

NAZI-HUNTING IN ARGENTINA

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IN June, 1941, the Argentine Chamber of Deputies decided to set up a *Commission of Enquiry into Intrigues against the State*. With immense trouble, and after cautious preliminaries, an instrument was thus fashioned to help in the fight against Hitlerism. Dozens of conferences had taken place, hundreds of newspaper articles had been written, before the magnitude of the danger became realized by the Argentine parliament, and expression was given to the collective will of the people. The German Opposition, united in the *Free-German Movement*, had interested itself in this press campaign. It had contributed numerous papers, and two sets of articles in one of the leading newspapers of the capital. With the establishment of the *Commission of Enquiry* the moment had come for us to throw in all our information and to apply all our effort, so that our extensive practical experience with party and party chiefs might enable us to advance the cause of freedom. Now was the time to show whether those methods for developing an "élite", for building up resolute storm troops and a network of secret agents in which the enemy must needs entangle himself, could stand the test of investigation. Or whether those others were right who sought to win support by posing as German democrats with decorative touches of Communist diction, not attacking Hitlerism with straightforward articles and thorough exposure, but letting loose a propaganda of lies which would in the end be ineffectual.

Some two weeks after the Commission had been set up, I was summoned to Congress. There I came to know for the first time four Deputies who were and are the driving forces of the Enquiry Commission—Taborda, Santander, Solari and Lanus. Not indeed for a long time had the history of democracies shown a Commission such as this one.

As a rule, parliaments nominate their sub-committees so that in the receptacle thus created they may bury disagreeable projects, or may have the exacting demands of the Opposition so plucked to pieces that nothing more will be heard of them. When at a sitting of the Chamber it is decided to refer any matter to "a Commission", every experienced Deputy feels sure that

the thing is out of the way for a certain period at least—long or short—and every press expert strikes it out of his programme for some weeks or some months to come. At the head of *this* Commission, however, in Raul Damonte Taborda there stood a young and ambitious politician, who proved himself dynamic indeed, and who was supported by keenly intelligent friends.

Sittings began in an intensely exciting atmosphere. Conferences were held at all hours of day or night: with any serious item of news at any time some Deputy could be roused from his bed. In incredibly brief space the members of the Commission had been made clearly acquainted with the business, and could begin action long overdue—after years of mere talking and writing—against Hitlerism. It was remarked to me at the first conference that the Commission had built on material of which we Free Germans had supplied 80 per cent, and that it was accepted as fair to appraise the atmosphere of personal sentiment before decisive actions followed.

As a sort of preliminary trial, on 1st July, in Florida (Province of Buenos Aires) a Nazi rendezvous was explored, and much interesting material was seized. It is well known that the Nazi Party and the Labour Front had been outlawed in Argentina on 15th May, 1939. Hitlerism is notoriously deluging the whole of South America with such floods of propaganda as to require the expenditure of millions upon millions of pesos. It was important to reveal how the forbidden organizations had been spread far more widely than ever under various disguises, and how the poisonous campaign of Nazi falsehood was promoted out of the "Winter Help" fund. For this, every year, subscriptions were exacted by all sorts of pressure, including the threat of dismissal from employment in the event of refusal! Information thus became available regarding two outrages upon law: violation of a prohibitory decree, through further extension of the outlawed Party, and fraud, through the use of money for purposes other than that for which it had been contributed. So preparations were made for legal action against the Nazis. Naturally to all of us it had long been obvious that the Nazi Embassy was the centre of all these anti-Argentine intrigues; that the envoys of the Third Reich must be treated not after the normal rules of international intercourse, but as gangsters, and that there was no crime from which Thermann and his gang would shrink if they felt personally in danger. The House Search in Florida, which started the move against Nazism in the country, showed how the threads conducted one from the local Party groups to the Embassy.

Thus were handed over to justice two officials of the Embassy itself, Froehlig and Korm.

