man, who knew little of the stuff he handled, was President, and that unhappy event was to repeat itself in even more dangerous form in the next war, with results so much the worse. In the British island, for the first time, a demagogic politician with equally little knowledge of Europe held untrammelled power; and by his own statements, later published, he had privately made territorial arrangements of the direst

consequences in the Middle East. The foundations of the Zionist Empire had there been laid and the seeds of endless embitterment and war had thus been sown among the Moslem millions. The Communist Empire had been set up in Moscow by a horde of conspirators arrived there from New York, and from New York too their funds came; both those things are now on record. Neither of these things was ever admitted to be among the purposes of the Great War when it was begun; both were gravely dangerous to the West, and would prove to be so before another twenty-five years had run.

Towards this new, then unimaginable world, Otto Strasser and millions like him in many lands of the West turned their faces, in 1918.

PART TWO

1918 – 1933

Chapter One

WITHERED GARLAND

Otto Strasser, on two crutches, looked about him and saw vast differences. Indeed, the entire history of the West had never brought about such changes as these which the four years 1914-18 had seen, unless in France during the Revolution and possibly for a brief period, soon overcome, in England during the nearly forgotten one there. No physical ruins met the returning German soldier, in 1918, but there was a spiritual shambles. All values and standards had been turned upside down, and not only in Germany; the future was a dark cloud in the shape of a question mark. The 'barriers' of class and sex, and perhaps of clarity and sense, had gone. Henceforth men would find little in the nature of hereditary privilege to prevent them from rising; they might in time, however, find quite other 'barriers', possibly more onerous. Women, everywhere, had thrown down the last 'barriers'. The womanless textile factory of 1913, with the womanless parliaments and offices of that era, might have been but a dream, so swiftly had they all vanished. The girls of the new century's first decade, who in their bedrooms had vicariously shared in the escapades of Mr. Wells's Ann Veronica, or of her literary counterparts in other countries, themselves had kicked over all traces during the war; in the nineteen-thirties as mothers married or unmarried, and in the nineteen-fifties as grandmothers of uncertain status, they might sometimes wish that they had left all those traces unknocked. They had had the fun of throwing down 'the barriers', but, in the light of experience and mature reflection, might wonder if it had been such fun, and if they had been barriers? Had they not given some spiritual security which, in retrospect, seemed much to be desired? In Germany the old rule for women, Church, children and household, had been swept away, and in its place freedom reigned, or what reigned was so called. It was the time of disenchantment, not much less for the soldiers of the victorious armies than for those of the defeated ones. 'O, wither'd is the garland of the war, the soldier's pole is fallen; young boys and girls are level now with men.'

Out of this German shambles of 1918 many politicians were made, and one of them was Otto Strasser, who in 1913 might have aspired to become a notary, an apothecary, or an office manager. Henceforward politicians would have to be bred out of the events of the day, as they were no longer to be born. The system of ruling families, constantly replenished by the more forceful from below, had had one great advantage; that of cadets who inherited a knowledge of, and from their youth were trained in public affairs. As the conduct of these affairs, called policy, is not the simplest but the most difficult of the sciences, and as no universities exist especially to impart instruction in it, that source of recruitment was of some value to peoples and States. From the time of the First War onward the qualification for a high career in politics was in most Western countries to be success as a lawyer, as a journalist, as a mob orator, in business or in a trade union; and, more important, the favour of powerful groups which sought to control policy, in the various countries, through the advancement of such candidates. The final result of this process, for the West, has yet to be revealed. Lenin, Stalin and Hitler were products of it in Europe and Eurasia; the reader must judge for himself how it has worked in the British island and the American Republic.

Otto Strasser, today, is a product of that process on its reverse side: that of the rejects, or discards. He was never among the favoured candidates. The result of that is that his experience of the last thirty years has given him the equivalent of several university educations, specifically in policy and political science. That training began in 1918, when he never expected to become a politician, and had only such political knowledge as he had acquired in his father's home. The events around him shaped his future; politics were thrust upon him.

Propped on his crutches, he had no thought of a political career, but only of reintegration and a livelihood. First, he meant to resume those studies which had been interrupted in 1913 by lack of

money for fees. Curtailed university courses were open to such as he, but he had only his officer's pay, and that only while he was on the sick list; he resolved to complete the one year course, somehow, in six months. The destiny that shapes our ends, intervened even then; he went first for a short convalescence to a Bavarian spa, Bad Eibling, and there found health, but also politics.

By such chances may a man's whole life be given a different shape. Up to that moment Strasser's only active political work (if it can be so called) was towards the end of the war, when General Ludendorff ordered that officers give their men 'patriotic instruction to improve the spirit of the troops', then beginning to crumble. Otto Strasser was among the officers selected for this duty in his unit, and in dugouts and billets sought to dispel his men's doubts about the war and its results, and 'the things' for which they (like other soldiers in other armies) were supposedly fighting. One night he lectured a group of soldiers on their duty to the Fatherland, and one of them subsequently said to him, 'Sehen S', Herr Leutnant, that's all very fine, what you say, but what does "Fatherland" mean to me. My father doesn't own any land, and nor do I; I'm a day labourer. To me "Fatherland" means the land that owns my father. When we defend the Fatherland we defend the rich who own it and who own us. If we were defending our own land our hearts might be in it.'

An incident observed, a snatch of talk overheard, a phrase read, sometimes have the effect of sudden revelation. Strasser never forgot this terse and cogent summing-up of a simple man's thought. It helped to guide and govern his entire political thought, up to the present day. 'Talking with that soldier, I realized that Germany should build a society that would give everybody a stake in the nation, an economic system in which all could participate as co-owners.' These origins of Strasser's political thinking should be kept in the reader's mind when he comes to consider Strasser's plan for 'German Socialism' (now 'Solidarism') as it is summarized in a later chapter.

The question he was asked that night, and other questions which he had to answer in those circumstances and at that time, were put by men who were among the early buyers of the Socialist and Communist goldbrick, the gilt on which was still fresh in 1918; the sons and grandsons of those men would have to find their own way back to the continuing verities of human life. Otto Strasser, who counted himself to be a revolutionary Socialist, understood the working of these soldiers' minds and was wont to discuss such incidents in the officers' mess, where he would urge that the governing classes (which then still survived in Germany) ought to give guidance and leadership to, rather than try to repress, the longing for a just social order which was fermenting in the German soul. This made him somewhat suspect in the Officers Corps so that he (who was to take arms successively against a Communist dictatorship and a reactionary Putsch and was later to be exiled from his own country at Communist behest) became known there as The Red Lieutenant.

That was the total political experience of the man who in December 1918 went to Bad Eibling, in a Bavaria whence the king was gone and where the Republic had been proclaimed, and one evening was catapulted into violent political controversy. He learned that the Communist leader from Munich, Kurt Eisner, was to address a meeting in Bad Eibling and went to see what transpired. Otto Strasser was by then on two sticks and in civilian clothes; he had to conceal the fact that he was an officer from the peat workers of the neighbouring Kolbermoor, many of whom, were Communists and trouble-makers.

That evening the curtain went up on Otto Strasser's political life. This man in the gallery, with his two sticks, called himself a revolutionary Socialist. The man on the platform called himself a Socialist and Communist. That sounds as if there might have been little difference between them. They were in fact worlds apart.

Strasser, whether he then realized it or not, first saw the true and wolfish shape of the force which had used the 'Socialism' of Western man as a stalking-horse. Kurt Eisner was no German, save by

form, but derived from that dark Eurasian borderland which from the 1890s to the present day has supplied the leaders of Communism in Russia and in all other countries. He had long hair and beard, spoke defective German and had spent the war years writing for the Socialist *Vorwaerts*. What this Socialist on the platform said made the Socialist in the gallery 'mad with rage'. Eisner was a master of mob-incitement and shouted that Germany had been guilty of the war, that the officers had swilled and guzzled while the troops were driven into the enemy's fire, and the like more. Both his speech and that of an obese cattle-dealer who followed, one Gandorfer, were directed mainly against 'the officers'. Strasser, in the gallery, boiled over and repeatedly called down, 'Liar, liar'. He was challenged to come down to the platform and went, thus making his first public appearance in politics.

He had never spoken before, was twenty-one years old, crippled, almost incoherent with indignation and faced a hostile audience, but his words took effect. He said that the casualties among officers had in fact been much higher than those in the ranks and that not 'the officers' had enriched themselves but 'the war profiteers, like Herr Gandorfer here; and for the rest, where were you in the war, Herr Eisner? You who sit down there: ask these loud-mouthed gentlemen what they did in the war and if they only had sixpence a day pay'. At this instant Gandorfer, who had been making inquiries, sprang up and shouted, 'Comrades, he's an officer!' The peat-workers, who carried knives in their boots, surged angrily towards the platform. The men on it hustled Strasser towards the back door and threw him out.

Such was the revolutionary Socialist's first introduction to what might lurk behind 'Socialism'. Soon afterwards Kurt Eisner was shot in Munich by a Count Arco.^[5] Thereon the Communist Republic was proclaimed in Munich. Until that moment there had been a Left Coalition government (Socialists, Independent Socialists and Communists) of the pattern which became familiar in the Second War as the formal preparatory to the seizure of power by the Communists in many countries; the governments of London and Washington in fact forced Communism on such countries as Poland and China by compelling governments there to form these Communist-containing coalitions, or in other words, to lay their heads on the block. Levine, an emissary from Moscow, was the controlling spirit in the Munich Soviet, and other characteristically un-German figures in it were Ernst Toller and Erich Mühsam.

Two things are important about this short-lived Bavarian Soviet. The first was the shooting of hostages, who were ostensibly arrested as a means of warding off an attack by anti-Communist forces from outside Munich. Among these hundreds of hostages were twenty-two Members, including several women, of the 'Thule Society', a small and unimportant body which fostered the cult of old German literature, traditions, folklore, legends and the like. Its devotees were elderly professors and noblemen and their wives and it had no political importance or the possibility of achieving any. It was anti-Christian and anti-Jewish. Precisely these twenty-two men and women were taken out and shot by the alien governors. There is a deep symbolic significance in this act of discriminate vengeance which is also to be found in several happenings in Europe at the end of the Second War.

The other remarkable thing about the brief Bavarian Communist Republic is that one Adolf Hitler, who disappeared when the Communist armies entered Berlin in 1945, in 1919 was a serving soldier in Munich at the time of the Soviet Republic and *stayed there*, so that he must have been under its orders! The red regime there lasted from November 1918 until May 1st, 1919. According to his own account in *Mein Kampf* Hitler, cured and discharged from hospital, reported to his regimental depot in Munich towards the end of November. His battalion there was under the orders of the revolutionary Soldiers' Council. This so disgusted him, according to *Mein Kampf*, that he contrived to be sent to a camp at Traunstein, a few miles away, but he returned to Munich 'in March'.

For about two months, therefore, he was in Munich, a serving soldier under the rule of a commissar sent from Moscow. Hitler's book, which devotes so much space to abuse of the Communists and Communism, calmly passes over these two months of his life in Munich. It says no word about events there, though it rails at length about massacres in distant Moscow. The only reference to this period is the unintelligible remark that Hitler was 'nearly arrested' three days before the Communists were driven out; from that he passes to a sentence beginning 'A few days after the liberation I was ...' There is nothing about the horrors of a Communist regime personally experienced or about the severe fighting that preceded the liberation, and nothing about the triumphal entry of the liberators. The man who says he had already taken an oath to fight Bolshevism when he was in hospital at Pasewalk is silent about those days and happenings!

This remarkable period in Hitler's life becomes more remarkable still when it is related to the striking incompleteness of published information about the associations of his formative years in Vienna and to the mystery of his disappearance in 1945. These facts are clear: that serving soldiers who did not accept the Communist Republic escaped from Munich to join the exterior forces which were preparing to overthrow it, and that Hitler, who stayed in Munich, presumably stayed of his own will. The inference is equally clear: that he must, as a serving soldier under discipline, have worn the red armband and in some capacity have taken part in the resistance to the liberating troops. Otto Strasser himself first drew the present writer's attention to this singular gap in Hitler's story, which might be of such great significance, and added that in later years there was often much puzzled shaking of heads among the National Socialist leaders if any of them ever ventured to ask, 'What was Adolf doing in Munich in March and April of 1919?' The answer was always a perplexed shrug of the shoulders or shake of the head, and a change of topic.

The revolutionary Socialist who is the subject of this book, however, clearly realized that Eurasian Communism was not what he had ever conceived as revolutionary Socialism. Otto Strasser was also in Munich, in convalescent hospital. He slipped out and at the risk of his life made his way to the anti-Communist force which was being improvised at Ohrdruf in Thuringia by General von Epp, a famous German officer who had commanded such elite troops as the Bavarian Guard and the Bavarian Alpine Corps. When the Epp Free Corps took shape, Otto Strasser was in it. So was Gregor Strasser, an immensely popular man whose own life was once more to embody the German tragedy. Gregor brought together a troop of 2000 infantrymen, 3 field batteries and a 15cm. howitzer battery, with full war equipment and munitions (such things were possible in the Germany of that day). Gregor Strasser was for a while Lord of Lower Bavaria, but as he had to tend his apothecary's shop by day and could only become a Free Corps leader at night he took a helper, a young man who was to be his own murderer: Heinrich Himmler. Gregor Strasser and a large part of his miniature army at once joined with von Epp (Himmler did not; here is another characteristic mystery, similar in its nature to that of Hitler's unexplained presence in Munich).

Then the Epp Free Corps and a regular Prussian division began the march on Munich. In two days of fighting, while Hitler lurked somewhere in the city and Himmler watched from far away, the battle was fought and won. Munich was taken; the commissar from Moscow, Levine, was court-martialled and sentenced. Otto Strasser, the revolutionary Socialist, was in the van of those who fought to rid Munich of the Communists and became entitled to wear on his left sleeve, when in uniform, the golden lion of the Epp Free Corps.^[6] Among those whom he and his comrades liberated (or who changed sides after the liberation), was the man yet unknown to him: Adolf Hitler, the arch anti-Communist.

On May Day, 1919, came the triumphal entry into Munich. The Bavarian soldiers had dreamed for four years of such a home-coming, and in November 1918 had found awaiting them instead an alien-led mob which spat at every soldier who did not wear a red armband and tore off the officers' shoulder-straps. But on this day, with the promise of summer in the air, Munich was a mass of

flowers and cheering people. The red ghouls had been driven from the stricken field; now Germany could rebuild. The returning troops did belatedly get posies for the muzzles of their rifles and for their helmets. Otto Strasser and his comrades seemed to have recaptured a broken dream; a little later, the dream came true.

Or so it seemed, that May Day of 1919.

Chapter Two

IN SEARCH OF SOCIALISM

Bavaria was free and Otto Strasser was twenty-one. Despite lost war and wretched peace,^[7] life had to be lived and, for such men as he, lived to the full in success or adversity. It was an urgent matter of bread and a roof, of a livelihood and a future, of adjustment to the new scheme and shape of things German. Like millions of other men, of all the countries which had fought each other, he had to elbow his way back into a society that showed little interest in making room for him and his like.

This is the place to give some picture of the man whom the reader will accompany through the rest of this story. Otto Strasser is of middle stature and homeric spirit. His astonishingly sanguine outlook could only survive, after so many years of pursuit and persecution, in a man deeply and inherently religious; he has perfect faith in the future, no matter whether triumph or disaster is to be his own ultimate lot. His energy is astounding and would exhaust most companions, though it leaves him quite unconsumed. These qualities, which in any circumstances would be remarkable, shine the brighter against the drab background of lonely exile and victimization which has so long been his. He is a fighter to the last gasp, a lover of women and laughter and a judge of wine, a scholar, and a talker so endlessly zestful that he would tire all listeners, had not his life, experiences and reading given him so much to tell that is worth hearing.

He and his brothers set out to make up for the lost years, in the Germany of 1919. Paul, the Benedictine priest, says that the lost war only impelled them to intensify their studies 'without giving way to the widespread hopelessness of that time, which later provided so fertile a seedbed for the teaching of Hitler'.

Gregor completed his university studies and then gave his days to his pharmacy and his evenings to his private army. His part in the liberation of Munich and his leadership of this force brought him much in contact with General Ludendorff, then honorary patron of all such semi-military formations, which held themselves ready to suppress any new Communist ventures, and also with one, Captain Roehm, chief-of-staff of the Epp Free Corps. General von Epp and Captain Roehm had installed a non-Socialist government in Bavaria after the liberation, against the wishes of Socialist-ruled Berlin; they hoped to use Bavaria as a base from which the rest of Germany could be similarly rid of leftists.

Roehm was the real ruler of Bavaria and thought he had found a way to establish himself there permanently when he sent an agent (a nondescript fellow called Hitler, whom he had found somewhere in liberated Munich) into the little National Socialist German Workers Party there, with enough money to gain control of it. Roehm counted on remaining master of the movement through the Storm Troops; he made the formation of this Brown Army a condition of his support. Things then unimaginable were germinating; Roehm's petty hireling was to become his executioner, and Gregor Strasser was to be murdered by the henchmen of the bespectacled young man he had taken on to do the orderly-room work of his Lower Bavarian Storm Battalion. But in 1919 Gregor Strasser was the most powerful man in Lower Bavaria, the trusted comrade of those famous German soldiers, General Ludendorff and General von Epp. None could guess what ill-omened lesser figures those were, that attached themselves to the three great men.

The vacation came at Munich University, and while all this went on in Bavaria Otto Strasser hastened to Berlin to continue his studies there. He was twenty-two, in that autumn of 1919, had no time to waste, no money, and one paramount problem; his daily bread. It was the first chaotic era in Berlin, and few who saw and shrank from it would have believed that a worse one would come

twenty-five years later. Young Englishmen and Americans, when they arrived in the Berlin of that time, were taken aback to hear older compatriots, who had known it before 1914, speak respectfully and even longingly of that former period of tidiness, stiff decorum, sycophancy at the Court, parade-stepping Grenadiers, besworded policemen, and, above all, Order. The younger men began to wonder; they had fought for four years to change the behaviour of Germans and thought they had succeeded; were they now to be told that they were wrong and had made it worse instead of better?^[8]

All conventions and standards, had been broken down. 'Regimentation', which the peoples of the West had set out to destroy while they themselves marched, like somnambulists, towards similar regimentation, had given way to a licence that was libertine; youth was the prey of the free foxes in the liberated henroost. Religion, patriotism, the family, chastity and tradition were all pilloried in books, on the stage and on the screen; Berlin was full of newcomers from Eastern Europe. Inflation was beginning; the mark was worth but twenty pfennigs and in another three years would be rated at 4,200,000,000,000 to the pound, so that incomes, pensions and savings would vanish and anybody who had a cousin in New York with a 100-dollar bill to spare might buy an apartment house. The moneylenders were at the helm. 'Glamour' was openly bought and sold in the marts of sexual perversion which plied their trade beneath blazing electric signs; youth, of both sexes, was the prey. Financial scandals multiplied as one trickster after another decided that the time for bankruptcy was ripe. In the West the Allied armies held the Rhineland; in the distant but ever-dangerous East the Cossack nightmare was become the Communist nightmare.

Amid this turmoil Otto Strasser groped his way towards the future. He studied from eight in the morning until noon at the university and then, to earn money, went to the Reichstag to work as stenographer for the parliamentary correspondents of the Socialist provincial newspapers. This went on until six or seven o'clock, when he hurried out for his meal at Aschinger's, one of the cheap chain-restaurants operated by that firm in Berlin. From eight until ten he took unpaid evening classes for workmen, to whom he taught German history and stenography, and after that he had to prepare his next morning's work for the university. When the evening classes were discontinued he used the hours thus set free to study Japanese at the Oriental Institute. Astonishingly, he found time for love.

Even so his mania for work was not sated. Conditions at the university led him to organize a League of ex-Service Students on behalf of men whose studies had been interrupted by the war. The universities were overcrowded and even the compressed emergency courses introduced for such men were being swamped by women, immigrants and others who had not served. Otto Strasser, at the head of his League, raised loud complaints and succeeded in having these conditions improved. Another aspect of the students' misery at that time was the plight of thousands of young men who starved themselves to finish their studies and could then obtain no employment. Leading German industrial concerns joined to form a Students Emergency Association, charged to find employment for these masses of despondent young men who were wandering aimlessly about. The secretary of this body was Dr. Heinrich Bruening, the later Chancellor who fought and failed to keep Hitler from power, and Otto Strasser worked in close collaboration with him. These early experiences and experiments in organizing his fellows for some cause, though they were not political, were of practical value to Strasser later, and they also show something of his mind.

Then, in the spring of 1920, came his second brief appearance in politics. He calls himself a revolutionary Socialist and was in search of socialism as he understood it; that is, a just social order on a religious and patriotic basis. He thought he would look for it in the Socialist Party, which he joined. The Socialists in Berlin then formed an *Einwohnerwehr*, or Civilian Defence Corps, as an answer to the Communist threat of violent uprising. Otto Strasser strongly advocated membership of the *Einwohnerwehr*, arguing that if the Socialists did not keep it firmly under their wing the

reactionaries would take it over. In his district, the populous quarter of Berlin called Steglitz, he carried the day. Steglitz joined, and Otto Strasser became the commander of Steglitz's *Hundertschaft*, or Hundred.

He was not destined to lead his Socialist Hundred against the Communists. Something quite different happened. There was a march on Berlin, as there had been a march on Munich, but the marchers were reactionaries, not Communists, and this time Otto Strasser was among the defenders, not the besiegers. Strasser, before he was twenty-three, thus gave proof of that constancy to his beliefs which he has always shown.

The Kapp Putsch was 'the first attempt of the old ruling classes to sweep away by armed force the newcomers who had succeeded to power in Germany'. The writer of this book has quoted the kind of description which was used at the time and which may be an over-simplification. In this century of infiltration and counter-infiltration it is hard ever to know just who is behind such an exploit as the Kapp Putsch and whose ambitions would truly be served by its success. If it really was organized by 'the old ruling classes', they chose strangely in selecting as their Press Chief so typical a figure of Communist conspiracy as the ex-Jew from Hungary, ex-Anglican clergyman, ex-British Member of Parliament, convicted traitor and Buddhist-monk-to-be, Trebitsch Lincoln!

However, that is the comment of time and experience. At the moment, in 1920, the Kapp Putsch seemed to Otto Strasser plainly to be a reactionary rising, and perhaps it was. At all events, the difference between it and the march on Munich in 1919 was clear. In Munich there had been an illegitimate revolutionary government led by an emissary from Moscow. In Berlin there was a predominantly Socialist government which was undeniably legitimate; it was *German* Socialist and contained no imported Moscovites. The Kappists were what would today be called Fascists, that is, Communists in differently-coloured shirts; a few years later, in Germany, they would have been called Hitlerists. Otto Strasser had no doubt what to do; he stood to arms against them, and this is the second evidential episode in his political life.

The Kappists ruled Berlin with their machine-guns for five days; then the general strike called by the fugitive Berlin Government caused their discomfiture and withdrawal. While they were in Berlin, however, they never cared to attack Steglitz, where Otto Strasser, once more armed and in uniform, and his Socialist *Hundertschaft* waited to receive them. Steglitz, surrounded but never occupied, was left a peaceful Socialist island in Kappist Berlin.

Later Hitler violently reproached Otto Strasser for his part in foiling the Kapp Putsch, and thus showed whose child it truly was. Yet in the sequel to it (and this is typical of the twentieth century, wherein a true man is always a lonely one), Strasser later left the Socialist Party. The withdrawal of the Kappists left the Berlin Government greatly strengthened and with ample power to carry out its Socialist programme; equally, it left the Socialists clamant for that fulfilment. The coalition government (Socialist-Centrist) gave the Socialist delegates, at Bielefeld, a written undertaking to dismiss the Police Minister, Noske (whose weakness towards 'the reactionaries' was held responsible for the Putsch), to socialize heavy industry, and to partition big estates. The Socialists thereon laid down their arms. That being accomplished, the government disavowed the promises, made at Bielefeld.

Otto Strasser was in search of his national and Christian socialism and for him those promises were important. He was never and is not now a socialist of the universal-confiscation creed; had he been that he could long since have found a political home in the Communist Party. But he did and does see the essence of a just social order in the community-ownership (as distinct from 'State control'; his theory is explained later) of land and industry. In 1920 it appeared to him that a great opportunity for necessary reforms had been basely betrayed by the disavowal of the Bielefeld

agreement. Indeed, the 'betrayal of Bielefeld' played a part in the controversies of German Socialists somewhat comparable with that of the 'MacDonald betrayal' of 1931 in the recriminations of British Socialists. In both cases the question of perfidy is arguable, in the light of passing years, but at the time seemed beyond doubt. Otto Strasser was among the loudest and bitterest critics and consequently was attacked by the Socialist Party leaders, who even denounced him as 'a police spy' (a curiously illogical charge, as both the Police Minister and the Police Chief were Socialists). Thus it came about that Otto Strasser, having commanded a Socialist *Hundertschaft* against Fascist besiegers, left the Socialist Party in disillusionment and disgust!

The course of truth in politics never runs smooth and the Socialist *Hundertschaftler* from Steglitz found himself equally unpopular when he returned to the university, where most of the students had favoured the Kappists. One morning Otto Strasser found a notice on the board announcing that he had been debarred from further study 'pending a disciplinary investigation'. When he angrily asked the reason he was told that his war record was suspect. The production of the official war history of his regiment quickly settled that question, so that a contrite Rector withdrew the insinuation in the presence of the entire Students' Corps in full regalia. In such a matter as this 1920 was better than 1950; by that time the newspapers of the world habitually published equally false statements about Otto Strasser and consistently ignored requests to print the disproof.

After these experiences he felt that he was homeless in politics and for three years stood aloof from them. His first meeting with Hitler, in the autumn of 1920, in no wise changed his mind about that. This was the encounter at which Hitler rebuked him for his part in foiling the Kapp Putsch.

Hitler, using the money with which Roehm supplied him, had by this time succeeded in shouldering aside the original leaders of the insignificant National Socialist Party in Munich and in gaining control of it. He had taken over its programme (the famous '25 points') and was busy perverting it and the little party. He had acquired a small local sporting-sheet, the *Voelkische Beobachter*, and through the use of it and his own talent for mob oratory was beginning to attract public attention. He had thus come to the notice of General Ludendorff, who was striving to amalgamate all the semi-military and ex-servicemen's organizations and to associate them closely with political groups of similar views. From Ludendorff's point of view the most important man to enlist was Gregor Strasser, and one day the General took Hitler to visit Gregor at his home in Landshut. Gregor asked Otto to be present, and Otto, who by chance was on holiday at his parents' home, went to Landshut to see what was afoot.

It was a fateful day for both brothers, and a fatal one for Gregor. General Ludendorff was as great a hero to any German officer then as Generals Alexander or Montgomery, MacArthur or Eisenhower to British or American officers of the Second War; to meet him was something not to be missed. Otto Strasser recalls today that General Ludendorff, in the flesh, made a deep impression on him. Hitler repelled him. 'He was too servile to Ludendorff and behaved like a battalion orderly before a general officer. Ludendorff was like a block of granite; Hitler was nervous and half-hysterical. I told Gregor that I did not want to join the party; the only thing I liked about it, I said, was the name, National Socialist, *und Dich* ("and you"). Throughout 1921 and 1922, when I was out of politics, I had many disputes with Gregor about Hitler and the party. I never felt drawn towards it and would not join. Hitler, after that lunch, always spoke of me as an *Intellektbestie*' (roughly, 'an intellectual crank').

However, Hitler achieved something that day which may have sealed the fate of Germany for the next twenty-five years and much longer. He had persuaded Ludendorff either of his merit or of his usefulness; generals are often much more easily beguiled in politics than they would allow themselves to be in battle. As a result, Ludendorff prevailed on Gregor Strasser, who undertook to place his Lower Bavarian Storm Battalion under the overriding military command of General

Ludendorff and under the political leadership of Hitler. Gregor also took over the leadership of the National Socialist Party in Lower Bavaria; until then it existed in skeleton form only in Munich and this was its first extension outside that city. Gregor Strasser brought it the first substantial accretion of strength.

This step, which in the sequel was to prove suicidal, appeared perfectly logical then. Gregor Strasser knew that he could not much longer keep his private army of foot and artillery together. The war and the Red Republic in Munich were both receding, the men were settling down to civilian life, forgetting to clean their rifles or to turn up on parade. Gregor Strasser knew that he must either disband his organization or turn it into a political one. He would have done better to transform it into a political party under his own leadership, and if he had done that might have been Chancellor of a peaceful Germany today. But he had his pharmacy and family, his livelihood and his dependants, to consider; he could not give all his time, and here was a man who lived only for politics. Thus the die was cast; Gregor Strasser became *Gauleiter* for Lower Bavaria and his little army passed into Hitler's grasp.

Otto Strasser returned to his studies and in March 1921 took his doctorate in law at Wuerzburg. That opened the door to a minor appointment in the Ministry of Food in Berlin, where he prosaically represented the interest of authority in artificial fertilizers and the cultivation of moorland. In 1923 he was found at his departmental desk by Count von Hertling, his commanding officer in the war, who had become head of a big industrial concern, in which he offered Otto Strasser a promising post. Thus, for two years, Otto Strasser, as he says, 'sat quietly in the Ministry or got on with my job in industry and hardly touched politics'.

He was twenty-six, rising now, and successful. He was financially secure and settled, for the first and last time in his life. As his brother Paul writes, 'He heard the call of politics once more; from that hour on Otto was never again a prosperous man.' Nor was he ever again, until the present day, to be secure, comfortable or carefree; only insecurity, struggle, flight, pursuit, exile, hardship and persecution awaited him.

What was it all for, and what was it all about? What impelled Otto Strasser to give up prosperity and security and set out again in search of his socialism? When the reasons are told that which happened in November of 1923 will be easier to understand.

First, his heredity, his father's house and his historic homeland bore and bred him to be a national Christian Socialist, and the war and what followed confirmed him in being that. Then there was the seething, prescient unrest of Germany in the 1920s, which perhaps can only be comprehended by those who experienced it. Was it nobler in the mind to suffer, or to take arms against a sea of troubles ...? Most Germans were racked by this dilemma, by the wretchedness of the present and the darkness of the future, and by the restless impulse to take the sorry scheme of things and put it right, for each man's own sake, for his children's sakes, for his country's sake. Strasser was not the man to suffer in the mind; it was his nature to oppose troubles; and he believed that the way to end them was through a national Christian socialism.

Today's reader, then, must consider (if he does not already know) that in 1923 national socialism was already a thing of some age. It had existed long before Hitler, had nothing to do with Hitler, and had not yet been perverted by Hitler; it is necessary to know that to understand the thought of a man like Otto Strasser in 1923 and long before. Mr. Churchill correctly says (*The Gathering Storm*, page 15), 'As Fascism sprang from Communism, so Nazism developed from Fascism.' Both Fascism and Nazism are derivatives of Communism and bear the same recognizable features. The continuing failure of conservative people to grasp this fact, and their continuing delusion that Fascism and Nazism were opposites of Communism, is a great source of weakness in the West.

The father of true 'National Socialism' was T.G. Masaryk, and none other. In about 1887 he delivered a crushing attack on Marxist Socialism, his main arguments being that it was wrong because it was international and anti-Christian. He inspired, by these arguments, Klovacs, a young Czech labour leader and Socialist member of the Vienna Parliament, who about 1892 seceded with the Czech workers from the Socialist Party in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire because the leadership of that party was 'Jewish, international and German'. In 1897 Klovacs founded the first National Socialist Party in the world. T.G. Masaryk had a few years earlier founded his Realist Party, of which he was the only member in the Vienna Parliament. This united with Klovacs's party and Masaryk became president of this first National Socialist Party until his death, with Edouard Benesh as his second in command. About 1903 the Sudeten Germans took up Masaryk's idea and founded a second, German National Socialist Party in the Austro-Hungarian Empire under Jung and Knirsch, both members of the Vienna Parliament. In 1907 the Austrians followed suit, with a third, Austrian National Socialist Party. From these Czech, Sudeten German and Austrian models, the Bavarians in their turn took over the idea in 1917, when Harrer and Anton Drexler formed the Bavarian National Socialist Party, the *fourth* in the line of direct descent. The guiding principle of all these parties was Masaryk's original one: Christian and national socialism, as opposed to anti-Christian and international, or super-national, Marxist socialism.

Hitler, the destroyer of the idea, intercepted the process in 1919 when, at the bidding of Roehm, he attended a meeting of the little Bavarian party, subsequently gaining control of it by purchase. He changed the whole idea and outlook of the party under the influence of Italian Fascism, which had a quite different history and other antecedents, and was inspired by Communism. Hitler turned the National Socialist movement into 'Hitlerism'; in its original form it was something entirely different. Nor was Hitler, as he claimed in *Mein Kampf*, the party's 'seventh member'. Apart from the other, earlier parties, the Bavarian one already had several hundred members when this Mephisto was sent to report on it and became the seventh member of its executive committee, in charge of publicity.

Thus national socialism, as Otto Strasser continued in search of it, was quite unlike what Hitler later made of it, but in 1923 Strasser could not foresee that. He later explained what he sought in his book, *The Structure of German Socialism*, published in 1930. It joins up with original and genuine national, Christian socialism, and was then, and remains today, fully consistent with all his words and deeds; although he has changed the name to Solidarism, he has not sensibly changed the content, which is summarized later in this book. It is a political theory deriving directly from Masaryk's idea, as developed by Strasser's own life and experience.

In 1923 he could not know what this newcomer Hitler would do with national socialism. Nobody knew, for the thing had not been put to the test. Then something happened to make him wonder if he had been right in his distrust of the new man, Hitler, and to awaken in him the hope that the party led by this Hitler might, after all, lead to the Christian, national socialism which he sought.

In November 1923 there was yet another 'march', this time again on Munich, but not against Communists. General von Epp, the liberator of 1919, had long since been outmanoeuvred by men more versed in politics and no longer controlled affairs there. His eclipse was also that of his chief-of-staff, that soldier of misfortune, Captain Roehm (who, having started Hitler on his demoniac course, had gone to continue his soldiering and his sexual aberrations in Bolivia). The politicians were in control in Bavaria again and they had set up in Munich what, to such men as Otto and Gregor Strasser, seemed plainly to be a reactionary government, composed of persons akin to those who had made the Kapp Putsch in Berlin. It may be hard today to recall, or realize, that Hitler's first bid to seize power (this Munich march of November 1923) to many Germans looked like a praiseworthy attempt to rid Bavaria first, and Germany next, of men who embodied the most detestable characteristics of the old regime; but so it was, and they could not then know what sort

of man Hitler would prove to be. Men like Gregor and Otto Strasser, although they would have fought Communism anywhere and at any time, and although they respected many things of the earlier system, were appalled at the idea that the old idols should be restored intact, and were as resolved to fight 'reaction' as Communism.

They came of the *fin de siècle* generation which in its youth had inwardly rebelled, not against monarchy and its manifestations in themselves, but against the stiff, stifling and cramping forms of life in Wilhelmine Germany in particular. The symbols of that era, when they looked back, still repelled them: the frock-coats, 'stand-up collars', whiskers and stovepipe hats, the whaleboned mamas, the dark dwellings and unlovely entertainments of the rigidly segregated middle class, the ossified caste distinctions, the inelegant formality, the whole lifelessness of life. Things of this kind, their mind's eyes saw when they thought of 'reaction', and they did not want them back. They felt, in this respect, that the lost war had in a sense been a sacrifice on the altar of the future. It had brought them for the nonce to a worse state of affairs, which they wanted to put right; but in amending it they were resolved not to restore the social structure which had so galled and irked them in their youth.

Otto did not take any part in the new march on Munich; he was out of politics and merely watched from Berlin. Gregor marched on the Feldhernhalle as commander of his Landeshut Battalion. In the front rank, side by side, marched General Ludendorff and Hitler, still a little known, untested quantity. They were met by the bullets of regular troops. Hitler ducked, fled, was arrested and imprisoned. Ludendorff, continuing erect, was hit, and never again would have anything to do with Hitler. Gregor was sentenced to imprisonment.

This, to many Germans almost unbelievable event (German soldiers firing at Ludendorff!) shook Otto Strasser in his opinions of the National Socialist Party. He was convinced that the regime in Munich was a reactionary one. Until then he had held the National Socialist Party, under Hitler, to be half-reactionary itself. 'A cheap edition of reaction with a red cover on it to delude the buyer.' But those bullets persuaded him to the contrary. 'My brother was right after all,' he thought, 'this *is* a revolutionary socialist movement. Hitler's flirtations with the generals and big business will have to stop now' (such terms, 'the generals' and 'big business', which again look like over-simplifications today, were the current coin of politics then).

He was strengthened in this view by Ludendorff's famous subsequent words, 'Now I know that the salvation and reconstruction of Germany are not possible in collaboration with the reactionaries', and still more by the fact that Hitler was now out of the way for five years; he was in prison! Ludendorff solemnly discarded all further caste-fellowship with his kind. Otto Strasser's regiment sent a circular letter to all members of its Officers Corps telling them they must choose between Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, the heir to the abolished crown, and General Ludendorff, and must make a declaration of loyalty in this sense. Otto Strasser chose for Ludendorff and was forthwith excluded from the officers' association of his regiment.

In this way Otto Strasser, the fervent admirer of the German Officers Corps, the anti-Communist soldier of Munich, the Socialist *Hundertschaftler* of Steglitz, was drawn once more from the shelter of his substantial post in industry towards the whirlpool of German politics. It did not happen all at once, but in another two years, by 1925, he was in the net, for better or for worse. It was to be the crowning misfortune of his life, if comfort and material success are taken as the standards of judgment; but it was his destiny and may in the end work to his own good, that of his country and of others.

The course of events was slow, but the deadly certainty of destiny can be traced in it. Nobody yet knew what National Socialism would do or prove to be; the outer world as yet barely knew the

name. It would be what it was made, and that would depend on the men who made it. Hitler was in prison, apparently for five years, that is, until 1928! The events of Munich had shaken Otto's aversion for the Party. In 1924 (and here is the first intervention of destiny) Gregor Strasser was elected to the Bavarian Diet and this carried with it his release from imprisonment. Soon afterwards he was elected to the Reichstag in Berlin. Hitler was still in prison, so that Ludendorff, the great man whom Otto admired, and Gregor, his own brother, took over the leadership of the National Socialist Party, and extended it at once by absorbing the Folkist Party of von Graefe. One of their first acts was to exclude from the party two of its most ill-omened men, Julius Streicher (who was executed at Nuremberg) and Hermann Esser; later, when they had been readmitted by Hitler, the hatred of these two helped to bring about Gregor's murder.

Thus Otto, in 1924, looked out on a completely different picture. He was a national Christian socialist; he saw a growing National Socialist Party led by one of the most famous living Germans and by his own brother; the man who was later to pervert it was behind bars. Here was an opportunity to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them; in fact, to find the socialism he sought and make National Socialism what he wanted it to be.

Even then he did not join the Party, but he set to work to give it the guidance it needed. First, he took the famous '25 Points', which were merely large statements of principle without any defined methods of practical application to practical problems of economics, industry, agriculture and foreign policy. Otto worked out these rules for practical application, which became known under the name, famous in German political history, of 'the Bamberg Programme'; it formed the basis for the embittered conflict between 'Strasserism' and 'Hitlerism' which ended only with Otto's flight into exile and Gregor's murder. Gregor fully approved this Bamberg Programme, and the reader who studies Otto Strasser's 'Solidarism', as it is summarized later in this book, may see what National Socialism would have become in Germany, had the Strassers prevailed. Otto carried on his work through a series of articles which appeared under the pseudonym Ulrich von Hutten in the *Voelkische Beobachter*. This produced the spectacle, inconceivable in the later days of that journal, of a violent running controversy between the apostle of true Christian national socialism, 'Ulrich von Hutten', and one Alfred Rosenberg (also executed at Nuremberg), who in the enforced absence of his master upheld the Hitlerist conception.

At that moment the future looked more promising for Germany, and therewith for the world, than at any other in the years between the two wars; had the Strassers been able to guide the party, there would have been no Second War. And at that very moment destiny, which appears to have been incurably malignant but no doubt is working in mysterious ways towards some good end, intervened again. It used for its fell purpose, this time, an obscure politician named Guertner, Bavarian Minister of Justice in Munich.

