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The Cleveland Nazis: 1933 - 1945

Michael Cikraji

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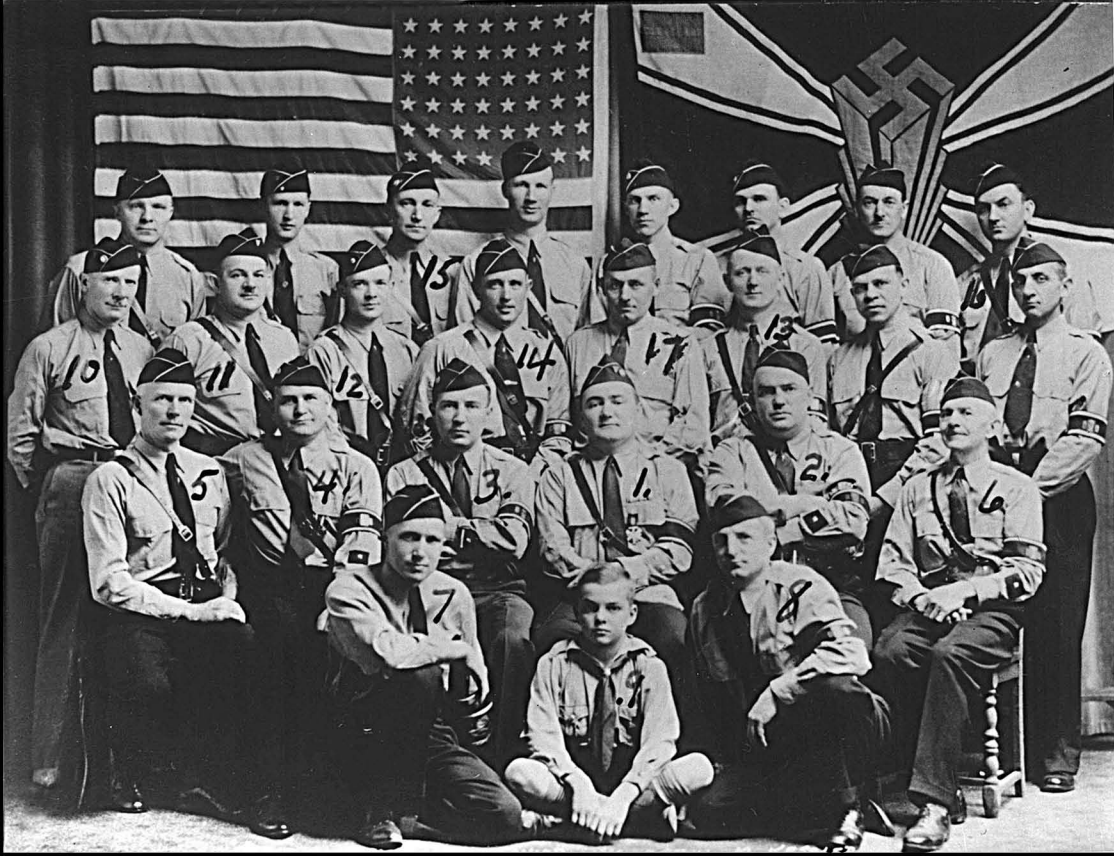
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THE HISTORY OF



The Cleveland Nazis

1933 — 1945

By Michael Cikraji



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The History of
The Cleveland Nazis
1933 — 1945

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The History of the Cleveland Nazis: 1933 — 1945

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Expanded from a manuscript submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts Degree in History, Cleveland State University, December, 1999.

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Introduction

This book is intended as a warning. Many people today that believe they know about Nazism, actually do not understand much of the movement at all. Put through the sieve of modern American political correctness, people often portray Nazism as being solely a study in hatred. For teachers and writers that do not comprehend (or perhaps even care) about what Nazism actually was, they commonly oversimplify Hitler's mass movement. This hatred, they say, is but another example of a purely European concept to enslave and destroy any person, or any concept, that was not truly "white." After all, the Nazis hated communists, the Versailles Treaty, the Weimar Republic, socialists, foreigners, gypsies, labor organizers, and most importantly the Jews.

