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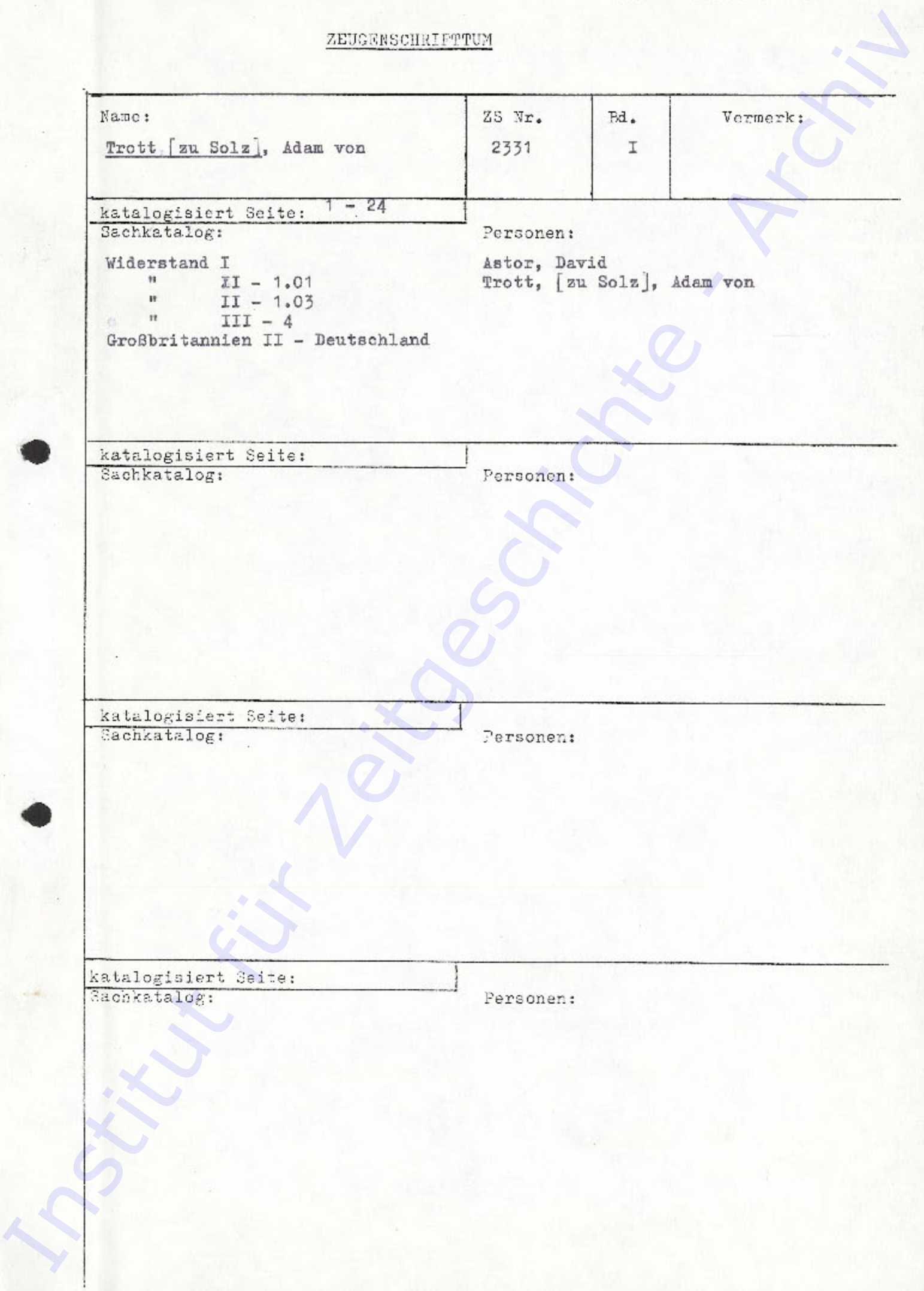
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I N T R O D U C T I O N

I shall be speaking of my recollections of Adam von Trott, particularly in the summer of 1939. Also of how he - and others of the German opposition - came to be misunderstood in this country before and during the war; and finally of how some of these misunderstandings linger on.

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I first met Adam von Trott in the Porter's Lodge of Balliol in September, 1931: we were signing on as new arrivals. I had just been spending a term at Heidelberg in what was to be the last eighteen months of the Weimar Republic. This experience made me curious to get to know the German Rhodes scholars at Oxford and two of them became my friends. One was Adam: the other, Fritz Schumacher (later to write "Small is Beautiful").