Dr. Guertner, in 1924, released Hitler from his imprisonment at Landsberg, where he had been sentenced to remain until 1928! The reasons have never to this day been learned; the persevering reader may notice that, with all the development of newspapers, broadcasting and other means of public information, the public is seldom informed about those questions of our century, the answers to which would explain its apparently fore-ordained and mechanical progress, like that of Greek tragedy, from bad to worse.^[9] However, when Hitler came to power a decade later the obscure Dr. Guertner received his reward; he was made Reich Minister of justice (and died comfortably in bed during the 1939-45 war).

The demon king popped up through the political trap door. General Ludendorff at once resigned. The Strassers were left far out on a limb. Looking back, and considering the matter merely from the aspect of their own comfort, they would have done better to follow General Ludendorff's example. But that was not then clear, and anyway, it would have been to choose the alternative of suffering

nobly in the mind; neither of the Strassers were men of that kidney. Moreover, the reappearance of Hitler at that time did not appear fatal to all their hopes and work. There were many good reasons to think they could still hold and guide the party and preserve Germany.

For instance, the Austrian Hitler, though free, was not allowed to travel freely, or to approach the central scene of the political battle; he was restricted to Bavaria. The Western Allies, in destroying 'Prussian militarism', had been careful to preserve Prussia (and to destroy the benevolent Austro-Hungarian monarchy). Prussia formed two-thirds of Germany and contained the Reich capital and parliament; in Prussia the great decisions would be made. Gregor could travel freely whither he wished (in more than one sense; as a Reichstag Deputy he held the coveted free railway-pass, which was most important in those impoverished days). It looked as if the Party could be developed in North Germany more or less independently of Munich, where Hitler was exiled. Gregor decided to take up the fight for the soul of national socialism and of Germany, and at last prevailed on Otto to join him.

Such were the circumstances in which the third political period of Otto Strasser's life began. It was a bid by these two brothers to save the party for Christian 'national socialism. Today, because somebody wants to keep Otto Strasser out of Germany (this is another question to be added to those on the previous page) he is often portrayed as just another of 'Hitler's gang', which is the reverse of the truth. There seemed a fair chance to save the party from Hitler, and the future of Germany was at stake.

At last Otto allowed Gregor to prevail on him. He gave up his lucrative post in industry and nominally joined the Party (he never wore its shirt or badge), in 1925. He used the substantial sum which he received from his firm to found in 1926, with Gregor, a publishing house in Berlin, the Kampfverlag. They began to issue two weeklies, the *Berliner Arbeiterzeitung* and *Der nationale Sozialist*.

The name of the second (*The national Socialist*) is significant. It was a direct intimation to Hitler that if the Strassers prevailed the party would be *The national Socialist Party*. Hitler and Rosenberg violently protested and demanded that the name be changed to *Der Nationalsozialist (The National socialist)*; the Strassers refused. There is much more than a squabble about initials in this. It was a matter of life and death, as the sequel showed. For the Strassers the social content of the party's programme was always the dominant thing, and that was the whole essence of their dispute for the leadership (when Otto Strasser later withdrew the headline of his announcement to his followers was, 'The Socialists leave the National socialist Party!')

All that was in 1925 and 1926. The years of chaos were receding; the German genius for order reasserted itself. The political struggle for the soul of Germany, however, grew daily more violent. Save for the cosmopolitan crowds on the Kurfuerstendamm, Germans thought and talked of little else but politics. They ran to and fro between the parties like lost sheep and some of them bleated 'Heil, Heil, Heil!' and others, 'Rot Front, Rot Front, Rot Front!'; in an illumined moment of despondent foreboding one of them sat down and wrote, as the title to a novel, 'Little Man, What Now?' The memory of the past and dislike of the present oppressed that nation, and in its loins it already felt the pains of the monstrous future. It was a moment when men of goodwill and statesmen were needed; for some reason which only time can reveal men of illwill everywhere prevailed. One of the worst of them was Hitler in this troubled, anxious Germany. Otto Strasser set to work to wrest the party from him.

He was twenty-eight and had had a remarkable political career, having adamantly and constantly upheld his beliefs at all costs through every change of circumstance. As a German he had fought against an alien Communist regime in Munich; as a Socialist he had taken arms against Fascist (or

'Kappist') invaders in Berlin. He had joined the Socialist Party, been embittered by its default on measures which he held to be vital, and left it. Now he gave himself wholly to politics and resumed the fight, within the National Socialist Party and against its titular, exiled head, who had been prematurely released from prison but still could not appear anywhere in Germany outside Bavaria.

Chapter Three

TO GAIN OR LOSE ...

The fight lasted just four years, from March 1926, when the Strassers founded their publishing house in Berlin, until May 1930, when Hitler at last succeeded in destroying it and them, and also the last hope of saving the National Socialist Party and Germany.

It can be seen now that the fight was lost, for the Strassers, at its start, when Dr. Guertner in Bavaria released Hitler from prison; but that was not to be foreseen then. Otto Strasser fought to the end, as he had before and has ever since, and he stands today, on the verifiable record, as the *only* leading personality who openly and adamantly and on a clear principle opposed Hitler inside the National Socialist Party. Strasser did not fear his fate too much; he put it to the touch without regard to personal loss or gain.

The present writer must repeat that it is all on the record. There is no room for question about the part that Otto Strasser played in those years and the obscuration of it in today's newspapers and political literature can only derive from the deliberate intention to obscure, for the facts can be verified from the abundant records of the time. The files of the innumerable newspapers, books and pamphlets published by the Strassers from 1926 to 1930 prove the undeviating fight they waged against Hitlerism.

The idea for which they fought was that of Masaryk's true Christian national socialism as applied to the needs of Germany and of Europe. Otto Strasser had incorporated it in his 'Bamberg Programme', which laid down rules of practical application for the rhetorical and imprecise '25 Points'. This book cannot be extended to include all the documents, but the Bamberg Programme is accessible to all present-day writers who wish to verify the facts; however, the aspect of today's newspapers suggests that the verifying breed is extinct. The Bamberg Programme was equally the basis for Otto Strasser's *German Socialism*, published when he left the National Socialist Party and summarized later in this book.

The differences between the Bamberg Programme and Hitlerism were vital, and the whole 'historic struggle' of those four years turned on them.^[10] Otto Strasser advocated, above all, the federalization of Germany, and passionately opposed centralization, in which he clearly saw the danger of the totalitarian State and dictatorship. Here, at once, he incurred the mortal enmity of Hitler. It may seem almost humorous today (but could not then be foreseen as hopeless) that the Strassers should have hoped to convince Hitler of the evils of dictatorship. Probably Otto had no such illusion, and only hoped to guide the party away from that fate; Gregor, a more confiding character, may have thought that 'Herr Hitler' (the two brothers never used the form of address, 'Mein Fuehrer') could by sweet reasonableness be persuaded.

In the field of foreign policy, again, Otto Strasser was an equally ardent advocate of a European Federation, whereas Hitler argued that Germany must be supreme on the European mainland. (Otto Strasser's conception of federation, for Germany and for Europe, is the exact opposite of the 'World State' idea, either in its total form or in that of its subdivisions. Federation, to him, is the means of preserving the individuality of nations and of different breeds within nations such as the Scots and the Welsh, the Bavarians and Rhinelanders, the Bretons and the Provencals. The plan for a World State, and for its regional substitutes, is clearly designed as a weapon to destroy nations and breeds.)

The second great field of dispute between the Strassers, with their Bamberg Programme, and Hitler was that of economics, where the question of socialism arose. The Strassers took their socialism seriously, and the root of this controversy lay in the suspicion that Hitler was selling out the socialist items of the '25 Points' to certain interested parties in return for monetary subsidies; one of the aims of the Bamberg Programme was to nail him to these socialist undertakings. Point 13, for instance, demanded 'the nationalization of all jointly-owned concerns' and Point 14, 'profit-sharing in the great industries'. The most controversial Point, however, was 17, 'We demand a land-reform suitable to our national requirements, the passing of a law for the confiscation without compensation of land for communal purposes, the abolition of interest on mortgages, and prohibition of all speculation in land'.

Hitler had added a rider to this Point 14 which in effect annulled it (long afterwards the surmise that he had received payment for so doing was confirmed by the German heavy industrialist Thyssen, after his flight from Germany). The writer of this book is conscious that readers at this point, if they are new to the subject, might conclude, that the issue was between the Strassers, intent on Marxist confiscation, and Hitler, resolved on moderation. That assumption would be the opposite of the truth. Hitler had no respect for property, though he was ready to pretend such respect if it were made worth his while. His policy was bound to lead, and did lead, to the destruction and confiscation of property on a scale never before thought possible. The Strassers' socialism, though earnestly intended, was contained within a prudent framework of reform (witness the *German Socialism*) which was devised above all to extend, not to diminish, the benefits of property.

In this connection, the kind of question which agitated opinion within the party in those days, and played a part in this particular controversy, was that of the property of the former reigning dynasties. On the ground that war-disabled men, inflation victims and others had received no compensation, the Strassers and their supporters were for expropriation. Hitler, who was constantly bargaining with interested parties behind the scenes, was against it.

The third, and possibly the deepest dissension between the Strassers, embattled in Berlin, and Hitler, secluded in Munich, turned on religion as the basis of national socialism. The Strassers believed in God and would have put Christianity and the interests of the Christian churches in the forefront of the party's programme. Hitler, the racial mongrel from the Vienna Destitutes' Home, looked disdainfully on religion and the churches as subjects of his total State to come, only to be tolerated if they submitted to its authority. Whatever his heredity may have been (and it may have been anything at all, in the Bohemian borderlands whence he derived) he had no inner understanding for, but only an outcast's spite against the Christian West. In this, too, he was the complete antithesis of the Strassers.

Such, then, was the shape of the conflict; federalization against the total State ruled from Berlin; Christian socialism against Nationalism without socialism; Christianity against paganism.

It was *not* a struggle for power. None could then guess whether the party would ever attain to power. What was important was that it should stand by its principles; for these principles, and for the soul of the party, the Strassers fought. It became a struggle for supremacy within the party itself only because Hitler, as all the world saw long afterwards, was never interested in principles, but only in tactics, so that he invariably tried to get rid of any who, by seeking to pin him to principles, cramped his tactics. To him, they were intriguing foes within the walls and he turned on them, to destroy them. They naturally resisted, believing that they were right.

The struggle shaped very well for the Strassers at first. Gregor was the real head of the party, for he controlled it in North Germany, from which Hitler was barred, and Otto was its guiding brain. Victory seemed even to have been won at the famous Hanover Meeting of October 1925, when all

North German *Gauleiter* (with the lone exception of Robert Ley, who in 1945 committed suicide, if report was true, on his way to Nuremberg) voted to substitute the Bamberg Programme for the '25 Points'. Dissatisfaction with Hitler was openly expressed at 'this meeting and Rust, the later Schools Minister, declared, 'We will not tolerate a Pope in our party'. The conference resolved that all North German branches of the party (that is, in North German States outside Prussia) should amalgamate under Gregor Strasser, and that the Strassers' publishing house should take over all press and publicity work for the party in North Germany.

This apparent triumph soon dissolved in a discomfiture which was mainly brought about, once more, by one of the jackals who prowled around the party camp. Hitler called a counter-meeting at Bamberg, Bavaria. None of Gregor Strasser's fellow-leaders from North Germany obeyed the summons to attend, but he went himself and took with him his secretary, whom he paid two hundred marks a month. For this post the ill-fated Gregor had chosen a malignant hobgoblin named Dr. Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels then for the first time saw Hitler and his attendant panoply of salaried officials and motor cars. Promptly Goebbels declared his repentance for proposing, at Hanover, that Hitler be expelled from the party. In a packed meeting Gregor Strasser was left completely isolated (later, at his downfall, Goebbels was to prance round him with jeers and taunts).

However, that was by no means the end. From 1926 to 1928 the Strassers controlled the National Socialist Party in North Germany and through their publications carried on the struggle for the mind of Germany. They were already lost but could not know that, for the reasons were beyond their range of vision. That strange and sinister process had begun, which continued until the very outbreak of the war: potent and invisible forces supported Hitler in everything he did. The reader may recall the later, more apparent manifestations of that process: his march into the Rhineland was tacitly approved; in London *The Times* gently encouraged his designs on Austria and Czechoslovakia (and in 1952 candidly confessed that the editor of that day had somewhat erred); President Roosevelt thanked him by telegram for graciously deigning to accept the gift of Munich; Mr. Chamberlain flew to bestow it on him; the German generals who were about to overthrow him fell back, stunned by the news.

All that was later, but it was all in the same line. In the years 1926 to 1928 the money power and what other support he needed was at Hitler's disposal. In 1927 he appointed Goebbels *Gauleiter* for Berlin and supplied him with the funds to start a newspaper, *Der Angriff*, in opposition to the Strassers' publications. Gregor Strasser was still Hitler's deputy, and as head of the North German party the real leader of National Socialism. The dwarf whom he had helped was sent to undermine him. The vendetta was carried on with tremendous bitterness, and the vendors of the rival newspapers fought each other in the streets.

Then the decisive blow fell. Just as Hitler had formerly been released from imprisonment by the mysterious Guertner, now he was liberated from his enforced seclusion in South Germany. Through the years he had been building up his Brown Army, the Storm Troops. This was another point in dispute between him and the Strassers, who demanded that the Storm Troop detachments should be under the orders of the local party branches, and be members of the party. Hitler refused both demands and insisted that the Storm Troops be organized as a Brown Army independent of the political party and its political programme. The subsidies he received from big industrialists at that time enabled him to make this, originally somewhat ludicrous private army into a force impressive enough to attract the approving notice of the regular army, the Reichswehr. The Reichswehr, in the suicidal spirit which seems to inspire so many activities of the West in this century, prevailed on the Prussian Government to raise the ban on Hitler; thenceforth he was free to travel and speak where he liked. At once he appeared in North Germany and Berlin and joined battle with the Strassers.

It took him another two years to destroy the Strassers' publishing house, which continued its crusade. He came in person one day to Otto Strasser's office in the Nuernbergerstrasse and tried by threats to induce him to suspend publication of the *Berliner Arbeiterzeitung*, asking what Strasser could do if Goebbels's Storm Troopers came along one day 'and smashed the place up'. That interview ended, with Hitler shouting abuse, when Strasser opened a drawer and showed him a loaded revolver. Strasser regrets today that he did not at that moment openly break with the party, for the brothers were in a very strong position. Once more Gregor prevailed on him to avoid the open conflict.

In 1929 and 1930 came the first great increase in strength of the party, which in 1930 caused the outer world at length to turn uneasy eyes towards Germany and it. The circulation of the Strasser publications grew so rapidly that several weeklies had to be transformed into dailies, and Hitler's anger rose in proportion. At last he sent for the Strassers and their partner, one Hinkel, to come to Munich, where he 'behaved like a madman. He shrieked and roared at us one moment and flattered us the next. He offered to buy the Kampfverlag at any price we liked to name and offered Hinkel and myself deputy's seats in the Reichstag. Gregor was ready to sell, but his share was only a third. I refused point blank and contrived to get Hinkel to refuse also. The conversation lasted many hours and I felt I was in bedlam. At one point I remarked mildly, "You are wrong, Herr Hitler", whereon Hitler shouted, "I cannot be wrong, everything that I do and say is history".'

At the third attempt, on May 21st and 22nd, 1930, the Strassers' stronghold fell, with Otto Strasser as the only non-capitulant. Hitler came to Berlin and had two very long meetings with Otto; at the second Gregor was also present. These two encounters seem to the present writer also to be of some historic importance, because as far as his knowledge extends, they are the only occasions on record when Hitler ever entered into debate! Possibly the most extraordinary thing about his rise, from petty political spy in Munich to Fuehrer of the German Reich, is that he never once in all that time stood question and answer. In his private conclaves he alone spoke, while his captains and lieutenants leaned forward, reverently and assiduously ready to say 'Ja, mein Fuehrer'; at his public meetings his Storm Troopers saw to it that any interjections were answered, but not from the platform; he never entered Parliament until he was Chancellor and all questioners there had been stilled; to these three assertions the present writer can testify from personal observation. Finally, when he was Fuehrer of the Reich he would receive foreign heads of State, emissaries, ministers and ambassadors with tempests of one-way oratory from which they would emerge amazed, bemused and bursting with retorts which they had not been allowed to make; the present writer was also witness of such humiliating and red-faced exits.

Thus Otto Strasser's two homeric arguments with Hitler seem to be unique, first because they occurred, and second because they are recorded in print. The irrepressible Otto put them down immediately afterwards, as literally as he could remember them, and published them as an appendix to his *Structure of German Socialism*, which appeared a little later. The mere fact that Hitler, who detested debate above all things, nerved himself to these two tremendous altercations shows how vital to his plans he held the destruction of the Strassers and their Kampfverlag to be. If there were room they would be reproduced in this book, but they are much too long; Hitler could say a lot in two days. They are of permanent, if melancholy interest, and should be published in English. The historian may reflect that they were available for study years before Hitler even came to power and ask himself what possessed the politicians of the West, that they encouraged such a man.

The engagement began with shouted complaints about the tone taken in the publications of the Kampfverlag and a demand for its immediate dissolution. When Otto Strasser rose and said he was ready for a discussion, but not for an ultimatum, Hitler at once became calm and friendly. Thereafter the discussion ranged to the ends of the earth and to extremes of irrelevance, with Otto Strasser, in the manner of a rodeo cowhand on a steer, always trying to bring it to the point. The

point was the programme and principle of national socialism, and that was precisely what Hitler, the tactician, did not want to debate.

He complained of an article which, he said, had 'differentiated between the Idea of National Socialism and the Fuehrer, and even subordinated the Fuehrer to the Idea'. Strasser, while disclaiming any respect for Hitler, said that was in fact his belief, a Fuehrer 'might become ill, or die, or conceivably deviate from the Idea, but an Idea is of divine origin and eternal'. That, said Hitler on a rising note again, was 'bombastic nonsense hatched out at a debating table and the worst sort of democratic bunkum. The Fuehrer and the Idea are one and every National Socialist must obey the orders of the Fuehrer, who embodies the Idea and alone knows its ultimate aim'. 'That, Herr Hitler', rejoined Otto Strasser, 'is the doctrine of Rome, and equally of Papist and of Fascist Rome. For me, the Idea is the vital thing, the Idea of national socialism, and my conscience decides when a gap appears between Fuehrer and Idea.' Hitler's answer to this was inevitable: 'Discipline!' He asked, 'Do you intend to submit yourself to this discipline, as your brother does, or not?'

That was Otto's Achilles heel: Gregor, who in spite of everything thought that he could remain with Hitler, guide Hitler, and direct the party in the spirit of the Bamberg Programme. His next brother, Paul, says today that 'Looking back, I find it hard to understand how Gregor, after this meeting, could still have yielded to this hope'. However, Gregor was gigantic in good nature and optimism, as well as stature, and the satanic spirit that invested Hitler was probably beyond his power even to imagine.

The hours of recrimination, cajolery and attempted bribery went on. Hitler offered to make Otto Strasser Press Chief of the party (the man who became Press Chief, Dietrich, was gently handled at Nuremberg and later was remuneratively employed in German heavy industry) if he would come to Munich and work there under Hitler's supervision. Strasser said he would only do that if they could agree about fundamental principles of policy, and to that end an exhaustive discussion of all questions, particularly those of foreign policy and socialism, would be necessary; he would be ready to come to Munich for that purpose for four weeks and thrash out all such matters with Hitler himself and with Alfred Rosenberg (the spiritual prompter of Hitlerist National Socialism).

The answer was one later to become familiar: 'My patience is exhausted', and an ultimatum. Hitler threatened, if Otto Strasser would not accept unconditionally, to expel him and his associates from the party and formally to excommunicate the Kampfverlag. Otto Strasser replied that such a step would confirm his suspicion, that Hitler's real motive was a fundamental antagonism to the socialist principles which the Kampfverlag upheld; if Hitler wished to destroy it, that could only be because he meant to collaborate with the reactionaries.

When the two antagonists met the next day Hitler had an experience, for him unique. He had to listen to a very long, prepared statement, read by Strasser, of his socialist views and of the way to apply them in practice; in other words, to a verbal exposition of Christian national socialism and the Bamberg Programme. It was Otto Strasser's theory, from which he never would deviate, of a German Socialism. It did not aim at the brusque dispossession of property-owners in favour of the unpropertied masses, or at the enthronement of a super-capitalist called The State in place of the body of individual capitalists; its essential objective was that the unpropertied majority of the German people should be admitted to co-ownership, co-management and co-responsibility. It differed from the '25 Points' in that it was worked out in detail, for practical application.

The world today has long since known that time spent on trying to pin Hitler down to such trivialities as these was time wasted; but in 1930 even Otto Strasser could not be sure of that. Anyway, he tried. The outcome is now old history. The great debate broke up. Hitler and Goebbels opened a national campaign against Otto Strasser, who retaliated with the famous manifesto,

published in all his papers, 'The Socialists leave the National socialist Party'. Hitler expelled Otto Strasser and his supporters throughout the country. One last unsubdued stronghold remained: the Kampfverlag itself. Gregor Strasser capitulated and sold his one third share to Hitler. At last the other partner, Hans Hinkel, surrendered too (and was later rewarded with the post of Reich Commissioner for the Jewish Question; being captured by the Americans in 1945, he was handed over to the Soviet armies. In 1952 he reappeared in Western Germany and there applied to the courts for 'de-Nazification').

The Kampfverlag was Hitler's and he at once closed it. Otto Strasser's one third share (for which Hitler on the earlier occasion had offered him 80,000 marks) was lost, and he was left penniless.

'... To gain or lose it all.' It had been a good fight, well fought. No other leading German had fought Hitler, openly and inside his party, for a clear principle, to the last inch and pfennig. The fight, however, was not over, but only beginning. There was to be no return now to a desk in a ministry or a well paid post in industry, for Otto Strasser. He was thirty-two and was in the fight for the rest of his life. Three years before Hitler attained his goal, power, Otto Strasser set out to fight him alone. As yet, the outer world, insofar as it knew the name Hitler at all, knew it only as one with a vaguely troublesome ring. 'Some German politician, isn't he ...?'

Chapter Four

SOLIDARISM

The world was not long to be left in that daydream. 1930 ended the between-war years of illusion; after 1930, though the masses long remained oblivious, students of affairs could no longer doubt that powerful forces were preparing the enormity of another world war.^[11] There is a vibrant quickening in the overture in the tense moment before the curtain rises and reveals the beginning of the drama; such was the atmosphere in 1930.

In May Otto Strasser in the great two-day duologue had reduced Hitler to angry silence and threatening exit. In June Hitler completed the destruction of the Kampfverlag. On July 4th its newspapers appeared under Otto Strasser's direction for the last time, with the headline, 'The Socialists leave the National socialist Party'. In September an election revealed that the Hitlerists, until then an insignificant group, commanded six and a half million supporters and a hundred seats in the Reichstag. There was a sudden, uneasy stirring in the world. Even the masses, floating on the stream of indifference, felt the first faint pull of the yet distant vortex. They were quickly reassured, by their next day's politicians and newspapers: what if this Hitler had so many followers and seats, he could never gain a majority or come to power! When, three years later, he came to power, without a majority, they were again, and for six more years, reassured: what if this Hitler was all powerful in Germany, he was no doubt a peaceable and reasonable man! (From 1944 onwards they were similarly lulled: what if half of Christian Europe were abandoned to Asiatic barbarians, the 'free world' was still 'democratic' and Stalin might yet prove to be a reasonable and peaceable man! Perhaps a 'man to man' meeting with him would yet save the peace; and if the Red prophet would not come to Munich for it, one could always go to Moscow; indeed, one had already been there, and were the results not propitious?)

Before 1930 life had been hard enough for Otto Strasser; from 1914 to 1930, from his seventeenth to his thirty-third year, he had known a comfortable security only during the two years of his post at the Ministry of Food and his job in industry. After 1930 his life was to be as dangerous and desperate as that of a frontier outlaw, and as he always fought those who had usurped power, and their backers, he was by the law of might in fact an outcast. Thus his remaining story is one of strange adventure, more thrilling than most tales of any Deadeye Dick, secret service agent or underground patriot. He was a man fighting for an inheritance of which he had been robbed and before the tale of his exploits and escapes is told the motive which inspired so brave and lonely a struggle needs to be explained; otherwise the meaning of all the adventures would be lost.

His socialism derived from his father's teaching, from the experiences and environment of his boyhood in Wilhelmine Germany, and from the Christian national socialism first expounded by Masaryk (before Hitler was born) as a corrective to the anti-Christian and anti-national perversions of Karl Marx and his breed. Otto Strasser has kept to this strait and narrow path of Christian national socialism from his first thinking moments until today, because he believes it to be right. On that straight course he fought the Communists; entered the Socialist Party and fought the reactionaries; left the Socialist Party; entered and left Hitler's party. To have acted differently at any of those points would have been to betray his beliefs.

He first codified these beliefs in the Bamberg Programme which, if the Strassers had prevailed, would have given the '25 Points' of the little party suborned by Hitler practical application in the form of Christian national socialism. He further developed his creed, in great detail, during a long railway journey between Munich and Berlin about that time. When Hitler destroyed the Kampfverlag Otto Strasser published this political programme in a book, *The Structure of German*

Socialism (Wolfgang Lindner, Leipzig, 1930), and it became the political bible of the supporters who have remained constant to him through twenty years of exile. After the war, when he expected to return to Germany and gather them around him, he republished it in German in Buenos Aires, under the title *Deutschlands Erneuerung* (Trenkelbach, Buenos Aires, 1946). Until the present day the British and American occupation authorities and the Bonn Government supported by them have prevented the issue of this book in the 'free' half of Germany.

In this book of 1946 he reproduced his programme for (a German Socialism' almost unchanged, but for the name, which he altered to 'Solidarism'. The writer of the present book has not inquired his reason for the change, but could imagine one. If one's family name is, say, Plantagenet, and one finds that it is being assumed by a long series of convicted embezzlers, murderers, burglars and impostors, one may feel driven to change even so noble a cognomen. There is an issue involved, as between a genuine suit of armour and one tacked together by a theatrical costumier's tinsmith. Otto Strasser knew what he meant by Christian national socialism, but how was his meaning to be made plain to the masses in this age of name-borrowing when such as Marx, Trotsky, Stalin, Blum, Hitler, Laski, Mussolini and all their breed have called themselves 'Socialists'?

Otto Strasser's dilemma is clear. In one of his books he called himself a conservative revolutionary, and perhaps that makes clearer what he truly is. He is in the line of the barons of Runnymede and the American colonists, whose spiritual descendants are in a kind of spiritual exile today, equally in England and in the American Republic. Such men, who fight against tyranny from above whenever and in whatever form it appears, are the true and continuing revolutionaries of all the generations, the revolutionaries of construction. The 'revolutionaries' of Moscow in 1917 and of Berlin in 1933 are the counter-revolutionaries, the revolutionaries of destruction.

This difference of motive, constructive motive and destructive motive, is the difference between Otto Strasser's 'German Socialism', or 'Solidarism', and the bogus socialisms of Moscow, Marx and Hitler. He wanted to preserve Germany; Communism and Hitlerism alike aimed at its destruction (this is plain, in the second case, from Hitler's statements, made in an expansive moment, to Hermann Rauschning, and is implicit in his deeds).

Solidarism stands today as in 1930, as Otto Strasser's programme for the salvation of Germany. Its origins are important to understand. The programmes of Marxist and Fabian Socialism were hatched out in cellars in Moscow, café-tables in Berlin and committee-rooms in Bloomsbury by Eurasian conspirators and Western professors and journalists; they had no roots in the life and needs of peoples; they were governed by the diseased ambition merely to destroy existing things and were the products of sedentary, unfulfilled men with malevolence towards mankind in their hearts and disappointment in their heads. Otto Strasser's Solidarism is a living thing rooted deep in the history and needs of the Christian West, and then moulded by the hard experience of his life. The difference between the two is in fact that between death and life.

The goal towards which he looked in drafting his programme was the gradual upraising of the unpropertied masses towards the level of those more fortunate, not the violent depression of those now propertied towards penury; the abolition of 'the proletariat' (which the dictionary describes as 'the lowest class of the community') and not its pretended elevation. His aim was to give that lowest class the status of independence, of co-ownership and of co-responsibility. An aim is one thing; a detailed plan for achieving it is another, and this is what he supplied.

He began his manifesto, which was a public challenge to Hitler, with a brief philosophical study of the roots of his thought. He began by protesting vigorously against 'the idolatry of race'; this was in 1930, when Hitler began his rapid rise to power on the steed of Nordic racial superiority. Strasser held that 'the family of Europe' was a mixture of four or five races, out of which intermingling,

topography, climate and historic events had made the various 'nations', the last of these to take shape being the Germans. He rightly excluded Russia from this grouping.

In the history of Europe, which he thus pictured as a community of interrelated nations, he perceived a rhythm of epochs recurring about every hundred or hundred and fifty years, from the Reformation of around 1500 to the English Revolution of 1640-59 and the French Revolution of 1789-1799. In each of these revolutions he saw the recurrent conflict between two primitive instincts, those of self-preservation (which he identified with 'Liberalism', or each man for himself) and of the preservation of the species ('Conservatism', or each man for the community). The pendulum of history, he wrote, swung continuously to and fro between these ideas of self and species. The English Revolution had brought the victory of the conservative idea and the French Revolution that of the liberal idea. The epoch of liberalism, he wrote in 1930, was inevitably approaching its end and bringing with it that of Marxist Socialism, which had borrowed so much from liberalism (for instance, internationalism, class-warfare and materialism) that it was bound to founder with it.

Otto Strasser, in 1930, saw a new epoch of the second idea approaching. Since 1914, he wrote, the pendulum of history had been swinging over towards a new era of conservatism and its associated ideas, true socialism, patriotism and national idealism, and the violent eruption of those ideas in Germany would be the German Revolution. It was for this future that he planned. He identified 'capitalism', as we have known it, with the liberal era; and Socialism, as it has been perverted and practised in our time, with State capitalism. Its governing principle, in either form, was 'the sanctity of property' (whether held privately or by the State) and the condition of its existence was that the masses of the people should have no property. Any system under which the community was divided into exploiters and exploited, and the overwhelming majority of the people denied the right of property, was in its nature immoral.

Thus Otto Strasser, contemplating a 'German Socialism' in a 'Fourth Reich', sought a way that would preclude State-capitalism and unbridled private capitalism alike. The cornerstone of *his* German socialism was the abolition of 'the right of private property'. This basic tenet appeared to be identical with the primary demand of Marxist Socialism, but was in fact entirely different in the application which he proposed; this was where the historic origins of his Christian national socialism came in.

His solution was derived from the study of German history, the German character and German needs. The basis of his thought was that what was needed was to make more people well-to-do, not fewer people rich. He desired in fact to give every German 'the right of private property', because he held that this feeling of ownership alone gave the independence of thought, sense of responsibility and creative energy which allow a man to feel himself a man. Thus the means (abolition of the dogma) was to the end of establishing the reality.

He defined his 'German Socialism' in relation to property thus: 'No German shall in future *own* as private property land and estate, mineral resources, or the means of production; every German shall come to *possession* of land and estate mineral resources, and the means of production.' He attached cardinal importance to this distinction between 'ownership', a conception without limits, and 'possession', which signifies an occupancy subject to limits. 'To own a thing', he wrote, 'means to be able to do anything you like with it; to sell, damage, or destroy it. To possess it means to administer it, to have its use and enjoyment, to hold it in usufruct on behalf of another, namely, the Owner. The Owner will in future be exclusively the community, the Nation. But the Nation, through its outward form, the State, will not itself operate or manage; it will delegate operation and management to individuals or groups in *Erblehen* (hereditary fief).'

This was Otto Strasser's solution to the great dilemma, his answer to the age old problem of the propertied and the unpropertied, the insiders and the outsiders. The abolition of the legal conception of 'the sanctity of private property' and the substitution, in things vital for the nation, of this system of the hereditary fief, was the foundation stone of his 'Structure of German Socialism', then, and is that of his 'Solidarism' today. It alone, he said, enabled that marriage of private profit and general welfare which the common weal demanded. The division of all possessions among the community of the nation whether in individual or in collective holding, was necessary to end the evils to which capitalism had led. The system of the hereditary fief, which for centuries was the legal form of the German economic system, alone offered the practical means.

He was in 1930 (and in 1953 has much greater cause to be) 'passionately opposed to the operation of concerns by the State or its officials, because this would be the opposite of true socialism. It would neither raise the masses from their proletarian state nor unloose their creative energy, or give them a sense of responsibility. On the contrary it would aggravate all these existent evils, and the workers would have even less rights in relation to their employer (the State) than to the private capitalist. I know all too well the annihilating effect of officialdom on the individual. I know so well the longing for independence of the German peasant and the middle-class German, and I should regard any reform as disastrous which condemned this striving for independence to be crushed under the streamroller of officialdom. I see the real torment of a proletarian existence in this deficient, or eternally repressed, urge for independence, and hold the most important task to be the creation of a feeling of independence for the worker, not the worsening of the lot of the peasant and middle-class man.'

Otto Strasser's emphatic warmth in this question also derives directly from the experience of his life. In his Bavarian boyhood he felt the oppressive constraint of Wilhelmine bureaucracy. He met the same spirit again in those parade-ground tyrants of 1914 whom he still ardently detests, and again in Hitler's SS-men. Then he encountered it repeatedly in other countries when he was trying to save his life from his pursuers. 'Officialdom', to Otto Strasser, is a synonym for stupidity, callousness, brutality and misery. For him the triumph of the totalitarian State, super-State or World State would be the triumph, not of the submerged masses, but of the very type of man he particularly loathes.

Thus the main proposals of Solidarism were: the cancellation of the dogma of private property; the transfer to the State, as representative of the body of the nation, of the title of owner of land and estate, mineral resources and the means of production; the re-conferment, upon the previous owners, of the hereditary usufruct of their possessions, which they would hold and administer in fee from the State. The usufructuaries, though their occupancy would be hereditary, would be debarred from selling, mortgaging or otherwise alienating their possessions. In this manner joint *ownership* by the community would be safeguarded and the nation's vital assets secured against the operations of international finance and stock-market manipulation.

Having stated the governing proposals, Otto Strasser went on to give a blueprint for their practical application in the three main fields of German life: agriculture and the land; industry; trade and commerce.

All land and estate, he wrote, would pass into the titular *ownership* of the community, represented by the State, and he re-conferred, in hereditary fief, on men able to work it, at the proposal of local Peasants' Councils. The governing principle of the redistribution would be that no man should have more land than he could himself farm or less than was essential for the maintenance of himself and his family, and a reasonable surplus. The peasant, smallholder or farmer would thus hold his land in fee from the State and bequeath it to a son at his death, and would pay to the State one single due; a tithe, payable in cash or kind. This would in effect mean that the great bulk of German peasants

would remain in occupation of their farms but would for the first time become freemen, because the abolition of the legal status of 'private ownership' and the substitution for it of that of 'hereditary fief' held from the State would necessarily carry with them the cancellation of mortgages. This liberation of German agriculture from debt, and the preclusion from incurring new debt, was similarly a major piece in the structure of Strasser's 'German Socialism'. To safeguard the creditors, he proposed that existing mortgages should be exchanged for non-interest-bearing bonds, paying three per cent amortization annually, these to be financed from the proceeds of the tithe payments. Large landowners would be left in possession of a sufficiently large piece of land and would receive compensation for what they forfeited from the mortgage-elimination fund.

This was, in 1930, a dynamite-laden proposal. The root evil of German agriculture (and of German politics) was the maldistribution of land. Of the 5,096,533 agricultural holdings counted in Germany at the 1925 census only 18,668 were 'great estates' (450 acres or more), but these 18,668 large landowners between them held nearly a fifth of all German agricultural land. They did not or could not use it efficiently, were often in debt, and through their political power (they were mostly entrenched in East Elbia) were often able to ward off insolvency by prompting subsidies from public funds. Two of the Chancellors who sought to keep Hitler from power, Dr. Bruening and General Schleicher, sought to gain public support by proposing such land reforms, and both appear to have been overthrown at the instance of those indignant and ill-fated squires, who were apparently responsible, at the last, for setting their own destroyer on his perch in Berlin. If 'Strasserism' had prevailed over Hitlerism, this major problem of Germany would have been solved without war.

The next problem of practical application was industry. That, Otto Strasser wrote, was a very different question, requiring quite another solution. Agricultural undertakings rested mainly on the labour of one man and his kin, industrial enterprises on the collaboration of the owner and his workers. Agriculture depended on the land and climatic conditions; industry on the supply of raw materials and their distribution. Germany produced some and imported the rest of these raw materials. In order efficiently to exploit the native ones, without plundering them, and adequately to obtain the imported ones, Otto Strasser proposed an economic and trade policy of the greatest possible self-sufficiency in Germany and a foreign trade monopoly, for the supervision of exports and imports within reasonable limits.

In industry, he said, a trinity of interests existed: those of the owner, the workers, and the community. None of them had the right to absolute authority, not the owner, as in private capitalism, or the State, as in Communism and Fascism. He proposed that the nation, as represented by the State, should become the *owner* of industrial undertakings which, like agricultural land, would be held in hereditary fee from it. The undertaking would be re-conferred on the owner as usufructuary, and in place of the multiple taxes of today a single payment, assessed from time to time, would be demanded from it, which would go to cover the expenditures of the State and take precedence over profits and reserves.

A common-ownership order, equally shared between State, owner and workers, would be introduced. The head of the undertaking would continue to depend on his energy and ingenuity for a greater or smaller income. He, his workers and the community would hold equal shares in the management, capital and profits of the undertaking. From their third-share the workers would derive a payment, of necessity not very large, additional to their wages; they would gain the feeling of co-ownership and co-responsibility. Otto Strasser wrote that this system would breed a class of responsible industrial leaders, distinct from the capitalist privateer, and on the other hand the mass of unparticipated wage-earners would acquire the status of co-responsibility for the prosperity of the undertaking.

Otto Strasser explained in the following terms the differences between his Solidarism, as it would affect industry, and capitalism and socialism in the contemporary understanding of these words:

'It differs from capitalism in that the private *ownership* of the means of production would be abolished, and these could be neither bought nor sold, but only conferred by and acquired from the State in fee, so that great possessions in money or goods, though possible and desirable, could nevertheless not lead to the evils which distinguish capitalism unbridled. The workers and the State would be equal partners with the heads of a concern, who would thus be not unrestricted 'capitalists', but usufructuaries. The obligation to employ sound economic methods and to consider the overriding interests of the entire community would be safeguarded by the two-thirds majority of the State and the workers in relation to the heads of the concern. It differs equally from Marxist Socialism in that the personal initiative of the leaders of industry would be encouraged and be limited only by the needs of the community as a whole. Within the limits of the State's economic policy the competition of individual concerns would remain. The identification of 'the State' with industry, or of State officials with the leadership of industry, would be avoided, and so would the exposure of the workers to arbitrary exploitation by 'the State'.

The simplest method of accomplishing this change, Strasser added, would be 'to transform all industrial concerns and great undertakings employing more than a certain number of hands into joint-stock companies; the tripartitioning of the property, its management and its profits would then be possible without further difficulty. But these shares would be of a new kind. They would be shares inscribed in the National Register of Property, exclusively in the name of the holder; they would be neither saleable nor mortgageable, in accordance with their status as property held in fee from the State ... The objection most frequently raised to these proposals for industry is that under such a system new capitalists would arise. But this objection overlooks the decisive difference between the unrestricted private capitalist and the proposed works-leader, or usufructuary. Above all, it overlooks the fact that private capitalism, which means economic and financial power based on the unrestricted ownership of monopoly goods, could not reappear, for not even the richest man could buy shares in an undertaking, as these would only be granted in fee from the State. He could buy unlimited quantities of those goods which can be produced in unlimited quantities, say, toothpaste; but he could not buy those things which only exist in limited quantities, that is, land and estate, mineral resources, and the means of production.'

After agriculture and industry, Otto Strasser approached his third main problem, that of the small man, the master craftsman and tradesman. Under this heading come 'the independent small concerns employing relatively few hands (clerks, shop-assistants, workmen, apprentices), who have fair prospect of becoming masters themselves. Such small undertakings differ fundamentally from the great concerns in that their prosperity, and therewith the welfare of each individual worker, depends primarily on the personality of the master'. In these cases Otto Strasser's proposal was 'to leave management entirely in the hands of the master, but such a degree of personal freedom would only be possible subject to obligations which safeguard the interests of the whole community'. To that end, he proposed the revival, in a form suitable to the times, of a well-proven German institution; the Guilds.

