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**WAR CABINET.**

**HITLER'S SPEECH OF APRIL 26, 1942.**

*Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.*

IN accordance with War Cabinet Conclusions 53 (42) 3 of the 27th April, 1942, I circulate to my colleagues herewith a memorandum, prepared in the Foreign Office, on Hitler's speech to the Reichstag on the 26th April, 1942.

A. E.

*Foreign Office, April 30, 1942.*

**ANNEX.**

THE general reaction of world opinion to Hitler's speech of the 26th April is that it is tantamount to an admission of serious internal difficulties in Germany. This judgment should be accepted with reserve.

The central point of the speech was Hitler's assumption of drastic new powers, which were defined in the following statement which Göring asked the Deputies to confirm:—

"There can be no doubt that the Führer, at this time when the German people is engaged in a war of 'to be or not to be,' must possess the right he has claimed to do everything which serves to achieve victory or contributes to it. The Führer must, therefore, in his capacity as Führer of the nation, as Commander-in-Chief of the army, as the supreme holder of executive power, as Supreme Law Lord and as leader of the Party, unfettered by existing laws or procedure, at all times be in a position, if necessary, to compel every German, whether soldier or officer, high or low, official or judge, official of the Party, worker or employee, by all means he deems suitable, to fulfil his duty and, in the event of his neglecting his duty, duly to punish him after thorough examination without regard to so-called duly acquired rights, and especially to relieve him of his rank or office without instituting the prescribed proceedings."

2. There has undoubtedly been a decline in German civilian morale (as opposed to the morale of the German army) over the past six months. This has been due partly to the overshadowing threat of the Russian armies and to the heavy losses suffered on the Eastern Front; partly to the dawning realisation that the war is likely to be long and in the end not necessarily a victorious one; and partly to the steady deterioration in living conditions in Germany. Hitler has been obliged for the first time to take public account of this state of affairs. It must be remembered, however, that after three winters of total war discontent, grumbling and war weariness are to be expected, and

it would be dangerous to regard Hitler's speech as an admission of serious internal difficulties in Germany. No doubt there have been murmurs of discontent in Church and Army, Civil Service and Judiciary, but there are no grounds for belief that these murmurs, though obviously a source of anxiety, have yet reached serious proportions. On the contrary, there is evidence to show that the German people as a whole have fully accepted the idea assiduously propagated by Dr. Goebbels that the next few months will very likely settle the fate of Europe for centuries to come, and that in this historic conflict Germany cannot afford to lose. There is indeed a general expectation that the German army will win spectacular victories in the East, but there is also widespread doubt whether these victories will be final. While the prospect of a fourth war winter causes dismay, none the less the German people at present undoubtedly still stand united behind Hitler and will follow where he leads. Nor are there any grounds for anticipating that such discontent as exists aims at actively prejudicing the success of the coming Eastern offensive.

3. During the past three or four months the whole German war machine has been geared up to maximum efficiency. There has been a ruthless drive to mobilise all available man-power and woman-power and to increase war production. The administrative machine has been subjected to the severest strain and weaknesses have certainly come to light. It would accordingly be wise to regard Hitler's assumption of drastic new powers primarily as the culmination of this all-out drive, and possibly as a precautionary step against future developments rather than as evidence of the sudden appearance of fresh internal difficulties. For every reason, it is essential for Hitler to force the issue this summer and to achieve results which, though not necessarily conclusive this year (he implicitly foretells another war winter), may make an ultimate Allied victory extremely difficult. Thus the commitment to victory on the Eastern Front is made more precise. The war against England is the submarine war. During the next four or five months Hitler intends to extract the last ounce of strength from the whole German people, and he will allow no one and nothing to stand in his way. (The cherished privileges and rights of the Civil Service and the Judiciary are specially emphasised.) Hitler has therefore armed himself with full powers to remove summarily the recalcitrant and the weaker vessels. No doubt he is gambling on having achieved by the autumn such a degree of success as to enable him then to relax his pressure on the German people. If the gamble fails, the reaction will no doubt be proportionately serious. But even in that event the country is likely to be held so firmly in the grip of the Party and the Secret Police that a gigantic effort, or a great disaster, will be required to break the shackles.

4. Another point besides Hitler's assumption of the rôle of Supreme Law Lord should be noted. This is the long introductory section on England. In it Hitler was at pains to point out that England must in any case lose this war since at the end of it her Allies would be stronger than she. Thus the war, whether Germany or Britain won, spelt catastrophe for the British Empire. From this Hitler developed a direct appeal to the peace-party he has always believed to exist in this country:—

“I do not know whether to-day all English people regard it as wise to have rejected the numerous offers of an understanding which I have made since 1933; whether they are to-day all convinced that it was very wise to refuse my offer of alliance which I renewed on the 1st September, 1939, and my offers of peace which I made after the Polish and French campaigns. But I know another law—that man must himself overthrow what the gods have destined for destruction. So what will be must be.”

Hitler is no doubt hereby pursuing his familiar technique of attempting to spread confusion and dissension on the eve of a major offensive.

5. On the whole the speech followed the familiar pattern of the Hitlerian discourse: the pseudo-historical exordium, the frenzied anti-Semitism, the abuse of the democratic leaders, the sarcasm at the democratic methods of waging war, and, above all, the ever-closer identification of the Führer with every aspect of the national life of the German people on the one hand, and with the will of the Almighty on the other.



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