They were friends of each other. Both came from liberal-conservative families: one diplomatic, the other academic. Of the two families, Trott's was the more free-thinking: it was the kind of idiosyncratic home where every question of the day was debated, the elder brother, Wernher, arguing as a Marxist; Adam as a Social Democrat.

Trott found the atmosphere of Oxford immediately congenial. He very soon became a popular figure, and a friend of some of the ablest younger dons, such as Isaiah Berlin, Dick Crossman, Maurice Bowra.

Then, in January '33, came those events that changed everything: Hitler began to manoeuvre his way into power. Within weeks, the situation of the German students in Oxford had become subtly transformed. There was henceforth an element of threat in their lives. If they denounced Hitler openly - as Trott had done in his first term at Oxford - they knew what was already happening in Germany.

They must have had at least an awareness of physical fear. They could see that the Nazis did not hesitate to put anyone into their new oubliettes. On the other hand, the role of students-turned-émigrés must also have looked uninviting. No-one had paid attention to the émigrés from Mussolini's Italy.

Caught in this situation, Trott's first reaction, as I recall, was gloom, tempered by challenge. He was, of course, fully aware of what was happening in Germany, particularly to the Left, both Communist and Social Democrat, and he had no illusions about what would happen to him if he made himself conspicuous.

He decided that he would complete his law studies in Germany; and that he would move among his fellow-citizens to discover their basic feelings. He was to draw most comfort from the reactions of the Berlin working class. He talked at this time of "not giving the country over to Hitler".

He also spoke of the hatred that the rest of the world had felt for Germans during the Great War and how Hitler would surely bring this back. He yearned to retain some sense of a common humanity between nations.

With Hitler talking of the Master Race and behaving with the utmost brutality, apparently unopposed, it was difficult to maintain this hope. Yet Trott, to the abiding annoyance of some of his British friends, always continued to think, and to speak privately as if, a normal Germany still existed within the Third Reich.

After some three years of this sub-life in Hitler's régime - which was, at this time, enjoying a popular success with the big public because of the elimination of the previous unemployment - he began to feel a compulsion to interfere in the course of events. He strongly sensed that the Nazis were moving in a dangerous direction and, still in his twenties, felt a personal obligation to try to stop Germany from taking the world into another war.

By the end of 1936, he had already accepted that popular action against Hitler - the original hope of the German Left - was an impossibility. He therefore conceived the plan of making a visit to America and the Far East. His purpose was partly to look at Germany from the

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outside. But his main concern was to decide what role he himself should play.

By that time, he had heard of discontent among a group of talented army officers. He already recognised the military as being alone in possessing the means to strike down the régime - but also as being those most inhibited, by their training in obedience, from doing so. So any signs of political allies in that quarter were exciting and sharpened his choice.

That choice was whether to pursue his opposition to the Nazis from inside or from outside Germany. Should he join the opposition of individuals that he knew was beginning to exist inside the government service and the army? Or, should he try to influence events from outside Germany, using his contacts in England and America?

His long journey to think this out was much beyond his own means. How he managed to finance it shows how highly he was regarded by some experienced men of the world in Britain.

One who helped him was Philip Kerr (later Lord Lothian), Secretary of the Rhodes Trust. Kerr had himself been a precocious young man. He had been private secretary to the then Prime Minister, Lloyd George, during the First World War and the Versailles Conference, when little older than Trott was at this time. He had, incidentally, greatly doubted the wisdom of the punitive clauses of the Versailles Treaty and this later impelled him to interview Hitler to assess their relevance to his thinking.

He was made British Ambassador to Washington shortly before the outbreak of war and, although he had supported Chamberlain's Appeasement policy, Churchill confirmed Lothian in that key post, which he held till he died. His loyalty to Trott extended to meeting him in America (no doubt improperly), after the outbreak of war and giving him all the help he could.

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Another backer of his trip was Sir Stafford Cripps (whose son, John, was another Balliol friend of Trott). Already a highly successful barrister, Cripps was shortly to become leader of the Left-wing of Labour, together with Aneurin Bevan. He was an outstanding anti-fascist campaigner, and his advocacy of an alignment with the Soviet Union made Churchill choose him as his Ambassador to Moscow. Cripps helped to finance Trott's Far Eastern journey out of his own pocket. He was, undoubtedly, Trott's closest political friend in this country.

With introductions from Lothian and Cripps, Trott made friends in the United States with some highly influential people: like, for instance, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife; Roger Baldwin, the founder of the Civil Liberties movement; Edward Carter, Director of the Institute for Pacific Studies; and Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, the widely respected theologian and writer on political affairs - who was to defend Trott vigorously when, later, his name came under attack.

