

Give A Man A Chance

BY DOROTHY THOMPSON

WITHIN the last few hours a very remarkable thing has happened. This country has suddenly discovered that on one issue we are one people. The issue has been precipitated outside our boundaries, by a country that only a few weeks ago proclaimed its desire for peace and appeasement and concluded a peace pact with Great Britain and France.

The immediate consequence of that pact has been an unexampled reign of terror against political minorities and against the Jewish population of Germany. This terror has turned the stomach of the American people. Suddenly and spontaneously they have risen, regardless of party, regardless of race, regardless of class, in a protest which declares that there is in this country the front of which I spoke in a column a few days ago—the front of human decency.

Much as we differ among ourselves on every social, political and economic program, we are one on the principles embodied in the American Bill of Rights. We are against terror and oppression. We are against the cynicism that brings an indictment against a whole people, totally regardless of the individuals among them. The State Department in asking our ambassador to return from Germany acts as an agency truly representative of American tradition, American principles and American opinion.

On Monday night I had a remarkable demonstration of what that public opinion is. On the regular program of the General Electric Company, which takes place at 9 o'clock on Monday evenings, I tried to picture the mentality of Herschell Grynszpan, the 17-year-old refugee who murdered Herr von Rath, and whose deed was the signal for the outbreak in Germany.

I expressed my own feeling that to send this minor to the guillotine for a crime that has already been paid for by deaths, suicides, thousands of arrests, a blanket fine of \$400,000,000 and the economic ruin of half a million people, was one more act very hard to stomach.

I pointed out that every Jew in Germany was being held as a hostage for every action taken by any individual Jew or Jewish organization, and that I thought it the business of non-Jews to provide for his defense, since he was penniless.

The response was flabbergasting. I am in receipt of some 3,000 telegrams, still uncounted letters and several hundred dollars in checks, although I did not ask for money, and was speaking solely for myself. The telegrams came from 46 states. Almost all of them gave their addresses and asked what they could do.

This morning's dispatches from Paris record that the French government has published some new edicts, among them one that decrees that a crime which may involve international repercussions may be tried in camera, with the press and public barred.

Every American journalist, working abroad, with many of whom I have been in correspondence in the last weeks, knows the terrific pressure which is being exerted on the governments of Britain and France by the Nazi government of Germany.

Europe is literally being terrorized into the most abject submission by the fear of Nazi force.

It would appear that the Nazi government has complete faith in its capacity to terrorize, because no attempt has been made to prevent the facts of what has happened in Germany from reaching the outside world. On the contrary, both Dr. Goebbels and Marshal Goering have acknowledged them in the most cynical manner and affirmed their justification.

Under these conditions, the United States, her democratic courage fortified by 3,000 miles of ocean, is the one place on earth in which the people can still freely speak their minds and affirm the simplest principles of decency.

One of these principles is that every man, to say nothing of a 17-year-old boy, has the right to a chance to

fight for his life, and a right to present his case. The case of Herschell Grynszpan is more than an individual case. It is the case of a whole race, who, in the countries where they are persecuted, have no recourse to law. It is possible that things of great interest to all the peoples of the world lie behind this assassination.

The world still recalls that in the early days of the Nazi regime a half-witted pyromaniac, a Dutch boy named Van der Lubbe, was sent to the block after the famous Reichstag trial, in which an attempt was made to fix upon German Communists the responsibility for burning the Reichstag. Even the German courts were unable to uphold the thesis of the Nazi party, and there was overwhelming evidence to indicate that the Reichstag was burned by the Nazis themselves and that Van der Lubbe was the unwitting tool of agents provocateurs.

Similarly, it is known to the most reputable American and British journalists in Vienna that the Nazis plotted the assassination of, first, the military attache of the German embassy in Vienna, later changing the victim to the German ambassador, Herr von Papen; that the plot was distracted by Schuschnigg's visit to Berchtesgaden, and the realization of the Nazi aim—the invasion of Austria—by other means.

Like the Reichstag fire, the assassination of Herr von Rath comes at an absolutely pat moment for the German government. The decrees against the German Jews, driving them completely out of German economic life and thus ruining them, were prepared many weeks ago. They were all ready to be put into operation. All that was needed was an excuse—an incident to provide the proper outbreak of organized public rage. The 17-year-old Herschell Grynszpan provided that excuse, with extreme convenience. He also provided the excuse for the Nazi government to lay its hands on nearly half a billion dollars which it desperately needs and which, indeed, it may have already spent in the construction of the Siegfried Line and the conquest of Austria and Czechoslovakia.

This is not, therefore, a private case but a public case and an international case, since the Nazi government is operating an open conspiracy today in every country in the world.

In view of the enormous public response to the appeal for a defense for Herschell Grynszpan, some of my colleagues have associated themselves with me in undertaking an appeal to the public for a fund to provide for that defense the best available lawyer or corps of lawyers in France.

Only a night and half a day have passed since the broadcast which elicited so many thousands of offers to help. But in that time Hugh Johnson, Heywood Brown, John Gunther, Leland Stowe, Raymond Gram Swing, Hamilton Fish Armstrong and William Allen White have allied themselves with me to form a committee to raise that fund.

We are appealing separately and jointly for other newspaper men to join us, to serve on the committee, use their pens and raise their voices for this defense. In a day or so we shall have a secretary treasurer. Meanwhile, we are asking that those who will contribute mail their checks to the Journalists' Defense Fund, 730 Fifth Avenue, New York, where this columnist has an office. Meanwhile I personally pledge myself to a strict accounting of the funds.

There is a reason why journalists should do this. All of us are more familiar with foreign affairs than most people, because it is our business. All of us have been trying for five years to tell our readers that this cyclone was approaching. Most of us have spent years in Europe; Mr. Gunther, the author of "Inside Europe," as the roving correspondent of *The Chicago Daily News*; Mr. Stowe as the Paris correspondent of the *Herald Tribune*. Both of these journalists reported the Reichstag fire trial. Mr. Swing was for many years the correspondent of *The Philadelphia Pub-*

lic Ledger and *The New York Evening Post* in London.

And we, as journalists, are committed to only one platform: The truth. Exposure and truth are the goal of all reporters. Free speech and the opportunity to get at the facts are an absolute necessity of the decent exercise of our profession. In the next days others of our profession will join us, I am sure, in an appeal for funds to finance the defense of Herschell Grynszpan.

We are addressing ourselves wholly to individuals and wholly to non-Jews. We seek a fund that comes from tens of thousands, and will take any sum over a dollar, hoping, however, that those who are sending small amounts will try and club together to simplify bookkeeping.

We appeal to the non-Jewish population, because contributions from Jews may be interpreted in Germany as an excuse for further outrages.

Whatever funds are not necessary to this defense, will be turned over to reputable organizations for aid to refugees—in the hope of helping to prevent any more crimes growing out of hopelessness and despair.

And we wish to emphasize that our effort throws no reflection whatsoever on the will of the French people as a whole to have this trial conducted according to the traditional French principles of justice and fair play. We are only aware of the tremendous pressure which may be exerted openly or otherwise, either to distort the issue or prevent the truth from being known. It is in the spirit of fraternity, as gesture of one democratic people to another, in a time when democracy is at stake, that we are asking American individuals who are not Jews to provide for this defense. The address is 730 Fifth Avenue.

(Copyright, 1938, New York Tribune, Inc.)

THE BIRMINGHAM AGE-HERALD
NOVEMBER 18, 1938
EDITORIAL