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Abroad

Hitler as Savior of the Small Nations

By ANNE O'HARE McCORMICK

Nobody has pronounced a harsher judgment on Germany's policy in Europe than Hitler himself. His eleventh anniversary speech is a desperate appeal to Europe to save itself from the consequences of eleven years of Nazi aggression. It is the speech of the destroyer begging those he has tried with all his might to destroy to rise up and rescue themselves, and him, from destruction. Look, Europe, he cries; look at the "Bolshevist Colossus" I have drawn out of its isolation to swallow you up. Look, Britain, at the giant I have roused to usurp your role on the Continent.

The pyromaniac who has set on fire the house in which he lives shrieks to the other tenants and to all the neighbors to help him put out the flames. The point of interest in the frantic SOS is not the repeated references to Russia as "the Colossus," though they shout to the housetops a confession of the fatal blunder Hitler committed when he challenged this power and set it in motion.

It is not that he goes down imprecating the Jews, though this tedious litany is also a confession that his first "enemy," like the last, has been "annihilated" in vain. In extremis, he has not lost the hope that he can leave his obsession behind him as a kind of memorial, so that it can be said, as indeed it can be wherever there is a stirring of anti-Semitism, or any of the subterranean currents of bigotry: "Hitler lives."

The main point of interest is the appeal to the small nations of Europe against what he piquantly describes as "a new invasion of the Huns." "Only Germany," he says, "can help the smaller nations." The leading Power of the future will be "either a European family of peoples represented by its strongest state or the Bolshevist Colossus." This is a reassertion of German leadership, and a plea to France, the Scandinavian countries, Holland, Italy, even Poland, to join Germany in resisting Russia. It is accompanied by a warning that they can expect no help from Britain in resisting Soviet domination.

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This is a typical Nazi attempt to make capital out of the Polish boundary dispute and aggravate the questions that trouble and divide other border states as the Russian troops drive toward the pre-war frontiers. As Hitler spoke the vanguards of General Govorov's army were crossing the Estonian line and speeding on to the capital, Tallinn. The Supreme Soviet was in session in Moscow, with the announced intention of amending the Constitution to increase the powers of the member republics of the U. S. S. R. Nervous observers in London and Washington wondered if the purpose of this change was to increase Soviet representation in world capitals and in the war settlements, but the timing makes it more likely that a new pattern of "autonomy" is being worked out for the states or territories marked for incorporation in the Soviet Union.

Simultaneously the Free Germany Committee, still in being in Moscow, directed a special broadcast to the German people bidding them "save Germany before it is too late." "Fight with us for a free and peaceful Germany," it urged. "Then our opponents of today will not deny their assistance in rebuilding our country."

Hitler was playing on the hopes and fears stirred by propaganda and by events. The fantastic impudence of his last-ditch pose as the savior of Europe, the help and hope of small nations, must unite for a moment in bitter laughter the people of Poland and Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Greece, France and the Low Countries. From one end of the Continent to the other not a soul will be deluded by this grotesque talk of "saving Europe" from the man who made war to destroy Europe. Nations that live in the wreckage, the slavery and misery he has wrought cannot be terrorized by his threats, because they cannot imagine anything worse than the fate he has brought upon them. Even the Quislings must jeer at Hitler appealing to Poles, Norwegians and Dutch, on the ground that their "salvation" cannot be assured "exclusively by the National Socialist German people and its Wehrmacht."

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Europe will not listen to Hitler. But no one who hears the echoes of its underground voices can doubt that it strains for an answer to its own questions. The suspended forces of European life are beginning to stir. Movements for the reorganization of government are developing and competing in every occupied country. Not one of these movements is looking to Germany. They are all looking to us—to Russia and Britain and the United States—to see what the Moscow Declaration means in practice, to see if decisions in one half of the Continent are to be left to Moscow and in the other to the Western Powers, above all to see what part they may expect to play in deciding their own future.

Hitler's speech is nothing, but the European peoples need to hear words that do mean something before the great invasion is launched. They need to be told that their hope of salvation lies, first, in the unity of the Great Powers in victory, and that this is a real hope, based on a firm agreement of these Powers to settle differences by consultation and compromise; and, second, in their own capacity to unify and help themselves. Unless the pattern of agreement is set by the strong it will not be followed by the weak, and there will be no chance of setting up provisional regimes representative enough to bridge the transition to peace without civil war.