

Note on the Conversations between Adam von Trott zu Solz and “Mr. Eliot” (December 1941)

Abstract

The jurist and diplomat Adam von Trott zu Solz (1909–1944) was an important resistance fighter who tried, albeit in vain, to secure foreign support for the German opposition to Hitler as early as 1939. After becoming an official in the Foreign Office in 1940, Trott entered into the hub of opposition based in Admiral Wilhelm Canaris’s Office of Military Intelligence (*Amt Ausland/Abwehr*) within the High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW). At the same time, Trott was also a key member of the so-called Kreisau Circle, a group of resisters who had come together around Count Helmuth James von Moltke (1907-1945). Although Trott worked hard to make foreign contacts on behalf of Canaris’s group, British and American government officials repeatedly rejected his attempts to initiate peace talks, since their goal was Germany’s unconditional surrender. Additionally, Trott faced mistrust on the side of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the FBI, with both intelligence agencies regarding him as a German spy.

The following summary of numerous conversations between Trott and a representative of the American National Council of Student Christian Associations (a “Mr. Eliot”) was taken from American intelligence files on Trott. The summary includes Trott’s assessment of the state of the German opposition (especially within the church and the military) at the end of 1941, and it also offers insight into his hopes for the kind of future that would follow a successful coup. The conversations took place in Geneva in December 1941, presumably with the help of the World Council of Churches. A nodal point for the European opposition to Hitler, the Geneva office of the World Council of Churches was also an important contact for the Kreisau Circle.

Trott was eventually arrested in the wake of the investigation following the failed attempt on Hitler’s life on July 20, 1944; he was sentenced to death by the People’s Court and hanged on August 26, 1944.

Source

Note on the Eliot-Trott Conversations

Geneva, December 1941

Mr. Eliot of the National Council of Student Christian Association[s] saw Adam von Trott zu Solz in Geneva on December 18 to 20—at which time, it will be remembered, he was said to have been in South America—and had in all about ten hours conversation with him.

Trott began by describing his own position. He had, he said, deliberately refused to become an expatriate, and had elected to return to Germany after his visit to America in the winter of 1939, because he believed he could be more useful working within the Reich than outside it. He himself had always been anti-Nazi, but he now found that there was a growing number of people in all classes who were, as it were, catching up with him.

This movement of opposition, though unorganized, was carried along by an irresistible ground swell of feeling, impelled by two motives.

1. The growing realization of the plight into which their early toleration of National Socialism had led them.

2. A deep-seated fear of Bolshevism without and Communism within.

The movement was to be found in all classes but more particularly among the Church, Labor and the Army. Churchmen had disclosed a far greater degree of outspoken criticism of the regime (e.g., Graf Galen's sermons, and the visit of Cardinal Faulhaber, and the Lutheran Bishop of Stuttgart to the Reichskanzlei in December to protest against the depredations of the Gestapo.) But at the same time they were teaching the philosophy of order and responsibility in preparation for the overthrow of the Nazis and the future peace.

Labor was realizing more and more that it had become the dupe of National Socialism and was turning to the Church for guidance, not so much in spiritual matters but in admiration for the stand taken by certain of its leaders. It is said to be a frequent question in Labor circles when a man secretly professed anti-Nazi views: "Is he a member of the 'Fighting Church'?"

It was, however, to the Army, Trott said, that the movement looked for its real leadership. He would name no names but he indicated that there were certain generals and senior officers, both in the field and on the general staff, who were to be counted upon if and when the time came. He also gave certain examples of discontent in the Army as a whole, (e.g., the Moelders incident, and the refusal of certain commands on the Eastern Front to execute orders of great cruelty against the Russian prisoners.) There was a growing feeling that the Army had created in the Party a Frankenstein's Monster, which had passed beyond their control, and was, by its own blunders, about to plunge both itself and them into complete catastrophe. More specifically, he said that the Japanese alliance was regarded by the Army as unnatural and was resented. As in the ranks of Labor there was an increasing regard for the Church and for Christian principles. Mimeographed copies of Robert Paton's "The Church and the Post-War World" had been distributed in Norway by German troops. (Incidentally, it was said that this book had had a wide illicit circulation in Germany, especially among the Army.)

Asked whether the object of the movement was a negotiated peace with the Army, Trott was emphatically negative. Peace, he said, and incidentally the success of the movement, was only possible after the military power of Germany had been broken. It was hoped, however, that, at an unstated time, it would be possible to stage a coup d'état and substitute for the present regime a provisional government which could "demand a new deal" from the United Nations for the "decent Germans."

Once established, this government would take certain immediate measures which should serve as acts of good faith vis-à-vis the Allies. These measures would include:

1. The proclamation of the restoration of the *Rechtsstaat*.
2. The rescinding of anti-Jewish legislation.
3. The return of confiscated property to Jews and Gentiles alike.
4. The evacuation of all occupied territory in Western Europe.

(N.b., no provision was made in these "immediate measures" for the evacuation of Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Austria, Greece and Yugo-Slavia, and though Mr. Eliot was not entirely clear on the point, it was his impression that Trott was unwilling to surrender any territory which would weaken the position of Germany against Russia.)

5. A statement on the position which the new Germany sees for herself in a federated Europe which she would not seek to dominate.

6. A proposal that, in view of the chaos which would exist in Germany after the collapse of the Nazi

regime and the consequent danger of Communism, the German Army in a properly reduced form should be permitted to assist and co-operate with the forces of the United Nations in keeping order within the Reich.

It was finally re-emphasized that there should be no let-up in the Allied attacks on Germany, for under this pressure the movement would grow and gather strength. It was, however, felt that Allied propaganda should give some assurance to the German people that a differentiation would be made between themselves and the Nazi Party, and that Germany would not be partitioned as of her former frontiers. At present they were being convinced by Goebbels that defeat would spell extinction.

Source: Note on the Eliot-Trott Conversations, Geneva, December 1941, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, Record Group 226, Entry 210, Box 92, Folder 367.

Recommended Citation: Note on the Conversations between Adam von Trott zu Solz and “Mr. Eliot” (December 1941), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-1516>> [May 01, 2024].