It was, in fact, inevitable that Trott should incur American and British official suspicion during this visit to the United States and China. He was pursuing two courses that appeared irreconcilable. On the one hand, he was meeting influential Americans as an anti-Nazi: on the other, he was keeping in regular touch with the German Embassy wherever he went. Why did he do this ?

The reason was that he was primarily determined to keep open the possibility to return to Germany, to join the embryonic opposition. He realised that to do this seriously meant being able to get a job in a key Government office, such as the Foreign Ministry. Obviously, this would be impossible if he had already become openly suspect to the Nazis. Hence, the essential importance of visits to German Embassies.

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Such visits were, however, easy to observe, if he was followed by British or American security officers. And this is what happened. Those visits were later to be considered by the American and British security authorities to be conclusive evidence against him.

Meanwhile, Trott was sometimes tempted not to return to Germany at all. He spoke of seeking an academic post in America. Indeed, when Hitler seemed about to bring about a world war in 1938 at the time of the Munich crisis, Trott became so filled with foreboding that war was now inevitable that he spoke of settling in the States and operating from there.

The decision he finally took to return to Germany to engage in active treason was taken quite alone. Moreover, he fully realised that, once taken, it would be irresponsible to tell friends what he was intending to do - unless they were themselves actively involved or especially able to help. To whisper to his Oxford friends, for instance, that what he would appear to be doing in Germany was not what he would really be doing would endanger his whole purpose and the lives of his fellow-conspirators, merely to gain approval.

He chose to tell me of his decision (originally, cryptically in a letter from China) because he needed my help. He knew my parents and he thought that they, as supporters of Chamberlain's Government, were his best hope of making direct contact with that Government. And it was throughout to be Trott's hope to bring about a working partnership between the British Government and the opposition inside Germany.

He arrived back in Germany in December 1938, that is to say, shortly after the Munich crisis - and, by the end of that month, he had made a major discovery. Through a friend in the Foreign Ministry, he learned that an oppositional act of the most important kind had already been taken by no less a person than the head of the Foreign Ministry staff, Ernst von Weizsaecker.

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It had happened some three months previously, when Hitler was threatening to invade the Sudeten province of Czechoslovakia and there had seemed every probability of a full-scale war. In that circumstance, senior commanders in the German Army, led by the redoubtable General Beck, had secretly decided to arrest Hitler at the moment that he gave the order to cross the Czech frontier. Their preparations included the movement of an armoured division to Thuringia in Central Germany, so as to cut off the SS troops stationed in Munich from using the new motor-way to reinforce those in Berlin, where the action against the Government would be taken. The mutinous generals were, at this time, fully confident that the German public would be greatly relieved to be spared another war and would support them.

The most extraordinary step that these generals took was to ask Weizsaecker to inform the British Government of their intention. This meant that they were willing to work with a foreign government against their own government - highly unusual for German senior officers or, indeed, for senior officers of any country. As Weizsaecker proved perfectly willing to deliver their message, the chief officers of the German State, both civil and military, were at this crucial juncture taking part in nothing less than an attempt to overthrow their government.

The transmission of their message to London had to be kept absolutely secret, not only from Hitler's Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop, but from everyone else in the diplomatic service, except those whom Weizsaecker trusted personally. The message, therefore, had to reach the British Government without passing through the German Ambassador in London. So, who should convey it? The British Government was, after all, not likely to receive a German diplomat who was not introduced by his own embassy.

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The method used was ingenious. There were two brothers serving in the German diplomatic service at that time, Theodor and Erich Kordt, whom Weizsaecker trusted completely. Theodor was Counsellor at the London Embassy. Weizsaecker sent for the other brother, Erich. He let him into the plans of the disaffected officers: he then asked him to make a holiday visit to London, possibly to talk family business with his brother, but in reality to convey these plans by word of mouth to his brother, the Counsellor. The latter should then, in the normal course of his dealings with the Foreign Office, ask that he might have an exceptional and strictly private meeting with Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary; that is to say, a meeting unknown to his own Ambassador.

In giving the outline of the planned coup, Theodor Kordt was to advise Lord Halifax that the British Government could help in one essential respect:- by not agreeing to Hitler's right to annexe the Sudetenland. It was not necessary to declare war on Germany: it would be enough simply to do nothing. That would oblige Hitler to make his annexation without any international approval; that is to say, a blatant act of war.