Under Otto Strasser's Solidarism, then, handicraftsmen, manual workers, tradesmen and professional men would be organized in Guilds, which would receive from the State certain rights and in return undertake the collection from their members of the sum assessed as the Guild's contribution to the State's expenditures. The Guilds would bestow the master's title and the right to practise a calling, craft or profession. They would also decide how many apprentices might be employed, and the like.

'By these means it would be made impossible for any individual ruthlessly to promote his own especial interests or to misuse his economic freedom. The workers in small concerns would not, like those in the big ones, have a share in ownership, profit and operation, but as employees and apprentices they would have the certainty that, if they passed the necessary standards, they could themselves become masters. The supply of candidates and their direction through the schools and universities towards the callings where they were most needed would need to be regulated in accordance with demand and with the interests of the community. However, such limitation of the freedom of choice as this might entail would be compensated by the fact that assured existences would be available for those who sought them, and that this intervention would not come from the State but be regulated by these self-governing bodies themselves, which would be subject to a minimum of supervision by the State.' (The solution suggested by Otto Strasser in this field already exists, or survives, in the profession of the apothecaries. In Germany (and in some other countries) only the State can confer the right to open an apothecary's business, and these cannot be bought, sold, bequeathed or inherited; on the death of a holder the title reverts to the State for bestowment on the next approved candidate.)

Finally, the legal principle of unrestricted private ownership would be preserved intact in respect of house property, under Solidarism, save that any newly-built property would arise on ground acquired, not freehold, but held, as in the other cases, in fee from the State.

Such is the rearrangement of German day-to-day life which Otto Strasser proposed in 1930 and still proposes. The plan throws up another question: what of the house in which that life was to be lived? He knew, in 1930, that the Germany tacked together by the victors at Versailles, the Weimar Republic, would not survive. When Hitler came to power in 1933 he was equally sure that the Hitlerist Reich would not endure. He had already, in the book of 1930, made his proposals for the structure of the Fourth Reich, the house which Solidarism would inhabit, and he has not changed those proposals today, either.

His governing principle in this matter is at all costs to prevent the rise of officialdom, of a swollen paper-bred bureaucracy, self-multiplying and self-perpetuating; this is almost an obsession with him. Arising from that, he proposed the fullest possible degree of self-government in every branch of German life. Farmers, master-bootmakers and master-butchers, not officials, should decide how and when to milk cows, make boots and slaughter cattle. Doctors, not officials, should decide what reforms are needed in the medical profession. Saxons, not Prussian officials, should decide Saxon affairs. (At the time when this was published the Bohemian or Austrian Hitler was setting up to dictate all conduct in all walks of life, so that these remarks were pointed.) Next, he proposed to destroy the last trace of centralized rule in Germany and make a federation of German Cantons. This again was a direct challenge to Hitler, whose *Grossdeutschland*, or Greater Germany, was nothing but Great Prussia all over again. In 1930 Otto Strasser made the destruction of this ill-omened Prussian hegemony the cornerstone of his proposals for the rebuilding of the Reich.

'I know,' he wrote, 'that every proposal for the dissolution of the Prussian State is attacked as anti-patriotic' (in Germany) 'because the creative energy of the Prussian spirit would, they say, disappear. I know too well the great part that Prussia and the Prussian spirit have played in the history of Germany to yield to any anti-Prussian feeling, deriving possibly from my Bavarian origins. But the study of the German character and German history shows that this Prussian solution for Germany's problems was but an emergency-outlet ... In the Liberal era the dominance of Prussia alone could form a firm basis for the Reich. But today the German people are becoming a nation, and this demands the liquidation of the exclusive, Prussian, spirit and all its manifestations ... The real German will then have that European conscience the lack of which is so sinister in the Prussian product.'^[12]

Those were his proposals, then: destroy the Prussian hegemony, federalize the Reich, banish the tyrant State.

He elaborated in detail. The German Union of the future must not be centrally governed from one place (the titular capital he would transfer from Berlin to some such centre of Western and Christian history and tradition as Regensburg or Goslar). It would need to be a uniform Reich but federally constructed, in *Landschaften* (Cantons) formed by breaking up the arbitrarily-drawn States and tracing new boundaries which would closely follow religious, traditional, historical and *stammesmaessigen* (approximately, tribal) considerations.

Thus Otto Strasser would destroy Prussia and the other dynastically-derived States and Statelets, rub out the memories of princely feuds and marriages, and draw the map of Germany again, in Cantons. Of Prussia, nothing would remain but the historic Mark of Brandenburg in its new form, the *Landschaft* or Canton of Brandenburg, with the Brandenburgers in it. Bavaria would be tripartitioned to yield the three Cantons of the Bavarians, Swabians and Franks. Hanover, the Rhineland and Hessen would survive, as Cantons. Thuringia would become bigger through the incorporation of Erfurt, and Saxony through the absorption of Magdeburg. Swabia would swallow up Wuerttemberg, Baden and the present Bavarian province of Swabia. In this way the Fourth Reich would emerge as a Federation of twelve or fifteen equiponderant Cantons and be rid of the unbalance caused by Prussia, its spirit and its domination.

So much for the Fourth Reich, inhabited by Solidarism, which Otto Strasser planned. How would it be ruled?

The principle that the most competent Germans should rise to the leadership of the State, he wrote, excluded a hereditary monarchy. Human experience did not suggest, and human probability denied, that qualities could be bequeathed in such measure that the son of a leader would qualify automatically to become the next leader of the people. The system of hereditary rulers was also opposed to the principle that each member of the nation should have the same start in life (or that, as the American colonists said, 'all men are *created* equal'). A system by which a man was assured the highest office in the State by reason of his birth was contrary to 'German Socialism' (or 'Solidarism'). The choice remained between an elected monarchy or a republic. Both had this much in common, that the head of the State was elected, in one case for life, in the other usually for a limited period.

But such limited periods 'carry with them the danger that the candidate, in order to secure re-election, will make concessions to the electorate, and this in turn endangers the principle of impartiality in his office.^[13] It may lead to corruption, to cheap vote-catching methods. These dangers disappear if the head of the State be elected for life. This would give him independence of the electorate and enable him to make farsighted plans, without taking account of the fickleness of public favour'.

So Otto Strasser set at the head of the Solidarist Fourth Reich which he was planning a *Reichspraesident* elected for life. Again he looked to history; Germany for centuries knew this form of elected rulers; the name (Elector, Emperor or President) is a thing of indifference, he says.

The Reich President would have a Reich Parliament and a Reich Federal Council; each Canton would similarly have a Cantonal President and a Cantonal Parliament; the Reich Federal Council would be composed of the representatives of the Cantons; the Federal Council would elect the Reich President, as the Cardinals the Pope. All parliaments would be elected; not by political parties, however, but by the five corporative groups (those of the peasants, the workers, the employees and officials, the employers and tradesmen, and the professions). The workers could

only elect a worker, the professional men only one of their own kind, and so on. Thus 'the workers' and 'the peasants' could not be 'represented' in parliament, as they are in most countries today, by lawyers, university professors, journalists and the like conglomeration. No one group would be allowed more than forty-nine per cent of seats in any parliament, but every group would have to be represented; this was intended to avoid little local dictatorships of farmers in a predominantly rural district or of workers in an industrial area. The officials in each Canton would be natives of that Canton.

This, in brief summary, is the outline of Otto Strasser's 'German Socialism' of 1930 and 'Solidarism' of today. It shows plainly the issues on which he broke with the German Socialist Party, fought with Hitler for the soul of the National Socialist Party, and then, when that fight went against him, broke away to continue the fight against Hitler and the National Socialist Party.

A Fourth Reich, presided over by an Elector, composed of historic Cantons in skilful equipoise, from which the shadow of Prussia has been cleared; a German Federation at the heart of Europe, possibly at the heart of a European Federation; a country where men may possess land and property but not monopolize it; where simple acquisitiveness is held within the bounds of the common weal but diligence and ingenuity may obtain their reward!

Such was his vision of 1930. Such was the Germany he would have built; it may be compared with the one Hitler set up, only to destroy. Was it all a house of dreams, a castle in the air? Not if the West survives, because then Germany will be rebuilt one day, and here is a plan at hand.

At present there is no Germany. That was something which very few people in the world could imagine in 1930 (though Otto Strasser foretold the danger of it in 1937) or even in 1944. Who could have foreseen that, while the British and American troops pressed on from Normandy, a Colonel Bernstein would agree with a Mr. Morgenthau, in Washington, that the measures proposed against Germany were not sufficiently severe, and that in the sequence an American President would lend himself to the bisection of Germany and set up the eastern barbarians in the heart of Europe?^[14] Otto Strasser's reflections of 1930 about the influences which may be brought to bear on presidents elected for a limited term were prescient indeed. He could not have guessed how prophetic were his words about the dangers of short-term presidencies, or how power groups would be able to prompt an American president to a mortal blow against the West.

That was the direst deed in all the history of the Christian West, this abandonment of its eastern marches and population to the barbarians. In consequence of it, all plans for the future of Germany are as tumbleweed for the present; they have no roots. Otto Strasser himself has told his supporters that the German problem at this moment can be reduced to one word: survival. Germany and the Germans have to survive, if they can, and only when that question is answered does the next one arise: what kind of Germany is it to be?

The writer of the present book will interject a forecast here. The Moscovites and Mongols will *not* stay in the middle of Europe, because that is impossible, and those who put them there must have known it. The Asiatics will either retire to their natural frontier (and if they do that without war it can only be by the dispensation of God) or they will advance to the western borders of Europe. In the second case, the question of Germany's future will be swallowed up in a much larger one: that of the survival of the remaining Christian West. In the first case, the future shape of Germany will become a matter of immediate importance, and Otto Strasser's plan with it.

He discharged it, in 1930, as his opening shot in his new war against Hitler, whom all the world was coddling. Otto Strasser had no such illusions. He knew now what manner of man aimed to be

the next warlord of Prussia and therewith of Germany. He formed his Black Front and for the next three years fought Hitler and the Storm Troopers all over Germany.

Chapter Five

THE ICEBERG THEORY

The battle continued, in Germany, from July 1930 until January 30th, 1933, the day when Hitler, the steeplejack, appeared at the pinnacle of power. After that, it was carried on from outside Germany until April 30th, 1945, the day when Hitler, by death or escape, vanished from the scene (after that, all unexpectedly, it had to be waged against new antagonists: the Western governments, which denied Hitler's foremost adversary the right to return to his country; in that form it continues until the present day).

On the day in 1930 when the Kampfverlag was torn from his grasp and the battle began, Otto Strasser had never held any office in Hitler's party, worn its shirt or badge, or accepted any proffered reward; he had refused alike the invitation to become the party's Press Chief, a deputy's seat and the offer of money. He had founded the Kampfverlag with his own money, that of his brother and of the third, renegade partner, and had lost everything at its destruction. The whole meaning and story of the Kampfverlag, as its publications show, was a fight against Hitler, so that the actual battle in fact began long before 1930; it began in 1926, when the Kampfverlag was founded. It was fought for the principles, which Otto Strasser thought were being betrayed by Hitler, of 'National freedom; social justice; European collaboration'; those, its original slogans, are Otto Strasser's political principles today.

The years 1930 to 1933 were in Germany the last ones of party politics in the old form. Seven major parties and many smaller ones contested against each other. Gregor Strasser, a doomed man, continued to fight for his beliefs inside the National Socialist Party and only failed by a hairbreadth to save its soul, and Germany. Otto Strasser at once declared open war on Hitler and for the waging of it formed his 'Black Front'.

He is a man of highly original thought in all matters whether of high politics or of daily life. In forming the Black Front he again applied an original idea, that of the 'iceberg theory', or mass of which only a small part is visible, the main body being submerged and hidden. It is a conception midway between that of the open political party, where all is seen (save for the power-groups who exercise supreme control) and that of underground political warfare, where all is unseen. The Black Front was in part visible, but its greater strength lay in its hidden bulk; its followers in great part remained within, or went into, nearly all other political organizations, and most particularly the Hitlerist party, the destruction of which was its reason of existence.

Language is a difficult thing and the simple translation of *Schwarze Front* into Black Front does not at all convey what *Schwarze Front* meant to Otto Strasser, his followers, the Hitlerists and Germans generally. The meaning was 'secret' or 'shadow' party. In England an opposition leader who believes himself likely to win an election usually selects the men whom he will appoint Ministers, after he has kissed hands at Buckingham Palace, and these form 'the shadow cabinet'. Thus the *Schwarze Front* was, and was by Germans understood to be, a vengeful shadow, tracking Hitler. The translation into 'Black Front' did not carry this significance to the mind of the world outside Germany, and sometimes led to curious confusions. (When Otto Strasser later, as a distinguished anti-Hitlerist exile entitled to respect, addressed a large meeting at Windsor, in Ontario, on the subject of 'The Black Front', he was somewhat nonplussed to see rows of black faces among the white ones; they belonged to negro workers from the automobile factories in Detroit who, having seen the bills, had crossed the Peace Bridge in large numbers in the expectation of hearing something stirring about colour questions.)

He saved from the wreckage of the Kampfverlag one weekly newspaper, which he began to publish, first as *Die Schwarze Front* and later as *Die Deutsche Revolution*. It continued to appear in Berlin until Hitler came to power (and thereafter in Prague, until Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia). The Black Front grew rapidly enough for two new weeklies to be founded, in Breslau and Munich. All these publications of the Black Front, like those of the Kampfverlag in the preceding years, survive today to show any seeker after truth how consistent were Otto Strasser's words and acts in his war against Hitler. The headlines of his manifestoes confirm it: 'The Socialists leave the National socialist Party' (1930); 'Social Revolution or Fascist War' (1933); 'Hitler means war' (1934); 'The Danger of the Partitioning of Germany' (1937); 'Hitler must die if Germany is to live' (1938); and so on. He was attacked by Hitler and Goebbels as 'a national Communist' (and in Canada after 1942 was to be driven almost to destitution when he refused to head Moscow's 'Free German' troupe!).

The Storm Troopers were set on him as he campaigned up and down Germany. He was beaten insensible in Bremen, nearly killed in Brandenburg, and rescued by the police, then still impartial, from Nazi mobs in Halle and Rostock. The progress of the Black Front was remarkable. The Berlin Storm Troops, under Captain Stennes, left the Hitlerist party and many joined Otto Strasser; the Danzig Storm Troops, under Bruno Fricke, followed suit. His open war against Hitler made a deep impression on the younger and more idealistic generation. Richard Schapke, who had a large following among the National Socialists of Silesia, came over to him, and so did many of the revolutionary peasants of Schleswig-Holstein, then led by Klaus Heim. The famous coterie of rising young men called the *Tatkreis*, whose foremost figures were Hans Zehrer and Ferdinand Fried (author of a celebrated book called *The End of Capitalism*), and the Young German Order of Lieutenant Artur Mahraun joined forces with him. These men and their movements represented what was best in Germany at that time. They all ardently desired the national liberation of Germany, but also a new social order, and their common fear was that Hitler would betray them and merely bring them to another period of militarist adventure instead of the reformed and cleansed Reich for which they longed.

Many of these men were to pay with their lives for their struggle to save Germany and the world from Hitler and his war; the fate of some of them will be recorded as this book proceeds. Before the end the casualty list amounted to many thousands. Otto Strasser himself, almost alone among the leading figures, escaped death, the concentration camp or prison. The story of one other survivor is fairly typical (save in the point of survival) of the martyrdom all suffered. Dr. Grantz, a small and indomitable man, had been a popular National Socialist leader, publicly extolled in emotional words by Hitler for his part in a free fight between Storm Troopers and Communists at Woehrden, when four Brownshirts were killed and thirty injured. Having seen through Hitler, he joined the Black Front and after the Reichstag fire in 1933 was thrown into a concentration camp from which he emerged alive, twelve years later, after Hitler's disappearance in 1945; then he at once resumed his work for Otto Strasser.

It was, in essence, a struggle for the Christian West, not only for Germany, that Otto Strasser fought in Germany during those years, and he appeared in scenes that are living pages from the story of this tormented century. Soon after he began his open war against Hitler came the famous trial of three young officers, Lieutenants Wendt, Scheringer and Ludin before the Supreme Court at Leipzig. This was the moment when the outer world received a first unheeded warning of what might impend in the heart of Europe: Hitler then declared that when he came to power 'heads would roll'. The three lieutenants were themselves most typical of the time. They were racked with despondent doubts about the future of their country and were groping to find a way to its salvation, and on that clouded path had become infected with the Hitlerist virus, so that they were charged with suborning their comrades. Hitler had given evidence, ostensibly on their behalf, but his words and demeanour had antagonised them. In their fortress imprisonment they asked Otto Strasser to

visit them and explain the whole political conflict. He went to them three times, and twice they confronted him with emissaries of the Communist Party, which was making a bid for the souls of such as these young officers by pretending (then as now) to desire 'the national liberation of the German people'.

In the dining-room of Gollnow fortress Otto Strasser fought the Communists for Wendt and Scheringer; Ludin was separately confined, in a South German prison. The first time Strasser had an easy task, for the Communist spokesman, Leow, commander of the Communist Storm Troops (or Redshirts) was a street-corner rabble-rouser, unable to convince or convert German officers (the present writer recalls this burly fellow who after Hitler's triumph fled to Moscow and there was 'liquidated'). The second Communist emissary was a very different man. Captain Beppo Roemer, a distinguished German officer who had fought with the Free Corps and followed Hitler in the 1923 Putsch at Munich, was a patriot and idealist. Caught in the eternal German quandary, he had decided that the better hope of 'national liberation' lay in 'co-operation with the East' and had gone over to the Communists, who made great play with his name. In the upshot Captain Roemer left Gollnow with the allegiance of Lieutenant Scheringer, who had been told that he need not join the Communist Party but would receive political and other support if he founded a 'patriotic-Bolshevist' group in loose affiliation with it and would publish a newspaper. Otto Strasser gained Wendt for the Black Front. The third lieutenant, Ludin, remained a Nazi.

The further careers of these three confused young men of the despondent nineteen-thirties were typical of the times. Scheringer broke with the Communists when he found that their ardour for 'the national liberation of the German people' was a tactical, and reversible, slogan; today report says that he survives in West Germany and in that case he is again faced with the old dilemma. Wendt, who openly joined the Black Front on his release, was arrested when Hitler came to power and has never been heard of since. Ludin, who was given high office in the Hitlerist Party, was taken prisoner by the Americans at the war's end, handed over to the Czechs and by them publicly hanged.

Otto Strasser went his way, speaking, writing, organizing, fighting. He introduced the platform-debate type of meeting, and challenged Hitler and Goebbels by public placard to confront him at any time or place they chose. He had many stormy platform-battles with the leading spokesmen of other parties, particularly the Communists, Willi Muenzenberg and Kaspar (Strasser was again to meet the first of these two adversaries, Muenzenberg, in a Paris concentration camp, where the French authorities put them both at the approach of the Germans in 1940; both escaped but Muenzenberg was by some hand murdered; Strasser broke through the net; Kaspar, like Leow, was later killed in Moscow). The Nazis, for their part, refused every challenge and never would appear on a platform in public debate with Otto Strasser or his Black Front.

All these were the visible activities, the part of the iceberg which showed above the surface: the Black Front, its newspapers, its meetings, its battles with the Storm Troops. The greater part was the secret organization. Everywhere, and especially in Hitler's party, the Black Front had its men. It was this secret organization, beneath the surface, which enabled Otto Strasser through the years to know so much of what went on inside the Nazi Party, and to make precise, public forecasts of its intentions at a time when the outer world was still persuading itself that Hitler could be guided or tamed. It enabled him, also, to make good his many escapes and later to continue his battle from one foreign country after another; his followers helped constantly with shelter, information, false papers, money and in every way they could.

In 1932 it was still far from certain that any of that would even be necessary. The battle then was not yet lost or won. The prospects of success seemed good for Otto Strasser and his supporters. The Black Front was gaining ground fast; the Hitler Party was going downhill. In November 1932 it lost

two million votes; Goebbels in his diary wrote that the financial position was 'hopeless' and that Hitler had threatened to commit suicide. Gregor Strasser, still inside the party but still fighting for the ideals of Christian national socialism, had good reason to think that he might yet save it and Germany. He had heard from the ageing President von Hindenburg's own lips that the Old Gentleman 'would never make the Bohemian Corporal Chancellor'. The country, worn out with political turmoil, street-fighting, repeated elections that never produced any clear result, economic troubles, and the general condition of permanent-crisis and permanent-emergency, seemed ready to be cured at last.

It was one of those decisive moments, when the future of many nations and millions of human beings hangs in the balance. There was a choice of courses, and the full consequences of the choice which was made cannot even today be approximately assessed; the ruination of the last twenty years is only part, and perhaps only the beginning of them.

One way led to hope. It was that of a coalition between the great masses of National Socialists, disillusioned with Hitler, who would follow Gregor Strasser, reinforced by the followers of his brother Otto, and the great masses of trade-unionist workers, who were equally disillusioned with the German Socialist Party; the whole to have the benevolent backing of the determinant force in the unhappy country, the Reichswehr.

That was the solution to Germany's ills which seemed to be at hand in November 1932. It alone could produce a parliamentary government with a broad basis in the country; Gregor Strasser's name was a guarantee for moderation (had he not expelled Julius Streicher from the Party, and was not his brother Hitler's chief adversary?); Leipart, the moderate trade union leader (a German Ernest Bevin), was ready for it; the Chancellor, General Schleicher, had intimated that the army would show the necessary benevolence by publicly proclaiming himself 'a social general'. Above all, the Old Gentleman had given the Bohemian Corporal a parade-ground dressing-down, raised his crutched stick as if in menace, and sent him away, tail-between-legs.

The present writer well recalls those dank November days of 1932 in Berlin; who that lived through them could forget them! They seemed full of promise. The satanic spirit that was abroad in the land would yet be laid! Gregor Strasser had been twice received by Hindenburg. How could the venerable President even think of entrusting the Chancellorship to a man who surrounded himself with such notorious characters as, for instance, Roehm (long since back from Bolivia). Why, Hindenburg had once disparaged even Goethe as a man of immoral habits and on being reminded, 'But, after all, he wrote *Faust*', had rejoined, 'Yes, that is his only excuse'. Besides, he had told Gregor Strasser that he would never do it.

Then followed those days and nights of intrigue which transformed the scene. Hindenburg had much earlier dismissed Chancellor Bruening for trying to foreclose on the land of those insolvent East Elbian squires, hopelessly indebted to the State, and use it for smallholdings. 'I hear that you have Bolsheviks in your ministry,' the Old Gentleman said, reading from the brief prepared for him by other hands, and out went Bruening. Now General Schleicher, feeling for a broad basis in the land, and trying to prepare the ground for the coalition which was to rest on it, brought up this same proposal!

Behind the scenes there was a stirring, as of some mammoth in a cave: the most powerful groups in Germany gathered themselves for the counterblow. Rather Hitler than this! Let the Bohemian Corporal become Chancellor; they had tanned worse than he. The industrialists in the west had invested too much money in Hitler, and the East Elbian squires were too much alarmed for their acres, for either of them to be ready now to acknowledge the Christian national socialist, Gregor Strasser, as Chancellor, the 'social general' Schleicher as Vice-Chancellor, and the labour leader

Leipart as Labour Minister. Gregor Strasser, going to Hitler to tell him that the President refused to make him Chancellor, but might be ready to bestow that office, or the Vice-Chancellorship, on Gregor Strasser, was brusquely told that Hitler had different information from another source. General Schleicher, being informed of this, set police agents to watch his fallen and envious predecessor von Papen, who was photographed leaving the house of the Cologne banker, Schroeder, after a talk with Hitler; at this meeting Papen had agreed to recommend that his avowed 'comrade', von Hindenburg, should make Hitler Chancellor on the understanding that he would remain the political ward of a majority of non-Nazi elder statesmen, none of whom he might dismiss, in the cabinet which he was to form. On this condition the banker Schroeder renewed the empty Hitlerist treasury and Goebbels's diary began again to take a more optimistic note.

It was the end, save for one more ingenious ruse; the last little touch which the tottering edifice needed to make it fall. The Hindenburgs, father and son, belonged to those East Elbian squires who were rallying in defence of their acres; they had adroitly achieved that by presenting the Hindenburgs with a large property. Now an agent of von Papen brought to the Presidential palace in the Wilhelmstrasse the story that General von Schleicher intended to march on Berlin with the troops of the Potsdam garrison. The Old Gentleman with trembling fingers signed the deed appointing Hitler Chancellor.

The bankers, the industrialists and the landowners, like Dr. Guertner and the Reichswehr earlier, intervened to save Hitler. They were all ranged at this moment against the men who, by saving Germany, would have saved them, their banks, their factories and their land. The Strassers were fighting overwhelming odds. Gregor Strasser was from that moment a broken man, who saw that all he had fought for was to be destroyed and felt, if he did not clearly realize, that he was doomed. He never appeared on the political scene again.

Otto Strasser went on fighting, during those last days of the climacteric, in November and December of 1932 and January of 1933. Towards the end of January he dined in a restaurant Unter den Linden with one of those peripatetic travellers who supply the masses of the world with their 'Inside Information'. Unless they are exceptionally discerning, these diligent inquirers cannot be better informed than their informants, and Madame Genevieve Tabouis, a familiar figure of the political periphery in those days, probably had a happy sense of having penetrated to the innermost kernel of Inside Information that day. She had just come from General Schleicher, she said, who had extended his clenched fist, in the manner of a man crushing something, and said, 'I've got Hitler like that!' Otto Strasser replied, 'Well, if Herr Schleicher really has got Hitler like that he'd better hurry up and crush him, or it will be too late'.

A day or two later the deed had been done. Hitler was Chancellor and deep into the night of January 30th, 1933, the bands and the torchbearing Storm Troopers tramp-tramp-tramped through the Wilhelmstrasse, huzzaing as they passed a closed window behind which an Old Gentleman stood nodding at them and then an open, floodlit one from which Hitler, leaning forward, looked down on his triumph.

The world may have forgotten that the terror did not begin immediately. There was a pause, a kind of false spring, which lasted exactly a month, until the night when the Reichstag burned. During that month life went on without violent alteration; hope and illusion enjoyed a month's extension of lease, and the Hitlerists, as Goebbels's diary later revealed, prepared their master stroke. Germans could not imagine what was to happen: that the methods of the barbarians in Moscow would be imported to Berlin. The outer world waited to see Hitler settle down comfortably as the political ward-in-chancery of the majority of non-Nazi ministers in his government.

One significant incident disturbed this hush before the storm. Hitler did not wait for the Reichstag fire to strike at his chief enemy. Even the Communists as yet were left unscathed! But on February 4th, four days after Germany fell into his clutch, Hitler declared that Otto Strasser's Black Front was 'national Communist' and proscribed its newspapers throughout the Reich. (It may be recorded at this point, for the reader's information, that Otto Strasser's Black Front was the *only German* political organization which did not support Hitler's dictatorship. All the German parties save the Socialists (the alien Communist party was excluded from the vote) voted for the Enabling Bill on which Hitler founded his dictatorship after the Reichstag fire.

Otto Strasser still did not leave Berlin, although he did not sleep at home and took care to leave no compromising papers in his dwelling. He even held a last public meeting during this period (an astonishing exploit, seen in retrospect) in North Berlin. It was an enthusiastic one, and his followers successfully dealt with the Storm Troopers who tried to break it up. For the rest, Strasser took all precautions. The documents and weapons of the Black Front were secreted. Plans were made for a second line of unknown regional leaders to spring into being, and into inter-communication, throughout the country if the known leaders were arrested. The Black Front headquarters office in the Wilhelmstrasse, not far from Hitler's Chancery, remained open, but only a telephonist and a couple of Black Front guards were left in it.

The final coup was brewing, from the effects of which, Germany and the entire West still have not recovered. On February 1st, the day after the triumph, Goebbels had written in his diary: 'We set to work at once ... We discuss new measures for combating the Red terror. For the present we shall abstain from direct action' (hence the four weeks lull). 'First the Bolshevist attempt at a revolution must burst into flame. At the given moment we shall strike.'

On February 27th the Reichstag obligingly 'burst into flame'; this was immediately proclaimed to be 'the Bolshevist attempt at revolution'; and Hitler 'struck', first and foremost at the Black Front. On the morning of February 28th the headquarters office was raided and wrecked and the few unfortunate men in it were taken away. All known leaders and members throughout the country, some thousands in all, were rounded up and taken to concentration camps, where some remained until Hitler's downfall twelve years later.

Although he did not even then immediately leave Germany, that was the start of Otto Strasser's life of flight, pursuit, escape, unremitting battle, exile and persecution, which has continued for twenty years now, and, in 1953, has left him, one man against a hostile world, in a remote and lonely Nova Scotian village. He was thirty-five when he went underground to carry on his war against Hitler.

NOTE:

I have referred [on page 113] to Strasser's 'precise, public forecasts' of Hitler's intentions at a time when the outer world was still persuading itself that Hitler could be guided or tamed. A good example, though it came at a time when the world had at last almost given up these illusions, is his article which appeared on July 15th, 1939 in the *New Statesman*. This foretold with remarkable accuracy the moment when war would break out, the battle-plan of the German armies, the later occupation of Denmark, and the general course and duration of the war. D.R.

PART THREE

1933 – 1945

Chapter One

INTO EXILE

On that night of February 27th, 1933, the writer of this book saw the first flames leap out of the Reichstag as he drove through the Tiergarten, so that he turned aside and watched Goering and Hitler arrive at the scene and stamp around in simulated horror. Not far away, at the Anhalter Station, Otto Strasser also saw the glow in the sky. The glow and the news spread and from the first startled groups the murmur of fear and surmise passed on to hundreds, and thousands, and then millions of people, who all discussed the event and wondered what it might portend, until all Germany was abuzz with chatter. Very, very few of all those millions, if any at all, could guess that the night's work would alter the entire course of their lives, and of their sons' and grandsons' lives.

One man knew at once what it meant to him personally: Otto Strasser. He asked a taxi-driver what the glow in the sky was and received the answer, 'The Nazis have fired the Reichstag!' (one may wonder fleetingly what became of that astute man in the ensuing calamities). Strasser at once turned back from the train he had intended to catch, to take him to his suburban lodging, and went to an hotel. In this manner began the fantastic journey which continues today, twenty years later.

His survival, in the first six of those years, was the result of his preparatory work in secret organization. He had his unacknowledged followers in all political parties in Germany save the Communist one. They remained at their posts in ministries, party offices, Gestapo bureaus, police headquarters and military formations. Through them and their help Otto Strasser was often able, during the years when he carried on his war against Hitler from outside Germany, to see through doors and walls, to learn of secret orders and conversations, to peruse the contents of his own dossier at Gestapo headquarters, to read the report made by a man who was sent to kill him, and to identify other agents of the Gestapo who were ordered out to track him down. He received correspondence from senior commanders in Hitler's SS, who were ready to venture anything to overthrow their Fuehrer, and from officers in the Reichswehr. These invisible supporters inside Germany supplied him with funds to carry on the struggle in which he had sunk all his own money, sheltered his emissaries and helped him to obtain false passports. On his escape from Germany he travelled for long distances in a car driven by a senior Storm Troop commander, who wore the brown uniform. Had Otto Strasser and his followers received help, later, from those Western countries which were supposedly leagued together to destroy Hitler, Hitler would very much sooner have been destroyed. But in the course of events the rulers of these countries turned against Hitler's chief adversary as vindictively as if he had been Hitler's friend. His sin, apparently, was that he was also the enemy of Communism.

While the Black Front headquarters office in Berlin was being demolished and ransacked, on the morning of February 28th, 1933, Otto Strasser was already on his way to a little Thuringian holiday resort which had long before been chosen as the first secret headquarters in such an emergency. From there he issued the following order to his followers throughout the country: 'All members of the Black Front who are not known as such to the police are immediately to apply for membership of the Army, the National Socialist Party, the Storm Troops and the SS, and to continue their political activity inside those organizations.'

This order became known to the Gestapo and Black Front men in the concentration camps were tortured to make them betray their associates. Thanks to the precautionary selection of second-line leaders, who were not known to be his men, Otto Strasser was able from his Thuringian hideout, by means of simple telephone calls, to keep all the threads of his organization in his hand, to issue orders and receive reports; in those early days telephone calls were not tapped. Then, after a week,

he received an urgent code message from one of his men inside the Gestapo, informing him that a Black Front man had broken under torture and revealed the approximate location of Strasser's hiding-place. He at once left the Thuringian inn (the day before the Gestapo arrived to arrest him, as he subsequently learned) and went to his second secret headquarters, in a Bavarian village, and then, at the end of March, to a third, a lonely house in the Teutoburger Forest. There he held conference with his four chief helpers in West Germany; they met on the shores of Steinhuder Lake (while some thousands of Storm Troopers paraded nearby with bands and flags), agreed their plans, and dispersed.

In the middle of April Strasser returned to Bavaria; this was the occasion when he was driven by a uniformed Storm Troop commander and was shadowed, through town and countryside, day and night, by a Berlin police-tender full of SS-men. Strasser gave them the slip by a quick side-turn into a barn and got clean away, afterwards receiving from his men in Gestapo headquarters a copy of the report made by these pursuers in excuse of their failure to catch him: 'Otto Strasser is known as a violent man who habitually carries a machine-pistol; for that reason, my plan was to wait until darkness fell and then blind his oncoming car with the beam of the searchlight before proceeding to the arrest.' Before 'darkness fell' Strasser had eluded them by that sudden duck into the barn.

These were his last days in Germany. The odds were too great and capture was certain in the end, unless he escaped abroad. He held a last fantastic *Fuehrerbesprechung*, a conference of leaders, on the green slopes of the Bavarian Alps within sight of the Austrian frontier, and very nearly tested his luck too far that day. Armed SS frontier guards on patrol appeared over the shoulder of the mountain, questioned the four men suspiciously and then sat down a little way off to keep an eye on them. Friendly nature solved that dilemma for Otto Strasser and his captains; a sudden and torrential deluge came out of a sky cloudlessly blue a few moments before and the SS men, after standing their ground for a few moments, decided that their suspicions were not worth getting drowned for and made off.

That was the end, and even then Otto Strasser had been living on borrowed time for more than three months. On May 8th, 1933, the Nazi Minister of the Interior, Frick, was moved by some impulse of earlier comradeship to warn Gregor Strasser that Goering had learned of Otto's hideout, on the Chiemsee, and had dispatched a special commando of killers thither. Gregor at once took aeroplane to Munich and sent warning and a motor car to Otto, whom he entreated to escape at once. Thus the terrorists, when they reached the lonely farmhouse near the Chiemsee, found it empty of Otto Strasser. However, he had not crossed the frontier; some premonition would not let him leave without seeing his brother. He made his way in disguise into Munich on May 9th, 1933, and there met Gregor, for the last time, in the house of a mutual friend who was also a senior SS commander but loyal to his old friendship with the Strassers.

Gregor, says his brother, was spiritually broken. He had been betrayed by those to whom he had looked to save the country and the party. He had been within an inch of success, had almost become Chancellor of the broad national coalition which would have averted all that happened after January 30th, 1933. Now outcast, he knew the consuming spiritual loneliness of the good man in an evil time. He had been encouraged to feel secure in his Berlin chemical works, but knew that he was not so; the foreboding of his appalling end was heavy on him. He now saw the emptiness of the hope, which he had so long cherished, of reforming Hitler; life was a darkening desert for him. There had been a time, many years before, when Hitler's niece, one Gely Raubal, had come to a sudden and mysterious end, never yet explained; Hitler then had raved and stormed and foamed like a madman for days and nights on end and Gregor Strasser, never sleeping, had nursed and restored to reason the man in whom he then saw the hope of salvation for Germany.

His mood now was that of fatalistic resignation. The difference between these two brothers is most clearly shown by their words and bearing at that last meeting. 'Goering will shoot us both,' said Gregor sadly. 'Or we him, that is certain,' retorted Otto hotly. Otto entreated Gregor to accompany him into exile and resume the struggle from across the frontiers. Gregor was past that; he had not the strength to go on. His destiny was resignation and surrender; Otto's was resolve and resistance. They shook hands and Otto went. Gregor returned to Berlin. In June 1934 he told a friend, 'Don't come to my house any more. I am surrounded by murderers and spies. But see to it, you and all our friends, that you carry on our struggle for a German socialism. Hitler and his creatures never understood it; they never had any ideas or ideals, they only wanted power. The tragedy of these people is that they have no reverence and no humility.' On June 30th, 1934, Gregor Strasser was seized in his home, taken to Gestapo headquarters and there shot in a cell.

About twelve hundred people, as far as can be learned, were shot during that first of Hitler's massacres. In 1945 and later the occupying Powers, and the Western German governments set up under their protection, although they investigated and tried all manner of 'war crimes' and other questions, never deigned to reopen the matter of the 1934 bloodbath, or tried to bring the murderers to book. Many of the people killed were innocent even of any participation in politics, let alone of any crime; one man, for instance, was shot because his name chanced to be the same as that of another man, against whom some Hitlerist gunman had a grudge. The killing of Gregor Strasser, General and Frau Schleicher and many others was murder impure and simple, without any vestige of extenuating circumstance. Hitler's conquerors allowed it to remain unpunished. Some inquiry seems since to have been carried out by the West German Government, but with little result.

That very night of May 9th, 1933, Otto Strasser was driven to a place in the Bavarian Alps near the Austrian frontier. About midnight, led by a guide who knew every inch of the way, he began to climb, along narrow and precipitous paths made by the hooves of the chamois. As dawn broke on May 10th, 1933, he crossed the frontier and in the evening he reached Kufstein, whence he made his way to the new headquarters of his war against Hitler: Vienna.

He had lived to fight another day and knew that hard years lay before him, but had he been able to foresee all that would befall him in the next twenty years he might have paused and asked himself whether it was all worth while. Being the man he is, he would certainly have answered yes even to that question and have gone on.

Chapter Two

... FOR HIM THAT GOETH AWAY^[15]

Nevertheless, even a stouthearted man may be thankful that his morrows' disappointments and tribulations are hidden from him. Otto Strasser, coming down at dawn from the Bavarian Alps into Austria, breathed the sweet air of freedom and of safety and his spirit sang the song of triumph over pursuers foiled. It was May; it was good to be thirty-five in 1933, and free and full of fight. *Morgen ist auch ein Tag*, he thought as he looked back at Germany and wondered how soon he would return. It would not be long; it could not be. Germany would not much longer suffer the curse that had come upon it, or if Germany did, then the world would not. The end of Germany would be the end of Europe and of the Christian West. That was inconceivable, in 1933. He turned his face towards Vienna and tramped on, in good heart.

Exile is a hard thing. All through history upright and courageous leaders have been forced into exile because it was the only way to remain alive and at liberty and to carry on their fight. Their lesser known followers, who remain silent in the homeland, are spiritually exiled even there, because they cannot confess or uphold their beliefs, and for Christian patriots such an existence as that is but living death. Otto Strasser was one of the very first of the greatest multitude of exiles, in this sense, which the Christian West has seen since it began. Today millions of men, still living in their native lands, have been made exiles of the soul by the things which their governments have done. Five years after Otto Strasser crossed that first frontier great masses of Englishmen felt that they had been mockingly deprived of their birthright when a British Prime Minister helped Hitler to the territory of 'a small country far away'; and did so, not in the tone of humble powerlessness to prevent the spoliation, but in one of arrogant self-righteousness. Even that was a petty misdemeanour compared with the capital deed of seven years later, when an American President and a British Prime Minister abandoned half of Christian Europe to the Asiatics. Millions of Americans, too, then lost their spiritual patrimony and became exiles in their own country. The redemption or extinction of the Christian West depend on this great mass of unknown exiles in all its countries, who as yet are constrained to acquiesce in things which their souls abominate, and on their ability, or inability, to check the rakes' progress of their rulers. For such men, in all countries, Otto Strasser is not just a German exile; he is of themselves; his lot diminishes them too, because they are all equally involved in the fate of mankind in the Christian West.

In that May of 1933 he hoped to continue his fight against Hitler from Austria until it was won, for he could not foresee the future or imagine that Western politicians would take up the lackey's work of stretching the red carpet before Hitler's feet, where Dr. Guertner, the Reichswehr, the German bankers, industrialists and landowners had laid it down. After four months it was becoming clear, indeed, that Hitler was befouling Germany by deeds of a kind of which Europe had seemed to be for ever cleansed; they were recognizably Asiatic and were inspired by Soviet Communism. Even so, it still remained unimaginable that his Gestapo would kill and kidnap *beyond* the German frontiers. That was a criminal insolence undreamed of in Europe, before it happened; today, only twenty years later, a public kidnapping by the Communist Gestapo of some British, American or German citizen is so commonplace a thing that it does not greatly disturb the surface of the day's news. But in 1933 Otto Strasser was entitled to think himself safe in Vienna. He learned differently in less than two months, for Hitler struck at him almost immediately and as the summer waxed he was once more on the run.

