

Newsweek

February 5, 1945: p. 50

Rigid Framework of Nazi State Straining Under Defeats in Battle

Breakup Could Be Hastened
If Tired Army Revolts in Answer
to Plea of Moscow Germans



Last act in Germany: Workers march out to build fortifications

From inside Germany last week emerged the picture of a state that by all normal standards was in the last stages of dissolution. Yet such was the structure of compulsion erected by the Nazis that on the surface at least there was nothing approaching revolt. What was going on underneath the surface no foreign observer could more than guess. But there was no doubt that the crisis the fronts had plunged the Reich into an internal crisis as well.

Drang Nach Westen: On the roads leading from the eastern front toward Berlin and Central Germany a terrible parody of the old German cry of *Drang Nach Osten* (Push to the East) was taking place. Along jammed, snow-bound roads, aboard packed railway trains, where people clung to open platforms in freezing weather, a human tide rolled westward.

Apparently the Nazi authorities were trying to evacuate all the eastern cities and countryside, and they were aided by the German fear of the Russians. From Breslau, Danzig, and Poznań, from provinces that had been German for centuries, from provinces from which the Nazis had driven the Poles, the évacués fled. A Swedish correspondent was permitted to write from Berlin that it was "the greatest exodus of modern times." Officials tried to reassure frantic parents that children who had been sent to camps in the east to escape bombing had been evacuated. Diplomats were ordered to leave Berlin and go to Salzburg in Austria.



Last act in Germany:
 évacuées from the eastern front try to get billets

All able-bodied men were impressed into the Volkssturm and given any weapons available. Knives, daggers, and bayonets were collected and even museums were robbed of their ancient arms. Newspapers and radio stations summoned up visions of a terrible and perhaps fatal crisis. The German home radio proclaimed: "Victory or we perish!" Hitler's *Völkischer Beobachter* declared: "This is the fatal showdown."

All the signs indicated a physical breakdown perhaps as great as that of France in 1940. *NEWSWEEK*'s Stockholm correspondent cabled this description of the scene in Berlin itself:

"Refugees, mostly women and children with blankets around their bodies and shawls on their heads to protect themselves against the biting, sub-zero weather, queue up for hours outside bakeries to get a loaf of bread. Draftees ride tanks in never-ending columns.

"Most male Berliners are at the front, so the city today has only 2,000,000 women plus war prisoners, foreign workers, and old men too feeble to carry a rifle. Young girls who only three short years ago were dressing in finery and furs and making up with Parisian lipsticks and other cosmetics brought back by conquering soldier friends from France today look unkempt. They serve in anti-aircraft units in suburbs, as switchboard operators or stenographers in some military bureau, and if they have had bad luck, they dig in the snow around Oderberg, Küstrin, and Fürstenberg, where they have been dragged to build fortifications.

"For Berliners remaining among the city's ruins the difficulties of daily life are threatening to become overwhelming. Only a few flats and factories are heated. Gas is shut off and electric current is limited to the barest minimum. Bus traffic has ceased completely and the crowding is fantastic on the few street cars still functioning.

"Refugees from the east have brought with them the so-called Russian influenza, this war's counterpart of the last war's Spanish flu. Hospitals are overflowing and patients have to sleep in rows in corridors. The refugees have also brought paratyphus and diphtheria, but such cases are much more rare than the Russian flu, which is an epidemic. War pro-

HOME FRONT

duction in Berlin factories is slowing down. Wherever it does, male workers are drafted into the Volkssturm and women are dispatched to the front to dig trenches."

The Generals Again: The usual reports of rioting and unrest in German cities came from the usual "neutral sources." Prague was reported on the verge of rebellion. Hitler was supposed to have shot some more generals. Franz von Papen, former German envoy to Turkey, was rumored to have gone to Madrid to make peace proposals to the Allies.

Beneath this propaganda and fiction, the hard fact seemed to be that any German surrender would have to be engineered by the army. Hardly a single observer thought that either the discontented masses or the impressed foreign workers could set off the spark of revolt. But the army almost got away with its attempted putsch last July; now disaster is even more imminent and the reluctance of the army to accept the terrible "planned chaos" schemes of Heinrich Himmler and the Gestapo has presumably increased.

Furthermore, there have been signs that the Russians might be preparing to set up the mysterious Committee of German Officers in Moscow, headed by Gen. Walter von Seydlitz, as a new German government. One member of the committee, Maj. Gen. Martin Lattman, on Jan. 26 broadcast a plea for army-led revolt in the Reich. On this subject, NEWSWEEK'S Stockholm correspondent cabled:

"Army morale is excellent in the west but not so good in the east, for a political reason. So many Germans have lately become convinced the country's only remaining chance lies with the Seydlitz Committee. These Germans think Stalin will appoint Seydlitz head of the government, a prospect far from displeasing to them, for they have good reason to hope Seydlitz stands well enough with the Russians to intercede for his countrymen and obtain a better deal from Moscow than unconditional surrender.

"Whether Russia's backing of Seydlitz would have Anglo-American approval the Germans do not stop to consider, or else they think Moscow will go ahead regardless, as it has with the Lublin Poles. Meanwhile, it seems a fact that Seydlitz has been courted openly in Wehrmacht circles, more or less with the approval of many prominent Nazis who hope eventually to climb on his bandwagon and escape punishment as war criminals.

"This state of mind among many Germans, including some Nazis, would certainly have facilitated a Russian breakthrough had anything more than brute force been required to achieve it; it might be the key to future developments in Germany."