This meeting took place on 5th September: the British Foreign Secretary accepted the need for secrecy and even arranged that Dr. Kordt should be admitted by the garden entrance to 10 Downing Street, to avoid any possible observation. Dr. Kordt's message was, undoubtedly, fully conveyed.

But, as we know, the British Government decided to disregard it. Chamberlain and his Cabinet went ahead with their own intended Munich Agreement. That agreement effectively gave the Sudetenland to Hitler. He was, therefore, able to send his army into Czechoslovakia, unopposed and without a risk of war.

That the German public had, indeed, been dreading another war, as the generals believed, was demonstrated in the emotional scenes in Germany that greeted Chamberlain

when he drove to the airfield after the agreement was announced. (Chamberlain was to receive shoals of grateful German letters for a fortnight thereafter.)

But all those in Germany involved in that secret plan must have been utterly and deeply downcast and disgusted. The ideal - and perhaps only - opportunity to strike Hitler down in circumstances that would have been understood, accepted and supported by the German public at large had been thrown away.

No-one seems to know what happened at the British end of this tragic story - tragic because this was the most formidable trap ever laid for Hitler; and tragic because, if successful, it would have forestalled his most terrible atrocities and saved some fifty-one million people from unnatural deaths. Did Halifax doubt the authenticity of the Counsellor, Dr. Kordt or doubt whether he really spoke for the German Army commanders and head of the Foreign Ministry? If so, would he not have asked for confirmation? Perhaps the message was too extraordinary to be believed. But were further enquiries made, for instance by sending someone to Germany to talk discreetly to one of the senior officers indicated by Kordt? Or was it, perhaps, simply impossible for the British Cabinet to imagine that Hitler's chief civil and military officers were really prepared to betray him? We do not know the answer to these questions. No British historian seems to have thought them worth pursuing.

Some apologists of British policy explain London's non-response by suggesting that the Chamberlain Government might have acted differently if General Beck had not suddenly been replaced by General Halder. But the plotters themselves were ready to go ahead under Halder. Is it likely that the Chamberlain Government were viewing the scene with such intimacy and curiosity that they were differentiating between one oppositional general and another. There are no signs of this.

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Halifax's own simplistic remark to Dr. Kordt at a subsequent casual meeting, namely that he regretted not being able to tell him at the time that the British Government was too far advanced with its own plans to be willing to alter them, sounds more like the truth. Whatever the explanation, this episode came to be regarded as the saddest missed opportunity of the whole hellish experience.

Trott may not have been told all the details of the Beck-Weizsaecker plan - which, after it had miscarried, must have become the most unmentionable of all subjects in official Berlin. (Some British historians have naively complained of the lack of documentary evidence of this intended coup.) But Trott certainly knew its essence. He was fully determined to work for a second attempt, and offered what connections he had in London to try to create this missing link.

He was, however, soon made aware that a second attempt could not be laid on immediately. Hitler's victory at Munich, by far his greatest bloodless victory, had removed (at least temporarily) any possibility of arresting him as a madman about to plunge Germany into war: his popular reputation as a miracle-worker had been restored. There were also immense practical difficulties. Since neither 'phone calls nor written messages were safe in Nazi Germany, personal visits had to be made to prepare any clandestine plans: they could never be improvised.

Trott's offer to help was, however, accepted by the Foreign Ministry plotters: but his missions were not to be as clear-cut as that of Dr. Kordt. The hopes of preventing Hitler from starting another war were now much more slender. His first and near-impossible unofficial mission was to explore possible means of keeping Hitler talking. He returned to England (after his two years absence abroad) in February '39 and his purpose was the modest one of sounding out the state of British

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opinion. It came as a great surprise to him to discover the strength of feeling among his British friends against the very idea of delaying the possible outbreak of war by any further talks. "No more talks with Hitler" had become an absolute imperative - since the debacle of Munich. Trott told me of his amazement that his most idealistic friends seemed actually to want war. But - and this was his chief difficulty - because of his need of secrecy, he could not argue with them that, if peace could only be prolonged, he had reasons to hope that there might be a military coup inside Germany.

He felt a coolness towards himself. However, he judged that the general British public still probably wanted peace - even if it meant further talks with Hitler.

He might have been right about this: but within a fortnight of his visit, Hitler gave the order that finally shattered British public indifference. He sent his armies into Prague and the bare-faced fraudulence of this act shook the British. The Labour Party ceased to oppose rearmament. And the whole country seemed to reach a silent agreement that they must now be ready to face another war.

However, this transformation was not easily noticeable to outsiders: for instance, the then American Ambassador, Joseph Kennedy (father of the future President) continued to report to Washington that Britain would not fight.