To people that push this overly generalized theme of systematized hatred, the image of the swastika flag is proof enough, since even the most ignorant American can recognize what seems like the simple illustration of hatred behind Hitler's menacing, twisted cross. Yet the true lesson behind what Nazism was rests in *why* and *how* the Nazis came to their conclusions about the world. We are forever tortured by Nazism's eternal and ominous questions! How did they gain so much influence over their followers? How did they legitimize a program that outwardly seemed so brutal and inhuman? And ultimately, how did they establish a gargantuan military machine that almost took over the world? These issues continue to haunt humanity, notwithstanding

the fact that the other historic threats to world peace, such as monarchy, communism, and (hopefully) fundamentalist Islam have largely fell apart by what appears to be their own evil design, their own corrupt and rotting core. This wasn't so with Nazism.

What humanity must do is study the fundamental heart of Nazism, to learn what it taught us about ourselves. Yet we must realize that Nazism was by no means simply confined to Germany; it had its ardent followers in many other European nations, Latin America, and even the United States. If posterity does not understand the troubles that provided the fertile ground for Nazism to grow, and the passions that flung it forward, we may indeed see its rise again someday.

This book serves to tell the story of Nazism in the form of a fascinating case study of a city, with an ocean and thousands of miles separating it from the fascist Fatherland. It describes the political, economic and social background concerning the rise of Nazism in Europe, and further illustrates the growth of Nazi groups in America in parallel with Nazism rising to power in Germany. This book outlines the leadership and organization of the Nazi groups, and shows the problems that American Nazis were fighting against: the Great Depression, the (supposed) Jewish control of the economy, and the international boycott of German goods. This boycott is extremely important to understanding the anger and frustration of America's Nazis, because this boycott drastically harmed German business, and consequently Germans themselves. Yet it was mainly pushed by the enemies of Nazism that had felt the brunt of Nazism's terror: the Jews.¹ It was an effective economic measure, but it also gave the supporters of Nazism something concrete to rally against. Since there are many decades that separate the time period of this book and us today, there is space dedicated in this volume to explaining the site and situation of the land and people represented in it.



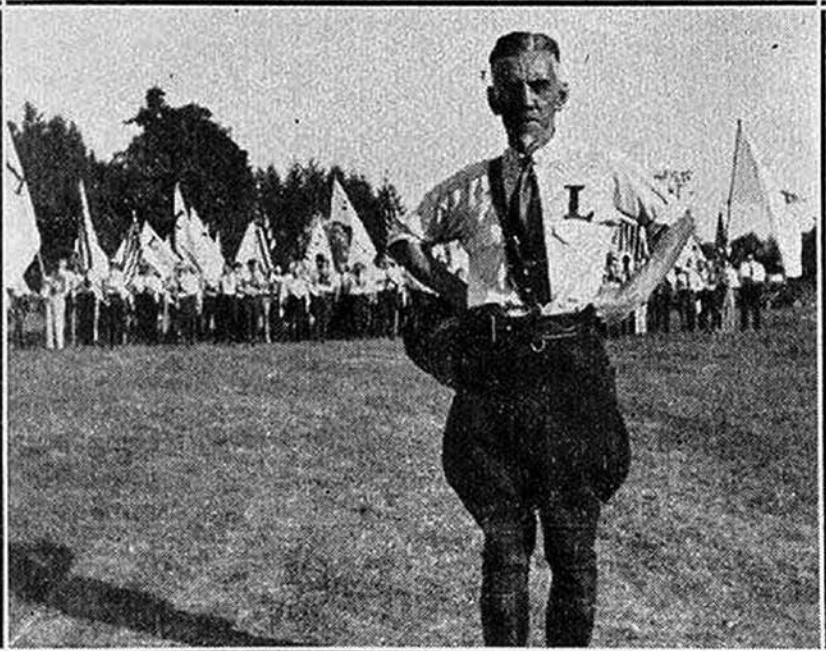
National German-American Bund leader Fritz Kuhn addresses a crowd during an American Nazi rally, circa 1938

All photos courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

Fritz Kuhn, center, and other Bund leaders discuss the development of American Nazism with Adolf Hitler, left, 1936



20,000 Bund supporters filled Madison Square Garden, New York, for a giant Nazi rally, 1939. (According to the Bund, George Washington was the founder of American fascism.)