The attack on the Party rendezvous could come as such a surprise, and could yield such copious results, only because the investigators had ignored the "High Command" and had made use of local police. Notoriously in Argentina the higher police officials are pro-Nazi: they habitually nullify every measure taken against the Nazi cause, and they had so far managed to get Nazi agents out of the country in good time when a warrant had been issued for their arrest. It is characteristic of the effective cooperation between the German Embassy and the Argentine officials that immediately after the House Search in Florida all police authority was withdrawn from the Taborda Commission, and every police station was expressly notified to this effect!

The Commission warded off the blow thus directed against it in the most skilful manner. It searched for, and discovered, a judge who took less concern for his personal prospects and for the risk to his own life than for justice and the service of the Fatherland. The name of this judge was Dr. Ramon F. Vasquez—a name ever to be remembered as that of the most notable figure, after the members of the *Enquiry Commission*, in Argentina's struggle against her totalitarian enemies. With Dr. Vasquez, Taborda prepared those further decisive blows which—like lightning out of clear sky—came down among the Nazis. It should be pointed out here that the fight against Hitlerism was carried on with a calm, a sureness of touch, a good judgment not only previously unheard of in this country, but rare and astonishing anywhere. For his legal groundwork, Vasquez required more than the basic information furnished him by us and by the House Search in Florida; he required also witnesses to stand by their depositions publicly. These witnesses must be men not only of personal courage to face the attacks of the Gestapo, but also men with the expert knowledge requisite to set forth the inner workings of the Nazi Party.

On July 1st I was summoned suddenly, about ten o'clock in the morning, to Congress, to sign a document composed by the Commission and the judge, that was necessary for the prosecution and the police search. When Taborda indicated that two or three witnesses would be enough, I brought four additional comrades. It was to me a good joke in this way to astonish the Commission, when I brought a member of the N. S. D. A. P., one of the Workers' Front, one of the Sacrifice Ring, and one of

the Argentine National-Socialist Junior Alliance. About three o'clock in the afternoon I was thoroughly surprised by a visit from a gentleman who brought a Deputy's papers. He asked me to appear, together with the four whose signatures have been mentioned above, at the house of Judge Vasquez. We hunted up the four with the utmost speed — a task not so easy as it sounds—and brought them to the Hall of Justice to render testimony. Having discharged this legal prerequisite, the judge about five o'clock in the afternoon set in motion the police force at his disposal against the Nazi Party and against the Workers' Front. There followed the famous House Searches in 25 Mayo Street and 1250 Alsina Street: echoes of these were heard the same evening in the world's press, and the best consequences followed. The Nazis had no expectation of a raid, and an abundance of the most damning material was found.

How completely these strokes surprised them may be seen from a single circumstance. The judge was able to sequester an airmail letter which had arrived an hour previously from the Reich and was still unopened; a letter which would by itself have been enough to show the continuing activities of the forbidden organizations, and their direct dependence on their respective headquarters in the Reich. Thanks to a communication from a confidential agent in the Embassy, I was able about four o'clock in the morning to inform Judge Vasquez of the location of the central printing-press for totalitarian propaganda, where by seizure of the cash books and the correspondence he would get proof that payments came from the Embassy itself. A House Search at once confirmed this. On the morning of July 2, more than thirty of the higher officials in the Nazi Party and the Workers' Front were taken from their beds and consigned to prison.

At enquiries which occupied the whole day and lasted until far into the night, the evidence of hundreds of witnesses was heard. In Entre Rios and Parana and in other Argentine provinces parallel actions were begun: they contributed to complete the evidence and broaden the proof of anti-Argentine activity and illegal procedure. Since Judge Vasquez desired to multiply to the utmost the case against the Hitler Party and the Embassy, within three days we brought thirty additional witnesses to the Department of Justice. The methods of the Black Front, begun and developed through the Free-German Movement, then achieved a brilliant success. We were able for the first time to show the part we took in the battle against Hitlerism; how we could serve Argentina, the land whose guests we were, and serve her free institutions, once we had secured the

standing with her authorities. This may serve to confute those still unwilling to grant to the German Opposition its rightful place in the union for democratic freedom. What happened here, in the framework of Argentine politics, can happen elsewhere in the great world movement against Nazism: it can happen on the battlefields of the Second World War, if the right men can be found to use our eager cooperation and our deep knowledge of Hitlerism's methods.