The effect of Prague on the German opposition was equally dramatic - but different. War offered them no hope. They believed that, once Germany was at war, popular sentiment against any kind of "stab in the back" would begin to work against them.

They began to feel desperate. The military cell of the opposition now felt sure that Hitler would attack Poland and that this would bring on an unintended full-scale war. The generals therefore decided to attempt an act of diplomacy of their own, even more unorthodox than that of Dr. Kordt. They sent to London in the early

summer of 1939 an English-speaking staff officer from the High Command, Colonel Gerd Schwerin, who equipped himself with printed visiting cards giving his Piccadilly address and his full German military status. Working, naturally, not through his embassy, he used what personal introductions he had been given to try to approach the British Government. He had, however, such difficulty in making any contact with the Government, even at a low level, that he turned for help to me, an entirely unqualified twenty-seven-year-old, whose name had been given him by a Hamburg businessman, Wilhelm Roloff, whom I had met through an émigré friend, Erwin Schueller. I consulted Trott: he said Schwerin was certainly not a Nazi and that I should definitely meet him. He proved to be a genial, blunt individual.

The message he wanted to bring to the British Government was as follows. The High Command expected an attack on Poland that summer: Hitler definitely did not believe that Britain and France would go to war over Poland; but it was quite useless for the High Command to tell him that this time they would. They had previously predicted that the West would fight and had always been wrong. If Britain this time really meant to go to war, there was surely no advantage to Britain in keeping Hitler in any doubt. But the only way to convince him was by actions. The British should send a warship into the Baltic to exercise off Danzig (the area under dispute) without any delay. They should transfer RAF squadrons to French airfields facing the German border; and they should replace the British Ambassador in Berlin by a military man. "He will scream, but at least he will believe that you mean war - if you do! You should also invite some friend of Goering, such as Milch, to see for himself that you really have a serious aircraft industry - they only believe their own cronies."

He gave as the reason for his mission to London that the German High Command "did not want to have to fight Hitler's war". His message had the merit of

simplicity and his advice that of being possible. I was amazed by its directness and lost no time in passing it on.

I approached my only contact in the War Office, Robert Laycock, and, through him, was passed to a brigadier engaged in German Intelligence, to whom I reported my contact with Schwerin and what he wished to say. I was a bit surprised to be told by this gentleman, sitting behind his desk in the grandest of manners, that he regarded Schwerin's visit to London "at a time when relations between his country and ours are as bad as they are, as a bloody cheek". The brigadier intended doing nothing further about the matter.

Schwerin had other contacts besides me, of course; but they, also, did not enable him to get further than the Chief of Naval Intelligence. It seems almost unbelievable, but is true, that he was viewed by Whitehall as a kind of traitor and that no member of the Government thought it worth while to meet him, particularly as the message he was bringing was a simple and reasonable one.

Incidentally, Schwerin did me one favour, which confirmed his bona fides: I asked him whether it would still be all right for me to visit Berlin in July: that is to say, I asked him the approximate date of the outbreak of war. He told me (with only a moment of professional embarrassment) that July would be quite all right.

Meanwhile, a last clandestine effort was being attempted by the disaffected group in the Foreign Ministry and this directly concerned Trott. Believing that Hitler still preferred bloodless victories, a scenario was evolved in the hope that it might draw him away from his attack on Poland. (This was, however, before the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact ended all such possibilities.) The idea was to find a way of suggesting to Hitler that he might recapture the position that he had held at the time of Munich as the "Arbiter of Europe" - and, at the same time, enable him to gain his "Germanic" aim of annexing

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Danzig and its Corridor. The proposal was that he should astonish the world by restoring to Czechoslovakia its political freedom - with, no doubt, a proviso that it must remain disarmed. After such a gesture, he could surely expect to take the Danzig Corridor by negotiation.

But who was to make this near-fantastic proposal to Hitler? The German plotters thought that it could only come from Britain.

The authors of this ploy (it is not known who devised it or how large a part Trott himself played in its invention) were certainly not imagining that this device could possibly form the basis of a peace settlement. It was conceived only as a way of enticing Hitler into essentially meaningless negotiations - but which would gain precious time for a second attempted military coup. This was the understanding Trott gave me when he came to London to try to sell the idea.

