

DREW PEARSON SPECIAL FOR PAPERS INTERESTED IN LATIN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS;
AVAILABLE TO ALL MERRY-GO-ROUND SUBSCRIBERS.

--BACKSTAGE ECONOMIST FOR DICTATORS--

ONE OF THE MOST INTRIGUING FIGURES IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC TODAY IS AN AUSTRIAN ECONOMIST, DR. HANS PRIESTER, WHO WAS ONCE CHIEF AIDE TO DR. HJALMAR SCHACHT, HITLER'S "WIZARD OF FINANCE."

ALTHOUGH A JEW, HE SURVIVED THE NAZI REGIME, PROTESTED AND KEPT OUT OF THE LIMELIGHT BY SCHACHT. IN SANTO DOMINGO, HE CONTINUES TO SERVE THE PRESENT DOMINICAN GOVERNMENT, THOUGH HE WAS FOR YEARS A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF THE LATE DICTATOR TRUJILLO.

BORN HANS KOHN IN SALZBURG, 57 YEARS AGO, PRIESTER CHANGED HIS NAME IN 1928, ADOPTING THE GERMAN EQUIVALENT OF KOHN--WHICH MEANS "RABBI" OR "PRIEST" IN HEBREW. AT THE NUREMBERG WAR CRIMES TRIALS IN 1946-47, PRIESTER'S TESTIMONY WAS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR WINNING SCHACHT AN ACQUITTAL.

READING FROM HIS OWN EXTENSIVE AND CAREFULLY PRESERVED NOTES, PRIESTER WAS ABLE TO SHOW THAT SCHACHT HAD FREQUENTLY DISOBEYED OR MODIFIED HITLER'S ORDERS, AIMED AT RUINING THE ECONOMIES OF CONQUERED NATIONS WHERE RESISTANCE WAS GREATEST--PARTICULARLY NORWAY AND HOLLAND --AND THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY BEFRIENDED MANY JEWS.

IN 1948, JUST AFTER RETURNING TO AUSTRIA, PRIESTER ACCEPTED AN OFFER FROM TRUJILLO TO ACT AS CONSULTANT ON SOME OF THE DICTATOR'S AMBITIOUS FINANCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL SCHEMES.

HIS FIRST ASSIGNMENT IN SANTO DOMINGO--THEN CIUDAD TRUJILLO--WAS TO MANAGE A TOTAL CURRENCY CHANGEOVER. UP TO THAT TIME, THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC HAD USED NOTHING BUT U.S. BILLS AND COINS. SOME OF TRUJILLO'S NATIONALISTIC FRIENDS WANTED TO PUT OUT COMPLETELY DISTINCTIVE MONEY, IN SIZE, COLORS, AND EVEN DENOMINATIONS; BUT PRIESTER OPPOSED THIS.

HAVING LEARNED THAT MOST DOMINICANS WERE EXTREMELY WARY OF THE STEP, HE INSISTED THAT THE NEW MONEY--BOTH PAPER AND METALLIC--SHOULD BE DESIGNED TO LOOK AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE LIKE THE U.S. CURRENCY BEING WITHDRAWN. THEN HE PERSUADED TRUJILLO TO MAKE THE SWITCH GRADUALLY, OVER A 14-MONTH PERIOD, WITH ONLY COINS ISSUED AT FIRST, FOLLOWED BY ONE-PESO BILLS, NEXT FIVES, TENS, AND SO ON.

THE MANEUVER WAS SUCCESSFUL, AND AS A RESULT TRUJILLO MADE PRIESTER HIS PERMANENT ECONOMIC COUNSELOR. THE LATTER SUPERVISED INSTALLATION OF ALL THE BASIC INDUSTRIES ESTABLISHED THERE UNDER THE DICTATORSHIP: TEXTILE, SUGAR AND FLOUR MILLS, CEMENT AND GLASS FACTORIES, ETC. CONDITIONED BY HIS EXPERIENCES IN GERMANY, HE SHUNNED PUBLICITY OVER THE YEARS AND NEVER BECAME INVOLVED IN POLITICS.

TODAY, MANY MEN WHO HELD POSTS OF LESSER IMPORTANCE UNDER TRUJILLO CANNOT HOPE TO GET PUBLIC JOBS. BUT HANS PRIESTER QUIETLY, EFFICIENTLY CONTINUES AS ECONOMIC CONSULTANT TO THE PROVISIONAL DOMINICAN COUNCIL OF STATE.

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