William Dudley Pelley, in dress uniform, stands in front of his Silvershirt Legion, in Asheville, NC, circa 1936

Photo courtesy: Ramsey Library at UNC Asheville

“UN-AMERICAN activities” wanted poster for William Dudley Pelley, describes him as being “distinguished looking,” having “penetrating” eyes, with an interest in “physic research”

Photo courtesy: Buncombe County Sheriff's Office, NC

WANTED



William Dudley Pelley

DESCRIPTION

Age, approximately fifty years; height, five feet, seven inches; weight, 120 pounds; has black hair mixed with gray; heavy eyebrows; wears mustache and a van-dyke; has dark gray eyes, very penetrating; has straight Roman nose; wears nose glasses; dresses neatly; distinguished looking; good talker; highly educated; interested in physic research.

Capias has been issued by the Judge of the Superior Court of Buncombe County for the arrest of the above-named party for sentence on conviction of felony, making fraudulent representation, and also for violating the terms of a suspended sentence on another charge by failing to remain of good behavior, and by engaging in, among other things, UN-AMERICAN activities.

Arrest and notify

LAURENCE E. BROWN, Sheriff
Asheville, N. C.



**National Silvershirt
Legion leader
William Dudley Pelley**

*Photo courtesy: Special Collections,
Michael Schwartz Library,
Cleveland State University*

For millions of Americans, the Great Depression was a terrible ordeal. In this time of economic and social decay, an extreme situation emerged. Millions of hardworking Americans had become unemployed, lost their homes, and began to go hungry. With no end in sight, some Americans believed that an extreme situation called for an extreme solution. To some, fascism and communism appeared to hold the answer to our troubles, and the interest and following of these ideas flourished during America's Depression. This book looks at Cleveland, a major metropolitan area, and how Nazism was viewed as a way out of the Depression. However, this manuscript is much about the immigrant experience in Cleveland as well.

It is fascinating to study the origins of who we are today as a people, and how we got there. But for the first immigrants that came off the ships, there was ever-present confusion, apprehension and a resounding worry about their adopted nation. How much were they products of the Old World, and how much were they reborn as new citizens of America? Ironically enough, those already established here, the elite, had similar worries about stability, and some also began to see Nazism as a valid program to help destroy the Great Depression.

This book serves to look at the individuals whose passions shaped the outlook of Nazism in America as people, not merely products of their environment. What must be kept in mind, however, is that it is odd today if we think in terms of German-Americans, Russian-Americans, etc. We think in terms of white and black. Yet at the time of the Depression, the old ethnic groups of Cleveland still flaunted their Old World culture, and came smashing into the troubled politics of the time. Though some of these passions and fears are long dead and buried, some are just as alive today as they ever were. The fear of immigrants and their different ways of thinking, their questionable allegiances and

activities, and the government's role in investigating them in times of peril, are just as much pressing issues today in our "war on terror" as they were then.

The following book is designed to look at Cleveland Nazism and the Great Depression from a variety of perspectives, chapters which are stories unto themselves. This work is a blending of subjects to illustrate the struggle for stability in Cleveland in an era of turmoil, the chapters beginning with the onset of the Depression, and coming to an end with the assault on Pearl Harbor. The subjects covered include the domestic politics of the Great Depression; the plight of immigrants and ethnic groups; the connections between politics and religion; the struggle over the freedom of expression; the impact of journalism on public opinion; the fear of espionage, terrorism, and general "un-American activities"; the economic and psychological effects of the Depression on some members of the upper class in Cleveland, and the consequences of the development of Nazism abroad. This book incorporates a large amount of material from a variety of groups and individuals, and consequently the subject was impossible to integrate into a single narrative without outright confusion.

This book has then been broken-down into the four chapters, each of which represents its own story, and explains the impact of Cleveland Nazism during the Depression from their own viewpoints and experiences. The first chapter looks at the following and politics of the flagrantly pro-Nazi German-American Bund in Cleveland; the second looks at the elitist following of the fervently anti-Jewish Silvershirt Legion; the third at the consequences of German-sponsored Nazi propaganda in the city; and the fourth at the impact of Nazism on Cleveland's great German-American societies and the role of government.

A vast array of primary and secondary sources were used to document the Nazi following, and resistance, in Cleveland during

this time. Particularly important were the (then) three major Cleveland newspapers: *The Cleveland Press*, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and *The Cleveland News*. Also, the League for Human Rights, founded by famous local Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, was organized and managed by a combined Jewish/Gentile committee that coordinated a clandestine spy operation on potentially subversive elements in Cleveland at this time. Their records, available at the Western Reserve Historical Society History Library, unveil the fascinating inner workings of a variety of pro-Nazi groups and people. These sources help illuminate a passionate story of Cleveland's people struggling for stability amid the chaos of the Depression, and caught by the hurricane of history.

