

David Lloyd George, “I talked to Hitler” (1936)

Abstract

Foreign sentiments towards and impressions of Nazi Germany were varied, from France and Poland's unease at German rearmament, to the Soviet Union's mistrust of Germany's increasingly anticommunist bent. Great Britain's leaders, however, remained largely convinced by German claims of maintaining peace in Europe, and that German rearmament was for purely defensive purposes. While British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain is often credited with the (in)famous general policy of Appeasement, he was by no means alone in his belief that Nazi Germany – and in particular Adolf Hitler – remained committed to peace. In 1936, David Lloyd George, the former British Prime Minister who had helped design the Paris Peace accords and the Treaty of Versailles so hated in Germany, visited Hitler. His subsequent report, published in the *London Daily Express*, reveals his honest conviction not only that Germany was a reformed country with renewed hope and dignity, but that its leader, Hitler, constituted more than a mere publicly venerated figure, but rather represented nothing short of a “National Hero” to the German people.

Source

I Talked To Hitler

By The Right Honourable DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

I have just returned from a visit to Germany. In so short time one can only form impressions or at least check impressions which years of distant observation through the telescope of the Press and constant inquiry from those who have seen things at a closer range had already made on one's mind.

I have now seen the famous German Leader and also something of the great change he has effected. Whatever one may think of his methods – and they are certainly not those of a parliamentary country – there can be no doubt that he has achieved a marvellous transformation in the spirit of the people, in their attitude towards each other, and in their social and economic outlook.

He rightly claimed at Nuremberg that in four years his movement has made a new Germany. It is not the Germany of the first decade that followed the war – broken, dejected, and bowed down with a sense of apprehension and importance. It is now full of hope and confidence, and of a renewed sense of determination to lead its own life without interference from any influence outside its own frontiers.

There is for the first time since the war a general sense of security. The people are more cheerful. There is a greater sense of general gaiety of spirit throughout the land. It is a happier Germany. I saw it everywhere and Englishmen I met during my trip and who knew Germany well were very impressed with the change.

One man has accomplished this miracle. He is a born leader of men. A magnetic, dynamic personality with a single-minded purpose, a resolute will and a dauntless heart. He is not merely in name but in fact the national Leader. He has made them safe against potential enemies by whom they were surrounded. He is also securing them against that constant dread of starvation, which is one of the poignant memories of the last years of the War and the first years of the Peace.

Over 700,000 died of sheer hunger in those dark years. You can still see the effect in the physique of those who were born into that bleak world. The fact that Hitler has rescued his country from the fear of a

repetition of that period of despair, penury and humiliation has given him unchallenged authority in modern Germany.

As to his popularity, especially among the youth of Germany, there can be no manner of doubt. The old trust him; the young idolise him. It is not the admiration accorded to a popular Leader. It is the worship of a national hero who has saved his country from utter despondency and degradation.

It is true that public criticism of the Government is forbidden in every form. That does not mean that criticism is absent. I have heard the speeches of prominent Nazi orators freely condemned. But not a word of criticism or of disapproval have I heard of Hitler. He is as immune from criticism as a king in a monarchical country. He is something more. He is the George Washington of Germany - the man who won for his country independence from all her oppressors.

To those who have not actually seen and sensed the way Hitler reigns over the heart and mind of Germany this description may appear extravagant. All the same, it is the bare truth. This great people will work better, sacrifice more, and, if necessary, fight with greater resolution because Hitler asks them to do so. Those who do not comprehend this central fact cannot judge the present possibilities of modern Germany.

On the other hand, those who imagine that Germany has swung back to its old Imperialist temper cannot have any understanding of the character of the change. The idea of a Germany intimidating Europe with a threat that its irresistible army might march across frontiers forms no part of the new vision.

What Hitler said at Nuremberg is true. The Germans will resist to the death every invader at their own country, but they have no longer the desire themselves to invade any other land. The leaders of modern Germany know too well that Europe is too formidable a proposition to be overrun and trampled down by any single nation, however powerful may be its armaments. They have learned that lesson in the war.

Hitler fought in the ranks throughout the war, and knows from personal experience what war means. He also knows too well that the odds are even heavier today against an aggressor than they were at that time. What was then Austria would now be in the main hostile to the ideals of 1914.

The Germans are under no illusions about Italy. They also are aware that the Russian Army is in every respect far more efficient than it was in 1914. The establishment of a German hegemony in Europe which was the aim and dream of the old pre-war militarism, is not even on the horizon of Nazism.

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