Before leaving Germany he had made all preparations to continue his one-man war from Vienna. His followers there were ready to print the first Black Front newspaper outside Germany's borders; it was called *Der Schwarze Sender*, or *The Secret Sender*, and from the moment of Strasser's arrival

it began to be printed and smuggled across the frontier into Germany. In addition, small-type pamphlets on thin paper were prepared, which could at need be screwed into a tiny ball and swallowed, and these were sent over the mountains in large quantities, fifty thousand at a time. The content of these publications was always the same: that Hitler had betrayed Christian national socialism in return for monetary and other support from interested parties, that he was leading Germany headlong into war, and that this war would end disastrously. Strasser even then saw the mortal danger of that partitioning of Germany which was in truth to be the partitioning of Europe, and of the Christian West; he comprehended this greater significance of the coming event which cast its shadow over his country.

The present writer is able to testify to the hatred which the Nazis bore the Black Front. Arriving in Vienna two years later, he attended the trial of some Austrian Nazis on charges of dynamiting. The leader of these men, in defending himself, deviated into a long and violent attack on the Black Front and clearly showed that he and his companions were taught to regard Otto Strasser's organization as their foremost enemy.

That was in 1935. In 1933 Austria still was, or seemed to be, an independent and sovereign state, much troubled by the activities of Hitler's Austrian supporters but resolved to maintain its authority; the Western governments and the Italian dictator, Mussolini, professed to be equally determined, though for different reasons, to uphold its independence. Otto Strasser saw no reason to fear any hindrance in his work. He was in a citadel of anti-Hitlerism and was fighting Hitler. The sudden disillusionment came on July 4th, 1933.

He was living in Vienna as Herr Müller, his supporters in Germany having obtained for him a German passport in that name. In two months he had greatly intensified his campaign and the stream of anti-Hitlerist literature, pouring across the mountain passes, was seriously worrying Hitler, Goering and Goebbels and bringing down their wrath on the head of the Gestapo. At this same time the Austrian Nazis, on orders from the Reich, were exploding bombs and committing other acts of violence in various parts of Austria. On July 4th Otto Strasser returned to Vienna late from a precautionary visit to Prague, where he had surveyed the ground for yet another secret headquarters, should need arise. Finding that his key, for some reason, would not open the door of his dwelling, he wakened the janitor, who told him, 'Oh, Herr Müller, the police were here today and arrested your landlady; they have sealed off the apartment.'

Strasser was bewildered (was not this the Austria of Dollfuss, that fought for its life against Hitler?) but was at once on guard. After a moment's thought he decided to keep on the move that night, a decision to which he was helped by the fact that he had returned from Prague with exactly one Austrian *Schilling* in his pocket (during all these years the money problem was an enemy nearly as harassing as Hitler). The night was chilly and he had neither overcoat nor (as he remarked in telling of this adventure), the wherewithal to seek that warmth which the pleasures of the town might offer in such a dilemma. Thus he walked about all night and when the first cheap coffee houses opened he went into one to buy, for half of that solitary Schilling, a cup of coffee, with sugar and whipped cream, and a roll. It entitled him also to the morning newspapers, and the sleepy *Ober* brought him one. He opened it and received his first major shock since leaving Germany. It said that the Black Front was responsible for the bomb outrages, that the leaders of 'this criminal organization', seventeen men and two women, had been arrested during the night, but that *the* Leader, one Dr. Otto Strasser, had unfortunately escaped.

He was shaken and stupefied. Why should he, Hitler's arch-enemy, and his men try to destroy Austria? Its survival meant their survival; its life or death was their life or death. Everyone knew who was planting and throwing these bombs. For what conceivable reason could he and his Black Front have been saddled with the blame?

Otto Strasser's astonishment, that morning, gives the standard by which the deterioration of our times may be measured. Even in 1933 a traitor was an almost inconceivable thing. Later the world became accustomed to the spectacle of suborned men, in many countries, who betrayed native lands to serve Hitler; many of them were executed for it. Thereafter the world became even more accustomed to this same spectacle in an even more repulsive form, but one which, by some strange alchemy, gained a kind of respectability. The scientists and politicians and journalists and professors who served and deserted to the Red Tsar (instead of the brown one) became numerous and familiar in the daily news, but seldom were they punished or even too harshly reproached; a subtle machinery of condonation was in their behalf set in motion.

Otto Strasser was one of the earliest victims of such a man, of the brown variety. The explanation for the baffling news he read in that morning's newspaper became known a year later, in July 1934, when Chancellor Dollfuss was murdered and his own Viennese Chief of Police, Dr. Steinhäusl, was found after the suppression of that revolt to have been among the conspirators (he was given a long term of imprisonment but after Hitler's invasion of Austria was restored to his police chiefdom). In July 1933 this Dr. Steinhäusl was trying to serve his secret masters by destroying Hitler's chief adversary, Otto Strasser.

Thus at his first brush with the Gestapo outside Germany Strasser escaped only by the fluke of absence. He could not at that instant even guess at the truth, but he knew that danger was upon him. He had to get out of Vienna, at once; and he had the equivalent of sixpence. His cousin (who was also his landlady) was under arrest. He could think only of one possible source of help. She was secretary to an editor in the employ of the Ullstein publishing house. To this man's office he went, a long walk right across the city after a sleepless night and a spoiled breakfast, and gained admission under another false name. He still laughs today when he tells of that encounter.

The man behind the table looked up, showed horrified surprise, and sprang up with hands spread before him as if to ward off some apparition. 'Go away, go away at once!' he said. 'Not without a hundred Schillings to get to Prague,' said Strasser, 'and if you don't give them to me I'll stay here and be arrested in your office, and you will be arrested too.' Frightened though he was, the man immediately recalled that the fare to Prague was but sixty-nine Schillings. 'But I want something for a taxi and food,' insisted Strasser. 'Here you are then, take it and go,' said the man. 'I'll send you a receipt,' said Strasser. Up came the protesting hands again: 'No, no, don't give me a receipt, just go away from here, go away quickly.'

Pushed out of the door, Strasser found himself in the street. He was a fugitive again, and could not then imagine why; he only knew that he had to escape quickly, but how? He assumed now that the police had identified him with 'Herr Müller' and that all frontier stations would have been warned to watch for a man with a passport in that name. After much thought he decided that there was only one thing for it, namely, to try the tram.

This relic of the past ran from a terminus in the middle of Vienna, only a few yards from that juncture of the Ring and the Kaerntnerstrasse, where the Opera stands, which is the city's equivalent of London's Piccadilly Circus. The tram went from there straight along the main road to Bratislava, two hours away. It was a survival of the happy days that ended in 1914, when Bratislava (then Pressburg) had been to Vienna as Windsor to London. That was in the time of Austria-Hungary, and now Pressburg lay just across the frontier, in the new State of Czechoslovakia. Where so much had changed, decayed and gone, the tram still ran, as if the decline and fall of this and the rise of that meant nothing to it. It even claimed still to be bound for 'Pressburg', whereas the Slovaks at the journey's end claimed that there was no such place, but only 'Bratislava'.

The present writer himself used that tram some years later and recalls the easygoing *Gemuetlichkeit* which prevailed aboard it. There was little supervision of the travellers who used it; many of them were people who came and went every day, commuters who for a few years yet were to be allowed peaceably to commute. Sometimes passports were not even examined; it was a pleasant ride in those darkening years.

This was a chance, possibly a last chance, in July 1933, and Otto Strasser took it. He walked down the Ring and got aboard and two hours later was in Bratislava, a free man in free Czechoslovakia. He had not even been asked to show Herr Müller's passport. He has had an astonishing run of luck, as this book will show. At the baccarat table it would have broken any bank ten times over.

Now he put his second frontier behind him. Still ignorant of any reason why he should be driven from Austria, he turned his face towards Prague, and began all over again.

Chapter Three

AN EPIC OF DEFIANCE

Vienna, behind him, was an imperial city on the twilight edge of oblivion; the monuments of its great history, the natural beauty of its site, between river, plain, woods and hills, and the heavy feeling of tragic expectation that overhung it in those years combined to fill the sensitive beholder with an almost painful sadness. Prague, which in different ways was nearly as beautiful, appeared to be its opposite: the vassal city liberated from the imperial thrall, eagerly inhaling the air of its new freedom, looking forward and upward to greater days yet to come. Yet both were equally cities in suspense; though the mass of their inhabitants, as they went about their daily tasks, seemed unaware of the menace, it was clear to the present writer, and so was its ominous meaning for the outer world. Vienna, Prague and Budapest were outmost citadels of the Christian West. Their fall meant its own more imminent peril. The relative indifference of the West to their lot in 1938, and its apparently complete indifference to their fate in 1945, was the clearest sign of the torpid or confused mood into which the people and the area of Western civilization had fallen during the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century.

Otto Strasser carried on his war against Hitler from Prague for five years, until the fatal day when the British and French Prime Ministers and the Italian dictator, with the cordial approval of the American president, opened the doors of Czechoslovakia to Hitler. He fought all through those years, at the daily risk of his life and at the cost of many of his supporters' lives.

In the judgment of this writer he is rare, if not unique among political exiles in that he *fights* and has always fought. The political exile often deserves sympathy, but seldom do his deeds command that respect which is due to Otto Strasser's. Usually he becomes a man of the Café des Exilés and the reading room, a sad debater in little restaurants where he foregathers with his fellow-exiles, a writer of letters to the *New Statesman* or *New Republic*, a speaker to little indignant assemblies of the intelligentsia and the literati in Bloomsbury or Greenwich Village; the present scribe has attended many of these melancholy meetings in a dozen capitals. The German Socialist, Centrist and Democratic politicians who went into exile were all of this type, and the Communist ones were as ineffective as they until Mr. Roosevelt imperially conveyed the title deeds of Eastern Europe to the Red Army, when beneath that iron umbrella they became bold. Otto Strasser was the only one of them all who *fought*.

His remarkable energy and talent for organization alone enabled him to continue that fight. Not the outbreak of war, or even the width of the Atlantic, could later break all the threads he had woven with his supporters in Germany, or subdue his irrepressible resolve to renew and extend that network. In 1933 in Prague he very quickly gathered friends around him and was supplied with enough money to resume his campaign. Through them, also, he was provided with a new German passport bearing Hitler's swastika on it. It was a genuine passport, though not his; it belonged to a supporter in Germany whose appearance and description approximated to his, and his picture had been skilfully substituted for that of its owner.

He informed the authorities of his arrival and identity and of the name under which he was living (as a lodger in the dwelling of an unsuspecting postman and his wife). He felt safe in Prague; he knew that no Czech policeman would want to deliver him to Hitler. He was given a desk in the office of a friend and set busily to work; he resumed contact with his followers in Germany, began to publish a newspaper and to print masses of thin-paper literature for smuggling over the frontier, and prepared his masterstroke: a secret radio transmitter.

Only five months passed before Hitler struck at him again, in the heart of united Czechoslovakia. As he lay abed, in the early morning of November 25th, 1933, his corpulent landlady burst in, exclaiming breathlessly, 'Police!' Close behind her pressed two detectives with levelled revolvers, who addressed the sleepy man in the bed in harsh and voluble Czech. He asked them to speak German, whereon they asked if he were 'Herr Müller' (the name he had used in Vienna). He said he was not and showed his admirable new passport. The date, name and the swastika on it non-plussed the two men who, after insisting that Herr Müller must live there, at length retired, muttering. Soon the landlady waddled back into the room, excitedly saying in broken German, 'Outside two policeman more, with revolver, by big motor car, all very cross.'

Having informed the Prague police of his assumed name and identity Strasser surmised that some strange mistake had occurred and was not much alarmed until he went to Police Headquarters to ask an explanation. There he was told that the Prague police never used motor cars and that no such visit had been made by them. Later inquiry revealed that the waiting motor car with the four pretended detectives in it had carried a German number (the IIA of Munich), and that before driving away in disgust they had thrown down in the gutter (where it was found) a chloroformed gag.

The chain of events was eventually pieced together thus: Otto Strasser had evidently been seen and followed to his lodging by someone who knew him and the name he had used in Vienna, and had betrayed him to the Gestapo. Abduction across the frontier (a thing now familiar but then unknown) had been planned, but the Gestapo needed for this purpose men who spoke fluent Czech and could pass themselves off as Czech detectives. To that end they used Sudeten Germans from the bilingual borderland, who spoke perfect Czech indeed but could not personally know Strasser. The possibility that he would have acquired yet another name and so convincing a passport had evidently been overlooked, and the sham detectives had been thrown out of the stride of their purpose by its production; they could not afford to make a mistake and assumed that their informer had erred.

This affair shook Prague badly. It was a warning, not only to Otto Strasser, but also to the Czechs. For the first time they realized, in November 1933, how near and how daring their enemy was; people who lived through the later climax of Hitler's violence may have forgotten how unready the world was, in those earlier years, to believe him capable of such things, and in this respect the Czechs were not much less complacent than others further away. Strict precautions were taken to prevent any further exploits of the same kind, but they were restricted to Prague, so that a later fantastic stroke of the Gestapo against Otto Strasser and his friends was murderously successful, as this story will show.

For the moment he had a respite of three months; not until March 1934 was the next attempt upon him made. He used the time well, and produced masses of miniature anti-Hitlerist newspapers, pamphlets and letters to his followers. From Czechoslovakia, as from Austria, these were smuggled into the Reich by reckless men who risked and often lost their lives for no other reward than the hope of contributing to the end of Hitler. Germans, Sudeten Germans and Czechs all helped in the work. They crossed the frontiers by secret paths at night with knapsacks on their backs containing thousands of these flimsies in envelopes stamped, with German stamps, ready for posting. When they reached Leipzig or Dresden and had posted their loads at some main post office they would buy enough stamps for the next consignment and return for more. These purchases of postage stamps, which were essential to the campaign, were in themselves most dangerous undertakings, for the Gestapo were doing their utmost to trace the source of Otto Strasser's missives and had instructed the post offices to keep a watch on anyone buying large quantities of stamps. This very danger had caused the British intelligence service in the 1914-18 war to forge German, Austrian and Bavarian stamps (they are still sometimes to be found in the stamp-dealing market) so that their

agents inside the enemy countries should not run the risk involved in purchasing stamps at post offices.

Otto Strasser is at once a student of political warfare and a man of natural ingenuity, so that some of the methods he devised and practised in his one-man war against Hitler were original and amusing. He had an envelope of the German Medical Association sent to him in Prague and made fifty thousand facsimiles of it. These he filled with his leaflets, leaving the flap (with its respectable legend) unstuck, and posted them, inside Germany, at the printed matter rate! He had the letterheads of the German Jurists Association copied and used for the postal distribution of violently anti-Hitlerist literature. In such enterprises as this his helpers inside Germany were invaluable to him. He smuggled into Germany several millions of glued, stick-on labels, rather bigger than an ordinary postage stamp, which bore the emblem of the Black Front and some threatening message addressed to Hitler. These were pasted on doors, walls, windows, trains, trams, pavements, hoardings, Nazi party offices, Brownshirt headquarters and military barracks all over Germany. It was simple to hold one in the palm of the hand and leave it somewhere in passing with an almost imperceptible movement, so that these little black warnings sometimes appeared on the desks of high Nazi leaders; similarly, the habitués of German cafés, as they opened their newspapers, often found Otto Strasser's smuggled newspaper neatly folded inside them.

In March 1934 the Gestapo made its next bid for Strasser's head. This was a subtle undertaking, clearly long thought out and well prepared, and it involved the treachery of one of his closest companions and the complicity of two Jews, who were added to the cast of the plot to disarm any suspicions he might have.

Today treachery is an epidemic disease, and the professional student of politics can trace its spread and course back through its tributary, Hitlerism, to its parent stream and fount, Communism, as a district medical officer, once an outbreak has been recognized and charted, can trace the contagion back to the original carrier. It is the deadliest disease of the twentieth century, more malignant and lethal in its effects than cancer or any other, for it kills nations. It is a killer of individuals too, directly and by infection; it produces physical death on the scale of a virulent plague. Its spiritual ravages are worse than, and ultimately show themselves in physical deterioration; treachery has its own face, as recognizable as that of dipsomania, for it is a poison. The tribe of Judas is the most miserable of all the peoples that on earth do dwell; its numbers are at this passing moment greater than they ever were in the history of the Christian West, and each separate traitor's end is as wretched as that of the original Judas; from that there is no escape. The book of traitors of the twentieth century, if it were written, would be a many-volumed encyclopaedia of human degradation and a physically healthy man might fall sick in the writing of it. If the Christian West were to be crucified, the Judases would have done it, and they would hang themselves or be hanged immediately after.

In 1934 all that was still in the egg, or barely out of it, and was too new and unbelievable a thing for the reaction against it to have occurred; indeed, the disease has only been half-identified today, twenty years later. In 1934 it was still customary to accept as genuine the allegiances which men professed, for until 1914, or 1917, it had been each man's pride to wear the rose of his loyalty, to speak his mind and say the truth. Otto Strasser knew that he was a man with a price on his head and was alert, but he had not yet sat at table with treachery and is by nature candid and loyal himself. He assumed that others who appeared to be exiled in Prague for the same reason as he, and who seemed ready to share his own dangers in the fight against Hitler, were what they claimed to be. This trustfulness almost cost him his life, once more, but thereafter he was an infinitely wary man, most difficult to entrap.

Two attempts to capture him by force had failed. This time flattery and trickery were tried; from the recipes of political witchcraft the methods and disguises of the confidence man were chosen and applied. There was the rich man with a bag of money, looking for someone trustworthy enough to help him distribute it; there were the two friends, of respectability so patent that it subtly guaranteed his own probity; there was the victim, Otto Strasser. That is the ancient and traditional grouping of a confidence trick; it has been so played in innumerable hotel lobbies and ship saloons.

On this occasion there was a fifth player, added to give even greater emphasis to the rich man's integrity and wealth. This key-man, who became involved, was Alfred Franke-Griksch. He was one of Otto Strasser's chief and most trusted helpers in the war he was waging from Prague, and, like Strasser, went under an assumed name there: Hildebrand. (He will be called Hildebrand in this chapter to avoid confusion between him and the rich man, who when he set out to ensnare Otto Strasser called himself 'Mr. Frank'.)

Mr. Frank presented himself in a winning way and under good auspices. After the unsuccessful attempt made by the sham detectives, Otto Strasser's presence in Prague had become publicly known and in March 1934 he gave a lecture on National Socialism, which was widely reported, at Prague University. The very next day he received the visit of a well-dressed 'Dutch gentleman', this Mr. Frank, who in faulty German expressed great admiration for the lecture and offered Strasser financial support in his war against Hitler on behalf of 'an American anti-Nazi organization', which he did not name. He was accompanied by a respectable Jewish citizen of Prague, to whose sister Mr. Frank said he was engaged. Here was the first subtle warranty for his good faith; what Jew of Prague would not want to help Otto Strasser and 'an American anti-Nazi organization'? The Gestapo knew how to stage a confidence trick.

Mr. Frank offered, without any conditions, to pay for five thousand copies of each number of Otto Strasser's weekly paper (which was being smuggled into Germany in the manner I have described) for a period of three months, and put down the money. (The walls of Otto Strasser's tiny room in Nova Scotia ring with his laughter even today when he recalls that at the end of this episode some sixty thousand crowns of Gestapo money had gone to swell the stream of his anti-Hitlerist literature as it flowed across the frontier into Germany; this is his most beautiful memory of the twenty years.)

The gilt edge of Mr. Frank's credentials having thus been tested and verified, he reappeared in Prague three months later with a pressing invitation to Strasser to go to Paris and there meet Mr. Frank's 'chief'. This was in June 1934 and Mr. Frank on this occasion spoke portentously of great political upheavals which were about to occur in Germany; these, he said, would show the strength of the 'anti-Nazi organization' which he represented. (Mr. Frank was well informed, although the information he thus imparted to Otto Strasser was the opposite of what he knew. Great events in fact impended in Germany, for June 30th, 1934, was to bring the great massacre. It seems clear now, in the light of that event, that the aim of the Gestapo was to get rid of Otto Strasser on the same day as his brother Gregor.)

Otto Strasser was a wary man by this time and took every precaution he could. He asked the Prague police about Mr. Frank, and also about his Jewish companion, guarantor and supposed brother-in-law to be. The reply seemed reassuring as far as it went. The police said they could only ascertain that Mr. Frank had a good *British* passport (that was at first sight surprising but on reflection also appeared reassuring) and that his close acquaintanceship with a Jewish citizen of good professional standing, seemed to vouch for his good faith. From Strasser's point of view, there was every reason to avail himself of this, his first offer of outside support, if it were genuine. The two great difficulties under which he and his friends constantly laboured in their fight against Hitler were, precisely, the lack of funds and the absence of foreign support. Help in both these forms was

available lavishly and continuously to the Communists, from Moscow, and to the Jews, from Political Zionism, but plain patriotic Germans could obtain none, and this situation has continued right through the Hitler years until the present day. Thus the trap which the Gestapo laid for Otto Strasser in June of 1934 was cleverly baited.

He continued to be cautious, but there is one peril against which a man in his position cannot devise any complete precaution. This is the treachery of a trusted colleague. Strasser had to have helpers, and of these had to trust some more than others; otherwise he would have had to abandon the fight, for he could not be everywhere at once or do everything himself. From the instinct of caution he conducted his negotiations with Mr. Frank through the man in whom he confided: Hildebrand. He learned later, as this story will show, that Hildebrand had been suborned and was preparing to disclose information concerning the Black Front and then to desert to Hitler. At this point, therefore, the confidence trick had taken shape; Strasser thought he was dealing with devoted and resolute anti-Hitlerists in Mr. Frank and Hildebrand and in fact had to do with a Gestapo agent and a deserter.

Having done all he could to check and verify, Otto Strasser made the journey to Paris to meet Mr. Frank's 'chief'. Mr. Frank was there, alone, and said his 'chief' had unfortunately had to go to Saarbrücken (in the Saar Territory, then still under League of Nations administration) to meet Konrad Heiden, the anti-Hitlerist writer, and would await Strasser there. That seemed plausible and Strasser agreed to go to Saarbrücken, but did not mention that he knew Heiden well. On arrival he visited the writer, who said he had never heard of Mr. Frank, the anti-Nazi organization, or the chief!

Strasser's suspicions immediately erected themselves like a porcupine's quills. He kept his appointment with Mr. Frank, but now thought to notice signs of great inner excitement in Mr. Frank's manner. It was suddenly borne in on Strasser, also, that he had seen a number of husky SS-men (recognizable, to his practised eye, by their high boots) hanging about the street in front of the hotel and that the German frontier was but ten minutes distant. He made an excuse about a telephone call, left his bag under Mr. Frank's eye in token of his intention to return (as one confidence man to another), walked downstairs, jumped into a taxi outside the hotel and drove away while the nonplussed SS-men stared uncertainly after him. A few days later came the massacre of June 30th, 1934, in Germany.

Even then Mr. Frank did not give up. He appeared once more in Prague in July, reproached Strasser severely and sorrowfully for his desertion at Saarbrücken, and depicted the events in Germany as the proof of his earlier words about the 'anti-Nazi organization'. All had been ready for the overthrow of Hitler, but unhappily the gun had backfired! Now the need to rid the world of that wicked man was greater than ever.

He found Strasser sharper on his guard than ever before. The bloodbath in Germany had, for a brief moment, even appalled the listless world, and Strasser himself now had reason, not only for deeper hatred of Hitler than he had formerly felt, but for even livelier awareness of his own mortal danger. He was by this time the last man on earth to walk into a snare. However, his suspicions were still only suspicions, as far as Mr. Frank was concerned, and Mr. Frank did not give up. He knew that unusually convincing arguments would be necessary, if Strasser were to be persuaded, and he played his trump card: Hildebrand, in whom Strasser still had perfect faith.

Mr. Frank urged Strasser to go with him at once, by special aeroplane, to London to see 'the chief'. Strasser firmly declined. Thereon Mr. Frank said, 'If you don't trust me I am willing for your friend, Dr. Mahr, to pilot the aeroplane'.

This was the trump card. Dr. Mahr, the son of the proprietor of a famous store in Berlin, was the second Jewish character in the drama. He was in Prague as an actively resentful 'refugee from Hitlerist oppression'. He was an old and close friend of, and had been introduced to Strasser by, Hildebrand, whose schoolmate he had been in Germany. Strasser's implicit confidence in Hildebrand extended to his friend, Dr. Mahr. Thus Mr. Frank's offer to have Dr. Mahr pilot the aeroplane was implicitly vouched for by Strasser's own chief helper of that time; and Dr. Mahr also appeared (as Mr. Frank's other Jewish acquaintance had appeared) to be above all suspicion in the sincerity of his anti-Hitlerism.

In circumstances so grouped, even a man in Otto Strasser's position might be put off his guard. After all, if there was a genuine 'anti-Nazi organization' behind all this, ready to help him in his lonely and difficult campaign, the opportunity was not to be missed; none such had come his way. However, he telephoned the Prague Chief of Police before making a decision. Dr. Mahr overheard this telephone call and when the police went to interview Mr. Frank, the bird was flown.

On that, all Strasser's suspicions awoke and he felt that he could trust no man. He had both Hildebrand and Dr. Mahr quietly watched by the Prague police and in the autumn of 1934 Hildebrand at last revealed himself by taking flight, to Switzerland. Thereon Strasser had Dr. Mahr arrested, who confessed the whole plot (he was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment; the story is told in a book by Dr. Caspari, *Mord Zentrale X*, which was published by the Reso Verlag in Zurich). Dr. Mahr asserted that Hildebrand had taken money from Mr. Frank and had revealed secrets of the Black Front; Strasser believed that this led to the identification of many Black Front men in Germany who then disappeared in concentration camps. Hildebrand went to Germany, became a colonel of SS troops, and made a curious reappearance in German affairs after the war. Strasser thought that he or Dr. Mahr must have revealed the location of Strasser's secret radio station, which was the object of the next Gestapo attempt. Dr. Mahr confessed that he was to have landed the aeroplane with Mr. Frank and Otto Strasser in Germany. After his release he was vaguely heard of in Copenhagen, then faded from the scene. 'Mr. Frank' (it later transpired) was one Wenzel Heindl, head of the anti-Black Front section of the Gestapo.

Hildebrand's desertion was unique among the Black Front leaders; most of the others gave their lives for their cause. He returned to Prague in 1939 with Hitler's invading armies. Two of Strasser's foremost helpers, Kremmin and Doepke, were then arrested and beheaded. No complicity of Hildebrand in their deaths has been established.

The two Jews who played parts in this little drama of five men belong to the tale of Hitler's Jewish agents. It is a long one, ranging from the woman who received a personal letter of thanks from Hitler for her help in bringing about his triumph at Munich to the man who was Hitler's leading representative in Spain throughout the Second War; but it will never be told because the politicians of our day unite in suppressing this chapter of the whole story. It has no separate significance (apart from the great significance of this suppression). Treachery, being a disease, knows no distinctions of race, class, colour or anything else; if there are traitors there will be Gentile and Jewish traitors, rich and poor traitors, traitors white and traitors black.

Their appearance in this narrative, however, offers the appropriate opportunity to discuss Otto Strasser and the Jews, because Political Jewry (that is, Political Zionism) joined its influence to that of Communism in perpetuating his exile and preventing his return to Germany. Strasser is honest and candid in his opinions about Jewry, as in all political questions. He holds this to be an important political question, and he never courted political support by echoing the sycophantic slogans of those who (as a Jewish, anti-Zionist writer said) for one reason or another seek Jewish favour. He is above personal or generalized antipathies; a Christian cannot yield to these (and his brother and he expelled Julius Streicher from the imprisoned Hitler's party). To him, Mr. Frank's

Jewish companion was implicit guarantee of good faith; to him, Dr. Mahr's sincerity was beyond question; and when these two were exposed that in no wise changed his feelings towards *Jews*, but only towards them as men. Among the few writers who have done him any justice is a Jew, Dr. Kurt Hiller, who in his book *Koepfe und Proepfe* (Rowohlt Verlag, Hamburg, 1950) says among other things:

'... He is unquestionably a man of honour. I knew him as such during four years in Prague and protest against cheap disparagements of this personality ... The feasibility of a synthesis between National Socialism and Socialism may be denied. Hitler falsified it. Strasser took it seriously. From the moment when he realized that Hitler was lying he became Hitler's open enemy.' Dr. Hiller goes on to speak approvingly of Strasser's manner of discussing Jewish questions, and says, 'Why should Strasser be subjected to public expectoration? From 1930 onward, first in Germany and then in exile, he fought an undeviating and valiant battle against the wehrwolf in Germany, whereas in 1933 in the Reichstag the party politicians, in betrayal of their own liberal electors, empowered Hitler to set up his dictatorship. To reward these gentry with ministerial seats and to forbid Strasser to return home: I cannot follow such logic! Probably it derives from false information.'

The last sentences refer to the men placed in office in Western Germany after the war by the occupying powers and their protégé government in Bonn. The purpose of this book is to correct the 'false information' on which, as Dr. Hiller says, such actions must have been based, if the best construction be placed on them. In any case, Political Zionism supported Communism in prompting the ban on Otto Strasser, and the reasons can be briefly stated.

He has never concealed or changed his opinions about the political aspect of Zionism; he states them honestly now, as always. They are objective, not subjective. He held (long before events vindicated this view) that the Jews had the choice between assimilation, in the countries where they had settled, or remaining an alien community with religious laws no less harsh than Hitler's anti-Jewish laws, which were but the inversion of them. He saw that the most powerful organized forces in Jewry were opposed to assimilation and that if they prevailed Jewry would come under the sway of a nationalist doctrine more exclusive than Hitler's. How could a man who fought so bitterly against Hitler and his 'idolatry of race' befriend himself with that. He knew that one section of Jews wished to and would assimilate, and that another section cherished its inassimilability as the very meaning of life. Given the wealth and power of Jewry, he considered that the victory of this section must lead to an intolerable supremacy of alien thought in Germany, or for that matter in any country. In his contemplated New Reich he would, with the other regulatory devices he proposed, have placed such restrictions as the welfare of the whole community demanded on the spread of immoderate Zionist influence in the thought of the country, in the professions, and above all, through the power of money, in the control of power.

The victory of Political Zionism over the masses of Jewry, in the ensuing two decades, proved the correctness of his anticipations. The Zionist State was crueller than Hitler in its exterminatory expulsion of the helpless and harmless Palestinian Arabs, and as exclusive as Hitler in the structure of its State, the representation of its inhabitants and its laws. It claims to represent *all* Jewry everywhere ('the in-gathering of *the exiles*'), and thus reopens the tormenting spiritual conflict for Jews, which the last century seemed at last to have ended. Otto Strasser's thought, in this matter, coincides with that of many Jews who today, equally with him, are prevented from expressing it. It is the truth of tomorrow and will not long be kept out of the public debate. It was one of the two reasons for the hostility to him which manifested itself in 1942 and which pins him in exile today. Political Zionism, having gained power over the masses of Jewry and the Western governments alike, was able for the time being to have its way.

So much for the confidence-trick of 1934, and the men who played their parts in it. When they had all gone their way, Otto Strasser completed the preparation of his greatest exploit. The name of his newspaper was *The Secret Sender*. Now he built a secret sender and began to speak directly to Germans, with his own voice and through the voices of his helpers.

Later, in the war, the ether was filled with voices challenging and defying, arguing and counter-arguing, accusing and retorting; it was pandemonium. The governments spent millions on this war of words and, merely by reason of their ability to speak some foreign tongue or of their claim to know some distant land, agents and spies innumerable slipped cosily into new departments of new ministries. After the war the monstrous thing grew even more monstrous; Dr. Goebbels's much-reviled Propaganda Ministry spawned offspring all over the once peaceful and prudent West. By 1952 the State Department of the American Government had one sub-department (The International Information and Education Activities Unit) which presented budget estimates of \$115,000,000 for the year! A sub-sub-department of this sub-department ('The Voice of America') demanded \$25,000,000 for radio broadcasting alone! The French-language sub-sub-sub-department, in July 1952, contained only one American-born broadcaster; she was dismissed (according to the New York newspapers of that time) on the morning after she broadcast a favourable review of the book written by Mr. Whittaker Chambers, who had exposed the Communist agent in the State Department, Mr. Alger Hiss!

Thus, by 1952, the purposes which all The Senders were truly serving, in 'the war against Communism', were hard to discern, but it was clear that political broadcasting had become a major industry, that queer people often acted as 'the voice' of the different countries, and that the taxpayers and treasuries of the West were being hard pumped to supply the stream of funds, whatever the end.

For one man to build and operate a secret sender on the borders of his enemy's country, in 1934, was a very different undertaking. It was heroic. This was the only secret sender that ever truly deserved the name (save for the wartime underground ones). It was operated by men who risked their lives. It was made possible by the skill of an outstanding German technician, Rudolf Formis, who was another of Otto Strasser's chief helpers in Prague. He had a fine fighting record in the First War, built the first wireless reception apparatus ever used in Germany, and was the author of many inventions used by the German radio, particularly the short-wave radio. In Germany he had risen to the post of chief engineer at the Stuttgart station, and was famous in the Black Front for having cut the cable during the transmission of an important speech by Chancellor Hitler. The culprit was never detected, but when a series of similar mishaps occurred at Stuttgart, during the transmission of Hitler's speeches, Formis was dismissed and arrested. Luck enabled him to escape and he made his way through Austria and Hungary to Otto Strasser in Prague, where he resumed the fight by constructing the secret sender. It was to a technician a thing of beauty and later became a prized possession and exhibit of the Czechoslovak Postal Museum; what happened to it after Hitler invaded Prague is not known.

After his escape from the clutches of Dr. Frank, Otto Strasser was left alone for nearly seven months, which was about the longest period of immunity he ever enjoyed during those years. It probably would not have lasted longer than that in any case, but when the secret sender began to tell Germans what Otto Strasser thought about Hitler the time-factor settled itself at once. This was in the autumn of 1934; in Berlin (as Otto Strasser afterwards learned) Himmler and Heydrich called the senior Gestapo officials together and told them that the Black Front station must at all costs be destroyed.

It was being operated from the rafters of the loft of a lonely little inn on the Moldau about forty miles south-west of Prague. It was cunningly built in. In Formis's bedroom only the microphone

was to be seen. He could sit at his desk or lie abed and open his heart to his fellow-Germans. In this manner the news and views of Otto Strasser and the Black Front were delivered into the heart of Hitlerist Germany three times daily, in one-hour transmissions. The place was called Zahoři, 'Behind the Hills'. It was ideally lonely; or rather, that fatal loneliness then seemed ideal. The innkeeper was a good Czech and did not bother himself overmuch with the strange activities of the new, and permanent, guest in his weekend hostelry.

For what followed, Strasser says, the real culprit was their chronic need of money, which harassed and hampered them at every move. Formis went armed, and whenever funds allowed an armed companion stayed with him at Zahoři, but that was seldom and Strasser had to be in Prague most of the time. He went to Zahoři last on January 16th, 1935, taking with him new records of speeches to the Germans. He asked if Formis had noticed anything suspicious. Formis answered that all was quiet; merely, on the previous day, two German lovers, had visited the inn; they gave their names as 'Hans Mueller from Kiel' and 'Edith Kersbach' (a good-looking girl) 'games-teacher, Berlin'. Strasser immediately said he 'didn't like the sound of them' and advised Formis to have the innkeeper and the police make inquiries about them. But Formis said he thought them to have been 'nice, harmless people'. They were his murderers.

Eternal vigilance is difficult for honest men, because their instinct is towards truth and trust, and this impulse may disarm them even though they know their lives to be in constant danger. Strasser had nearly fallen victim to the confidence trick. Formis had in fact already succumbed to the Delilah trick. He did not tell Strasser (possibly he had not even thought it important enough to remember) that the girl had squabbled with her lover and, in pique, had said to Formis, 'Let's be photographed together and make him jealous'. Then they were photographed, arm in arm, by the smiling, attentive waiter, and the next day (as was later ascertained) Hans Mueller flew to Berlin with the photograph to make sure that Formis was the right man. The Gestapo examined the picture and said, 'Yes'.

Thereon Hans Mueller, accompanied by one Gerhard Schubert, both of the Gestapo, flew back to Prague and the girl, and the three spent hours of revelry in the night clubs and bars. On January 21st they stayed a night at Stechovice, not far from Zahoři, and had their fast Mercedes car overhauled, and on January 23rd Edith Kersbach and Hans Mueller reappeared at Zahoři. Gerhard Schubert was not with them; a rope-ladder which was found the next morning hanging from the window of the girl's room showed how he was able to appear inside the inn at the denouement.

The two arrived late. Neither the innkeeper nor the local police had a telephone, so that the police check-up recommended by Strasser could not be requested that night. Hans Mueller had a headache and went to bed at once. His bedroom, Number Three, which was also Edith Kersbach's, was on the first floor; two doors beyond it was Formis's room, Number Seven. Formis and the girl remained in the *Gastzimmer*, or public room, for an hour and a half; the waiter heard her unburden herself of a tale of lovelornness and of a brutal lover. The innkeeper and his family retired to their rooms in the far wing of the hotel. At last Formis and the girl rose to go to bed and went upstairs.

It was a still night, and this was a lonely place in a lonely valley. There was no friend near, save possibly the sleeping innkeeper in the distant wing and the sleeping waiter in the basement. There were no other guests in the hotel. As the two went along the silent, empty corridor Edith Kersbach paused at the door of room Number Three. She held out her hand to say good night and as Formis took it she tried, apparently, to drag him inside the room, where Mueller and Schubert were; the lacerations of her nails were found deep in his wrist.

The best made plans ... Something went wrong then: either Formis contrived to draw his gun and shoot her or she received one of the bullets meant for him. The waiter, sleeping in the basement,

was awakened by the crash of shots. Rushing upstairs, he was confronted by an unknown man with a revolver in each hand. He fell back, but saw Hans Mueller dragging the body of Formis along the corridor to room Number Seven, and heard Edith Kersbach screaming. The unknown man (Schubert) drove the waiter and the chambermaid, who had also appeared, in curlpapers, down to the basement, where he locked the door on them. They heard further bangs and noises but were too frightened to move. The innkeeper and his family, in the far wing, neither saw nor heard anything of what was afoot.

Later, as rolling black smoke filled the basement, these two captives, in fear of suffocation, broke out through the window and alarmed the innkeeper. With the waiter, he rushed through this nightmare inn and in room Number Seven they found the petrol-soaked and bullet-riddled body of Formis, with two incendiary bombs, which had been prevented by the mass of smoke from taking full effect; they smouldered but had not burst into flame. The microphone had been smashed by the murderers, but they never found the secret sender (it was later seized by the Czech police).

A strange scene now, in the wintry valley. Clouds of smoke pouring from the inn. The waiter, rushing along the dark road to the nearest village; a bemused village policeman, rushing back along the dark road to the isolated inn. Endless delays, before the police at the nearest town and then at the nearest frontier could be reached. The Mercedes car dashing through the night and through the frontier posts without stopping; after that the Czech frontier guards kept the barriers down, but only after that.

The next day bloodstains were found on the rope-ladder; the two men had lowered the girl that way. They had washed her wounds in the river; the bloodstained hotel-towels were found there. The racing Mercedes had even been stopped once during the night, because of excessive speed, at the Czech township of Lobositz. The policeman, who had found the driver's papers in order and allowed him to go on, had seen only two occupants and, on the back seat, 'a mound of rugs and coats'; that was the girl. In the Saxon town of Koenigstein the men brought her to a hospital. The doctors said she must be taken to Dresden immediately for an operation. On the way there she died.

All this Otto Strasser subsequently learned through his subterranean channels of information. He also learned that Mueller and Schubert had received the price of ten thousand marks which the Gestapo had put on Formis's head. Hitler's government, although the number of the Mercedes car and full descriptions of its occupants and their papers were given by the Czech authorities, blandly denied all knowledge of any such car, persons, passports and triptychs. Nearly five years later, after the Second War began, the *Voelkische Beobachter*, in accusing Otto Strasser and the British Intelligence Service of the Munich bomb explosion, equally blandly announced that his secret sender 'was destroyed on January 26th, 1935, by two SS leaders in execution of their orders'.