THE GROWTH OF NAZISM

Nazism began in Germany as a consequence of the erosion of the mighty German economy coupled with the strong nationalist sentiment that held the German people together before and during World War I. Furthermore, it was through the inability of the Weimar Republic to remedy the worsening situation that led many to look for an alternative answer to their mounting problems. As Hitler and his Nazis began to cultivate an ever-growing following in the 1920's through their revolutionary and anti-Semitic doctrine, they ironically imitated their fiercest opponent. As the communists of the world had put a truly international accent on their movement, (most notably in their anthem "The International") so did the Nazis, as Hitler's groups and anthem, "The Horst Wessel Song" spread abroad as well.

Major National Socialist groups in the United States²

Teutonia Association	1924-1932
<i>(Nationalsozialistische Vereinigung Teutonia)</i>	
Friends of the New Germany	1933-1935
<i>(Bund der Freunde des Neuen Deutschland)</i>	
The Silvershirt Legion	1933-1945
German-American Bund	1936-1941
<i>(Amerikadeutscher Volksbund)</i>	

During the Great Depression there emerged two primary National Socialist groups in the United States. Originally established by spies on mission from Nazi Germany, the German-American Bund was an evolution that by far was the most explicitly Nazi. Originally the Teutonia Association, then the Friends of the New Germany, what became the Amerikadeutscher Volksbund was largely comprised of immigrant German-Americans and Americans of direct German descent. Their organization, centered in New York City and Long Island, was nationally led by Fritz Kuhn, who regularly claimed that Hitler's projects should be the model for how America could exit from the Depression. The other major American Nazi group was the Silvershirt Legion, nationally led by famous writer and mystic William Dudley Pelley, and headquartered in Asheville, North Carolina. Consisting of mainly homegrown upper-class socialites and elite industrialists, the group attempted to be kept secret and hidden as they tracked elaborate conspiracy theories, while actively

plotting a violent, fascist overthrow of the American national government.³

In the early years, the United States was a prime breeding-ground for the Nazi program. As Susan Canedy illustrates in her book, America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma, the Bund emerged not only out of the Depression, but also as a reaction to many of the social ills in the 1920's; ones that were even more cultivated by the welter of the time.

Although it emerged later, the Bund rested on the changes and accompanying anxieties and fears that coursed through the decade of the 1920's. Each of the conflicts that marked this period- war/peace, urban/rural, machine/man, immigrant/nativist, wet/dry, black/white- in some way encouraged the growth of this radical Nazi group. The onset of the Great Depression only exacerbated these transitional imbalances.⁴

The followers of Nazism prospered through the turmoil of the Great Depression. As this scourge divided America, many people began to look for extreme answers to an extreme situation. And just as economic and social decay helped foster the Nazi rise to power in Germany, many felt that a similar fate was in store for America. As Canedy points out, the lingering question brought out by German-Americans during this period of depression was "if Hitler's methods could transform Germany, what could they do in the United States?"⁵ It was these lingering questions and difficult dilemmas that came to the forefront for German-Americans, and elements of the upper class, through the 1930's in Cleveland.

As a secretive and subversive group, the Silvershirt Legion following was built upon elitist principles. Whereas the Bund attracted members by appealing to ethnic loyalties, the Silvershirts

played upon elitist, Gilded Age prejudices against the lower classes, and racial/ethnic minorities. In contrast to the concepts of democracy, where everyone is supposed to have a say, or communism, where the workers and peasants have the say, the Silvershirts thought that American society and government would be best directed and controlled by America's aristocracy.

The Nazi rise to power in Germany turned many people against the growth of a Nazi party in America, as events such as the "Night of Long Knives" and the unending, flagrant anti-Semitism frightened many in the years 1933-35. Within a facade of stability, the Berlin Olympics, the impressive rebirth of the German economy, and an apparent lightening of anti-Semitism, allowed many outside of Germany to look at Nazism in a more positive light through the years 1936-38. Magda Lauwers-Rech, in her book Nazi Germany and the American Germanists demonstrated a good example of this feeling. In her analysis, she suggests that from 1936-38 many found that anti-Semitism seemed to have disappeared in Nazi Germany. Foreign envy came from the *skill* the German people had in rebuilding their battered economy so rapidly. For during the Olympics, "to impress foreign tourists, the Nazis were underplaying their anti-Semitism and dazzled visitors with their technical and architectural accomplishments."⁶