He came in early June, but this time he had to take more precautions. If he visited British Ministers, this might excite the German Embassy, as he had no official authorisation for such talks. He therefore improvised a cover plan. He had scraped acquaintance with one Walter Hewel, a middle-aged businessman of modest intelligence, who happened to be one of the very earliest Nazis and a personal friend of Hitler. Hewel had been given a high-sounding liaison function in the Foreign Ministry. Trott represented himself to Hewel as wanting to use his personal connections in London to promote a better understanding of the Führer. Hewel gave his general approval to this and he thus became Trott's unwitting alibi, if Trott needed to show the Embassy his authorisation for any talks he had in London. To assist this process, Trott asked me to meet Hewel over drinks in a Berlin hotel and to build up an impression of Trott's high standing in London, which I did, to the best of my ability.

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Trott's final London visit was made in the unimaginably tense atmosphere of the impending war. It is, I think, easy to see with hindsight that his mission was foredoomed to failure. The Chamberlain Government could not possibly make any further diplomatic move after the seizing of Prague, without risking Britain's hard-won national unity and determination. Any further move to talk to Hitler must have looked like a sell-out. Trott had been away from Britain too long to realise this situation. He remained overwhelmingly conscious that, once war had broken out, it would generate its own terrible momentum and he continued to see war as the ultimate disaster.

Soon after arriving in England, he met Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, over dinner at my parents' house and took the chance to speak, in general terms, about the internal situation in Germany. Halifax was sufficiently impressed to arrange that Trott should have a private talk with the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain - in itself an amazing achievement, at that stage of events, for a young German with no official position.

This talk took place at 10 Downing Street on 7th June with Alec Douglas-Home (then, Lord Dunglass), the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, also present. Trott's main purpose was to convey the message that there was, indeed, a German opposition, well-placed to strike at Hitler; but that its chances of success depended almost entirely on whether war could be averted. His secondary purpose was to outline the idea for gaining time through talks on Danzig and Czechoslovakia. That, in brief, was how Trott described the occasion to me.

Later on, back in Berlin, Trott produced a fictitious report for the Foreign Ministry of this and other talks he had during this visit. It was

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written in strident Hitlerian prose and was deliberately aimed at reaching Hitler's eye, in the hope that it might yet make him believe that it would be worth his while to delay any move against Poland. This document has, not surprisingly, caused confusion by being taken literally by historians.

I have a clear recollection of asking Trott on one of the last evenings of this visit to say, in the simplest terms, what he really was hoping to achieve. He put his answer in an allegory. You could imagine Hitler as a heavily-armed drunkard, whose wild behaviour was endangering the lives of his own family and those of his neighbours. The best way to deal with him might be for two of them to take him, one by each arm. One arm would be taken by his strongest relative (the German plotters) and the other by his strongest neighbour (Britain). These two should then persuade him, with much pretence of friendly helpfulness (negotiations on Danzig, colonies, anything at all) to come for a long walk. Having got him into a quiet field, they should then hit him on the head with his own revolver (the German Army).

Trott's talks with Halifax, Chamberlain and Douglas-Home apparently left a favourable impression on them, according to the latter's interview with Trott's biographer. He did not manage to persuade them to act as a partner to the German opposition in trying to overthrow Hitler: perhaps they did not even fully grasp that this was what he was inviting them to do. However, he certainly did not alienate them or strike them as unrealistic or dubious in any sense.

This favourable reception was in marked contrast to what happened when Trott met his personal friends on this same visit. With the exception of the one or two to whom he had confided the full purpose of his visit, he made a lamentable, even a fatal, impression. At this distance, the reason is not hard to see. He was proposing

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more talks with Hitler - without being able to say that the time thus gained would be used to attempt a military coup in Germany - which he had, of course, indicated to the British Ministers he met. He, therefore, appeared to be suggesting further concessions, possibly at the expense of the Poles and Czechs - for no purpose other than to humour Hitler.

Trott made one partial exception in his policy of not confiding. He, like others, had a special respect for Maurice Bowra of Wadham, a man of great boldness. He took a chance on telling Bowra half the truth. He seems to have told him that he had a connection with the German Foreign Ministry and that this gave him a relationship to those army officers prepared to make a coup. Bowra immediately asked what these people would do about Hitler's territorial gains and claims.

This was, of course, a question that greatly worried some of the oppositional generals. They did not want to be accused of giving up what might be regarded as legitimate German claims. At that moment, Hitler was demanding a corridor through Danzig to restore the land-link with East Prussia - certainly, a popular demand. This obviously presented them with an awkward problem. Could they renounce that claim? What was, however, inconceivable was that these officers would have wanted to keep conquered Czechoslovakia, when they had but recently been willing to make its conquest the cause of striking Hitler down.