Rudolf Formis was brought back to Prague and buried. Otto Strasser stood at his grave, with another trusted helper, Heinrich Grunow, who was to come to a similar end through operating a second secret sender.

The death of Formis, who was at once a close personal friend and an invaluable helper, was a heavy blow to Strasser. Once more he had to start all over again, and now knew that he could trust hardly any man and that the Gestapo was ever close behind him. In Prague the German Minister repeatedly inquired of the Czechoslovak Government 'when Dr. Otto Strasser is to be tried for operating a secret sender', and that harassed government, on which the West was turning its back, at length gave way. On January 6th, 1936, Strasser was sentenced, for this offence, to four months hard labour without alleviating circumstances. The sentence was never served because, under Czech law, if a plea for the quashing of a sentence were lodged on some legal grounds, the highest

authority in the State had to confirm or quash it. No time-limit was laid down, and President Edouard Benesh returned the document to his 'Pending' file each time it was put before him.

Strasser struggled on. He continued to publish his paper, until the hard-pressed Czechoslovak government suppressed that too. Then he carried on with the leaflet-war across the frontier. His amazing energy displayed itself in the production of books; he wrote several at that time. Even in the desert there are oases, and even in such a life as his there are respites. He contrived to take a holiday on the Dalmatian coast, with a good companion, and snatched idyllic days from the press and turmoil of his century. He thinks today of their beauty, and also of an incident which suddenly, and symbolically, recalled him from the sunshine and the peace to the grim reality of his times. He was wandering among marble ruins on a green island set in the blue sea when, abruptly and sinuously, a dark serpent writhed out of a crumbling tomb, slid evilly past him in the golden sunlight and in an instant vanished into some other cranny of mortal corruption.

He never gave up, but after each escape or setback set to work harder than ever. Czechoslovakia could no longer allow him the means to carry on the fight against Hitler; then he would try France. It took him two years of untiring effort to get a second secret sender made and transported, in the face of endless difficulties, from Prague to France, where another of his supporters, after the death of Formis, had offered to instal it in his villa. At last all was ready. Strasser stayed at his battle post in Prague; on a note of triumphant defiance the second secret sender began to operate from France.

That was in 1937. He could not know it, and would not have desisted had he known, but the odds against him were overwhelming. He was no longer fighting merely Hitler, but the embattled might of the West. The political leaders of the West were moving to fall into line behind that long succession of Germans, from Dr. Guertner to von Hindenburg and von Papen, who step by step had paved the way for Hitler, frustrated his enemies, and sent him on his path victorious. They seemed transfixed in wrong intention, like figures in a bas relief; they moved from foreseeable fiasco to foreseeable catastrophe, like characters in a Greek tragedy; and the American president was yet to outdo them all in the apparently hypnotic continuance of wrong courses.

1937 brought an event, not directly related to this process, which to the present writer (who then was also in Prague) seemed in the circumstances of that time as ominous as the beating of great pinions in darkness. This was the death and funeral of Masaryk, the father of Christian national socialism and Otto Strasser's mentor. Of all the displays of mass emotion which this writer has seen, that one stays most poignantly in his memory. The hilarious or frenzied multitudes, when he looks back, appear ludicrous or repellent; that spectacle of the weeping millions in the old streets of Prague was charged with more sadness than even the passing of Masaryk could explain. It contained the prescience of the time to come, when his successor and his son would come to wretched ends and his country know days much more evil than any in the past from which he had, he thought, set it free. Masaryk was dead, but something much greater was dying, and the heavy foreboding of that filled the air.

The reality of it soon followed. In the spring of 1938 Hitler invaded Austria. In London, *The Times* found much that was reasonable in such an expansion of Germany's frontiers. In Vienna, the correspondent of *The Times*, who had already expressed his feeling about this obviously imminent event in *Insanity Fair*, packed his bags and departed, rancorous with incomprehension and indignation. At one move Otto Strasser's pursuers came much nearer to him and his line of retreat was greatly narrowed. He carried on his war, but in a world which now began to be inexplicable.

Nevertheless he was on the point of victory. His work and war, and the efforts of those in Germany who shared his horror of Hitler, were about to bear fruit. As the racked summer went on the German army at length realized into what hands it had fallen and there was at the beginning of

September 'a definite plot to arrest Hitler and his principal associates' (Mr. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, confirmed by Mr. Chester Wilmot's *The Struggle for Europe*). Just when all was ready for the coup the men who were ready to strike received the stunning news of Mr. Chamberlain's flight to Hitler at Berchtesgaden, and within a few days Hitler's triumph, consummated at Munich, was so complete that no German or Germans could hope to overthrow the man whom new backers, this time outside Germany, had set up. Hitler, with such high sanction from the West, took the only defensible part of Czechoslovakia. *The Times* opined that this was reasonable enough; and the correspondent of *The Times* in those unhappy regions resigned and wrote *Disgrace Abounding*.

At this fell blow, which smashed so much else, Otto Strasser's work of years also was ruined. His pursuers drew even nearer. Whatever any others may have thought, he knew that they would now take the whole of Czechoslovakia and would soon close in for the kill, of that country and incidentally of himself. Not through his own fault, his war from Czechoslovakia came to an end, but he had no thought of abandoning the fight.

He took aeroplane and flew over the heads of the German armies to Paris, on October 1st, 1938; had he stayed in Prague he would have been caught when the trap snapped six months later. He was accompanied by Wenzel Jaksch, the Sudeten German Socialist leader (who, strangely, returned to Prague and was there when the Nazis marched in; with the present writer, who was also there and also on the Nazi black list, he took refuge in the British Legation and one day walked out of it in disguise and got clear away).

Otto Strasser, now forty-one, began yet again, in Paris in the autumn of 1938. He was as full of fight and optimism as ever. The Gestapo had killed his friend, deprived him of the secret sender and driven him from yet another country; but the new secret sender was working well. Surely the French would hold fast and allow him to wage his war against Hitler until it was won and he could return to Germany!

NOTE:

In this chapter I have referred to Strasser's books written during these years. The proceeds from them helped to finance his long struggle. In Prague he wrote the *German Bartholomew's Night*, *Europe of Tomorrow* and *History in my Time*, the last of which also appeared in England. In the period now to be described, when he was in Paris after the outbreak of war, he wrote *Hitler and I*, 120,000 copies of the French edition were sold in a few weeks and it was translated into five languages. But for this fortunate event he would have been without money to make his escape from France possible. D.R.

Chapter Four

FIGHT IN FRANCE

'We shall fight in France ...' said Mr. Churchill two years later, and the words resounded through the world as the pledge of indomitable 'defiance in defeat'. Two years earlier Otto Strasser, driven from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, had begun to fight in France. For the third time the headquarters of his organization had been destroyed; of his three most trusted helpers who remained and carried on in Prague, two had but a few months left to live before the incoming Gestapo caught and killed them and only the third escaped.

He set up his new headquarters in Paris, and his second base in Copenhagen, where the Silesian peasant leader, Richard Schapke, went to work. The new secret sender was installed in a villa at Le Cannet, near Cannes, belonging to Robert Trenkle, a former police captain in Germany who had emigrated to France after Hitler's triumph and, on Formis's murder, had offered the use of his house for the Black Front broadcasts to Germany. Trenkle was technically qualified to operate the transmitter but had little political experience, so that Otto Strasser sent Heinrich Grunow, his right hand man in Prague, to take charge of the broadcasts. All these men were before long to share Formis's fate.

Once more the campaign was resumed, from Paris, Copenhagen and Le Cannet. For a moment the prospects of success seemed better than ever before. The outer world had awakened from the passing intoxication of Munich to its grim hangover and for the first time appeared aware of the peril in which it stood. Illusion and deception were no longer possible, thought Otto Strasser and men like him everywhere.

The disillusionment, once more, was his and theirs. He had not been in Paris three months when the German Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, arrived there, in December 1938, to sign a treaty of eternal friendship with the country which Hitler was to invade two years later. He requested the arrest of Otto Strasser and the French Government at once complied; in their treatment of this one man the governments of the West have vied with each other in perfidy, in the last two decades.

God moves in a mysterious way, and the present writer discerns a straight thread of reassurance running through the long, and otherwise melancholy story of Otto Strasser's experiences during the last twenty years. Whenever he has been in the direst need or danger help has unexpectedly come, and often from some person or persons unknown to him whose actions have been prompted by indignation at the injustices done to him. This is a declining race of men at the present time, but still numerous enough repeatedly to have succoured this man against whom every other man's land seemed often to be turned, and but for them he would hardly have survived. His few friends in Paris did all they could to gain his release, but might not have succeeded without the dignified protest of the Spanish Ambassador, a cavalier whom Strasser bears in grateful memory.

He was released, but was expelled from France; such acts are the outward and visible sign, as characteristic as the streptococcal display of erysipelas, of the disease which infects the West today. The already long trail which had taken him from Berlin on the night of the Reichstag fire, to Bavaria, Austria, Czechoslovakia and France, now led him to a little Swiss hamlet called Herrliberg, near Zürich. It was but a stone's throw from the frontier of German-occupied Austria; here the enemy was nearer to him than ever before.

Poor, hunted and harassed, he had to work cautiously and with restraint in that little place, where every sound and movement by day or night was known at once to his pursuers, waiting so near at

hand. He could not afford to embarrass the Swiss authorities; where next could he go, if he were driven from this country too? Nevertheless, the one-man-war went on. The secret sender continued to speak to Germans from Le Cannet; his friends in Germany still smuggled their news and reports to him; through Richard Schapke in Copenhagen he held the strings of the Black Front together and issued orders and messages to it.

In Herrliberg he was reunited with his wife and children. Those remaining months of 1939 were the last he was to spend with them until the present day, or ever if the governments of London, Washington and Ottawa maintain their present one-man concentration-camp law against him; he has never seen his children since.

As the summer died the Second War began and the fourth phase in his life opened. During it he was by a series of miracles to slip through the closing ring and escape to the transatlantic part of that which they call today, 'The Free World'.

Chapter Five

A PEECE OF THE CONTINENT ...^[16]

Only those who have been in similar plight, perhaps, can understand the feelings of Otto Strasser when the war began and he found himself cornered, like a hunted stag, in this tiny Swiss place near the German border. The war itself did not take him by surprise. He had long foretold it and its calamitous end for his country; this evil and wantonly unnecessary thing was the greatest of all his reasons for the long struggle against Hitler. Now that it came its personal menace to him was nearer and deadlier, thanks to Herr von Ribbentrop and the French Government, than he had ever calculated. His pursuers were very close and if they struck he would have hardly an instant's time or any way of retreat but that of a man running blindfold. His family was endangered with himself. None could guess, in 1939, that Switzerland would be spared. By walking a little way he could look into his pursuers' very faces. He had no way out. He tried to get to France, again, and then to England, but every door was closed against this one 'refugee from Hitlerist oppression'; all those who so loudly declaimed against Hitler's wickedness seemed equally resolved to pin Hitler's adversary down where he would not have even a dog's chance of survival.

Ironically, Hitler by his own act released Otto Strasser from that one of his many tight corners, although this effect of what happened was not to be imagined at the time. What occurred came, if not as a bolt from a clear sky, nevertheless as a startling interruption of that ominously quiet period which was called 'the phoney war'.

Two months after the Second War began, on November 8th, 1939, a bomb was exploded in the Buergerbraeukeller at Munich, where the Old Guard of National Socialism was assembled, in traditional fashion, to celebrate that first, abortive Hitlerist Putsch of 1923 which, at the time, had so surprised Otto Strasser. Hitler was not present (though he was awaited, as the German reports asserted) when the bomb went off. Within a few hours the German police informed the Swiss authorities that Otto Strasser was the organizer of the plot and that his extradition would be demanded. In this manner his enemy's hand reached out, without an instant's warning, and hovered over Otto Strasser in his humble refuge just across the frontier. Life and death once more contended for him at his very threshold.

Before describing the sequel, the present writer might here interpolate some information about that curious bomb plot; he was at the time asked by the British Ministry of Information to write a monograph about it and is thus qualified. On November 21st, Himmler, the Gestapo chief, issued a statement to the effect that a mysterious being called 'George Elser' had been arrested on the night and near the spot of the explosion and after six days of obstinate denials (namely, on November 14th) had 'confessed' and incriminated Strasser. However, as the German police had accused Strasser immediately, they apparently knew on November 9th what George Elser would admit on November 14th.

The Gestapo stated that the culprits were this George Elser, who was never heard of before or since; Otto Strasser, the instigator and 'agent of the British Secret Service'; and the British Secret Service itself, which, the statement declared, had given Strasser the money and the order for the explosion. Two British consular officials serving in Holland, Messrs. Richard Henry Stevens and Sigismund Payne Best, were in the hands of the Gestapo and, by astounding coincidence, were co-responsible for the plot. There was to be a great trial when Strasser had been handed over. (The pretext on which Messrs. Stevens and Best were lured to the German-Dutch frontier on the day following the explosion, and there kidnapped, was, according to authoritative British statements, that some important personage or group of personages in Germany wished to talk peace.)

Thus, of the four 'culprits', only Otto Strasser was not in Gestapo hands and his extradition was demanded. It appears now, from the timing of the abduction of Messrs. Stevens and Best, that the whole affair was one more elaborate plan to lay hands on Otto Strasser. The present writer, who had seen the Reichstag fire and attended every session of the subsequent trial, pointed out in his monograph at the time that the staging of the Munich bomb explosion, the announcement of the culprits' identity, and the shape of the proposed trial followed in every detail the pattern of the Reichstag fire.

The chief culprit in the Reichstag Fire Trial had been an unknown vagrant, one Marinus van der Lubbe, apparently picked up on the highway or in a destitutes' home; the chief culprit in the Munich Bomb Trial was to be the similarly mysterious 'George Elser'. In both cases there was the German 'agent' of the 'foreign power': in the Reichstag Fire Trial Ernst Torgler (leader of the Communists in the Reichstag) and in the Munich Bomb affair Otto Strasser. In both instances good fortune had delivered into the hands of the Gestapo living representatives of that foreign power: in the Reichstag case, the three Bulgarian Communists (Dimitroff, Popoff and Taneff), and in the Munich affair, Messrs. Stevens and Best of 'the British Secret Service'. The present writer, in his monograph, recalled that it had proved impossible to maintain so obviously fabricated a story in any open trial and that the Reichstag one had been a fiasco. He went on from that to say that the Munich Bomb Trial would never be held, and was right in the event, though wrong in the premise, which was that even Hitler would never court a second public exposure so humiliating as that of the Reichstag Trial. In fact the Munich Bomb Trial would not have been public; it would have been held in the black secrecy of a Hitlerist People's Court (as later events in Germany showed) which was exactly the same thing as a Stalinist People's Court. It seems certain today that the Munich Bomb Trial, in that form, was never held for one reason alone: that the man whose head was needed, Otto Strasser, at the last instant broke through the net again.

He was without money or the means to go to another country; the threat of extradition was imminent. At that moment his situation was mortally desperate. He had no knowledge of a bomb which he would most gladly have planted. If he could still be amused, he may have smiled to learn that he had been receiving funds from the British Secret Service, or any kind of help from any quarter; he was almost in penury. The present writer, who was then in communication with him and disliked his inability to assist, knows how grave his plight was; this was probably, in degree of peril, one of Strasser's worst moments. He had been repeatedly refused permission to go to England, for reasons as mysterious as those which cause his treatment today. An enticing offer came only from one source, in those days. Before the Munich bomb exploded Otto Strasser was offered four hundred thousand Swiss francs to cease his campaign against Hitler; the proposal was made to him through a Swiss Cantonal Councillor who was also a Socialist! Strasser refused and informed the Swiss authorities of the offer, naming the man concerned. Later, through his supporters in Germany, he learned that Himmler (who conducted the negotiations with the Cantonal Councillor) had told Hitler, 'Otto will never fall for that'. Hitler answered, 'But his wife would like a villa on Lake Geneva, and she'll talk him round'.

His reprieve came in the nick of time. It looked more and more possible that the Swiss Government might not feel able indefinitely to resist the extradition demand, or at any rate Strasser and his friends, after their experiences with so many other governments, could not confide in its ability to resist. In Switzerland also, however, were a few people of that diminishing race which will not see an honest and honourable man martyred if it can help. By means which still cannot be related, he was able to gain entry to France again. Now that France was at war with Hitler, he assumed that he would be safe at least from new molestation there. He would wait and work in Paris until the day came for his return to Germany. When the thing was ready he slipped out of Herrliberg, put Switzerland and the nearness of his pursuers behind him, and came again to Paris.

Paris in 1940! How different it was from the droolings of Tin Pan Alley. 'The last time I saw Paris, her heart was young and gay ...' The present writer also went to Paris in those early days of 1940, to see it and Otto Strasser, and felt the imminence of catastrophe heavy on the city. It was in the faces and voices and gait of the people and the air they breathed; here was yet another city in suspense, but in a different kind of suspense from that of Vienna and Prague. There is, and in this writer's acquaintanceship with it always has been, an enduring pessimism in Paris, a weary and cynical disbelief which to him seemed to have sprung from the experience of 1792, so different is the spiritual atmosphere of Paris today from what it was in earlier centuries, if the literature of the period was true. At the start of 1940 a tangible and embittered melancholy filled the lovely city, and a discerning man could not expect to see valiant resistance or long endurance sally from its gates.

It was a sad, twilit place, and in this twilight Otto Strasser and the present writer met and talked and walked and ate and tried to look into the future of Germany, of Europe, of the Christian West. The writer had his island behind him and was thus a fortunate man compared with his companion, but he remembers Strasser in those days as a man of infinite jest, courage and optimism. None who did not know his lot could have guessed how grave it was. The only outward sign of it to those who knew him well enough, was the revolver which lay ever by his bed when he was at home or was in his pocket when abroad, and the rare, and quickly banished, moments of complete despair which seized him.^[17]

The writer returned to England. In Paris, Strasser had another respite of a few weeks and worked away as hard as ever, organizing, writing, and preparing for the day of his return to Germany. Hitler invaded France on May 10th, 1940; the following extracts from a message and order issued to his Black Front by Otto Strasser *in May 1939* are thus of interest:

'... As far as it is possible to foresee the course of the war, which probably will not break out until the late summer, it seems likely that ... even if Italy should fight at Germany's side the French and British fleets will quickly secure mastery of the Mediterranean. With the collapse of Poland a new political and military stage in the war will be reached. Hitler will have no more success than Ludendorff had in 1917 in obtaining the hoped-for separate peace and will, whether he likes it or not, have to prepare for an attack against the West. Whether he tries the direct attack on the Maginot Line or his darling idea of a landing in England, or the indirect form of attack through the northern neutral states, or a combination of these, is unimportant. The decisive thing is that he can no more avoid the attack in the West, after the crushing of Poland ... than Ludendorff was able to avoid it after crushing Russia and Rumania ... We must overthrow Hitler through a domestic revolution in Germany, in order to save Germany. The whole strategy of our campaign, from the first hour of the war on, must be ruled by the principle: "Only the rapid overthrow of Hitler can save Germany from partitioning".'

That was the kind of thing Otto Strasser told his supporters before the war began and a year before Hitler invaded France, on May 10th, 1940! On May 14th, 1940, Strasser was arrested by the French Government and put in the Buffalo Concentration Camp, near Paris; presumably some suborned official wished to make the work of the Gestapo easy. Today, when the infiltration of all governments of the West by suborned agents is a thing of public knowledge, that seems unquestionably to have been the motive. There were enough Dr. Steinhäusl's and Dr. Klaus Fuchs's and Mr. Alger Hiss's in the French Government of May 1940.

Before very long, in Buffalo Concentration Camp, Otto Strasser began to hear an ominous sound, like the knocking which a man in a condemned cell awaits. It was the noise of German guns, first far distant and then coming daily nearer. He was trapped at last, and this time the French did his enemies the service. He had at that fateful moment of deadly danger only one remaining friend in

Paris who could spend all time and energy in his cause. The name of the devoted companion, who from this point on will frequently appear in the narrative, cannot be given, so that the pseudonym of 'Hans' will be used. Hans performed miracles of entreaty and persuasion in his behalf, and even penetrated to the inner sanctums of General Georges and of the Prime Minister, M. Reynaud. The days dragged by, the knocking at the door grew louder, and nothing availed. In the concentration camp Strasser encountered his old adversary of the platform-debates in Berlin, the Communist Willi Muenzenberg. Muenzenberg now passed the time telling all who would listen why he had quarrelled and broken with Stalin.

At the end of May Hans's efforts at last succeeded and Otto Strasser was once more free. His life on this occasion may have been saved by the space of twelve hours. Just that much later the camp and its inmates were removed southward, to be out of the way of the oncoming German armies, and communications between it and Paris were soon cut. Many of the captives fell later into Gestapo hands; Muenzenberg was 'liquidated' by some unknown hand during the transfer of the camp. Otto Strasser returned to his humble room in a little hotel on the Left Bank and listened to the guns that came nearer, nearer, nearer....

NOTE:

The present author should add that 'Hans' is personally known to him and that he can from personal observation on some occasions vouch for the part played by this energetic and intrepid person. D.R.

Chapter Six

WHENCE ALL BUT HE ...

The row of dots at the end of the last chapter may have led the reader to his own surmise of what happened to Otto Strasser next, and he will certainly have been wrong; nothing is predictable in the tale of Strasser's adventures, which at each new turn takes unexpected shape. Given his long experience of close pursuit and narrow escape, his obvious course would have been to make himself scarce and safe at once, while he yet could. He did the opposite. As if nothing threatened, he stayed in Paris and worked harder than ever to enlist the support of the West in his campaign to destroy Hitler and save Germany and Europe. He even thought himself on the very verge of success, at long last. Then, one morning when he went to clinch the bargain, the government was gone and the Nazi armies were at the gates!

No other episode in his life is so characteristic of the man. It cannot have been an act of bravado, for he is not a posturer, and it cannot have been one of simple ignorance or illusion, for he knew better than most men the might and implacable hatred of his enemy. In the writer's judgment, it may not have been a conscious deed of defiant courage, but was more probably the expression of an invincibly sanguine spirit. The world could not believe that France would fall until France fell. Otto Strasser, who knew these things so much better, and had so much at stake, cannot quite have yielded to that simple faith, but his upbringing and nature convince him that God and the right will in the end prevail and so he stayed in Paris until, once more, his head was in the noose.

He was released from the Buffalo Concentration Camp at the end of May and the Nazi armies entered Paris on June 14th. During that fortnight he besieged the French government departments (as if nothing much were happening) with his proposals to mobilize the Freedom Front in Germany against Hitler and to support him in his efforts to that end. He was able to talk to the Ministers of the Reynaud Government. The Daladier Government, which had arrested him at Herr von Ribbentrop's request in December 1938 and at the outbreak of war had confiscated his second secret sender, acquired and installed with such pains at Le Cannet, was gone. The Reynaud Government was different; he was able to reach the Prime Minister himself and another Minister, M. Mandel.

To them he expounded his theory of the war, which, he said, was not a war of peoples as such but of opinion and counter-opinion. The 'Quislings' in the various countries were not 'paid agents of foreign powers' any more than he, Otto Strasser, was. They represented the party of the totalitarian or all-powerful State, and against them, in all countries, were ranged the millions of supporters of the party of freedom. Thus the dividing line cut clean through nations, classes and families, just as the cleavage between 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' had divided nations, classes and families in the religious wars of the Middle Ages. Mankind was confronted once again by the question whether it should arrange its affairs on the principle of rule from above or of responsibility shared, and in view of this spiritual conflict divisions according to race or blood-groups became insignificant. The party of freedom, he vigorously urged, had millions of supporters in the countries of Central Europe, in Germany and Italy, and for years they had carried on their struggle without outer support while the leaders of the West had sought to placate and appease the new tyrants.

Thus he pleaded to be helped in organizing the party of freedom in Germany, for the quicker ending of the war, and at last he made an impression. M. Mandel had listened earlier, before the invasion began, and had asked 'Will Hitler attack in the West and what are his prospects of success?' Strasser had answered, 'He will attack, because his domestic situation compels him to attack. The result will depend on the inner strength of France.' This answer alone, in the light of

what had followed, entitled him to respect, so that he was cordially welcomed and attentively heard in those early days of June, and on Saturday, June 8th, received a telephone message from the office of M. Reynaud, the Prime Minister, War Minister and Foreign Minister of France, asking him to call in the course of the morning. All was agreed and ready, M. Reynaud's secretary assured him; his proposals for a campaign to invigorate and organize the party of freedom in Germany were approved and would be supported.

At the War Ministry on June 8th, he saw the Commander-in-Chief, General Weygand, run up the steps ahead of him, looking blithe and confident, and he was then told that because of the general's visit his own interview must be postponed until 11 o'clock on Monday morning, June 10th. The details of the campaign would then be finally approved. He was in high spirits, therefore, on Sunday, June 9th, even though Free Czech soldiers, at the midday meal, told him they had orders to leave Paris that afternoon. At four o'clock he watched their trucks leave for Baz-sur-Mer, and the safety of England, and refused an invitation to accompany them. Its acceptance would have spared him much, for England could not then have refused him sanctuary. He thought of the reassuring communiques and of the meeting with the Prime Minister on the morrow. The long fight seemed to be won at last. He stayed and watched the Czech transport disappear down the Avenue Bourdonnais.

The next morning he was at the War Ministry again in good time for the decisive interview. Once more General Weygand went up the steps ahead of him, slowly this time, tapping his high boots with his riding switch, watched by officers and officials now ominously silent. Otto Strasser sent in his name and M. Reynaud's chef de cabinet came out.

'What!' he said, with hands and eyebrows raised, 'are you still in Paris?'

'Of course. I am at last to have a definite answer today.'

'Ah, too late, mon cher, all too late. Save yourself. Leave Paris at once. We are going south in half an hour.'

Chapter Seven

SAUVEZ VOUS

Sauvez vous! Two small words, easily spoken; and they were the simple prelude to thirteen years (up to the present) of flight, concealment, escape, exile and persecution. The good man who uttered them did his best to lend them meaning; he gave Strasser a safe-conduct, an exit-permit for England and a pass for all war zones. They shook hands and Strasser, who had gone to the French War Ministry in such high hope, went out into a grim world where the lines of green army trucks outside the government offices, the long trails of heavily-laden vehicles, from handcarts to limousines, the sound of guns, the frightened faces of the people and the rumours of treason that filled the air now all held a personal, deadly message for him.

He was almost without money. His bank account was still impounded (in connection with his internment in May), and his publisher refused on the same grounds to part with a substantial balance owing to Strasser. His literary agency, the Opéra Mundi, came to the rescue by paying not only a balance due but an advance and Hans by some miracle, succeeded in obtaining two tickets on the last train from Paris to Lausanne. They burned their papers, gave away what they could not carry of their belongings, and set out; before very long they were to be forced, in the stress of the flight, to abandon everything but what they wore. When they went into the street they found a Paris gone mad. The Italian declaration of war had become known and millions of people were making their way blindly southward, as if scourged by furies. They had to fight their way into the station, losing several pieces of baggage and a typewriter on the way, and at last found themselves in a lethally overcrowded and blacked-out train travelling through blacked-out stations, they knew not whither.

It dropped them, the next morning, June 11th, near the Swiss frontier, which was closed. Otto Strasser could not in any case have crossed it, having been denied permission to return when he left, on account of the extradition demand against him in connection with the Munich bomb; the Swiss Government did not want any more trouble about that. They hired a taxicab and drove back to Dijon, whence they hoped to be able to make their way right across France to a little place not far from La Rochelle where a friend had a house. From La Rochelle a way of retreat to England might be open at need; they did not even then think that Hitler's armoured divisions would ever cross the bridges of the Loire.

Early the next morning, June 12th, they started off, again by taxicab, on this nightmare journey, through old Autun, past Nevers, and then by innumerable detours to the Atlantic coast. For the first time the possible magnitude of the disaster was made clear to them by the huge, rolling flood of refugees that filled every road, street and path, town and village. For two days and nights they went on, and still hoped, when they reached their destination on June 14th, to be able to wait there until 'the battle of France' ran itself to a standstill. Even at that point Otto Strasser's thoughts and plans were directed only to finding a place, in France, but beyond reach of the German armies, where he could resume his campaign.

Nevertheless, the things he saw and the things he heard baffled him. Although the picture of the refugees was calamitous the French radio continued to reassure, and even denied a London broadcast about the dispatch of French emissaries to German headquarters. The torturing uncertainty led him one evening to listen to the German broadcasts and he knew at once that if they were true ('We have crossed the Loire on a broad front, there is no longer any unified front line') catastrophe was complete. He resolved to learn the truth and drove, with the daughter of his host, to see the Town Commandant of La Rochelle, on Friday, June 21st, 1940. Then, at last, he was forced

to realize that, for the time at any rate, the game was up and that there was nothing but life itself to be saved, if that were still possible.

After the first exchanges he comprehended that he had come to the end of any road he knew; what lay ahead was dark and uncharted.

The Commandant advised him at once to take ship for England and, brave man, gave him a special recommendation to the Harbour Commandant. The Harbour Commandant said the last ship had sailed for England twenty-four hours before: 'We are lost, M. Strasser; sauvez vous!' He went back to the Town Commandant. 'Yes, we are lost, M. Strasser, sauvez vous! I'll give you from army stores enough petrol for you to get away from here and continue your flight. Go to Bordeaux or Bayonne and from there to England. England is our last hope, all of us!'

Times without number Otto Strasser has been saved by one brave and honest man or woman among a horde of hostile or indifferent folk. The Town Commandant gave the petrol, but there were no cars for hire or taxicabs. The German armies were advancing without opposition, people everywhere were beginning to turn their coats and look for whom they might denounce. His host's daughter came to the rescue this time. In an ancient Ford, the top speed of which was less than thirty miles an hour, she set out from her parents' house (which twenty-four hours later was occupied by German troops) for Bordeaux, with Otto Strasser and Hans. They left before dawn on June 22nd and towards noon came into Bordeaux, which was a madhouse, a picture of collapse at its worst. A town of a quarter-million people, about one and a half millions were crowded into it, most of them without food or lodging, and all of them frantic with fear and bewilderment. Otto Strasser says today that he cannot recall any such picture of chaos in his experience, and he had known the German collapse of 1918 in such storm centres as Munich, Kiel and Berlin.

There was no point in staying in Bordeaux and the girl offered to drive them on to Biarritz, where the head of Strasser's literary agency was staying. Through an eerie countryside of cork woods and marshland, where the few inhabitants went on stilts, by devious and little known roads they went and at last reached his friend's house, where, once again, his cash was replenished.

They held a rapid council of war and, learning from the radio that the German-French armistice had been concluded that evening, decided that Strasser's one remaining hope of salvation lay in flight to England. The next morning, June 23rd, his host, with Hans, went to request an exit permit for Strasser from the Prefect of Bayonne, to whom he was personally known. They succeeded only, at first, in obtaining an identity card entitling the bearer to admission to the Prefecture itself, but even that was an invaluable document in those days of confusion. In the afternoon they had to fight another battle, even with this ticket, to gain access to the Prefect, but at last it was done and Otto Strasser and Hans fought their way out again through the battling throngs with visas on their passports enabling them to leave France by ship in the direction of England.

The next step was to get into the Harbour Commandant's office, which was besieged by thousands of people and guarded by troops. Ultimately Strasser's host contrived once more to get in and to procure one more entrance card, for the following morning. The girl who had driven them south set out to try and reach her parents' home, three hundred miles way, and Otto Strasser and Hans, after a night's sleep, made another attempt to get into the Harbour Commandant's office, where, in drenching rain, many thousands of people fought, kicked, and in many languages shouted and screamed to be admitted, and were pricked back by the soldiers' bayonets when they tried to climb the high railings. In such a situation only a man with local standing can have any hope of success and Strasser's host once more succeeded, after many hours, in getting through and returning with tickets for a small freighter going to Casablanca; all ships to England had long since left. When the fugitives reached the quay they saw the ship just moving away. They struggled through the milling

crowds once more to the Harbour Commandant's office and got tickets for the very last, and even smaller freighter, also bound for Casablanca. His bitter experiences must have been assuaged for Strasser by the unending efforts which a few people have made on his behalf, and the valour of his host and his other friend's daughter on this occasion reveal the spirit of true French people.

Nevertheless, it was all unavailing. Otto Strasser and Hans did succeed, at the cost of the last of their luggage, in getting aboard that last tiny vessel. Twenty-four passengers were to be taken and he candidly says that, knowing what awaited him if he missed the ship, he was resolved that he and Hans should be among the twenty-four. He achieved that, but unwillingly recalls the scene and says that only the pen of a Dante could describe it. Thousands of people besieged the little craft and tried to force, cajole or bribe their way aboard, through the lines of armed marines who guarded it. Luggage and struggling people fell or were pushed into the sea, and he still sees the face of a Spanish republican who, by a desperate exertion of strength, forced his way to the side of the ship, was thrust back by the sailors, screamed like a madman and held fast with one hand while he fought with the other, until his fingers loosened, one after the other, and he fell into the water.

Strasser and Hans, with their valid tickets, got to the gangway. A member of the crew, who knew Strasser's books, told the captain that his was 'a special case', and so, at the last, they were allowed aboard. Then the captain announced that the ship was full and immediately the crowd began its final assault. The soldiers were thrown aside or into the sea, people began to shin like monkeys up the gangway, or tried by jumping across the widening gap to catch the rail and haul themselves aboard. The sailors beat on their heads and hands with bars and hammers, cast off the ship's gangway, which fell into the sea with men hanging to it, and the little freighter moved away.

Otto Strasser and his companion were safe at last. Behind them, the men of the Black Front were paying with their lives for their efforts to overthrow Hitler. Strasser's chief lieutenant, Richard Schapke in Copenhagen, had fallen when the Nazis invaded Denmark. On that morning of April 9th, 1940, the Gestapo went straight to his dwelling, but his friends contrived to get him away and put him and some of his Black Front men in a fishing boat bound for Malmoe in Sweden. The Gestapo learned of that, too, and followed him with a motor-boat, firing on Schapke's boat in Swedish waters until it foundered and then shooting at its occupants as they swam. All but two or three were killed and the survivors later recovered the bodies of their dead comrades, who are buried in Malmoe. Down at Le Cannet, where the second secret sender had been operated, Heinrich Grunow was arrested by the French and after the armistice handed over to the Gestapo. Between 1942 and 1944 several Black Front men met him in a concentration camp and later reported the tortures to which he was subjected. Robert Trenkle, in whose house the sender had been installed, remained safe until the landings in Africa, when the Germans occupied Southern France; then he too was arrested by the Gestapo and taken to Berlin, where he and Grunow were beheaded together. His grave was later discovered by his widow.

Such was the fate of the Black Front leaders, and thousands of their followers shared it. Now Otto Strasser himself was safe, at sea, bound for Casablanca. He and Hans huddled on deck in the streaming rain, for with the turn of events in France the sailors had turned hostile, denied them access to any covered place and said they should have neither food nor water. All that seemed of little importance to the two fugitives. When a man has just saved his life from deadly peril he is filled with a spiritual elation that elevates the body above the need of food and drink. Those who have experienced it know the all-sufficiency of this thankful and triumphant feeling.

It did not last long. The ship moved out with the tide into the open sea and darkness fell. Then came midnight and the start of another day, June 25th, 1940. For Otto Strasser and Hans, the night was filled with gladness and on its black curtain their minds' eyes saw, in golden letters, the word 'Casablanca'.

About three o'clock in the morning the engines stopped, and the twenty-four passengers' hearts nearly stopped with them. At once the strangling sensation of despair returned, even before the cause was known; the cessation of that reassuring pulse was in itself sure token of danger. The soldiers who were aboard put the covers on their anti-aircraft gun and threw their steel helmets in a corner. 'La guerre est fini,' they curtly said in answer to questions. In a little while the truth was out. At midnight the French-Italian armistice had been signed, and therewith the previously concluded German-French armistice had entered into force; one of its provisions was that no more French ships should leave France and that any at sea should receive telegraphic orders to return to their departure Ports.

In obedience to the radio order the captain put his ship about and began to return to Bayonne, but he did not do this compassionately or reluctantly, or even silently. Thus far Strasser had been fortunate in his emergencies; now he was unlucky. The captain looked at him derisively. 'You'll find the Germans waiting for you when we get to Bayonne,' he said, 'they've already occupied the harbour!'

Sauvez vous! It was easily said. With twenty-four captives aboard the ship made Bayonne about eight o'clock in the morning of June 25th, 1940.

Chapter Eight

DIE NUERNBERGER HAENGEN KEINEN ...^[18]

Fortunately for two of these captives (what became of the other twenty-two one cannot guess) the captain's malice was father to his words, which were not true. The Germans had not yet occupied Bayonne Harbour when the ship docked; that twilight interlude prevailed, between the collapse of French authority and the assumption of authority by the Nazis, to which Otto Strasser was repeatedly to owe his life. The twenty-four passengers sprang ashore from the ship, aboard which they had fought their way a few hours earlier, and like beings disappearing in fog lost themselves in the chaos of Bayonne, where swarming mobs of despairing people raided shops for the food which they could no longer buy.

Otto Strasser at once got rid of the papers he had obtained from M. Reynaud's chef de cabinet; anything with his true name on it was now his own death warrant. He brought out his last card, a fairly respectable looking passport in a different name and different nationality which he had acquired, with much difficulty, against such an emergency as this. The last hope now was the Spanish frontier; some soldiers aboard the freighter had told them that two large British vessels were still lying at anchor off St. Jean de Luz (the southernmost port of France, about two miles from that frontier), where they were waiting to take off remnants of the British, Polish and Czech forces. At a high price they engaged a taxicab and at noon reached St. Jean de Luz.

The picture was as hopeless as that of Bayonne. Two British steamers were just visible, on the horizon, and tens of thousands of people gazed dully at their distant shapes and at the barred and bolted office of the Harbour Commandant. Near by, the great bridge leading to the Spanish frontier town of Irun was strongly guarded by troops. In the crowd Strasser met an old friend from Paris, a French officer, who, after a brief council of war, hurried away to the aerodrome, hoping to persuade the commandant there, whose friend he was, to fly him and them to General de Gaulle. He returned with the news that German aeroplanes had just landed occupation troops there.

There was no time even for reasoned thought. To be anywhere but where they were; that was the next move. Hans raced off in search of some vehicle to take them inland. The French captain, a picture of resignation, went back to his men, who were standing dejectedly in the market place. Suddenly a small detachment of German soldiers, ten or twelve men, came tramping down the street to the harbour. They marched past Otto Strasser, who was now alone. The heads of the people in the great throng turned and watched them for an instant in silence as, looking neither left nor right, they marched towards the Harbour Commandant's office. Then, with an inhuman noise, a multitudinous shriek or roar, the tens of thousands abruptly broke into a surging mass which streamed towards the bridge, swept aside the guards there, and rolled yelling towards the Spanish frontier, which was closed by the Spaniards and now guarded by the Germans as well.

Strasser was left in an almost empty street, and had to stay until his companion returned. When Hans appeared, without a car, he looked at the changed and lifeless scene in astonishment. Then, without wasting words, they both faded into the town.

This seemed the end, for Strasser at all events. He was inside the ring now, and there was no way out; he could but go on, running blindfold, until he was caught. Then, in the hysterical crowds, they saw a few unexcited Royal Air Force men led by an officer and pressed towards them in search of information. This was once again their salvation. They learned that the Germans were not to occupy all of France, but only the Atlantic coastal belt to a depth of sixty-five miles inland, leaving the countryside beyond unoccupied.

Inland, then! For fifteen days they had been striving desperately to reach the coast, and a place on it whence they might escape to England. Now the coast was deadly; the net had closed around them and the only hope lay in retreat from the coast to the centre of the net, where there was still a little room. Escape, when it reaches this stage, is no longer a thing of planning but of instinctive reaction, like the hare's twists and turns, or that manoeuvre of elusion which pilots in the First War called splitarsing, and in the second one weaving. A man must run and run, whichever way he can, and ever avoid a corner until, at last, he escapes or is cornered.

It was dusk. Otto Strasser went into hiding while Hans ransacked the town for a car. Whatever his chances had been before, Strasser would certainly not have survived the remainder of his ordeal without the help of this one unflinching companion, who was able to go where he dared not be seen. Hans was fortunate in having a 'respectable' passport, that is, a genuine passport of a neutral country; he was also a person of the rarest intrepidity and ingenuity. He returned at ten o'clock with a Belgian refugee who was ready to drive them to the unoccupied zone for fifty francs a kilometre, if he were satisfied, after personal inspection of Strasser, that they were 'harmless'. He was so satisfied and left, promising to return at seven in the morning.