Investigation of the Nazi purpose had to move in wider and wider circles. While Judge Vasquez proceeded against the Nazi Party and the Workers' Front, the Commission of the Chamber of Deputies concerned itself with other institutions of which Hitlerism had made sinister use.

It should here be emphasized that I was from the first well aware of the need to destroy the central power rather than to act against a couple of thousand party comrades and their local groups. The headquarters for all anti-Argentine intrigue was and is the Embassy of the Third Reich in Buenos Aires. Jovial Herr von Thermann, once consul-general of the Weimar Republic in Danzig, personal friend of Stresemann and implacable foe of Hitler and the N. S. D. A. P., sits like a spider in its web in that gigantic building, 25 Mayo Street, belonging to the German Bank, where he concocts his schemes and watches over his booty. The personnel of the Embassy was increased from 40 to more than 300; one storey was added after another, with new divisions and offices; millions upon millions of money were available, and were given out for purposes only in part disclosed. Here, under the shelter of diplomatic immunity, have those card-indexes been constructed (and they are still being constructed) which contain the name, the record, and the relations of every firm of the slightest importance in Argentina and South America; indexes which reveal the political position, the moral integrity or venality of each person that can be made available as instrument for the treacherous designs of Hitlerism.

This Nazi Embassy is still the seat of that complex throng of organizations large and small which comprise, control and direct not only the German but also the foreign Fascist groups—the groups which serve simultaneously one end, to mislead the authorities and to provide disguise for fulfilment of their own purpose. Constantly I emphasized at conference with members of the *Commission of Enquiry* that the attack on the Embassy must be carried forward if a genuine result is to follow. The enquiry extended ever over new provinces: ever wider circles were encom-

D. M. B. were visited by auditors of

books; the directors of German and Argentine newspapers were questioned; control of all bank accounts of the suspected group leaders was inaugurated; Board of Trade and School Association were found to be of doubtful character and were scrutinized under a magnifying lens. The outcome of this three-months work was presented to the Congress: a record compressed—so far as this job had yet gone—into four memoranda. The last one of these is itself 196 pages long, and all include in the form of photostat copies of incriminating documents rich material for interpretation of the whole case.

These four memoranda cover much less than one-half of the products of the Commission and of Judge Vasquez. It was scarcely possible to master the material: the staff of the Commission had to deal alone, day and night, with the arranging of information which kept pouring in, and with the statements of witnesses who came laden with evidence for the hearing. But it may be disclosed that the most interesting and important part of the Commission's findings was held back for a time in order that it should be given publicity only after previous methods of investigation had been found barren of result. For example, I was able to bring an officer of the Gestapo, whose voluntary confessions would have been enough by themselves to make a complete case against the Nazi Party and the Embassy. The Commission still thinks it will be able to reach its goal by conventional diplomatic practice, and for this reason deliberately abstains from bringing criminal intrigues to justice on the evidence of a part of the Embassy staff.

If at the outset the Chamber of Deputies accepted as almost its only task to eliminate certain disturbing and ever widening Nazi organizations against the State, its purpose soon went beyond that. Unimpeachable evidence has been forthcoming that under protection of diplomatic immunity the most treacherous criminal plots have been woven from the Embassy itself, and that the Embassy and the Nazi Party (to all intents and purposes the same) are at work by every means—bribery, slander, persecution, murder—to compass their infamous ends. The impression which the investigations and revelations of the Taborda Commission produced was immense. From the gravest of South American journals—*La Prensa*, with its million copies—to the lowest of noisy sheets on this continent, the *Argentine Daily News*, the whole press was as one on a single point, that only the immediate expulsion of Thermann, or, better still, the breaking off of diplomatic relations could be the issue of this enquiry. The

festos which presented a challenge. This manifesto was so composed that it could be endorsed by all the Commissioners, though they came from the most widely separated political sections. When the Declaration of the Chamber of Deputies was published, there burst forth a storm against Thermann, comparable only to the one which Congress experienced in 1917 in reference to the affair of Count Luxburg which almost led to a declaration of war. No fewer than five speakers branded the Nazi ambassador as a liar, and his manner of conducting the Embassy as an insult to all the principles of diplomatic intercourse. The creation of the Taborda Commission was applauded, only one Deputy dissenting. The Chamber demanded that the Administration take its stand with all speed.