Had Trott put the dilemma facing the plotting soldiers frankly to Bowra and made it plain that they must be thinking much more of how they would handle a civil war between themselves and the SS, rather than how they would settle Germany's frontiers in perpetuity, Bowra would probably have understood and discussed their problem reasonably. As it was, Trott, not fully confiding in him, conveyed the impression of wanting more appeasement of Hitler in a doubtful cause. Bowra,

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furious, asked him to leave his house. Later, he wrote to Felix Frankfurter, Roosevelt's close friend, whom he knew that Trott was planning to see, warning him against Trott in the most hostile terms. This, naturally, was to wreck Trott's chances in Washington. Roosevelt indeed wrote to Frankfurter jokingly of Trott as a spy.

At the end of the war and after Trott's death, Bowra remarked to another Oxford wit that Trott was one of the few Nazis to have been hung. Later, he repented and, to his credit, admitted his misunderstanding and expressed bitter remorse.

The majority of Trott's British friends took the view at the outbreak of war, not that he was a spy, but that he was a misguided "nationalist" - a term which, of course, has several meanings. It can be a favourable term: to be a nationalist of an oppressed country struggling for independence (say, a Polish nationalist) is highly respectable. To be a nationalist of an "imperial" or ex-imperial power (like Britain or Russia) is much more dubious. But to be called a "German nationalist" at the time of the Third Reich was something much worse - it could mean to be the carrier of that sentiment that had made Hitler's career possible.

Terrible though that allegation was, it is just possible to understand that in the feverish circumstances of that time, some of Trott's British friends misjudged him in that way. The complexity of the role he had chosen; the strains of an impending war; even an accidental factor like his use of my family (themselves the objects of suspicion as appeasers, because of the supposed "Clivedon Set") to reach British Ministers were all enough to provoke accusations in that summer.

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It is more surprising that one or two who judged him so severely then still, unlike Bowra, maintain they were right. There are, of course, those with an axe to grind, such as the permanent or temporary civil servants who compiled the damning Foreign Office dossier on him. And there are those who must justify having encouraged him to keep contacting British Embassies in neutral capitals throughout the war, at great risk to himself although there was never any intention to answer his messages.

These ugly transactions took place some forty years ago. Should it not, by now, be agreed that those British friends in whom Trott confided most fully were probably in the best position to judge his politics? The chief of these was Stafford Cripps, who as a Cabinet Minister spoke up for him in mid-war. Adam's relationship to Stafford and Isobel was almost that of an adopted son. Cripps - a famous anti-fascist and internationalist - simply could not have been a close friend of anyone with German nationalist sentiments at that time.

Another intimate friend over many years was Wilfrid Israel. This brilliant young man, who owned family property in Berlin, but was the holder of a British passport, used that safeguard to bring Jewish children out of Germany till the last possible moment. His biography is in preparation and will show the high regard and close friendship that he and Trott had for each other. Would Wilfrid Israel not have noticed the German nationalism which Trott's Oxford friends thought they detected?

Finally, consider his close relationship to Fritz Schumacher. They ultimately took opposite decisions on whether to stay in Germany or move to England for the war. Trott felt an obligation to try to "save" his country - not from its hostile neighbours, but from its own régime. Schumacher perfectly understood this, but thought Trott was assuming too great a responsibility. The difference

between them was not one of merit, but of kind. Trott belonged to the category of patriot.

I am differentiating between the term "nationalist", which often implies an aggressive role, and that of "patriot", which is normally used of those playing a defensive role. A patriot defends La Patrie and he may well be defending his country from a domestic enemy - like Wilhelm Tell against the Duke's agents. Trott and the German opposition of the Left and the Right were, in my opinion, patriots of this familiar kind.

What is perfectly true is that their little network of anti-Nazi individuals, to be effective, needed to extend its membership, particularly in the officer corps. There were soldiers, such as Beck and Oster, who were the staunchest founder-members of the opposition. But there were others who had to be won over. And it was these marginal generals who were most anxious not to be regarded by their countrymen as traitors. They wanted assurances from the Allies. And their hesitations were, obviously, the cause of delay and annoyance within the opposition.

This ideological gradation between the small opposition proper and some of the military on which it depended seems easy enough to understand. However, there are people, old and young, in Britain, the United States and Germany, who seem to enjoy confusing this distinction.

Indeed, the judgement on Trott himself still sometimes seems to be stuck in 1939. A recent book by a personal friend of his repeats all the damaging misunderstandings and allegations of that time, but in summing him up includes almost nothing of all that has since become plain. Yet this book carries a foreword by our leading scholar on Hitler and his highly favourable appraisal was accepted by all the reviewers of this book, except myself.