Otto Strasser then spent, in occupied St. Jean de Luz, what he still describes as the worst night of his life to date. At six-thirty in the morning the Belgian's son arrived with a message to say that his mother would not let his father go. This was one of Strasser's black moments, of the kind mentioned in an earlier chapter. He was inside the ring, saw no hope left and was resolved to make an end rather than be taken alive. Hans dissuaded him from this purpose, told him to wait and went out to see the woman. By dint of persuasive skill and the offer of another fifty francs a kilometre he succeeded at the last instant in appeasing her, and at seven they set out on their bid to cross the occupied zone and reach the unoccupied one.

They drove through a countryside now apparently lifeless; the flood of refugees had rolled on and spent itself on the coast, and here the people, locked in their houses, awaited the coming of *les Boches*. Once more the two fugitives were saved by the fraction of time that intervened between the passing of the old order and the advent of the new. At every entrance to and exit from a village the barriers stood, but they were unmanned; the French had deserted them and the Germans had not yet taken post. By noon they were in the unoccupied zone, breathing again, and after an attempt to enter Pau (which was so full of French soldiers fleeing from capture in the occupied zone that it had been closed by the police) they came in the evening of June 26th, 1940, into Tarbes. All the barriers behind them were occupied by the Germans two hours after they passed through.

Once more they were filled with relief, not the elation they had known on the freighter bound for Casablanca and freedom, but at any rate the uplifting feeling of reprieve. Again, it did not last long. For the first time for many days they saw a newspaper. It contained the full text of the armistice terms, and one clause hit Otto Strasser like a blow between the eyes: it required the French Government to surrender to Hitler refugees on its soil who were sought by him! On that list, Otto Strasser occupied the first place! As the country was under martial law, travellers in any part of France had to report to the police; his identity card (which all had to carry) bore his own name and this meant that for as long as he stayed in France he would have to remain in hiding, pursued by the entire French police as well as by the Gestapo. His passport did not help in this dilemma, because of the obligation to carry an identity card; also, though it was of its kind a very good passport, it had one great defect: it bore no entries showing his sojourn in France and thus would have been immediately suspect to any French *agent* or official.

Without Hans he could not have stayed alive. Hans bought food while Otto Strasser stayed in his room at an obscure inn. After three days they realized that they could do no good in Tarbes. It was too far from the only remaining open frontier, the Spanish one, to attempt an illegal crossing and

contained no consulates where they might have tried to obtain the necessary papers for a legal departure. From their dwindling funds they took enough for one more taxicab and on June 29th came to Toulouse. The state of chaos and overcrowding in that city was worse than any they had yet experienced and after many hours they only succeeded through the charity of a Spanish nursing sister in finding an attic with two chairs in it in an old and vermin-ridden house. Hans went out and bought good maps, and for two days they planned their escape into Spain. They concluded that the frontier was most likely to be unguarded in the neighbourhood of the world's smallest republic, Andorra, and so, on July 1st, 1940, they set out in another taxicab for Ax les Thermes, which was but five miles from the Andorran frontier; from there they meant to get over the mountains into Andorra by night and afoot.

They got as far as Tarascon, six and a half miles from Ax. The present writer wonders now that the very name did not impel Strasser to take another route, for he knew his Tartarin, if not, until then, Tarascon itself. At such a time Tartarin was sure to be more than usually vigilant. However, there may have been no other route. Any way, Otto Strasser and Hans passed safely through Tarascon and then, at the townlet's exit, a policeman found them suspicious and took them to the police station, where Tartarin himself sat in state. Two foreigners in the neighbourhood of the frontier could only be spies! (What there was yet to espy, in France defeated and in collapse, did not concern him; he was alert to catch Them, and They should not pass.) He telephoned a description of the two strangers to Toulouse and received orders to send them there. Fortunately he had none to send with them, so he gave their driver orders to deliver them to police headquarters at Toulouse.

The driver, saying he was 'no informer', took them to Toulouse but not to the police. They returned to the attic, greatly alarmed because the Toulouse police now had their descriptions and would be watching for them, sat down on the two chairs, and at once began to devise a new attempt at escape. They decided that for Otto Strasser only one possibility remained, which involved obtaining three documents in succession, each being prerequisite to the next: first, a visa to enter Portugal; second, a transit visa to travel across Spain to Portugal; third, an exit permit enabling him to leave France.

Only those who are utterly desperate would even attempt such a task; in France at that time it must have looked to be an impossibility. Ten days passed before Otto Strasser could gain a card of admission to an interview with the Portuguese Consul. That meant waiting each day from eight o'clock to noon outside the Consulate, among a great throng of fear-ridden people, and in constant fear of recognition. This ordeal was slightly diminished by the fact that after eight of the ten days had passed they succeeded in finding a lodging with a bed and were able to sleep. When at last Strasser reached the Portuguese Consul (who was later to prove another good Samaritan) he learned that Portugal was now granting only transit visas, which could not be given without an entrance visa for some American country and the production of a ship's passage, already paid.

That seemed again to be the end. Only Chile, of American countries, had a consulate in Toulouse, which was not granting any entrance visas. There was but one course left, if it was a course: Otto Strasser still had good friends among patriotic officials of the French Government, now removed to Vichy (soon afterwards they shook the dust of Vichy from their shoes) and all American States were represented there. If he could but reach these friends, one of them might help him obtain the scraps of paper, without which he was a man bound hand and foot. He did not dare himself to go to Vichy; he only needed to be asked for his identity card by some zealous *agent* and he would have been in the hands of the Gestapo at once.

Hans made the attempt. He went to Vichy, taking Otto Strasser's passport, and was away eight days. For these eight days Strasser sat in his lodging and could not go out at all. He was provided with just enough frugal food, bread and cheese, and red wine was still to be had for from three to

five francs a litre. He thinks the good red wine of France saved him in those days, and blesses it still. For a man on the run the street is bad enough, but to sit in a room and await a loud knocking at the door is a torment that can drive almost to madness. Strasser says that these eight days were worse than weeks in the front line in the First War.

At last Hans returned, with funds replenished but no exit permit! Strasser's friends at Vichy all sent him the message he had already so often heard: *Sauvez vous!* but they could not help. They implored him to get out of France because his extradition had already been demanded and the German Government had repeatedly pressed for it. 'Of course, we are only looking for Herr Otto Strasser, and not for Herr X.Y., as your friend is now called', they had smilingly told Hans (and Hitler's government later informed Vichy that it saw 'a proof of ill faith' in this attitude). But with all their friendliness, none of them had any longer the influence or the courage to give Strasser the trumpety exit permit which he needed. The only good result of it all came from a chance meeting between Hans and the head of the *Opéra Mundi* agency, who once again supplied them with money.

It seemed to be the end of the road. They had tried everything and were cornered. The wit of man could not, even in their desperate situation, devise any way of escape.

However, God disposes. What other power can it be that leads a hunted man like Otto Strasser, who cannot go out by day, to seek out a quiet canal bank for a stroll in the friendly dusk and there to meet another man who proves to be the little Portuguese Consul? Strasser recognized and addressed him, and the Consul listened while Strasser, without revealing his identity, again told the tale of his needs. Suddenly, in that dark and hopeless situation, light broke through. It was as if a captive found in a corner of his dungeon the key to its heavy door.

A good deed in a naughty world! The Consul had the simple combination that would open all locks. He said quietly, 'Go tomorrow to No. 8 Avenue Strasbourg and get a tourist's visa for Curaçao; then we can book the ship's passage by telegraph and after that I can give you a Portuguese transit visa.' The mysterious address proved to be that of the Netherlands Consulate, which was still open, although the Netherlands had been invaded (soon afterwards the consulate was closed at Hitler's order). The official who received Strasser there was another of those men who try to mitigate, and not to aggravate human suffering, and without inquisitive questions he provided Strasser (and dozens of Jewish emigrants who had followed the same tip) with a tourist's visa for Curaçao. Thereafter the Portuguese and Spanish visas were quickly obtained. There remained one last obstacle: the elusive French exit permit.

Hans performed the incredible exploit of obtaining it, on behalf of a third party! Those who know officialdom (and who does not, in these times?) will realize that this would be a remarkable achievement at any time. In France at that moment it was a miracle. Strasser could not go himself into any French prefecture or police station; he might never have emerged again. Even the necessity to go out for the purpose of obtaining the other visas had almost proved his undoing. He had on three occasions been recognized and accosted in his own name by former fellow-internees from the Buffalo Concentration Camp and could never be sure that one of these would not denounce him. He had to trust to Hans, and Hans succeeded, by means which are not fully known even to the present author. All the signatures, scraps of paper and rubber-stamp impressions which Saint Bureaucratus required, even at such a juncture, were now in order.

At last the noose around Strasser's neck slackened. He spent a last night on French soil, in Gêrbère, and took leave from Hans (who had reasons to stay in France awhile and, with his 'respectable' passport, was able to do so). On August 1st, 1940, after a hunt that had lasted seven weeks, Strasser, a respectable traveller with all his papers apparently in order, passed yet another frontier station, Port Bou, and was in Spain!

Chapter Nine

EUROPE THE LESSE ...

A man never knew what he was going to find across the next frontier in those days. There was no precedent or pattern for this new kind of war, in which Hitler and his Gestapo had their agents everywhere (just as the Communists have theirs everywhere today). Otto Strasser had expected, when the train put him down in Barcelona, to find himself in the quiet Neutrality of former wars, far from the clutches of his pursuers. He was at once undeceived. The public rooms and lifts of the hotels in which he stayed, first in Barcelona and then in Madrid, were full of men who looked to him very much like Gestapo agents, of others who wore the Nazi badge in their buttonholes, and even of Germans in uniform. From fear of being recognized he had to avoid regular meal times in the dining-rooms, the use of the lifts, and the terraces where he would have liked to take his coffee. The hair on his scalp began to rise again and he was impatient to be on his way to Portugal. There his brother Paul, the Benedictine priest, after adventures almost as exciting as his own had reached a seminary on the coast. Paul had been arrested and released in Constance in 1935, and had then received warning that the Gestapo was after him too, so that he escaped by way of Austria, Switzerland and France to a Benedictine monastery in Luxembourg. At the outbreak of war he went first to Belgium and then to France, and from Paris, after a perilous journey, to Portugal.

Otto Strasser was warned by friends not to use the Madrid-Lisbon train and sought to make his way to Portugal by detours. He took a bus from Madrid to Salamanca, a local train from there on, got out a few miles beyond the Portuguese frontier and took another bus to Villa Real on the coast, only to learn from the porter at the seminary that his brother had removed to a monastery in the interior. He was lucky to meet an old man, a prisoner of war in Germany in the First War, who was proud of his German, and who helped him with the inevitable paper-formalities at police headquarters and put him on another bus which brought him to his brother's monastery.

He was greeted as one, risen from the dead, the radio having recently announced that he had been captured and killed by the Gestapo. The brothers drank a glass of port in honour of the German adage, *Dass die Totgesagten am laengsten leben*, and exchanged narratives. This was another idyllic respite on the hard path; outside Strasser's cell was an orange tree that bore both blossom and fruit, and the monastery garden, in its perfumed quiet, was like paradise.

For Otto Strasser no respite endures long. He reached the monastery in the second week of August 1940 and one day in September, as the abbot and his monks were crossing the garden, a motor car drove into the courtyard. Two well-dressed men got out and asked to see the abbot, who gently praised the elegance of their vehicle. Without any embarrassment one of them answered, 'We should be most happy to make you a gift of one exactly like it if you will do something for us.' The abbot, somewhat taken aback, invited them into his study and afterwards informed Strasser of what transpired. His visitors informed him that they knew one Dr. Otto Strasser to be residing in his monastery under an assumed name. Dr. Strasser was a notorious traitor, whose extradition had already been applied for by the German Government. If the abbot would 'co-operate' and hand over the traitor to them, they would make a donation of a hundred thousand escudos to his monastery, in addition to the motor car already offered.

The abbot reached for the telephone and called the police. 'By all means inform the police,' said one of his visitors, 'we have no objection', and he displayed a diplomatic passport. The two strangers were the Military Attaché and the Press Attaché of the German Legation in Lisbon. The police arrived, but could do nothing in view of the diplomatic passports; the two gentlemen politely but coldly withdrew and drove away.

Otto Strasser thinks of that place as paradise and was sorry to be driven so soon from it; by supreme irony he was later for many years to live in a Nova Scotian hamlet actually named Paradise, where he was compelled to remain much against his will. On this occasion his idyllic reprieve was abruptly ended. It was obvious that the Gestapo would not stop at that attempt, and notorious that they did not shrink from violence. He could not expose the friendly abbot to such risks and slipped away that very night. He was alone again, his brother having flown to the United States to take up a professorship in a Benedictine college. However, one or two people proved their goodwill towards this hunted man again, and he was enabled to go into hiding in a little fishing village in the north of Portugal. His money worries were at this moment assuaged from another source; his English publisher 'contrived to transmit a balance due to him.

In this tiny and remote spot he found a little peace again, a peace even then disturbed, however, by the impatient wish to get somewhere where he could resume his political fight against Hitler. His only link with the outer world was the radio and he spent the greater part of the day and night listening to the B.B.C. broadcasts about the Battle of Britain. His heart rose again as he heard them. It had seemed that nothing could stop Hitler, but now, at last, the Royal Air Force was holding him, and throwing him back. Strasser vividly recalls those accounts, heard on a lonely but sunlit coast; they gave him fresh spirit to go on with his own fight. Meanwhile he tried as best he could, from that little place, to arrange his further journeys, to get to some place from which he could gather up the strings and resume his campaign. He did not wish to live in concealment; he wanted to be in the fight and in the open.

The problem of his immediate movements was solved for him by others. In the early morning of September 30th, 1940, a motor car drew up before his little abode, and a man stepped out of it who was covered with dust and visibly very tired. He addressed Strasser in French without any preliminaries, telling him that he must get away at once, that Hitler's government had learned where he was, that a Gestapo attempt on him was being prepared and that in addition the German Government had now made an official demand for his immediate extradition. The stranger presented himself as a citizen of a country which from a distance had followed Otto Strasser's fight against Hitler with great interest and sympathy for many years and wished to preserve him from falling into the hands of the Gestapo if it could. The country was Britain.

Otto Strasser gave his visitor the kind of look which he would have bestowed on an unknown man who affably tried to sell him a gold brick in the Kurfuerstendamm in Berlin. By now he was prepared to see a Gestapo man behind every bush. He answered coldly that he thought his visitor to be in fact a Gestapo agent, who only wished to get him, Otto Strasser, into that waiting car. The stranger was not offended but admitted the force of such suspicions. He agreed that Strasser should hire a local taxicab and follow him, at an interval of fifteen minutes, to the British Consulate in a city not far away, where he would prove his identity in the presence of the Consul. An hour later Strasser was in the consulate at Oporto, fully convinced of the identity and intentions of his visitor, who, he learned, had been looking for him for thirty-six hours.

Contrary to a common fallacy, the British are an efficient people. None could have done better or quicker in getting Otto Strasser unobtrusively to Lisbon and aboard the American steamer *Excambion*, which sailed on October 2nd. Even before he went aboard the Portuguese Government announced that, to its regret, it had been unable to discover the German refugee, Dr. Otto Strasser, who was alleged to be in Portugal.

That was a shining deed, at a shining time, of which any Britisher may be proud. In the later sequel, and in the light of the quite different treatment that was later accorded to him, one might ask, for what reason was Otto Strasser saved? Was it only to condemn him to a living death in permanent exile, this man on whom no shadow of reproach lies?

But the two things cannot so be linked. Life is after all the most important thing; his life at any rate was then saved, and by the British. He himself, although he has at present no reason to look forward to the rest of his life and every cause for embitterment, says, 'I shall for the rest of my life be grateful to my saviour and to those who instructed him'.

Now, on October 2nd, 1940, the *Excambion* sailed with Otto Strasser aboard. He watched the gap between the ship and the dock widen, the rivermouth open, and then the shape of his native continent dwindle and disappear.

'... Every man is a piece of the *Continent*, a part of the maine; if a Clod be washed away by the Sea, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were....'

Europe *was* the less.

Chapter Ten

OASIS, WITH WELLS

White cliffs and dark cedars, an emerald sea and a sky of brilliant blue: God,' who makes deserts, also makes oases, and now Otto Strasser, on his hard and barren path, came to one where he was to rest awhile. On October 10th, 1940, the *Excambion*, to the surprise of its passengers, anchored off Bermuda; a police launch came out to the ship and then returned to the island with Strasser aboard. He had had no chance in his hurried departure from Portugal, to apply for a visa for any North American country. Mother England now gave him a temporary permit for Bermuda so that he could from there pursue his efforts to reach some mainland country whence he could resume his campaign. That was in the period of the Second War, between Dunkirk and the German attack on Russia, when truth and loyalty still prevailed, and an honest ally was paid his due in courtesy and aid.

In Bermuda Strasser for the first time trod British soil. He has always had a soldier's esteem for the men against whom he had fought, and in addition belongs to that large body of Germans who feel, helplessly, that the salvation of Europe and the West would be ensured if the two countries could but find the way to work together. His respect for Britain appears in all his political writings, and for the present author it is a consolation that in 1940 his life, in all probability, was saved by British intervention. That is a substantial credit entry to set against the treatment accorded to him by British Governments, together with those of Washington and Ottawa, from 1942 until today.

He was taken by surprise by the friendliness of the Bermudans, and was deeply impressed, at this his first acquaintanceship, by the British Colonial official. In the spiritless 'twenties and 'thirties British folk fell into a facile habit of jesting about the man who dressed for dinner in the jungle; today that opinion may be changing again, for manners are rare and their value is consequently reviving. In 1940 this German exile found nothing to mock and much to admire in the British Colonial official. He wrote at the time, 'The Colonial Britisher, with his training, education, self-confidence, integrity and incorruptible judgment belongs undoubtedly to the best products of our civilization. The Colonial Secretary on this island was an especially good specimen of this type, whose example unquestionably inspired a large circle around him'.

After the hunted life he had lived for seven years, with death ever at his heels, Bermuda was reprieve, respite and enchantment. He still speaks of it as the loveliest spot he has seen on earth, and as he has seen many delightful places this superlative opinion may to some extent be relative to the grim experience that lay behind him. Against that background of hope, fading into extinction, beauty may have looked doubly beautiful. The British had saved him when the relentless pursuit reached him in a remote Portuguese fishing village; the Royal Air Force had checked Hitler just when nothing on earth seemed able to stop him. Suddenly everything looked vastly better, in that autumn and winter of 1940; the long nightmare that had begun with the Reichstag fire seemed to be coming to an end at last. He was alive and full of energy; Hitler's day would soon be over; Otto Strasser and his like would yet rebuild Germany and restore peace in Europe.

It was a false dawn, not only for this man, but for the masses of English people and Europeans. The writer also recalls the exultant feeling of that autumn and winter and the spring that followed; it seemed that the mistakes that had been made had after all been honest ones and would now be honourably amended. There was hope alike in the spring flowers in Regent's Park and in the bomb debris around St. Paul's. The next summer and autumn were to bring the return of the nightmare. The leaders of the Christian West were to abandon the greater part of Europe to a worse fate than even Hitler had inflicted on it. The wretched story of the years 1933-45, in which there was but this

one bright interlude of 1940-41, was to be resumed in chapters even darker with dishonour and sorrow. Millions of people were to be the victims of that, and Otto Strasser was but one of them. However, he will always be important, if only for the different shape which such men as he could have given to the course of events, had they not been outlawed, and this is his story.

He spent six months in Bermuda, uplifted by his own experience, heartened by Hitler's reverses, inspired by new hope and restored by the peace and beauty around him. He was troubled only by the impatience of his wish to get to the mainland and to work, and by one untoward episode which was inexplicable to him at the time but ominously presaged what was to befall him.

This was a strange encounter with a man of British nationality whose behaviour towards him was in such violent contrast to all his other experience of the British, and particularly his recent experience, that Strasser was left in nonplussed consternation. He had never, anywhere, met or even imagined so megalomaniac a being as this squeaking gnome; it was as if a pelican postured as a peacock, and to make it the more ludicrous, this man was an Englishman. Even today Otto Strasser shakes his head in perplexity when he thinks of that curious meeting. His only comparable experience was the violent debate with Hitler, and Hitler was, if anything, more modest in demeanour than this new acquaintance. Strasser had never seen a man so fixed in self-importance, so cocksure in curious fallacy, or so unaccountably vain.

The man was a writer, a Mr. H.G. Wells, whom ill chance brought to Bermuda at that moment, and whom the devil had long since prodded (like Wilkie Collins) towards perdition by whispering 'Herbert, get a mission!' so that he had deserted Kipps and gone in for Utopia. This he envisaged as a beautiful place which mankind could quickly reach if it followed his directions and as he had given all the directions, including all the opposite ones, he was embittered that mankind did not arrive there, but wilfully persisted in going its own gait to the dogs (unless it were to the gods). He knew and had at one time or another foretold all things, including the military potency of the balloon and the naval uselessness of the submarine, the military invincibility of France and the impossibility of naval warfare between two powers continuing more than a week. The obdurate blindness of mankind to all his revelations had deprived Mr. Wells of that unhop'd serene which men call age. As he grew older he grew angrier and by the time Otto Strasser unluckily crossed his path he had come to confuse his own end, then inevitably near, with the end of the world. To this doomed planet, condemned to extinction because it had not followed the innumerable conflicting courses recommended by Mr. Wells, he was soon to bid farewell in these words: 'The writer sees the world as a jaded world devoid of recuperative power ... The odds seem all in favour of man's going down and out.'

Otto Strasser is a man who laughs at the pranks of fate, however unkind, instead of repining, or he might have lifted his hands to heaven and asked if he were not already in enough trouble, without having Mr. Wells thrust upon him, who, quite apart from his constant cosmic wrath, had special personal reasons for illwill towards mankind when they met. He had just come from New York, where (wrote Mr. Somerset Maugham) 'His lectures were a failure. People couldn't hear what he said and didn't want to listen to what they could hear. They left in droves. He was hurt and disappointed. He couldn't understand why they were impatient with him for saying much the same sort of thing as he had been saying for the last thirty years. The river has flowed on and left him high and dry on the bank.'

As if that were not enough to stoke the failing fires of his choler, he was put off the aeroplane at Bermuda because the space was needed for urgent mail. He, Mr. Wells! Under this indignity he swelled, bullfrog-like, until he nearly burst. 'Urgent mail!' he snorted to Strasser, 'why, most of those letters are for me anyway!'

Thus he was just in the mood to take it out of a lonely exile, delivered into his hands; this was his cup of tea, and they met at a tea party at which their host and hostess were the only others present. Otto Strasser contemplated Mr. Wells with mild disillusionment, listened to the tirades that then began in growing astonishment, and after five minutes would have left in droves, had courtesy permitted; he acknowledges the law of courtesy.

Mr. Wells, being apprised that the other guest was a German and Catholic, violently abused Germans and Catholics. In the First War he had for a time been put in charge of propaganda against Germany at the Ministry of Information; his qualification may have been a published recommendation for the looting of Berlin, unless it was simply his ignorance of Germany. Now he poured harsh vituperation on the Pope, the Church, the Germans, and 'the accursed mysticism of German philosophy'. Otto Strasser, who had never seen an Englishman behave like this, could only tell himself that it clearly took all kinds to make an England.

When that subject was exhausted Mr. Wells turned to Utopia. His mind, at that particular instant, saw the shortest way to universal bliss and peace in the creation of a World Air Line; the idea was hard to follow, but this seemed to be it, if it was an idea at all. In the manner of Hitler delivering an ultimatum he demanded to know whether Germany, once rid of the Nazis, would join in this World Air Line. Strasser answered, 'Why yes, of course. For that matter, Bismarck joined the World Postal Union, not that that stopped war, as far as I know.' This reply produced an angry squeal and another abusive and pontifical harangue. To this day Strasser is not clear what Mr. Wells was driving at, but thinks he had some vague notion that mechanical progress, by inherent magic, would evolve a solvent of all mankind's problems, as a sort of by-product, but that mankind in general, and Otto Strasser in particular, was from sheer contrariness obstructing the realization of this, his vision.

Strasser felt as if he had suddenly encountered the ghost of nineteenth-century liberalism, talking through the hat on its decapitated head in the ruins of the Fabian Society's manse. There was no common ground between these two men: the one a Christian, soldier, man of action, scholar and cavalier; the other, a disbeliever and sedentary pamphleteer in whose mind inconsequent ideas scurried about from first reaction to second thought and later afterthought like a riotous mob that surges forward to destroy, reels backward at the word 'police', and then scatters and scuttles through the byways, throwing a random stone from aimless rage.

Strasser, though he was puzzled by the personal vindictiveness which seemed to envenom Mr. Wells's outpourings, gave them no further thought, and had they come from any other man they would have gone with the cleansing wind. But Mr. Wells still had power to hold a pen and wreak a petty spite; he might have been left high and dry on the river's bank, but he could yet make a little fire of twigs of malice there to warm his chilling blood. When space was found for him in an aeroplane and he returned to England, he continued his tea-table tirade in articles attacking the man, previously unknown to him, whom he had by chance met once in a drawing-room in Bermuda! Otto Strasser ought to be put in a concentration camp, Mr. Wells told newspaper-readers (at a hundred pounds a thousand words, according to his biographers). Mr. Wells seemed anxious to succeed where Hitler, Himmler, Dr. Steinhäusl, the Daladier Government and a long line of others had failed.

Indeed, there were astonishing resemblances, remarked by many people, between the prophets from Bromley and from Braunau; Mr. Wells was very much like Hitler in the confusion of his ideas, in overbearing manner and inordinate conceit, in impatience with reasoned objection and vindictiveness towards the objector.

In fact, Mr. Wells (and this is a piquant reflection) would inevitably have become a demagogic politician of the Hitler type but for one small disqualification. In his *Anticipations* (1901) he wrote,

'It is improbable that ever again will any flushed, undignified man with a vast voice, a muscular face in incessant operation, collar crumpled, hair disordered and arms in wild activity talking ... copiously ... rise to be the most powerful thing in any democratic state in the world. Certainly the individual vocal demagogue dwindles.' The anticipation, as events showed, was incorrect, and the picture given is a very good one of Mr. Wells himself, save for one detail. His vocal chords were so made that they emitted a squeak; had they been built to produce 'a vast voice' nothing, in this writer's estimation, could have stopped Mr. Wells, who was without equal as a demagogue of the pen, from becoming a vocal demagogue with a herd following. He could then have thundered from platforms (instead of merely putting on paper) such inspiring anticipations as: 'And for the rest, these swarms of black and brown and dingy white and yellow people who do not come into the new needs of efficiency? ... I take it they will have to go'; and the intoxicating and timber-shivering roar of 'Heil!' would have done the rest.

The author, though his collection of examples is large, does not know of a more wanton case of published misinformation than the statements which Mr. Wells then and later made in the newspapers of the world about the man he had briefly met on an island. The writers of all time might hold their noses over it; however, in this day many of them inhale such odours as if they were the perfume of Eden, or perhaps the aroma of a bird hung long enough to be approved by those who like their game high. This book shows where the malicious impulse started: Strasser was whipping-boy for the droves that left those American lecture halls and for the authorities who put Mr. Wells off an aeroplane; thus is 'the news' born, as ragweed may spring from a seed carried into a dark corner by some wind of chance.

The vindictiveness with which Mr. Wells pursued from London the man he had by chance briefly met in Bermuda admits of no rational explanation. Indeed, the search for one is unnecessary, for Mr. Wells called his last book, written not long afterwards, *Mind at the End of its Tether*, and this title was more appropriate than its unfortunate deviser could realize. Just enough tether remained, however, for him to discharge a long series of expletives and denunciations at Strasser, then in Canada. These fulminations went on for months and years and were eagerly echoed and spread by leftist newspapers and politicians so that at times the Second War might have seemed, to innocent newspaper readers, to be against Otto Strasser, not Adolf Hitler; Mr. Wells's feeling about Hitler must have been that of one demagogue for another, to judge by his conduct in this matter. He was renowned for his short legs and if the adage be true his words may not have much longer ones. However, they went trotting on for a little way even after his death, so that one of his biographers in 1950 still extolled his valiant campaign against 'a man whose hands were stained with blood' (*H.G. Wells*, Antonina Vallentin, John Day Company, New York). The reader of this book may check that statement for accuracy or inaccuracy. At this mid-century, in 'the free world', anybody may publish anything about an impoverished exile whom powerful governments have combined to outlaw.

Wells passed on; the oasis remained. Bermuda was enchantment, but also captivity, because Strasser thirsted for the fight. He needed to find some place on the North American mainland from which he could once more begin to organize his campaign, rally the party of freedom in Germany against Hitler, enlist the support of the West, and in particular enlighten the Anglo-Saxon world about the inner stratification of the German people. At that time, when Britain led the fight, the world still made a distinction between Hitler and Germany, between the Nazi government and the Germans, and he thought it to be of paramount importance that this distinction should be clearly maintained by means of authentic information. The days of Mr. Roosevelt, Uncle Joe and Unconditional Surrender were yet to come; at that time none could imagine that the West would deliberately turn its back on those Germans who were waiting to destroy Hitler. There seemed to be a great work waiting to be done by him on the North American mainland.

With all those considerations in mind, Otto Strasser took a fateful decision, which today, in the light of all the unforeseeable things that later befell him, he may regret. He refused an invitation of the Mexican Government to go to Mexico and directed his efforts towards the United States and Canada, where he thought he could best apply his energies to the struggle. He then received the first warning of what was to come. He was told by an official American authority that telegrams of protest against his admission were being received from Jewish and leftist organizations. The Canadian Government, however, offered him hospitality. He preferred to go to Canada in any case, because Canada was in the war, so that he expected no hindrance to his political activity.

Chapter Eleven

THE LAST FRONTIER?

All the difficulties of passage and permission were one day overcome and on April 7th, 1941 Otto Strasser sailed from Hamilton, Bermuda aboard a ship which a little later, on the same run, was sunk by a U-boat with great loss of life. He left behind him sunny Bermuda, which lies on the latitude of the northern Sahara, and soon saw before him the coast of New Brunswick, still under snow. He had since 1933 crossed many frontiers: from Germany by night over the mountains into Austria; from Austria by tram into Czechoslovakia; from Czechoslovakia by aeroplane, over the heads of Hitler's troops, to France; from there to Switzerland and back again to Paris; then had come the twisting, turning flight across France and over the Pyrenees into Spain; next, the sidestep into Portugal, the Pimpernel-like British intervention and the escape aboard the *Excambion* to Bermuda.

Danger had been his constant companion on those long journeys and many frontier-crossings, and mortal peril had often been at his very side. Now he looked over the ship's rail at one more frontier, the wall of Canada, and his heart was high with hope. If at that instant he cast his mind's eye over the various prospects of success or failure that might await him on this new shore, the thing that was to happen certainly never occurred to him; it was too fantastic, in 1941, to be even imagined. He could not possibly conceive that this might be the *last* frontier he would ever cross! He was 43 then, and had been fighting Hitler, like none other, for eleven years. He is 55 now, and at present no reason offers to anticipate that the governments of Washington, London and Ottawa, and their protégé regime in Bonn, will ever allow him to see his country or his children, who were infants when he went away and are now full grown.

He landed at Saint John and began the long journey to Montreal and then to Ottawa, looking from the train windows with that surprise which the dimensions of Canada ever inspire in a man from Europe. At first all went well. He was received at the Canadian Department of External Affairs with the respect and sympathy he deserved and confidently counted on support in his work. He would have received it at the last attempt, in Paris, but for the catastrophe there. He had even from Bermuda succeeded in founding the Free Germany Movement, with organized branches in South America and South Africa, and looked forward to erecting, on this basis, a German National Council which would speak with authority for Christian, anti-Hitler Germany and provide the core of a German government to be established after Hitler's defeat. His aims were at that time fully consonant with those professed (but later abandoned) by the governments of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth countries and the exiled governments allied with them. Two publications issued by the British Ministry of Information 'in particular, implied that the collaboration of anti-Hitler Germans was feasible and was desired.

Otto Strasser set to work with his characteristic energy, lecturing, writing, organizing and interviewing authority. The press was friendly to him and his plans. His task now had changed. Up to the outbreak of war his objective had been to prevent the war itself by bringing about a German revolution against Hitler; that hope had been destroyed by the concerted support given to Hitler, at decisive moments, by the men who held the keys to the situation in Germany, first, and next in England, France, Italy and the United States. Now that the war had come, he saw that his foremost aim must be to make the world aware of the distinction between Hitler and the Germans, and to organize all Germans whom he could reach against Hitler. The outbreak of war had achieved what the Gestapo had for six years failed to do: where the concentration camp had not sufficed to disrupt his Black Front in Germany, the automatic call-up was effective. Therefore he saw that he must concentrate on radio-broadcasts direct to Germany (if he were allowed); and on the spiritual

mobilization against Hitler of the large German communities in North and South America, South Africa and in other countries, and the growing armies of German prisoners-of-war. He hoped to receive support in all these plans and at a later stage to be assisted in forming a German Freedom Legion to take part in the actual fighting against Hitler.

The condition of all this was that the Allies should have a clear policy towards Germany among themselves. In April of 1941 it was still possible (though not for long after that) to hope that they would evolve one of such soundness and sanity. While he argued and pleaded, Otto Strasser wrote and disseminated his ideas untiringly. The programme of his Free Germany Movement was published in English, German and Spanish in 1941 and circulated in large numbers in many parts of a world then responsive. His lectures were packed (a remunerative lecturing tour in the United States, however, was cancelled at Jewish demand). His books, *Hitler and I* and *L'aigle prussien sur l'Allemagne*, were sold in large numbers, and in all these ways he was able to pay for the printing and distribution of his periodical Letters to his Free Germany Movement throughout the world.

Every condition for his success was fulfilled save the essential one: the Western governments, or those who controlled them, would not commit themselves to a sane policy towards Germany, so that the support he sought, though it often seemed always near, was ever withheld. When Hitler attacked the Communist Empire, the Western allies, by the alacrity of their sycophancy towards Moscow, threw away the great cause which had been at stake: freedom against tyranny. Then, when the United States entered the war, it was gradually shown that the treatment of Germany was to be governed by the desire of powerful pressure-groups for an Old Testamentary vengeance, and the verb 'to morgenthau' was added to the war's other new one, 'to coventrate'. (In the light of what ultimately happened the present writer has always been surprised by Mr. Winston Churchill's inclusion of the precept 'In Victory: Magnanimity' among the four 'Morals' which introduce his volumes about the war; the application of the word 'magnanimity' to the transactions of Quebec, Moscow, Yalta and Potsdam seems to be of almost unique incongruity.)

Thus as 1941 wore on and ended, on its course transforming the Communists into the noble allies of the West and the Americans into belligerents, Otto Strasser felt the temperature change. In the American House of Representatives a Democratic Congressman, Mr. William Thom of Ohio, received no government answer to his proposal that Otto Strasser's Free Germany Movement be officially recognized and supported in broadcasting to Germany, giving instruction to German prisoners-of-war, classifying Germans resident abroad, and establishing a German Freedom Legion. Such ideas no longer received governmental support; Germany was merely to be morgenthaued; the great principle of freedom against tyranny was being thrown overboard like a corpse sewn in a blanket and the real shape of the war was emerging. It carried with it the abandonment of leaders and allies everywhere who had joined in the fight for the original, supreme principle. That process continues today, in 1953, and Otto Strasser was but one of the many victims of it. Mr. H.G. Wells would not cease from wreaking spite or let the pen rest in his hand while he could still attack Hitler's enemy, briefly met in Bermuda. His tirades were taken up by leftist Members in the Canadian House of Commons (some of them later expressed regret) and so harassed the Canadian Prime Minister, Mr. Mackenzie King, that although he admitted their emptiness he also undertook, with the politician's instinct for hedging, to withhold any support from Strasser and his Free German Government.

All these events are on record, accessible to any who care to search files and verify their information. The background to them, however, is here revealed for the first time. The change of behaviour towards Otto Strasser did not come about by spontaneous aversion or by any process of reasoning. It was a process prompted by third parties who did not publicly appear in it and were powerful enough to direct the actions of officials and governments. 'I am taken captive and I know not by whom, but I am taken,' wrote Seneca. Otto Strasser was not left in doubt about the identity

of those who in effect took him captive. They were not the police officers, government officials and ministers from whom he received intimation of his plight....

Chapter Twelve

SLINGS AND ARROWS

At the turn of the year 1941-42 Otto Strasser was unexpectedly invited to dine at the house of an important citizen of Montreal, whom he scarcely knew, for the purpose of meeting a distinguished American visitor. The standing of his host seemed to speak for harmless and pleasant entertainment and he accepted. To his surprise the guest from the start took command of the conversation.

This man was an American of Eastern European origins and was head of one of those 'Institutes' in Washington and New York, the names of which suggest that they are opposed to sin and in favour of some worthy, though vaguely-defined cause. They derive large revenues from the massive fortunes left for good works by the titans of rugged individualism, and these occasionally come to be applied in ways which might startle the original Carnegies and Rockefellers, for some of them have been at times 'infiltrated', and then 'captured' by Communist agents, so that their activities are perverted. Mr. Alger Hiss (the Communist agent who was President Roosevelt's adviser at Yalta) was until his exposure head of an establishment dedicated to the promotion of 'peace'; though his colleagues were patently sincere, their chief presumably held the furtherance of Communism to be the primary consideration and the cause of peace an incidental one.

The man who confronted Otto Strasser, that winter's night in Montreal, was (say) Mr. Davis Washington Jefferson of The Foundation for Cultivating True Americanism and today presides over The Institute of American Sympathizers of Thailand (the true names cannot yet be given). He was a high Soviet agent and thus never appeared in Communist politics. In the presence of their mutual host, who said little, and may have understood less of what transpired beneath his nose, he invited Strasser to take over the leadership of the entire German opposition, on condition that the Communists should be admitted to Strasser's Free Germany Movement (the reader may recall that this is the invariable Communist device for gaining entrance to parties, coalitions, governments or any body, the capture and overthrow of which is intended; this same demand, being supported by the governments of London or Washington, led to the Communist usurpation of power in Poland, Yugoslavia, China and other countries).

Mr. Davis Washington Jefferson urged Strasser to realize that the facts of political life had completely changed through the Communist Empire's emergence in the war on the side of the West. The Communists now regarded themselves, and by all democracies would be recognized, as 'the allies of democracy', so that Otto Strasser had no further grounds for and should abandon his hostility to Communism. He would be supplied with funds and given full support in his campaign, but must agree to the formation in Moscow of a second headquarters of his Free Germany Movement, and to this end should himself go there, all having been arranged for his journey.^[19]

This was the party-line patter of that moment and as it was also being trumpeted from the wartime propaganda machines of London and Washington masses of trustful people believed it; possibly Otto Strasser's host thought he was listening to sweet and reasonable truth. To Otto Strasser it sounded like one of the earliest phonograph cylinders, playing 'Tell me the old, old story'; but then, he was an experienced man. He replied politely that he would not consider any form of co-operation with Communism then or later and that his Free Germany Movement would never modify its fundamental principles, which were Christian and anti-totalitarian. Thereon the guest said coldly, 'You will bitterly regret it', and, without asking leave of the host in that strange house, had Strasser shown the door, through which he passed without having seen his dinner!

At this same time Strasser received another warning, also from a person of Eastern European origins, whose status in the eyes of the Canadian law and authorities was precisely that of Strasser himself; the man was by nationality German and a refugee in Canada. He was also a Communist, and apparently an important one, although he had taken little public part in Communist politics either in Germany or in Canada. He approached Strasser after a lecture and said bluntly that if he, Strasser, refused to work with the Communists the Canadian Government would ban his political activity, possibly intern him, and in any event see that he never returned to Germany.

This was a threat of what the Canadian Government would do, made in Montreal by one German refugee to another! The matter is on record because Strasser, in view of its nature, immediately reported it to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, with the man's name, address, political affiliations and statement. To this day it must be in those official files; and to this day the man concerned lives in Canada, never troubled by any.