In 1936 Rolf Kassler, the "acting German consul", also presented this view when he spoke at the 1936 German Day celebration at the German Central Organization's farm in Parma. "Through Hitler's energy this year Germany has been freed from shameful chains and has attained what every nation needs for existence, honor, equal rights and the right to defend herself against attack."⁷ To many Americans, however, the idea of Nazism materializing (especially within the borders of their own country) during the 1930's posed a serious threat to their security. As Sander A. Diamond noted in his book, The Nazi Movement in the United

States, those who thought that the growth of the Bund was only the first step in worldwide domination by the Nazis feared the Nazis. For when it came to Americans, "the belief that a Trojan horse was being readied by Hitler's supposed agents was not considered farfetched."⁸ Though there was opposition to Nazism before, it was the ultimate horror of Kristalnacht in 1938 that truly re-introduced the hatred of Nazism and, consequently, brought steadily escalating opposition to the following of Nazism as America slowly crept toward the Second World War.

IN GRATITUDE

The Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS) provided me with an unlikely source of material concerning the Bund: their adversary. The League for Human Rights provided ample information through their records. Also, the society provided me with the records of the Stadt-Verband, (United German Societies, or UGS) which was often the voice of many groups in Cleveland. The Cleveland City Council archives in City Hall also offered interesting material on how the city government spoke out against Nazism from the very start. I used secondary sources to set the picture of the Bund on the national scale, but I did not use them throughout the paper; for in the end, this is a book that draws heavily on primary source data on a Cleveland topic that has never been done before.

In writing this book I also received an enormous amount of help from colleagues and friends. Friends Patrick LeClair, Kaery Rivera and Professor Mary Hovanec took an honest interest in the work (or at least pretended like they did), and provided valuable feedback and encouragement. Also, the staff of The Western Reserve Historical Society History Library, Cleveland City Hall

Archives, Lakewood Public Library and Cleveland Public Library were of immeasurable assistance.

Most importantly, I am greatly indebted to William Barrow, in Special Collections, and William Becker, in the University Archives, of Cleveland State University's Michael Schwartz Library. Cloistered in their unique departments on the library's third floor, these two have turned their respective areas into small museums of Cleveland's rich history. In CSU's stark, brutalist Rhodes Tower, these two have amassed a dizzying array of documents and artifacts that illuminate our understanding of the past, and continue to inspire the minds of tomorrow. Anyone at least halfway interested in area history would do themselves a great disservice by not visiting "the Bills."

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ The supporters of Nazism conveniently often overlooked the fact that other ethnic minorities, as well as intellectuals that had fled Nazi Germany (the most notable being Albert Einstein), and political dissidents also supported the boycott.

² Taken in part by Sander A. Diamond, The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974, p.21n.

³ Ibid., and Susan Canedy, America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma. Menlo Park, Ca: Markgraf Publications Group. 1990,

⁴ America's Nazis, p21.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Magda Lauwers-Rech, Nazi Germany and the American Germanists. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 1995, p 37.

⁷ Beatrice Franks, "5,000 Gather for German Day Here," *Plain Dealer*, 1 July, 1936.

⁸ The Nazi Movement, p21.

Cleveland's Nazi Bund

Chapter 1

The cold deprivation of the Great Depression assaulted Cleveland, tearing at the very heart of its economic, political and social structure, forcing many to at least question the very system that allowed this to happen. From this dark morass grew the German-American Bund, propagating the traditional values of America while introducing the doctrines of Nazism.

First the "Teutonia Society" in the 1920s, then the "Friends of the New Germany" in 1933, and ultimately the "Amerikadeutscher Volksbund" (the German-American Bund) in 1936, the evolution of Cleveland's German-American Nazism helped solidify a following by maintaining a forum from which Nazi ideals could be spread to the public, and their many opponents could be consistently challenged. With an insistence on the racial purity of the group's leaders, during the 1930s the Bund fervently stressed a deep hatred for communism and a fervent distrust of Jews, while they manipulated traditional German customs, culture and values to publicly raise the swastika above the specter of the sickle and hammer in the wake of the apparent decline of democracy.