For our own part, we (Free Germans) abstain from entering into those deeper reasons which, up to the date of this writing, prevent an immediate dismissal of Thermann. They belong to the province of Argentine foreign policy, and one who is a guest in Argentina has not the right to be in such matters a critic, intruding upon concerns which ought to be handled by the Argentine people only.

But, beyond doubt, the Nazis have been beaten all along the line. In their mass gatherings and their street demonstrations it has been made clear that the vast majority of the Argentine people are against them. Representatives in the legislature and press stand to-day in one front against the totalitarian system, and the danger of Nazism is—if not removed—at least on all sides made known and clearly realized. An attempt at a military *coup d'état*, which in view of the doubtful situation of the Fascist elements would have been tried, was nipped in the bud. Tonazzi, the War Minister, dealt with it drastically, arrested the heads of the movement, and dismissed nearly two dozen of the higher officers. It remains only to see whether the Administration will rouse itself to adopt the needful measures for giving adequate expression to the new inner spirit of the Argentine people. That the Declaration by Parliament was meant to serve as basis for procedure by the Administration appears in the very wording of it. The National Chamber of Deputies affirms:

- (i) That the German ambassador, Freiherr von Thermann, permitted himself to transgress the limits of his diplomatic functions, and misused his diplomatic privileges.
- (ii) That dissolution of the German Welfare Society and the Cultural Associations and of the League of Creative Germans is required, because these represent just a continuation

decree of the Government on 15th May, 1939. Further, the application of Law 4144 (Law regarding Foreigners) is required against the leaders of the forbidden organizations.

- (iii) In like manner it is appropriate that the German Chamber of Trade be deprived of its character of a juridical person.

The decisive joint labor executed by the German Opposition of which we were representatives, the Enquiry Commission, the Chamber of Deputies, the Argentine press and with it the Argentine people, was not without result. With delightful clarity nearly all speakers at the three days discussion in Congress emphasized the contrast between the industrious and loyal German people in Argentina on the one hand and, on the other, the treacherous activity of the Nazi organizations. In support of this, the Free-German-Movement determined to underline once more the contrast between Germans and Hitlerites. Twelve delegates were sent to Congress that they might present before the Investigation Committee the following statement, which was published with photograph of the delegates in the entire press:

These delegates, brought together from all German party groups, desire to express warmest thanks to the Commission of the Chamber of Deputies for undertaking under the leadership of Deputy Taborda with good results the battle against a criminal clique which brings disgrace upon the name and honor of all Germans.

The overwhelming majority of Germans in Argentina stand firm in resolution behind the proposals of the Enquiry Commission, which aim at expulsion of Thermann and destruction of those Nazi organizations which are a menace to the State. Hitler is no representative of the real will of our people, nor Thermann, nor are the Nazis in general. They are our people's presumptuous tyrants. We Germans, as guests in this beautiful and free country, desire only friendship with the Argentine people, peace and the opportunity of diligent work for our mutual profit and the obliteration of the Nazis who disturb their harmony and abuse the hospitable kindness of Argentina.

IN THE NAME OF THE FREE GERMANS

The result up till now of the fight against Hitlerism is not to the credit of any single person; nor is it the fruit only of the exertion of a group of the "Free-Germany-Movement." Not in Argentina, nor in Uruguay, nor in Chile, nor in Bolivia. A few persons must always be the driving force, and must stand in the foreground. But the result is always dependent on the efforts of a multitude working together. So it has proved in South America, and must continue to prove in the fight against Hitlerism