These two men were not blathering. They meant what they said and knew what they and their friends had power to do; their words were very soon made good to the letter. That is not to say that the Canadian Government knew what menaces were being uttered in its name, or that the political leaders of the West in the last decade have been consciously aware of the humiliating use which has been made of them. Three years after this incident, at the war's end, the Canadian Prime Minister himself, Mr. Mackenzie King, was utterly bewildered to learn from the sanctuary-seeking Igor Gouzenko of the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa of the extent to which Canadian governmental departments and agencies and the Canadian services had been honeycombed by Soviet agents. He would not at first listen; next could not believe; and when at last the scales fell from his eyes he was so shaken that he took aeroplane at once to President Truman and Mr. Attlee to acquaint them with the fact that he had discovered in his own country a situation 'more serious' than any in its history and that the one in theirs was even graver. That had no effect in Washington or London. Not to this day, eight years later, has that grave condition been sufficiently investigated, or publicly exposed at all save by accidental and episodic revelation.^[20]

The men who threatened Otto Strasser at the turn of the year 1941-42 knew what went on and what they could do; they were not simply American, British or Canadian ministers of the twentieth century. Not even Otto Strasser then suspected their power. Immediately the vindictive campaign begun by Mr. Wells was given double venom and range, and has not ceased to this day. As at the touch of a button speakers in the parliaments, reporters of the news agencies, and writers in the newspapers of Washington, New York, London, Manchester, Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and all other cities of 'the free world' discovered that Otto Strasser, Hitler's foremost enemy, was a Nazi, a Fascist, a reactionary and many things more. He was to be made to 'bitterly regret'; he was to be banned and prevented even from returning to his country or his children again. The source of the campaign against him has here been shown; the course of subsequent events will now be described.

In July 1941 the Canadian Under Secretary for External Affairs had written to Strasser that, 'The Canadian authorities are naturally very much interested in the questions you raise, although the decision as to most of them would lie primarily with the British Government. If and when any of the proposals are approved by that Government, I have no doubt that the Canadian Government will be prepared to co-operate as far as is considered feasible....'

In December 1942 a very different note was struck. Otto Strasser was then visited by a high officer of the Canadian police in Montreal, who informed him that the Canadian Government desired him to abstain from further public appearances in Canada and to suspend publication of his writings in Canadian papers, as these had aroused 'disquiet and discontent in certain circles of the population'. Strasser protested at once to the Department of External Affairs that this would deprive him of all means of earning a livelihood, that no restrictions had been attached to his permit to reside in

Canada, that every word he had ever written or spoken was on record as being filled with the spirit of hostility to, Nazism, and that the 'disquiet and discontent', according to his police visitor, was in fact confined. to 'a certain small section of the population'.

On February 23rd, 1943, the Department of External Affairs replied that the Canadian Government had consented to his admission only 'on condition that you had or would be furnished with definite means of financial support. It was not contemplated that you would be dependent for support upon speaking and writing activities to be carried on while you remained in this country'. He must 'refrain from public speaking and writing and from correspondence with other persons on political matters, so long as you continue to enjoy sanctuary in Canada'. He had foretold 'a deal between the German Government and the U.S.S.R. at the expense of Poland ... It seems advisable, therefore, to remind you that, since co-operation with the U.S.S.R. in the war against Hitler is the policy of the United Nations, the spreading of speculations or insinuations against Russia's good faith is detrimental to the war effort and cannot be permitted'.

Thus the joint wrath of 'the United Nations' (no longer merely the reproof of his host-country) was now directed against the one man in the world who had been waging 'the war against Hitler' for thirteen years. Strasser repeated in reply that in fact no restrictions whatever had been attached to his entry into Canada and pointed out that he could not have been expected to have financial means as Hitler himself had deprived him of all his property and possessions, so that he would be destitute if he were forbidden to earn a livelihood in the only way open to him.

In March 1943 the Department of External Affairs answered formally, '... We expect you not to publish any articles, letters or books so long as you are in Canada. Manuscripts now actually in course of publication will be regarded as exceptions to the above rule, but we must ask you to withdraw any other manuscripts which are not actually under contract by publishers. This would apply to manuscripts now under consideration by any magazine or publishing house'.

This was just ten years after the Reichstag fire; to such plight had the many years of unremitting warfare against Hitler brought Hitler's foremost adversary. In August 1943 he was served with an official Order-in-Council, signed by the Minister of Justice (the incumbent of that office later became Prime Minister) which said, among other things:

'The said Otto Strasser shall not communicate to any person within or without Canada by public address, letter, telegraph or telephone any information, comment, statement or opinion with regard to any political, social or religious matter excepting however social or religious communications of a purely personal nature. The said Otto Strasser shall not publish, cause to be published or agree to or authorize the publication of any book, pamphlet, newspaper, periodical or review, or any article in any book, pamphlet, newspaper, periodical or review....'

The order very clearly signified political extinction and personal destitution unless these things could be avoided by the ingenuity or good fortune of its recipient. The qualification in respect of 'social or religious communications of a purely personal nature' apparently allowed him to issue printed invitations to a banquet or to copy out the Lord's Prayer and send it to a friend. Even Clarendon, who was driven into exile first by the Puritans and then by the Royalists, was not more harshly treated; and like Clarendon, Otto Strasser never lost his good humour. He says today that the experience 'cannot cloud my view of Canada and its people. I found many friends there, among the English-speaking and French communities alike, and came to the conviction that Canada is the land of the future.'

He was kept alive once more by destiny, which in these emergencies was ever his friend. He met a Sudeten German acquaintance from Prague who had a tiny and unused farmhouse in the apple-

growing Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia and offered him this refuge, free. He went and lived in it, amid utter loneliness, for three years. He wrote two books. The manuscript of one, which bore the prophetic title *Armistice or Peace?*, was confiscated by the Canadian Government and never returned to him, although he had contracts for its publication (the other, *Deutschlands Erneuerung*, appeared in South America after the war).

A small but regular remittance from his brother in the United States maintained him in food. The Black Front and the Free Germany Movement seemed to have been smashed at last, by those who claimed also to fight Hitlerism. He was by the ban cut off from communication with his organization and his supporters in South America, South Africa, China, the Netherlands, Indies and the neutral countries of Europe. Astonishingly, the fruits of his work bloomed without his tending; these branches developed a life of their own and later he was able to renew his work as if it had not been interrupted, thanks to this constancy of his supporters.

However, at that time the threats of the two Communists in Montreal were completely fulfilled. In the Western countries and capitals Communists began to nest in all governmental and service departments and agencies. In Nova Scotia Hitler's chief antagonist, lonely and forgotten, grimly dug his garden and planted potatoes against the winter. Moscow, freed from the competition of the foremost candidate for leadership of the German opposition, formed its own 'Free Germany Committee' with the captured German generals, to whom were later added a Nazi Gauleiter or two. The choice of a similar name was deliberate; there was to be only one 'Free German' movement, and as Otto Strasser had refused any part in it it was to be established in Moscow without him, while he faded into oblivion in the Annapolis Valley. The party of freedom in Germany had been abandoned by the Western Governments which claimed to be fighting for freedom; henceforth the party of the totalitarian State was to be supported and Hitler's work continued for him.

PART FOUR

1945 – 1953

CAT AND MOUSE

The writer believes that recent Western history contains nothing comparable with the victimization of Otto Strasser as it began with the bans in 1942 and continues today, eleven years later, with his virtual internment. It would be a commonplace occurrence in any backward region, but precisely this was from the time of Magna Carta supposed to be the essential point of difference between such barbarous areas and that which has come to call itself The West. To find anything like it in the West the student must go back to times of despotic justice which but recently seemed to have been left far behind. That it should be possible at this mid-century is the measure of the West's deterioration in these fifty years. The motive for it was perceptibly his belief in Christian nationhood and the individuality of nations, and if that is now heresy in the West, then the term 'The West' is losing its distinctive meaning and becoming merely a geographical indication. He is but one of many leaders in many countries who have been defamed or deserted for the same reason; nevertheless there is a peculiar and particular outrageousness in the injustice done him. Fiction alone offers a fairly modern counterpart; the Count of Monte Cristo suffered in oblivion a persecution about as long, equally unknown, and by any fair standards as unaccountable.

While the war continued he gritted his teeth, tended his little plot between the going and the coming of the snows, sought firing for the long winters and waited for the fighting's end. He was occasionally reminded that he must not write, say or publish any word about public affairs and was threatened with 'legal means of enforcement' even if things published by him *before* the ban were republished! The problem of existence was left to him to solve. His post was intercepted, scrutinized, sometimes forwarded, sometimes withheld. He asked in 1943 to be allowed at least to leave Canada and was told months later, in 1944, 'in view of disturbed conditions in South America it would not be possible to approve your earlier suggestion that you should migrate to Uruguay!' He was unwanted; but he must stay. He lived on that borderline of want described in a German phrase; he had 'too little to live, too much to die'.

At last, in May 1945 Berlin fell, the fighting in Europe ceased, and he thought the clouds were lifting. He asked that 'the wartime restrictions' be raised; the Deputy Minister of Justice replied that they must continue 'as there has as yet been no official proclamation of the end of the war in Europe'. Some time after that again, 'the restrictions' *were* raised, in a curious manner of speaking. He was nominally permitted to resume his work. In fact his connections with the publishing world had been destroyed, in part by the silence imposed on him and in greater part by the freedom to defame him enjoyed by others. He could not pick up the threads of his literary work as if they had never been cut. Apparently he was not intended to, for the familiar 'spokesman' of authority jocularly told the press, 'There are no legal restrictions on Dr. Strasser's right to say anything he wants ... but the legal right is one thing, and the propriety of his making statements embarrassing to Canada is another; then we might have a word with him'.

'Legal right' was not even 'one thing' in this case; it did not exist at all. Strasser was not too much disheartened; because writing was not, in 1945, his first interest. He wanted to resume his life's work (the political struggle for the future of Germany), not merely his literary work which had been a means to the greater end. His urgent desire was to leave Canada (which in any case appeared to find him distasteful), not so much for the simple sake of leaving Canada as for that of returning to his own country and of seeing his children again. At that point his treatment took its new, fantastic and present shape. He was by every device of sophistry and ingenuity prevented from leaving the country where he was called a nuisance.

The true motive for this has never been stated and such pretexts as authority reluctantly gave, years later, could by the most cursory examination be proved barren. For the better understanding of the real motive the circumstances of 1945 and 1946 need to be described.

The end of the war in Europe, the reopening of the postal services, and the release of Strasser's mail from interference all showed something unexpected, possibly even to him. He was by no means forgotten in Germany. In that respect the twelve years of exile and the three years of bans had been ineffective. His old supporters began to get in touch with him, by scores, then hundreds, then thousands. Very quickly an organization was re-established; it was as if ivy, torn from its hold, by nature's prompting found its way back to the wall. Strasser from his humble room in Nova Scotia at once proclaimed the dissolution of the Black Front; no further need existed for a weapon forged solely to destroy Hitler. His followers, postally instructed by him (his greatest problem was to raise the money for stamps) grouped themselves in a large and loosely-knit League for Germany's Revival (the name was taken from his book, *Deutschlands Erneuerung*) at the core of which was a small controlling body, in the nature of a general staff, called The Friends of Otto Strasser. He contemplated the foundation, on this basis, of a political party to mobilize opinion and fight elections. It was called the German Freedom Party; its symbol was the Christian cross, and that alone was likely, in the circumstances of the time, to incur hostility in political London, Washington and Ottawa.

At once the machine of outlawry was set in motion against him. Up to that moment, apparently, faith had been put in the power of time and oblivion to obliterate the political significance of Otto Strasser. Now it was seen that these had not availed. In the chancelleries of the West an abrupt awakening seems to have occurred. The forgotten man of the Annapolis Valley had not been forgotten! From that instant the persecution of this solitary man entered its second phase; it was that envisaged in the second phrase of the menace uttered by the German Communist refugee in Montreal in 1941. Otto Strasser (he had said) would find his political activity banned if he refused to work with the Communists; and more than that, *he would never be allowed to return to Germany*.

What was thus threatened in 1941 was fulfilled in 1945 and until the present day. The combined might of the governments of London, Washington and Ottawa, supported by the governments of Paris and of Bonn, has for eight years been exerted to keep this one man from his native land. To achieve this they have availed themselves of Hitler's own law against his chief enemy, in open disregard of all their own laws, constitutions, professions and precepts. They have perpetuated the law of the concentration camp, which obviates the need for charge, trial, evidence or justice, in this one especial case alone.

Before the tale is chronologically told, a brief summary of the basic facts of the situation is here appropriate:

Otto Strasser was deprived of his German nationality by a decree of the Hitlerist Minister of the Interior (Dr. Frick, hanged at Nuremberg) published on November 1st, 1934, in the German *Official Gazette (Reichsanzeiger)* and issued under Hitler's Denationalization Law of July 14th, 1933. Under this law and decree all Strasser's property in Germany was confiscated (his life insurance was about the only important item remaining; however, Hitler even ordered the University of Wuerzburg to rescind his doctorate!), and also that of his wife and children; deprived of their German nationality, they fled to Greece in 1934, reaching Switzerland in 1934. Under this, the valid law of the German Reich at the time, Strasser was disabled from obtaining a German passport. He lived and carried on his campaign in Austria and Czechoslovakia with false passports, or genuine passports bearing another name, escaped from France with a Czech passport, and was given a British passport for the voyage from Portugal to Bermuda and Canada. This passport he was required to surrender on reaching Canada and thenceforward was by Hitler's act that most unhappy of mortals: a man living in a foreign land without a passport.

Then (in 1945 and 1946) came the end of the war, the sudden revelation that his supporters in Germany continued to be numerous and staunch, and his immediate attempt to return there and, at last, take up his life's work. It was desired (though not at first admitted) to prevent this; for what reasons, this book has sought to divine and show. But on what ground could he be forbidden to return to Germany? He had been put under ban, and in effect exiled to Nova Scotia, during the war on the ground that 'the spreading of speculations or insinuations against Russia's good faith ... cannot be permitted'. In 1945 and 1946, however, the politicians of the West were competing with each other to expose Soviet ill faith! There was soon to be a great 'airlift to Berlin' and later a war 'against Communist aggression' in far Korea. The remaining peoples of the West were once again to be crushed with taxes and hamstrung with restrictions, this time to enable them to face and overcome the Communist menace.

Otto Strasser had been vindicated then, in the case of Communism as in that of Hitlerism! The ban had been unjust. He was the proven enemy of the new evil as of the old one. What possible explanation could be publicly given, if one were demanded, for preventing this man's return to his country?

There was a simple answer. Under concentration-camp law no explanation is needed. No public justification was attempted. Hitler had deprived him of his passport and he could not travel without one. Quietly the Western Governments took over that useful enactment of The Wicked Man and by means of it have for nearly eight years kept Otto Strasser exiled in Nova Scotia. The Communist in Montreal in 1941 made no idle boast.

There is a sardonic arrogance and inhumanity in this injustice which stands out more starkly when it is studied against the parchment background of public protestations:

The Constitution of the Republic of Western Germany, promulgated by the government which the Western Powers set up at Bonn, says in Article 116, paragraph 2: 'Former German citizens who, between January 30th, 1933 and May 8th, 1945, were deprived of their citizenship for political, racial or religious reasons, and their descendants, *shall be regranted German citizenship on application.*' (The Bonn Government, against which a suit under this article is pending as these lines are written, has publicly stated that it will uphold Hitler's expatriation of his leading adversary, Otto Strasser.)

The Declaration of Human Rights drawn up on December 10th, 1948 by the United Nations, the creation of the Western governments, and signed by Britain and Canada, among other countries, says in Article 13: 'Everyone has the right *to leave any country*, including his own, and *to return to his country.*' (The United Nations refused to give consideration to Otto Strasser's appeal to it on the ground that it had 'no machinery to deal with individual cases', so that the human rights proclaimed have no genuine existence for human beings. The signatory Canadian Government has long declined to give Strasser a travel document; the signatory British Government, under Socialist and Conservative Prime Ministers alike, has refused to allow him to enter its zone of occupation in Germany and has intimated its wishes in this respect also to the Bonn Government.)

The United States Alien Property Custodian, in his report accounting for the disposal of the property of Axis nationals in the United States up to June 30th, 1950, stated, 'Congress prohibits the return of assets to Germans or Japanese except for obviously persecuted groups like Jews *and anti-Nazi political leaders.*' (The military representatives of the Washington Government in Germany have declared that they will not allow this foremost 'anti-Nazi political leader' to enter Germany, so that he cannot reacquire his assets confiscated by Hitler.)

The Canadian Foreign Minister, Mr. Lester Pearson, being urged in the Ottawa Parliament on April 4th, 1952 to cancel the passport of a Dr. James Endicott (who in Communist China had made allegations about germ warfare implicating his own country) said, 'Dr. Endicott's citizenship is *a birthright and cannot be denied him under law*; therefore *he is always free to return to Canada*'. (The Canadian Department of External Affairs, under the same Minister, has for nearly eight years denied Otto Strasser any such birthright or freedom to return to his country.)

Noble precept and contrary practice make a chilling contrast, like that between a sunlit place and a dark, mildewed vault where things that shun the light creep and crawl.

These are the facts and rights of the matter; as the reader may see, they are beyond dispute. They form the background of proclaimed principle against which five governments have played cat and mouse with Otto Strasser from 1945 (when the ban was nominally raised!) until this day. The writer remained in communication with him, intermittently during the war but regularly thereafter, from England, South Africa and the United States, and eventually met him again in Canada, and has a complete record of these fantastic events.

The simple rules of the game were: first, to tell Strasser privately (and if compelled thereto, publicly to announce) that none desired to detain him and indeed that all would welcome his departure, if he could find some country to admit him; and next, if he found a country ready to accept him, and needed a travel document to cross intervening frontiers, to deny him one. Given freedom from publicity, the game could so have been played for ever, or until he died, the cornered king on the checkerboard being able to move merely from one to the other of the two remaining places open to him: application and denial, denial and application; it was the most charming checkmate. The only disturbing influence came from the gusts of publicity which occasionally blew open the door. These sprang, and inevitably will continue to spring, from Strasser's natural standing and following in Germany.

In September 1945 he again tried to avail himself of the natural 'birthright' and 'man-made law' (above quoted), and return to his country. Having no passport, he asked the Canadian Department of External Affairs to issue to him that 'International Identification Certificate' which had been devised, especially for political emigrés, after Hitler came to power in Germany, by the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth countries, Switzerland and other lands. It was refused. He kept on trying, all through 1946 and 1947, and in that year, just before his fiftieth birthday, received Mr. Lester Pearson's renewed expression of regret that the Canadian Government 'at present sees no possibility of furnishing you with the international travel paper' which he needed.

The two words 'he tried' give no idea of the efforts he made. The background of remoteness, loneliness and penury must also be pictured, against which he struggled with these unearned enmities. The very cost of postage and writing-paper was a constant nightmare; it was hard for him even to communicate with the few who, knowing the facts, wished to help, if they could. The frugal diet and the bitter winters told on him, and in 1946 and 1947 he began to suffer unaccountable pains in his back which seemed to portend the end of all further struggle. Help in that emergency came as manna from Heaven, from a Canadian. He was sent to Winnipeg, where the X-rays showed the cause of the trouble. His horse had been shot under him during the fighting in January 1918 and, being heavily thrown, he had received a compression fracture of the spine; never properly mended, this had given way under the stress of the hard garden work by means of which he sought to keep himself fit and his spirits high in the Annapolis valley. There was a serious operation and then, hale once more, he went back to his exile in Nova Scotia.

In the little community where he found a new dwelling there were few men who had some understanding of the great outer world and its affairs. Two of these, a retired manufacturer and a

schoolteacher, perceived his quality and became his friends. One of them says today that Strasser could be as valuable to the Western nations, in the struggle against Soviet Communism, as a million soldiers; the other, that Strasser is the most honest man he has ever met (he adds, 'probably too honest for his own good', which in the material interpretation of 'good' may be correct). Both these tributes are deserved, in the writer's opinion.

Apart from these two friends, reading has been Strasser's only solace during the long and bitter years. He was lucky not to be cut off from even that source of consolation. Nova Scotia, by happy chance, has a free travelling library which makes periodical rounds of the villages and hamlets, and Strasser became one of its most ardent and thankful users. A scholar before, he has in this way put the dragging, hostile time to good account, and thought deeply on the causes and effects of things as he pored over hundreds of volumes of the story of Greece and Rome, of the American Civil War, of the French Revolution and of other great chapters in the tale of the West. In scholarship alone he must today be the peer of any Western politician at all, and the master of most. This gives his conversation about the events of the present time, and his part in them, a deep foundation of historical and philosophical learning which makes it fascinating to the listener. Withal, he is a robust and amusing man, never frowning his brow very long. For instance, the scowl that comes when he thinks and speaks of Hitler (of that man's sexual impotence, stomach that would not support meat or liquor, and hunger for power to compensate these organic defects) changes swiftly into a laugh as he concludes, 'Beware of the politician who doesn't like women, steaks and good wine.'

He tried, and went on trying, stubbornly. He even tried to take seriously the announcement of an unnamed official 'spokesman' in the press that he could, of course, leave Canada if he could gain permission to enter another country; no exit permit from Canada was needed! He persisted all through 1946 and 1947 and 1948 and in that year succeeded in obtaining the French Government's consent to enter France and stay there a year. Having that, he thought the Canadian Government would at once grant the International Identification Certificate, previously denied, for he had long been told that the second thing depended on the first. After many months this request also was refused (the refusals were five, from first to last), and by that time the American and British Governments had begun a new press campaign against him, so that the French Government took fright and withdrew its already ageing permit.

The wartime bans on his public work had lasted three years, and had not sufficed to obliterate his memory. Now, at the end of 1948, the peacetime ban on his return to Germany had endured three years, and apparently he was less forgotten than ever in Germany, for suddenly a violent bombardment on him opened from all the third parties which had taken Germany over. For a little while it seemed that Otto Strasser, who by this time dwelt in a snow-bound spot called Paradise in Nova Scotia, was foremost in the thoughts of all the great governments of the world. From that moment on no doubt remained, if any had existed before, that he was constantly in their minds.

There is a constant element of farce in this drama of man's inhumanity to a man. The present writer's dictionary defines farce as 'a dramatic piece intended to excite laughter' and 'an absurdly futile proceeding', and the word is here used in the second sense, for the plainest thing about the events which then began is their absurd futility.

First came a broadside, a bolt from the red, from Moscow, where the German-language sheet, *Die Neue Zeit*, in October 1948 suddenly came out with a three-column-long attack on Strasser and the Black Front, in which 'Truman, Churchill and Strasser' were violently attacked as a united trinity of warmongers. Thereon the French radio broadcast the statement that Otto Strasser had taken up a leading post on the German radio, and London newspapers, on the authority of news agencies and under such categorical headlines as 'Otto Comes Back', reported, 'Otto Strasser, leader of the former

German underground movement and enemy of Hitler, returned from Canada to Germany yesterday'. Otto Strasser, in Nova Scotia, added these clippings to his already large album of similar reports about his movements and undertakings; though he was never allowed to stir from where he was, the newspapers of the world blithely transported him from one country to another during these years.

London and Washington were not far behind Moscow with their onslaught. A few weeks later, in January 1949, the American Military Governor in Germany, General Lucius D. Clay, reported that '... nationalistic groups which had been driven underground in Germany *since the overthrow of National Socialism* are again be-ginning to lift their heads ... One of these movements is a revival of Otto Strasser's *infamous Black Front*, under the seemingly innocuous name of the League for German Revival'.

The author has italicized two passages. As the reader will recall, the Black Front *went* underground at Hitler's accession to power, and was not 'driven underground' after his overthrow twelve years later. Its entire meaning and reason for existence was this underground fight, under Otto Strasser's leadership, against Hitler. It is reasonable to assume that General Clay, as a recent military arrival, had no deep or long knowledge of German affairs and that the report issued under his name was prepared for him by others.^[21] This is the usual method of compiling such reports and might explain the use of the word 'infamous'. In what respect had the Black Front deserved to be called infamous? Was it, in 1949, already infamous to have fought against Hitler from 1930 until 1945? The graves of Formis, Schapke, Trenkle, Grunow and thousands of others might protest against that, could the earth speak.

But in January 1949 truth, too, appeared to be under concentration camp law, and the familiar 'spokesman' of the United States Military Government in Berlin added to General Clay's words, the next day, the threat that if Otto Strasser should return to Germany 'he would face possible prosecution in German courts as a former Nazi'. Here the element of farce again appears. Is there to be a second Nuremberg Trial, with Hitler's only persistent and active antagonist as the last, sole defendant? That would be a spectacle indeed, if the man who began his open war against Hitler three years before Hitler even gained power, and eight years before the West combined at Munich to present him with the keys to Czechoslovakia, were to appear in such a dock!

The Times, in London, joined in the cannonade, with reports and a leading article. This newspaper, three years later, was in its official history to confess the misleadingness of the leading articles about German affairs presented to its readers during the 'Appeasement' period of 1933-38; on this occasion, in 1949, in the present writer's judgment its news and views were not more accurate. The Berlin Correspondent said that Strasser's League for Germany's Revival 'is symptomatic of the new nationalistic spirit that is finding ever louder expression, not least, under Russian inspiration, in Communist propaganda' (this appears to be once more, the suggestion that the inveterate anti-Communist is some sort of Communist). The correspondent concluded, 'There is no reason to suppose that Strasser has changed his fundamental ideas since he fell out with Hitler and was deprived by Nazi law of his rights as a German citizen'.

This singular sentence implied, reproachfully, that Strasser, whose own great claim is that he has never changed his fundamental ideas, which led him to break with Hitler, is reprehensible for *not* having changed them (in which case he would presumably *not* have broken with Hitler!). What his ideas are is not stated. There is a condemnation without an argument, like a dome without a cathedral. Next, the Ottawa Correspondent told the readers of *The Times* that it was unlikely Strasser's application to be allowed to return to his country would be granted because General Clay had described him as 'an expelled Nazi', which fact would 'doubtless be taken into consideration in Ottawa in dealing with the application' (the fourth or fifth). The logic of this statement appears to

have been that an expelled Nazi (the term does not contain the truth of what happened) must not be allowed to return to Germany, where there were some millions of non-expelled Nazis, many of them in high positions.

The Times followed these reports with a leading article entitled 'A Ghost from the Past', which began by saying (wrongly) that 'men who came to the fore during the Nazi regime are rightly forbidden to enter public life'. The corollary of that should clearly be that men outlawed during the Nazi regime should *not* be forbidden to enter public life, but *The Times* drew no such conclusion. It recorded that Strasser, in exile, had 'conducted an energetic if futile opposition to the Nazi regime'. No opposition conducted by German exiles could be more effective than their hosts allowed it to be, and if all opposition to Hitler proved futile the story of Appeasement (see *The History of The Times*, Vol. IV, Chapter xxiii) gives valuable information about the reasons.

Proceeding, *The Times*, which had so long and patiently tried to understand the Nazi faith between 1933 and 1938, in 1949 shrank from 'the ghost of the Nazi faith' which it perceived in Strasser's 'rather muddled vision of a Socialism which would not be Socialist and a Nationalism which would not be Nationalist'. Strasser's expositions are not muddled, for anybody who reads them, and the 'vision' that led him to break with the German Socialists and Hitler alike is one of a socialism that *would* be socialist and a Christian nationalism that would *not* be Prussian militarism; his statements are clear and all on record. *The Times* then concluded that 'the British and American authorities are wise to insist that ... the League for Germany's Revival is altogether too potent a brew and that Dr. Otto Strasser is more safely employed in Canada than in the western zones of Germany' (the qualifying phrase, 'the western zones', is curious unless it also was meant to convey an insinuation against the man who had refused to head Moscow's troupe of 'Free Germans').

Strasser wrote a reply to these statements (the present writer, who during several of the years in question had supplied Our Correspondent's reports to *The Times* from Berlin, similarly sought to correct them) and to other erroneous and disparaging ones in other newspapers, all based on General Clay's use of the labour-saving adjective 'infamous'. No newspaper, anywhere, published his protest and rebuttal. Solely *Truth* (which had not given currency to the detractions) printed a dignified objection to the practice of denying reply to published aspersions.^[22]

This sudden outburst against Otto Strasser, begun by an American general and then taken up, in the manner above shown, by newspapers in London, Ottawa, Washington, New York, Paris and the Commonwealth capitals oversea, marked a new stage in his persecution. Theretofore it had been clandestine; thenceforward it was public, if intermittently so. Previously the pretence had been privately maintained that the whole difficulty was one of his lost citizenship and lost papers; now it was openly admitted that the governments of the West were united in the resolve to prevent this one man from returning to Germany (others who had lost their nationality under the same decree had long since been enabled to travel freely, and to Germany if they wished).

That became clear in the statement of the American Military Government 'spokesman', following General Clay's speech, that 'any application by Strasser for re-entry into Germany would be rejected unless it was backed officially by the Canadian Government' and that he would 'face trial as a former Nazi' if he succeeded in returning; in the statement of 'a Foreign Office spokesman in London' (reported on the same day by the *New York Times*) that 'Strasser will be barred from the British zone of Germany because of long and leading associations with National Socialism'; in the further statement on that day of the Ottawa Correspondent of *The Times* that the Canadian Government was consulting with the British, American and French Governments and 'it is unlikely that permission will be granted'; and in the withdrawal of the French Government's permission, previously accorded, for him to go to France. In addition the British Government, through its military authorities in Germany, refused him the requisite 'licence' to form his contemplated

political party; and the British and American Governments banned the publication in their occupation zones of his highly successful book *Hitler and I*, which had been issued during the war in English, French, Spanish and German, in England, America, Canada, France and South America.

From that moment on the fact was admitted when the question was pressed (public discussion of it was not fervently encouraged). Mr. Skeffington-Lodge, M.P., in January 1949 democratically asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in the House of Commons, to 'take steps to prevent Otto Strasser from re-entering Germany as long as this country remains one of the occupation authorities', and Mr. McNeil democratically replied that, 'His Majesty's Government have taken all the steps in their power to prevent his return'. A year after that an official of the British Foreign Office, in reply to another M.P. who expostulated on Strasser's behalf, replied that in the opinion of the Foreign Office 'no Government could take upon itself the responsibility of allowing Dr. Otto Strasser to return to Germany, as they believe he might be instrumental in reviving in Germany the sentiments and ideas which it has already cost the world so much to suppress'. The letter added that the German Federal Government 'also shared' the opinions of the British Foreign Office (a notable coincidence) and that 'it appears that the Black Front largely consists of the followers of Dr. Otto Strasser' (it was formed by, and until he ordered its disbandment in 1945 consisted solely of his followers, whose joint aim was to destroy Hitler and Hitlerism).

There are many other governmental, official, semi-official and 'spokesmanlike' statements on this subject. They are all completely clear in one point (that four Western Governments and the administration at Bonn are resolved to prevent his return) and completely unclear in all else. No reason that can be tested, charge that can be disproved or genuine ground of any kind for his treatment is ever contained in them. They are envenomed with aspersions and insinuations which any advocate would tear to pieces, could he command the attention of a magistrate to the documents of Otto Strasser's record; Strasser is denied all means of vindication and disproof. Officialdom today does not need to fear any such process of verification or supervision; it continues to act, everywhere, under emergency powers and military authority.

These governmental or official statements, however, observe a certain caution. Mr. Hector McNeil, for instance, stated no *grounds* for what he undertook to do: to keep a man against whom no political crime or misdemeanour can be charged out of his own country. He merely said he would do it, and as yet that continues to be enough. Similarly, a government department cannot now or ever be called to account for expressing the opinion, monstrous though it is by the standards which once prevailed, that 'no government could take upon itself the responsibility of allowing Dr. Otto Strasser to return to Germany'; such large asseverations are easily made from the seclusion of a bureaucratic cell.

The present writer, however, having long experience in daily journalism, has been surprised even in these times by the universality of newspaper defamation in this case. It appears to him extraordinary that the code of the journalist can so have deteriorated in a decade. He has seen things, which, from his own newspaper service in Germany he knew to be inaccurate, printed about Otto Strasser in leading newspapers of his own country, of the United States, France, Canada, South Africa and Australia.

Before him as these lines are written lie the cuttings of two articles which show the extreme range of unsupported innuendo discharged against Strasser. In one the Paris Correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor* informs the readers of that newspaper that, 'Otto Strasser, henchman in Adolf Hitler's climb to power, is now seen moving again into the European picture, this time as an instrument of the Kremlin ... In his advances to the Russians as well as in his propaganda among the West Germans he is said to stress the need for a Russo-German alliance' (this was published in April 1950, just after Strasser had refused a second enticement from Moscow, described later in the

present chapter). In the second article the Berlin Correspondent of the *Daily Express*, states that 'Allied Intelligence regards Otto Strasser as one of the most dangerous Germans still, alive, and dynamite if he comes back to Germany ... he is rabidly anti-Bolshevik ... he believes it is only a matter of time before he is allowed to return to whip up the ultra nationalism in Germany' (the words, 'one of the most dangerous Germans *still alive*' are interesting in this effusion; presumably the saving clause means that some of the dead ones are more dangerous).

'Instrument of the Kremlin', 'rabidly anti-Bolshevik'; it is an experience, embittering but by some strange means salutary, for a man who has been through and done so much as Otto Strasser to read such things about himself, in a bare room in Paradise. It is deeply puzzling, at first, to find that there are people all over the world who clearly know little about a man and his work and nevertheless are filled with an unreasoning vindictiveness towards him. It is all part of a liberal education in politics and human nature. Strasser knows, as the present writer knows, how this machine of defamation is operated, and how incomprehendingly young men in journalism lend themselves to it. In time the victim can even smile at the abuse of people, completely unknown to him, who clearly know not what they do; and a man needs to be able to grin at adversity when he has for years lived in such impoverishment as has Strasser and one day reads in a Montreal newspaper these words by an anonymous columnist:

'Interested parties (and there are many) have been wondering about the source of funds which have maintained Otto Strasser, exiled former Nazi leader, in his lengthy stay in Canada. It has been established to the satisfaction of police and other authorities that he had money cached here when he arrived. The question is being asked: has he been receiving additional funds from German sources? In the opinion of some, he will never be granted a passport to return to Germany, since they profess to see him closely linked with a rabid neo-Nazi faction there.'

There the question is fairly clearly put by a genial and anonymous stranger: why doesn't the man starve? There is not enough mystery about Strasser's funds for a conjuror to play the pea-under-a-thimble trick with it. Though he is in enforced exile, he is not in hiding and anyone who is interested could see how he lives. He has during these years had fifty dollars a month from his brother in the United States and in a good month makes up to another fifty dollars from articles supplied by him to a few German-language newspapers in Canada, the United States, Argentina and Switzerland which have not yet yielded to demands that they should cease publishing his work. How frail this part of his income is may be judged from the following letter to him from the editor of one such newspaper:

'Dear Dr. Strasser. - I was in New York recently and had my attention drawn to your articles by one of the advertising agencies with which we deal. The owner of this agency, who is Jewish, intimated that several large concerns, clients of his, had complained about the publication of your articles in our newspaper. They made no complaint about the content of your articles, but objected to the appearance in our journal of your name, "Otto Strasser" ... As you can imagine, I am anxious to avoid any trouble with the government and for that matter not to lose advertisement revenue....'

A world of enemies! The power and organization of this persecution is remarkable; it has an all-seeing eye, tentacles that reach to the furthestmost nook and cranny, and a relentless malice. The daily life which its victim leads may be depicted here. He inhabits a tiny, bare apartment over a village grocery store; in the winter the snow is deep, the days are short and the nights are long for an exile cut off from his country, kin and life's work. He cooks his own meals, washes his own dishes, sweeps his own floors, and detests the household drudgery but enjoys the cooking. Rent costs him twenty-five dollars, fuel and electricity ten, and he has to spend a minimum of twenty dollars, where he could well use a hundred, on postage. He has about thirty dollars a month for food, and that means, in North America, that hamburger (or mincemeat) is his usual meat dish,

because it is cheapest. Towards the end of the month hamburger gives way to cheese to leave a few cents more for postage. He does not smoke; the free mobile library provides his only entertainment; he works far into the night and can afford but one luxury, 'lying in bed in the morning'. To his few neighbours he is known as a man of pleasant manners and invariable good humour, who tells the fruit growers and poultry and dairy farmers of the district with a chuckle that he is 'busy raising hell from Paradise'.

He neither courts nor shrinks from publicity, and is ever ready to give the facts of the case to some news agency 'string man' from the nearest town, who telephones to know if it is true that he has just flown to Moscow, landed in Berlin, or the like. For many years the courtesy with which he met these inquiries was repaid with the distortion or suppression of the information he gave. Only in the last few months has there been some improvement in this respect, and one or two of his replies, to reports disseminated about him, have been reproduced without disparaging comment or appended misstatement.

The individual journalist is seldom to blame in this last matter; he usually tries to tell a straightforward story, but the sub-editors, headliners and editors trick it out with defamatory additions. An example of this was the case of a young reporter for a leading Canadian weekly who apparently tried to get his facts right (only a few were wrong) and to avoid prejudicial insinuation (though he could not refrain from seeing something sinister in the fact that Strasser's parti-coloured sports shirt was in part brown!). This young man produced a fairly objective report about Strasser, apart from these defects, but when it appeared in his magazine a headline had been added, in letters an inch high, 'The Last of the Hitler Gang'. However, the Canadian broadcasting authorities, when they last made use of Strasser's time and information, made some amends for earlier treatment by literally quoting his polite statement that, in his opinion, 'the circumstances under which I am being kept in Canada smack of the concentration camp'.

That is in fact the law under which he is being held by the concerted resolve of the four Western Governments and the Bonn Government, as announced in January of 1949, and it is Hitlerist and Communist law, applied to keep a man of good record out of Germany while others of bad record rise there. For it is not true that (as *The Times* then said), 'The men who came to the fore during the Nazi regime are rightly forbidden to enter public life'. They have re-entered it in masses, while Otto Strasser has remained outlawed. If he were to go back to Germany today he would for that reason have to fight against many of the same men who opposed him before!

In August 1949, a few months after the bombardment by General Clay, *The Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Moscow Neue Zeit* and all the others, Strasser wrote to the author, 'Is not the enclosed cutting ludicrous? This "Major General" Remer is the very man who, being in command of the Berlin Garrison Regiment on July 20th, 1944, went to Goebbels and from his office telephoned to Hitler, and then crushed the attempt to overthrow Hitler'. In the clipping enclosed, Major Remer (promoted Major General by Hitler for his services on that day, when the German opposition made its last attempt to kill Hitler and bring the war to an end) was advertised as chief speaker of 'the German Rechts-Partei' (the Party of the Right). 'So this arch-Nazi may speak publicly' (continued Otto Strasser in his letter), 'and his party is granted a licence by the British! I believe he has in the meantime even been elected a member of parliament. Meanwhile my party is refused a licence, I am prevented from returning to Germany, all publicity on my behalf is hindered, and my books are banned in the British zone. What can be the meaning of it all, and where is the sense?'

That was only one case. On October 17th, 1951, Chancellor Adenauer stated in the Bundestag that one hundred and thirty-four former Nazis were serving in his foreign ministry alone. By 1952 the Bavarian radio stated that eighty-five per cent of the leading officials of that ministry, including all heads of division of the political section, were former party-members. An Associated Press report

from Frankfurt stated that about half the state and municipal officials in the American zone were former party-members. There is nothing remarkable in this. It would hardly be possible to staff the governmental and municipal services of Western Germany without using 'former Nazis', because qualifications and experience are needed, and they are mathematically bound in large proportion to occur (given the circumstances of the years 1933-45) among men who were forced to become members of Hitler's party.

What is remarkable is that while all that goes on the one man who, demonstrably, is *not* a 'former Nazi' should by the combined effort of five governments be kept out of Germany. For what is a former Nazi? In the sense in which the term is bandied about in the press, it is simply a man who was a member of the party before it was suppressed. That does not mean at all that he must be a *former* Nazi. He may in his heart still be one. The only way to prevent such men from becoming openly and ardently Nazis again is to help Germany to leadership by proven anti-Nazis. The only men who can genuinely claim to be *former* Nazis are those who left the party before it even came to power, and fifteen years before it was smashed by force of arms, and of these Otto Strasser is the earliest and chief. Men who are no longer 'Nazis' merely because the party has been obliterated by foreign command cannot claim to be or be regarded as 'former Nazis'; the claim of the man who left the party in 1930 and fought it and its leader unremittingly for fifteen years is beyond challenge.

Either the leaders of the West must be so ill-informed about the history of the last thirty years in Germany, that they have no sound basis for their judgments and actions, or their professed desire to eliminate the men and the spirit of Hitlerism is not genuine. Moscow, for that matter, makes no humbug about 'Nazis' and 'former Nazis'; it makes the best use it can of any on whom it can lay hands. Martin Bormann, Hitler's deputy, is almost certainly being held in reserve there for some dramatic intervention in German events at a moment to be chosen, and so are Erich Koch, the former *Gauleiter* of East Prussia and *Statthalter* of the Ukraine, and many other surviving Nazi dignitaries. And so, by all the signs, is 'Hildebrand', who played a part in the kidnapping plot of 1934 in Prague.