Again, consider the high repute of the late Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, our greatest authority on the German Army in that period. His magnum opus is a study of the

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German officer corps, mainly seen as men of no moral courage. Yet it was he who pretended in that book that he had not known Trott, when he had long known him, and had greatly helped him in Washington during wartime. And it was he who wrote a confidential memorandum to the Foreign Office in November 1939 advocating support for the German military opposition, but later, when this became unfashionable, always denied that he had ever given such advice.

It is, indeed, hard not to gain an impression of national bias in British historians' treatment of London's relations with the German opposition. For instance, the mission of the Kordt brothers and that of Schwerin have always been played down here and the lack of British response to them passed over. While the failures of the German opposition - functioning under incomparably more difficult circumstances - have been played up. It is as if British historians were saying of the German opposition:- "We British were right not to help them - because they were really not worth helping".

Perhaps the most striking omission is in the reasons given for the cool British attitude to the so-costly attempted coup of 20th July 1944. Talks that produced the Allied policy to divide Germany into Zones after the war, with the Soviets controlling the Eastern section, had already been secretly begun in November 1943. Obviously, nobody in Germany could have been expected to welcome this dismemberment. So, if any German opposition had overthrown Hitler in 1944 and had then asked to talk to the Allies, it would have meant acute embarrassment for the Allies.

It is understandable that nothing was said of this at the time. But the continuing pretence that the Allied governments would not have wanted to deal with the members of the 20th July plot because of their politics (the old story of their alleged German nationalism) when the truth is that they could not have dealt with them because of

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the Allied intention to partition Germany, is surely propaganda, not history.

There was, also, throughout this whole period, a great deal of simple misunderstanding between those in Britain and those in Nazi Germany. It was the gulf of experience between those who live in relative political freedom and those who live inside any kind of tyranny.

A final anecdote may illustrate the point. In June '42, a document from the German opposition was brought out of Germany by Trott and eventually delivered to Eden, the Foreign Secretary. He commented on it to his colleague, Cripps, in a letter thus:- "Our view is that until they [the German opposition] come out into the open and give some visible sign of their intention to assist in the overthrow of the Nazi régime, they can be of little use to us or to Germany". How did he imagine that anyone could "come out into the open" and show an intention to assist in overthrowing the régime - in Nazi Germany ?

He went on to taunt Trott and his fellow-conspirators in the Foreign Ministry for their unwillingness "to pay the price of their convictions and resign from the service of the Nazi régime". Did he mean that they were too cautious and careerist to give up their jobs - when he knew they were willing to risk their lives by taking treasonable documents addressed to the enemy out of Germany in wartime ?

Eden's letter is written from another world than the one in which Trott and his fellows were living. But his attitude to the German opposition was not special to him. It was the official British view and it was never, so far as I know, challenged inside the Government or its specialised agencies, except by the lonely voice of Cripps. That view overlooked almost all the realities in Hitler's Germany - including the fact that his German opponents were alone among the resistance movements of

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Europe in receiving no help or encouragement whatever from the outside world - yet were expected to show results in by far the most difficult circumstances of any.

There may be a clue, here, why the German opposition has been treated so much worse than the resistance movements of the rest of Europe, both by historians and by popular legend. The resistance movements of the occupied countries could be represented as popular movements. By contrast, the German opposition was within a totalitarian system which made any semblance of a popular movement completely impossible. As in all genuinely totalitarian societies, whether of the Left or Right, the only way that action could be taken was from above - i.e. action taken from inside the government, its civil service or its armed forces. This is the only way that any changes have been made in the Soviet Union and China; and it is also how the fascist régimes in Greece, Spain and Portugal were ultimately dismantled.

But bringing about changes from within must, obviously, mean working through the officers and officials of the hated, tyrannical régime. And these (whatever their personal qualities) are not well-loved figures among the historians of democracies or the makers of popular legends. For instance, German army officers of the pre-war period, as a class, usually excite prejudice. This has been noticeable in both the British and German treatment of the German opposition, where the term "the generals" is used as if it were pejorative. Yet there was no possible alternative to the military, if the overthrow of the Nazis was to be attempted.

All those in Germany who took part in efforts to overthrow Hitler took a decision to act with no popular support, and with few colleagues, against a government that was world-famous for its cruelty. Their actions were taken, not on mountain sides or de-railing trains in open country, but mainly in offices and behind the backs of a universal police system. Their preparations required

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moral courage of a quite unusual kind. And it is to be hoped that they will, one day, find historians, in their own country or here, who can write about them without the need to patronise. They deserve to be treated by scholars at least as their equals.

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