The reader may, from an earlier chapter, remember this man, whose real name is Alfred Franke-Griksch. He deserted Otto Strasser and the Black Front after the failure of the kidnapping scheme and went to Germany, where he became a colonel of Hitler's SS troops and took part in the invasion of Prague. In describing those incidents the author mentioned that he would reappear in the story.

In March 1950 Otto Strasser wrote to the author, 'I can but smile when I see what kind of men are receiving from the Allied occupation authorities the 'licence' for political activity, refused to me. First Remer, now Alfred Franke-Griksch! Believe it or not, he is now negotiating with the Western Powers and with Chancellor Adenauer about the rearmament of Germany! What can one do but laugh, lest one weep?'

As an SS colonel Franke-Griksch was taken prisoner by British troops in 1945. In 1947 or 1948 the present author received a mysterious inquiry about him from the War Office, presumably because he had been briefly mentioned in the earlier book about Otto Strasser. In the preoccupations of wartime Franke-Griksch and the part he had played had somewhat faded from the author's mind, but the reply, although he cannot clearly recall it, was presumably unfavourably worded; if it was not it should have been, as this story has shown.

Nevertheless, about that time Franke-Griksch suddenly reappeared on the scene, at large and apparently prosperous. He was seen for a while in Italy, and Strasser received report that he there travelled with British papers. This could not be verified, but if it was the case Strasser fears that some British authority was too confiding.

Later he reappeared in Germany and became surprisingly important there, when earlier events are considered. He built up a body, apparently influential, called the *Bruderschaft*, or Brotherhood. This was the first organization of former officers of the Hitler armies, and especially of those of the SS troops. Franke-Griksch was the head of the Brotherhood (with the title of 'Chancellor') and when the question of rearming the Western Germans arose he prominently engaged, in that capacity, in negotiations with the Bonn Government and, through it, with the Western Powers! (Newspaper reports at that period said there had been some trial or investigation of the question whether he had been involved in the execution of Black Front leaders at the invasion of Prague, and that he was cleared on that score).

In any case, the contrast is startling, between the immunity and freedom accorded to a man of such record and the outlawry of Strasser. In course of time Franke-Griksch's ideas about 'Eastern policy' seem to have become suspect, and he was dropped by the Bonn Government and the Western Powers. He then went, with his wife, to Berlin, where according to report, he was 'arrested' in the Soviet zone. However, the West German press reported that he appeared as a public speaker at 'national-Bolshevist' meetings there, and if this is the case he appears, not unforeseeably, to have landed in that camp. Indeed, Strasser holds him to be no Communist, but a believer in co-operation 'with Moscow against the West' as the best method of achieving Germany's 'national liberation'. The line of thought is almost inevitable in an SS man. Strasser firmly opposes the 'Eastern alternative' and apparently on that account remains in enforced exile; the Hildebrands enjoy all freedom of action and movement.

The reader may care to put himself in the position of Strasser when he learns of things like this and reflects upon his own outlawry. To him there is a sardonic irony in the constant clamour of the Western newspapers about the danger of 'neo-Nazism' in Germany. 'Neo' means 'reversion to'. What need is there of a reversion to Nazism when the Nazis are still there and are gaining more power every day? If there is a danger it is that of Nazism, not of neo-Nazism, and it could only be fought by Germans who fought the Nazis before they were neo-Nazis. The chief of them, Strasser, is under ban.

Early in 1950, as he wrote to the author at the time, the Communists made their second attempt to gain him for their cause. This time they wanted him, not to go to Moscow, but to takeover the leadership of their 'National Front' in Sovietized East Germany. The offer was made through an intermediary, on two occasions, and took skilful account of his plight. Where all others refused to let him leave Canada, the Communists offered to transport him to Germany 'at once, like Eisler'.

The allusion is to the German Communist Gerhart Eisler, who apparently entered the United States as a 'refugee from Hitlerist persecution', with many others of his kind. In 1949 and 1950, after years of delay, the United States Government was prodded by uneasy public opinion into investigating espionage in the atomic bomb field. In the course of the inquiries it was discovered that Eisler, and none of the lesser figures publicly known, was the head of Soviet Communism in America, and he was arrested but released on bail. He then fled from the United States aboard the SS. *Batory* from Soviet Poland, which took him to Sovietized Eastern Germany, where he was made Communist Propaganda Minister (no difficulties about passports or papers arose in his case). The fact that this same ship, the *Batory*, called regularly at Halifax, not far from Paradise, lent point to the invitation which was extended to Strasser early in 1950. At that price, he could have returned to Germany three years ago.

He refused in 1950 as in 1941. He used a famous German phrase in writing to the author at that time: 'The Russians have twice in recent weeks offered, in different ways, to take me across as they took Eisler, *aber ich kenne meine Pappenheimer* and trust them just as little as I trust the Nazis.'

So the lonely struggle went on, through 1950, 1951 and 1952. Strasser had not the means to travel to Ottawa and argue his case in person, little though that would have availed. In October 1950 his brother was in Bonn and was told there that the constitutional and legal position might not allow Otto Strasser to be kept out of Germany for ever, but that the Western Powers and the Bonn Government were resolved by one means or another to prevent his return at least until the question of German rearmament had been settled. Apparently Otto Strasser's influence on German opinion in this matter is greatly feared: however, the Western Governments are much mistaken if they think to make a better deal for themselves and their people with such as Franke-Griksch.

Then his brother Paul returned to the United States by way of Ottawa and himself tried to obtain for Otto the International Identification Certificate (anybody who has occasion to frequent Consulates in North America will see scores and hundreds of people carrying these certificates) which would enable him to book a passage and get transit visas. The reply this time was different. The Deputy Foreign Minister stated that such a document would no longer be necessary because a German consulate was about to open in Ottawa and Otto Strasser could then demand a German passport from it.

That seemed to be a ray of hope and for the first time in many years Otto Strasser thought he had at last reached his goal. He then wrote to the author, 'Now I am justified in hoping that I shall be able to sail in a few months time. Of course, that will be the end of Paradise for me, because what awaits me over there is more like hell. I have no illusions, either about the domestic or the foreign situation of Germany, but I can do no other. I am today not moved by any ambition, as perhaps I was in younger years, or by any illusions, or least of all by any appetite for power; even the impulse to be of help has somewhat suffered through my experience of mankind. But there remains a feeling of duty and of dedication to a task.'

Indeed, after so many years there must have been a constant temptation to throw in the towel, to admit defeat, to say 'I know when I've had enough', and to seek some modest professorship in a minor college, or open a little shop, or even comb the beach; anything for peace and quiet and an end to the persecution. However, if it is in the nature of a man to take arms against a sea of sorrows he will continue to the end to act so.

By the time the German Consulate in Ottawa opened and began to issue passports (in January 1951) the Bonn Government had decided (unless it was instructed) to keep Strasser out of Germany at the cost of no matter what affront to its own constitution and laws. Perhaps it hoped for an act of God or of the devil, some miracle or calamity, illness, death, war, a Communist annexation or its own collapse: anything that would save it from having to face this first test of the metal of 'democracy' and of the Constitution in Western Germany. Strasser was refused a passport because he no longer had German nationality; had not the Chancellor (Hitler, not Adenauer) deprived him of it!

The cat and mouse game began all over again, and as if nothing had happened in the seven years of its duration Otto Strasser set to work to devise a way out of his corner. Truly, he never gave up. Early in 1952 he very nearly succeeded. He had so often been told that if he could but obtain permission to enter another country he would not need either passport or identification certificate. Now he heard of an airline which was willing to carry him without a passport if he had valid permission to land at the other end. By some miracle of ingenuity and effort, he obtained such permission from his own home State, Bavaria! It was without time-limit; if he could get to Bavaria he was back in Germany for good (or until he had to escape from it again before the advancing Red Army).^[23]

The author was then in Canada and is thus able to describe the next episode in the cat and mouse game from personal observation.

Otto Strasser arrived in Montreal one bleak and bitter winter's morning in high heart and hope. That is, he thought at last to have broken through the ring and was for this reason alone elated. He had nothing to look forward to at the journey's end; on that point he said merely, 'If I don't go I lose my reason for existing; if I go I shall probably lose my life', and shrugged.

Otto Strasser and the author then set out together, through a February blizzard, in search of that passage. He went first to the Dutch airline, which some weeks before had told him that it was ready to carry him if he had a residence-permit of the kind which he had now procured. The first setback came at once. The airline had changed its mind and would not book him without a regular passport. The French airline was more promising and booked his seat in the aeroplane for Frankfurt without demur. With the smile of victory Otto Strasser went out into the snow, did some other business, and when he returned to the French airline to collect his ticket was informed that he would need a French transit visa, as the aircraft would land in Paris. He offered to stay in the machine, and if necessary be locked in, but that was of no avail, so he plodded through the snowstorm again to the French Consulate, filled out a form and paid the fee. The clerk foresaw no difficulty; but when Strasser returned to pick up his transit visa he was summoned to the Consul, who had been telephoning to Ottawa; 'I fear I cannot give you a transit visa unless you have a Canadian or German passport.'

Otto Strasser felt as if he were back in Toulouse in 1940, with Hitler's armies on three sides of him and the Spanish frontier, on the fourth side, closed to him unless he could get a French exit permit. This time there was no friendly Portuguese Consul to help with a hint. He tried the Canadian airline, the Pan American, and the Swiss, and at last seemed to have found a way out of or round all difficulties, just as on that earlier occasion. The Canadians needed no papers at all to take him to Gander in Newfoundland; the Americans were willing to take him aboard their New York-Frankfurt aeroplane at Gander. All this took forty-eight hours, and on the third morning, having paid his passage, he made ready to leave, and pictured himself landing the next day in Frankfurt. He had not seen his children for nearly thirteen years. Two hours before he was due to go to the airways terminal a telephone call apologetically informed him that a detail had been overlooked; he needed a British transit visa because the aeroplane landed in Scotland.

Without a sign of disappointment (but with 'a bleeding heart', he said) Strasser gave back the tickets. He tried once more. There was a small shipping line that operated a vessel between Halifax and Bremerhaven; at least no question of transit visas could arise. Once more the clerk booked the passage without ado, appearing perfectly satisfied with the document presented. Later the head of the concern, having noticed the name of Strasser on the passenger list, telephoned some authority, and the passage was cancelled with the usual explanation: you must have a passport. (The Western German Government was also notified by some zealous informant of Otto Strasser's attempt to sail by this ship. When it reached Bremerhaven in March a reinforced body of immigration officials put all passengers and their papers under double and treble examination, while special detachments of police from Bremen and Bonn, as well as the local Bremerhaven police, searched the ship and watched every porthole for twenty-four hours, apparently from fear that Strasser might have smuggled himself aboard.)

The author said goodbye to Otto Strasser at the Windsor Station in February 1952 and as he then watched the train pull out on its journey through the snows to Nova Scotia cast his mind back over the years and scenes of Strasser's long odyssey and ordeal. Paris waiting for the calamity in 1940; the German columns roaring and rumbling into Prague in 1939; Vienna lighting candles for Dollfuss in 1935; Berlin reddened by the glow from the Reichstag fire in 1933. The author had

made a somewhat similar journey himself, over the same ground and sometimes in a little discomfort or danger, but he thought with some humility, as he watched the receding train, how secure and comfortable he had been compared with this hounded man.

Back to purgatory in Paradise! This concludes, at the start of 1953, the present author's tale of the Prisoner of Ottawa; the end of the story, whatever it is to be, lies hidden in the years yet to come. To the tale itself this writer has but a footnote to add:

Six months after Otto Strasser's latest attempt to go home (the one just described) the Chancellor of the Western German Government, Dr. Adenauer, requested the release of one hundred and forty-six German 'war criminals', and apparently made this a condition of his government's signature of the treaty with the Western Powers. Neither the author of this book nor any other can form any opinion about the guilt or innocence of these men, because their trials did not follow process of law as previously established and recognized in the West. They were not truly public; the charges and any evidence supporting them were not publicly known; the defendants and their defenders, as far as can be learned, were not allowed the resources of defence as these were otherwise jealously upheld by judges in the West. Guilt or innocence could only be established by new and fairer trials, which in the circumstances of today are inconceivable, and as these men did not receive what the West previously held to be fair trials they should be released.

Almost certainly they will be released, sooner or later, but not from any such considerations as those just stated. If they are liberated, it will be from motives of political expediency and political bargaining behind scenes (the process is contemptuously known to Germans as *Kuhhandel*), and that will do no good at all.

The purpose of this footnote is merely to point out that one result of this process would be to leave Otto Strasser, Hitler's and the Nazi's proven, oldest and most redoubtable enemy, as the last German in the world suffering a form of retribution which might arguably be fitting in the case of a convicted 'war criminal'; and that he is being held in exile under Hitler's very own concentration camp law, not under any statute of the civilized West.

PERORATION

Such is the story of the man I think of as the Edmond Dantes of 'the free world'. Biographies are usually written because the subject is famous, or because of the writer's personal affection, or from the prospect of substantial remuneration. None of those motives quite fits this book. I know the scenes and times and events of Strasser's story better, probably, than any other, because chance led me the same way at the same period; also I have a great respect for him. I have chosen to write his story, however, chiefly because it illustrates the continued errors of Western policy and the continuing lack of authentic public information in the West and also because it is also the story of Germany.

Germany has been left bisected, and one of the three men concerned in that 'hideous partition' says 'IT CANNOT LAST'. Truly it cannot last, and so the dismembered parts of Germany will come together again, either as part of the Soviet Empire (in which case the Germans may take over the leadership of Communism) or as part of Europe redeemed from the barbaric thrall which Hitler first, and Stalin next thrust on it. I have not said much in this book about Strasser's views on Germany's foreign policy, for the obvious reason that there is no Germany today, and that for the present there can be no German policy, domestic and foreign, save 'to survive'.

However, neither he nor any other German worth having would collaborate with the West save on the condition of Germany's re-establishment. Moscow, knowing this well, constantly dangles that bait before the Germans. The West, for the present, is behaving as it behaved between 1918 and 1933; it is seeking to prop up unpopular and unrepresentative governments and doling out small concessions scrap by scrap. On the former occasion it reserved the ample titbits for Hitler. Experience should teach it to find Germans worthy of trust at an early stage and to support them in reasonable demands. Strasser's self-evident condition for any military collaboration with the West (it is contained in all his literature since the partitioning) would be 'The unity and freedom of Germany from Aachen to Beuthen, from Memel to the Saar'. That means eventually restoring the frontiers of January 1st, 1938, in other words, those which existed before Hitler's first annexation, that of Austria. The West will not find a better bargain than that and may count itself happy if it can on that basis find a way out of the corner into which it has driven itself. In any case, the 'hideous division' of today 'cannot last'.

That is the greater shape of the affair in which Strasser is concerned, and his ordeal of the last eight years is a significant part of it. By keeping such a man out of Germany the West continues to serve expediency and sacrifice principle, and the end of that will again be disappointment. His personal fate is a separate question, a simple one of indefensible injustice, and as long as it continues it is impossible to confide in the sincerity, higher morality or sagacity of the leaders of the West.

It may be considered in the light of certain comments made by Mr. Churchill during the war in regard to the imprisonment, under wartime emergency powers, of Sir Oswald Mosley. During the war I wrote a good deal in protest against the imprisonment under Regulation 18B of certain folk, against whom no charges could be brought, merely because they were disliked by certain other folk. There was a principle at stake, and it was reassuring after the war to find in Mr. Churchill's *Closing the Ring* that he felt similarly at that time.

In this matter of detention without trial Mr. Churchill stuck sturdily to his principles in 1943 (although his government in 1951-53, like that of Mr. Attlee in 1945-51, was to keep Strasser exiled from his native land without any charge, trial or chance of self-vindication). He then wrote to his Home Secretary, Mr. Herbert Morrison, urging him to uphold in Parliament 'the great principles of *habeas corpus* and trial by jury, which are the supreme protection invented by the British people for ordinary individuals against the State. The power of the Executive to cast a man into prison

without formulating any charge known to the law, and particularly to deny him judgment by his peers for an indefinite period, is in the highest degree odious, and is the foundation of all totalitarian governments, whether Nazi or Communist ... Nothing can be more abhorrent to democracy than to imprison a person or keep him in prison because he is unpopular. This is really the test of civilization.'

Apparently Mr. Morrison, and Mr. Attlee, the Deputy Prime Minister, were then doubtful about incurring that wrath which the release of an unchanged and untried man was bound to cause on the democratic Left. Nevertheless, after Mr. Churchill had written, 'On no account should we lend any countenance to the totalitarian idea of the right of the Executive to lock up its political opponents or unpopular people ... In such a quarrel I am sure I could carry the majority in the House of Commons and the mass of the nation; anyhow, I would try', they decided to take the step, and the noise on the Left proved to be but wind. Mr. Churchill congratulated them and commented, 'People who are not prepared to do unpopular things and to defy clamour are not fit to be Ministers in times of stress.'

I would let the case for Otto Strasser's release rest on that. People who keep an unchanged and untried man detained in times of somewhat less stress, eight years after the fighting's end, do not dignify their office, and in this particular case five Governments are involved. Strasser's windows in Nova Scotia are not barred or his doors locked; this does not alter the fact that he has in fact been kept exiled from his country, and prevented from seeing his children, for these many years, for no reason but that he may be 'unpopular' with some people, though their identity is not made known. He has been 'denied judgment for an indefinite period', not only by his peers but by any at all, and if there truly is such a thing as 'democracy' this must be abhorrent to it. In any case, it is abhorrent to the former British conception of plain justice.

In fact this is truly a 'test of civilization'.

APPENDIX

Otto Strasser's war record is contained in the *History of the First (Prince Regent Luitpold) Bavarian Field Artillery Regiment*, vol. IV, which covers the years 1911-20 and thus includes the 1914-18 war. Strasser is often mentioned in this work, which was published by the Bavarian War Museum in Munich in 1931. The following extract is from the chapter relating to the last great German offensive in that war, which began on March 21st, 1918:

The 24th Bavarian Infantry Regiment took the enemy first line in thick fog. Its left battalion, the First, had been allotted the task of taking Urvillers from the south-east. Lieutenant Strasser was with it and devoted himself to his especial mission, which was to keep the infantry pressing forward hard behind the curtain of fire. At this point in the line, the method was successful. He found the first enemy trenches flattened out and the few survivors offered little resistance ... Lieutenant Strasser and the scout officer of the First Battalion, Lieutenant Sailer (being held up in their advance by a British machine-gun nest), collected a few volunteers and with them pushed along a trench by means of which they were able to reach the British troops, whom they attacked with hand grenades. They captured the three machine-guns and their crews without loss ... Lieutenant Strasser pushed on some hundreds of yards farther and suddenly saw to his left British guns in action. He decided to take these. He surprised the British artillerymen with a quick attack from the north - they were firing towards the east - and killed some of the gunners, who had been reinforced by some infantry. He made prisoners of the remainder, whom he gathered in a dugout. Two British guns were thus put out of action ... Lieutenant Strasser then rejoined the staff of the First Battalion which, with one company of the battalion, was in a captured British trench. Five hundred yards away they saw a British battery in action and Lieutenant Strasser offered to attack it with Lieutenant Sailer. Taking a platoon of men with him, he was able to cover the five hundred yards of open ground and to reach cover midway between two British guns. Four guns, two machine-guns and a complete brigade staff were captured in this engagement. Machine-gun fire hindered a further advance, and Lieutenant Strasser decided to turn one of the captured guns upon the machine-gunners. But as the British artillerymen had rendered their guns useless, two hours' work was needed to make one of them ready for action. Lieutenant Strasser then served this gun himself, shooting over open sights.

Lieutenant Strasser was nominated for the Max Josef Military Order for his work on this day.

This was the first big engagement in which Otto Strasser took part as an officer (he received his commission towards the end of 1917).

By August the German advance had ceased. American troops were pouring into France, and the German armies were on the defensive. On August 9th the great Allied counter-offensive (which ultimately led to the German collapse and the end of the war) began. Of this day the *History of the First Bavarian Field Artillery Regiment* says:

The news of the British attack east of Amiens made a deep impression on us. Lieutenant Strasser, who was carrying on in spite of severe sciatica, at this time wrote in his diary: 'When I think of the feeling at home and of the condition of our infantry, I am filled with anxiety, the deepest anxiety. If only the whole army were like the artillery and particularly the artillery officers - ah, then!'

On August 20th, 1918, the German line began to break and the German retreat began. The *History* describes how Otto Strasser saved his guns:

When the advancing enemy was only eight hundred yards distant, Lieutenant Strasser ordered the withdrawal of all his guns save one, and sent an orderly with an appeal for limbers to get this gun away. He took command and fired all his remaining ammunition at the advancing French Colonial troops. At 6.15 p.m. he removed essential parts from the gun and ordered all his men save two bombardiers to retreat, giving one of them a message to say that the limbers must be sent at the gallop. He then went to a point on the road to await the coming of the limber, and saw there three Prussian guns which were bound to fall into the enemy's hands. Lieutenant Hieber, whom he had left in command of the gun, then arrived to report that masses of black troops had captured the battery position vacated by the other guns, and were advancing on the last gun. At this moment the limbers appeared at the gallop. They had already passed the last of the retreating infantry, who had tried to prevent them from coming on, saying that they would only fall into the hands of the French. Lieutenant Strasser succeeded in harnessing six-horse teams to two of the Prussian guns and then went to help Lieutenant Hieber rescue the last of his own guns. The enemy was now within bombing range. The noise of the explosions alarmed both men and horses, and escape seemed impossible. Lieutenant Hieber says: 'I attribute our success in saving the gun at the last moment to the coolness and courage of Lieutenant Strasser, who called to the men: "Steady, don't hurry. Just let them go on throwing their bombs", so that in the end all four guns, his own and the three Prussian guns, were saved.'

Strasser, says this regimental history, was for his work on August 20th nominated a second time for the Max Josef Military Order (he had been wounded on June 6th, but did not leave his battery).

NOTE:

I am indebted to the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth, for the opportunity to consult, and thus to quote from, this history of a Bavarian Artillery Regiment in the First War. D.R.

FOOTNOTE

Between the writing and the printing of this book more and even stranger things have happened in the tale of Otto Strasser, Germany and 'The Free World'; and I append a summary of them.

Until the summer of 1952 the four great governments of 'the free world' were *directly* responsible for Otto Strasser's enforced exile in Nova Scotia. As partners in the military occupation of Germany, the governments of the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and France had the power to prevent him from entering his native land, if he reached it. He could not reach it because the Canadian Government, acting in concert with and on behalf of all, by denying him travel papers immobilized him in Canada.

This situation changed on August 31st, 1952. As a gesture of respect towards the sovereign status which the West German Government now enjoys, in name, the Western Governments announced that they would on the morrow, September 1st, hand over to the Bonn Government 'most of the travel controls which they have exercised since the war'. As a step on the path towards rehabilitation, therefore, the West German Government was to become responsible for its own frontier, customs and immigration regulations and their application. It was to say whether, and what, Germans might enter or leave its half of Germany.

This restoration of sovereign rights was subject to a large qualification. The Bonn Government (as the news agencies of the free world dutifully and unquestioningly recorded) was at the same time 'given control over a black list of approximately twelve thousand Germans and other nationals to whom the Allies have forbidden travel visas ... One of the best known is Otto Strasser, friend of Adolf Hitler ...' This is the version purveyed to the world by the Associated Press, twenty-two years after Strasser's violent defiance of Hitler. The last four words, which are clearly its own, may be appraised by readers of this book.

Control over the comings and goings of Germans, therefore, was restored to the West German Government, but it was also ordered to continue the debarment of Otto Strasser from his native land. As it was by this time full of former Nazis, its compliance was not surprising. 'Black lists' (the reader may have forgotten) did not exist in Europe until Hitler imported them from Soviet Russia to Germany (my own name was on one which was found in the ruins of the Nazi Government's offices). Now the governments of those countries which had cleansed the world of Hitler reinflicted Hitler's black list on the 'free' half of that Germany which has been 'hideously partitioned', in Mr. Churchill's words.

Meanwhile, many other things have happened in Western Germany since General Clay, in 1949, spoke of 'the infamous Black Front' and uttered his warning, approvingly echoed by *The Times*, about the danger of 'neo-Nazism'. Such danger is dead now, for the *old* Nazis are back, in strength. Chancellor Adenauer himself has publicly stated that '66 per cent of the higher officials in the West German Foreign Ministry are former Nazis', and his critics assert that the figure is greater.

Herr Diels, the first Chief of the Gestapo (and how well I remember the astonishment and repulsion I felt when, that body having made its appearance in Germany in 1933, this young official emerged as the head of it) is now a senior official in the West German Ministry of the Interior, and by credible report in the *Verfassungsamt* (or Department for the Constitution) in that ministry; this department would presumably have something to say about Otto Strasser's suit before the West German Constitutional Court to regain his German citizenship, a right specifically prescribed in that Constitution!

Again, Captain von Pfeffer-Salomon, Roehm's successor in the command of the Brownshirts, and under Hitler and Goering a Prussian State Councillor, is today an executive member of the West German Government party.

In Soviet East Germany the picture is the same. On October 2nd, 1952, the East German Parliament unanimously passed a law granting former Nazis and army officers the same civic rights as other East Germans.

And finally, in January 1953, the British Government, through its military authorities in Western Germany, arrested seven high-ranking former Hitlerists, stating that they were 'plotting eventually to regain power'. Chief of them was Dr. Werner Naumann, who was with Hitler during the 'last days' in the Berlin bunker and was by him nominated to be Dr. Goebbels's successor; there were also two former *Gauleiter* and other Nazi leaders. In 1949 *The Times* had applauded the detention of Otto Strasser in Canada on the grounds that 'men who came to the fore during the Nazi regime are rightly forbidden to enter public life'. Now such men had to be arrested to prevent them from entering public life, and such a man as Strasser (who as this book has shown did *not* 'come to the fore during the Nazi regime', but was its enemy long before it was established) is still denied his birthright. The state of affairs which led to the arrest of the seven Nazi leaders was but one foreseeable result of the policy pursued, and the further consequences are equally foreseeable. Men who have roots and meaning in Germany, who have proved their devotion to the common cause, are kept out of Germany. A regime without roots has been planted which will soon wither and fade away, because it must. The worst in Germany will again rise to the top, if the policy of errors is continued. Will it then be coddled, as Hitler was?

There is nothing unexpected in all this. It was bound to happen, given the repetition after 1945 of the mistakes which were made after 1918, and I only mention these things to throw into greater contrast the pitiless iniquity of the treatment accorded to the one man who constantly and consistently fought Hitlerism and Communism, at the cost of all he had and for many years at the daily risk of his life.

As men like Strasser are prevented from taking a hand in the rehabilitation of Germany, others will assume control there. Who they are and yet will be is now plain to see. Myself, I feel like a ghost walking on my own bones when I read the daily reports in *The Times* from Our Own Correspondent in Berlin and cast my memory back to the days, between the wars, when my reports for so long appeared under that headline.

It is the same in green, as the Berliners used to say when they meant that there was, between two things, no discernible difference. In West Germany there are politicians of the same kind at the top, shadow-shapes that in a little while will dissolve like cigarette smoke in the air. What hope have they, or can their country have in them, these men who are saddled with the blame for acceptance of 'the partitioning'; of the payment of 'reparations' for Hitler's sins to a State which did not exist in Hitler's lifetime and which contains hardly any folk who formerly lived in Hitler's Germany; of military service, not for any German cause but for 'the plans of The West'? These things are not their fault, but they will bear the onus of them and be swept away as the 'Weimar Parties' were swept away.

It is like watching the reissue of an old film; it makes me feel as if I were again a newspaper correspondent in Berlin around 1930 and watched *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Meanwhile the one man who fought Nazidom so long and so hard is in fact held in the very outlawry that Hitler put on him.

It is an apt footnote to the Second World War.

POSTSCRIPT (and Addendum)

As this book goes to press I have had my attention called to recently published information which confirms the statements made in it about the original motive for the Canadian ban on Otto Strasser and about the illegality of his continued detention. In September 1952 *The Times* (the earlier statements of which I have quoted) reverted to the subject in messages from its staff correspondents in Ottawa and Bonn. The correspondent in the Canadian capital, clearly conveying official information, said, 'Welcomed at first in this country as one who had personally disagreed with Hitler, Otto Strasser later appeared in a less favourable light through *his criticisms of Russia during the brighter period of the wartime alliance*'. So much for the ban of 1942; as to the continuing enforced exile of 1952, the correspondent said, 'Under the constitution of the German Federal Republic, persons who lost their German nationality during the Hitler regime *are entitled to have it restored*. Strasser has been seeking restoration of his nationality since the end of the war.' The newspaper seems to have asked its Bonn Correspondent why, if Strasser were entitled to return, he was not allowed. The correspondent reported the West German Government's attitude as follows: 'pending a decision by the Constitutional Court there can be no question of Strasser being granted a visa to come to Germany'. Strasser's constitutional suit has been 'pending' for more than a year.

Again, as the book goes to press an event in Germany throws even brighter light on the injustice done to Strasser. In January 1953 the British High Commissioner ordered the arrest of a group of Hitlerist leaders on the ground that they had been making plans, or plots, to regain or seize power in West Germany; the chief of them was Dr. Werner Naumann, Goebbels's chief assistant and the nominee for his succession, and the others included former *Gauleiter* and other high Nazi officials. The statement made, in justification of action taken over the head of the supposedly sovereign West German Government, implied that considerations of great and even imminent danger had led to it. After ten weeks, during which the arrested men were held incommunicado and denied access to lawyers, and habeas corpus pleas on their behalf were disallowed, the affair dissolved in fiasco, being handed over to the West German Government.

It should today hardly need saying that there are many groups in Germany which are working to gain power sooner or later; that surviving Nazi leaders are prominent in them (so that the term 'neo-Nazism' is misleading); and that these groups will obviously make every use they can of action in the line of the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, if by that means they think they can bring about the reunion of Germany. The only way to avoid further disappointments (and fiascos) would be to give at least equal freedom, if not support, to those who consistently combatted both Hitlerism and Communism. Strasser remains in outlawry, enforced by the American and British Governments. D.R.

*

At the last moment before publication of this book comes the news of Otto Strasser's moral, and possibly final victory in his long and lonely struggle. On April 29th, 1953, the German court of first instance, at Cologne, admitted his legal right, under Article 116 of the Constitution of the West German Republic (quoted in this book) to regain the German nationality of which Hitler deprived him in 1934, and therewith to return to his native land.

The West German Minister of the Interior, a Dr. Lehr, thereon announced that his government would appeal the decision. If it does this, it will be fighting against its own Constitution to perpetuate Hitler's law of arbitrary outlawry of political opponents. Strasser's return to Germany might by such means yet be postponed, but the final result is inevitable. The West German Constitution is explicit; his legal right is as unchallengeable as his mortal right is patent.

If Germany is to become again a *Rechtsstaat*, a state of law and order, the decision will stand. If not, it will have been shown that Hitler's law continues in the West German Republic established by the Western allies. The just decision has been given and the moral victory has after twenty years been won. Therein lies the justification of Strasser's life and struggle so far, and of this book.

DOUGLAS REED

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FOOTNOTES

1: Only 'preserved for the instruction of twentieth century man', incidentally by the last-moment appeal of an American officer who by chance knew it and understood the symbolic importance of its history and beauty.

2: Shakespeare knew the state of mind, in young men, mentioned in the previous chapter:

To the wars, my boy, to the wars!
He wears his honour in a box unseen
That hugs his kicksy-wicksy here at home,
Spending his manly marrow in her arms,
Which should sustain the bound and high curvet
Of Mars's fiery steed.

3: Strangely, after two wars against Germany barrack-square methods in one great Western country seem to have taken on some resemblance to the harsh ones used in the Germany of 1914; at any rate, this reflection is inspired by pictures of recruit-training in the United States Marines recently published in an American periodical.

4: The main facts of Otto Strasser's war service are given at the end of this book from the official German records. This is not done for the purpose of extolling acts of courage performed long ago, but because his war record, with all other phases of his life, has often been denied and falsified since the systematic persecution began. Thus the authentic record puts the matter beyond doubt.

5: This Count Arco escaped a death sentence but was arrested, many years later, by Hitler's Gestapo! What became of him afterwards eludes my efforts at research. D.R.

6: In the author's opinion, no life of Hitler or story of Hitlerism yet published is of much permanent value, because of the gaps which occur at four essential points: his descent, early associations in Vienna, activities in Munich during the Red regime, and the manner of his disappearance. Any future historian who might seek to elucidate the real truth about the man would do well to give attention to another significant incident: when he later formed his Brown Army Hitler forbade any members of it who fought in the liberation of Munich to display on the sleeve of their brown shirts this golden lion to which they were entitled.

7: 'A wretched peace may be well exchanged even for war,' said Tacitus, and many young Germans of the years after the First War seem to have thought in this way, to their undoing; Otto Strasser, however, was not of these.

8: And after the Second War Mr. Churchill, a severe critic of the policies of the victors after the First War, wrote, 'We find ourselves still confronted with problems and perils not less but far more formidable than those through which we have so narrowly made our way'. Similarly, Mr. George F.

Kennan of the American State Department (recently United States Ambassador in Moscow) wrote, 'Both wars were fought, really, with a view to changing Germany, to correcting her behaviour, to making the Germans something different from what they were. Yet today, if one were offered the chance of having back again the Germany of 1913, a Germany run by conservative but relatively moderate people ... it wouldn't sound so bad, in comparison with our problems of today' (*American Diplomacy, 1951*).

9: My own list of such questions would include, in addition to the one indicated here, the following: Who fired the Reichstag? Who killed King Alexander of Yugoslavia and Count Folke Bernadotte? What were Hitler's associations and activities in Vienna before 1914, what did he do in Munich in March and April of 1919, and how did he contrive to remove his body after committing suicide in Berlin in 1945? Why would President Roosevelt for six years listen to no warnings against Mr. Alger Hiss and why was Mr. Hiss chief presidential advisor at Yalta? Why were Dr. Klaus Fuchs and others allowed access to the most secret British and American military information? and several others. D.R.

10: The quoted words are those of a German leftist writer, Dr. Jakob Stoecker, who is one of the very few current commentators to have done justice to Otto Strasser. His book, *Maenner des deutschen Schicksals* (Oswald Arnold, Berlin, 1949), is informative about this period.

11: Not even one year, or one moment, of such self-deception was excusable after the Second War. The Third War was made inevitable, saving divine intervention, by the preconcerted arrangement for the bisection of Europe which was sealed at Yalta.

12: These words of Otto Strasser, published in 1930, may be compared with some addressed by Mr. Winston Churchill to the House of Commons thirteen years later, on September 21st, 1943: 'The core of Germany is Prussia. There is the source of the recurring pestilence ... Nazi tyranny and Prussian domination are the two main elements in German life which must be absolutely destroyed. They must be rooted out if Europe and the world are to be spared a third and still more frightful conflict.' Mr. Churchill's government returned in 1951, and still in office as this book is written, continued its Socialist predecessor's policy of keeping Strasser exiled in Canada and barred from Germany.

13: When Otto Strasser wrote this Mr. Roosevelt had not been elected President of the United States, so that it is not a contemporary allusion; it was, however, an enlightened prognostication of the Roosevelt era.

14: See *The Forrestal Diaries*, page 10 (Viking Press, New York, 1951).

15: 'Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.' *Jeremiah*, xxii, 10.

16: No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the maine; if a Clod be washed away by the Sea, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were ... (John Donne's *Devotions*, 1624).

17: These moments are known to all men who go through such experiences. Mr. Churchill describes such brief moods of consuming despair at his capture by the Boers in the South African war and at Mr. Eden's resignation just before Hitler's invasion of Austria in 1938: 'I must confess that my heart sank, and for a while the dark waters of despair overwhelmed me.' Mr. Churchill also shows the same mood seizing his friend, Ralph Wigram, at Hitler's march into the Rhineland in

1936: 'My friend never seemed to recover from this shock. He took it too much to heart ... His untimely death ...' (*The Gathering Storm*).

18: Or in English, 'First catch your hare, then cook it!'

19: As an example of efficient political staffwork and synchronization, it may be recorded that immediately after this meeting the Tass Agency issued a report, which the non-Communist agencies assiduously spread over the world, stating that 'Dr. Otto Strasser has arrived in Lisbon to organize the amalgamation of all anti-Hitler forces and to take over their leadership'. Being issued under the imprint of 'Tass', that could only mean one thing. Although Otto Strasser never left Montreal, and could be inspected in the flesh by any who were interested, he could gain little publicity for the denial which he immediately issued.

20: The official report on the investigation of the Canadian espionage affair, with all its disclosures, would apparently never have become known in England but for the efforts of the present writer, who gave it publicity in a newsletter which he was then publishing, *London Tidings*. Thereafter it received some attention in the mass-newspapers and a limited number of copies was obtained from Canada for sale by His Majesty's Stationary Office to any who had the energy to seek them there. One of the most illuminating official documents of this century, it is still little known. The corresponding investigation in England, which should have been the natural result of Mr. Mackenzie King's warning, has never been held, each fragmentary revelation (for instance, the cases of Dr. Klaus Fuchs, Professor 'Bruno Pontecorvo', the vanished diplomats and others) being presented to the public as a casual and separate incident, unrelated to any containing whole. Similarly, in the United States no amount of public pressure has sufficed to produce a total investigation and exposure, and even the demand of a Senatorial Internal Security Subcommittee, that 'the role of Alger Hiss in foreign affairs and the formulation of foreign policy in the United States and his influence on personnel decisions in the State Department' be investigated, was ignored by the rulers of that Republic.

21: The American Military Governor had on his staff officials of a category not previously known to the military establishments of the West, as far as the author can ascertain, although a somewhat similar institution has existed in the Soviet area since it began. These were the 'Political Advisers'; the name recalls the 'Political Commissars' who accompany, and apparently exercise supreme control over the military commanders of the Red Army. It appears possible that the new 'Political Advisers' of the West may fulfil a rather comparable function, namely, that of ensuring that military commanders conform strictly to certain overriding dogmas. At a later stage in the events above discussed the office of United States Military Governor gave way to that of United States High Commissioner in Germany. This new, civilian authority was also supported in his work by a staff of Political Advisers. In 1952 the Committee on the Judiciary of the United States Senate, acting under Resolutions of the Senate of the 81st and 82nd Congress, carried out an investigation into 'espionage, sabotage and infiltration by persons who are or may be under the domination of the foreign government or organizations controlling the world Communist movement ...' The investigation lasted a year, was exhaustive, and was carried out by the Committee's Internal Security Subcommittee. One of the recommendations was that the United States Department of Justice should submit to a grand jury the question of whether one such Political Adviser in Germany had perjured himself in giving testimony, by denying that he had recommended that the United States Central Intelligence Agency 'employ, utilize and rely upon certain individuals having Communist associations and connections'. In such circumstances there seems reasonable ground to suspect that the word 'infamous', deftly inserted in the report which was to be issued under General Clay's name, was of Communist origination, the Moscow Government having the greatest stake in (1) ensnaring Otto Strasser into its service, if it can, or (2) as he has refused all baits, keeping him

out of Western Germany. The epithet was parroted by the entire world press without any examination of the question whether its use was justified or unjustified.

22: Apropos, by way of contrast, and to show how times change: In July 1939 the combined British press waged violent warfare for a week on *The Times* when it refused to print a reply to a letter by Mr. J.A. Spender criticizing a speech by Sir Archibald Sinclair. The journals which joined in rebuke included the *Daily Telegraph*, *News Chronicle*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, *New Statesman*, *Time and Tide*, *Spectator* and *Manchester Guardian*; an example, from the last newspaper '... it is, to say the least, unfortunate that an editorial censorship of opinion should be set up in a forum so traditionally impartial as the correspondence column of *The Times*'. One must conclude from the perusal of all those columns of outraged protest that the denial of right of reply was at that time extremely rare, in the British press at least. At the mid-century Otto Strasser was almost invariably unable to induce any newspaper to print a reply to or correction of any statement about him, and such statements went and were published all over the world.

23: The Bonn Government some time later issued a report stating that this document was forged. The author, who would hold Otto Strasser to be fully justified in any means he used to return to his native land, and who considers his treatment an abomination, has not asked him about that. The document looked good, but the author did not examine it minutely, having no such doubts in mind.