What the Cleveland Bund had to constantly grapple with were not just their opponents in the press who slandered their organization socially, but those who attempted to prolong the boycott on German-made goods in America, established as a protest measure by the opponents of Nazism. Importantly then, the Bund not only attempted to fend-off social but economic retaliation

as well. The reason for the ultimate emergence of the Bund was to create a better-organized group, an official organ of National Socialist activity.

THE SWASTIKA ASCENDS

American Nazism was born in Cleveland. Coming to the United States in the early 1920s, Walter Kappe, a man undercover as a culturally-concerned, German newspaperman, arrived in Cleveland and founded the Teutonia Society, a group of tightly knit German-Americans that were the first to promote the values of the emerging Nazi ideology in the U.S.¹ In fact, Oberleutnant Walter Kappe was actually a German Nazi officer on a secret propaganda and espionage mission. As an official in the Third Reich's "Ausland Institute," and an operator through Berlin's "Abwehr-II" spy center, his first tasks were to spread propaganda through America, and get foreigners to join the Nazi party.

Being a major Midwestern hub, Cleveland was chosen to begin the American Nazi infiltration. Although leaving, over time, Kappe kept an eye on Cleveland, occasionally stopping by to give a speech praising Hitler and smearing Jews. In one such 1935 Cleveland meeting, Kappe discussed the boycott on German goods, he blasted:

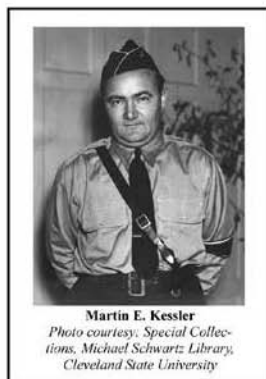
The Jews who lead the boycott movement are a racial minority in this country, it is not in the interests of the United States that they advocate a boycott, but in the interests of their private war with Germany. Our biggest fight is to unite spiritually Germans in America. We should find ways of preserving the language and traditions of our ancestral country. We should unite to fight the greatest danger that has ever faced this country: communism.²

Two decades later, as America was entering the war on the side of the Allies, Kappe designed "Operation Pastorius," a sabotage attack that landed two groups of trained Nazi saboteurs, via secret submarine landings, on Long Island and Florida. Their missions were to disable or destroy vital American electric, transportation and production centers, but the spies were consequently all arrested.³

In 1930 the Teutonia Society moved to Chicago and began publication of the pro-Nazi publication *Teutonia*.⁴ The ardent followers of Nazism in Cleveland remained, however, and over time they emerged as a formidable and aggressive force. This core of followers was soon to become another organized Nazi group, steadily incorporating Nazi doctrines, and increasingly becoming more militant. The basic premise of this group stayed the same, as their following was intimately linked to Germany's international struggle for power and prestige. In 1933 Adolf Hitler consolidated his power in Germany, and began transforming the troubled nation into an immensely powerful, racist camp. Thanks to the work of Kappe, and others like him, the struggle for Nazism was now by no means confined to Germany; it had become a worldwide phenomena. During the same tumultuous year of 1933, Martin Kessler established the Cleveland branch of the flagrantly Nazi "Friends of the New Germany".⁵ The Friends' program developed steadily, as they experimented with the presentation of Nazism. With the passage of time it appeared that Nazism was an ideology to stay in the world's political thought, and the Friends accordingly became ever more combative toward their detractors.

A militant European immigrant, Kessler witnessed the hardships of Germany under the Weimar Republic, and saw the rise of Nazism as bringing in a new age of prosperity. Kessler believed that the work of Hitler and his followers offered a lesson for America, who was now caught in her own abyss of economic and social despair. Copying the Nazis of Germany, Kessler's Friends staged their first public meeting on September 1, 1934, at

THE HISTORY OF THE CLEVELAND NAZIS



WANTED

GERMAN SABOTEUR

Photo taken February 19, 1936



WALTER KAPPE, alias Walter Kappel I.P.C. 16 M 28 W 081
M 6 W 171

Walter Kappe is known to be connected with sabotage activities being promoted by the Nazi Government. He was born January 18, 1905 at Alfeld, Latvia, Germany, and entered the United States on March 9, 1925. He filed application for United States citizenship at Evanston, Illinois, in June, 1935. He is known to be a member of the German Literary Club, Cincinnati, Ohio, and the Teutonic Club, Chicago, Illinois. Kappe was an agent in the United States for the American Organization and editor "Deutscher Wacker und Deutscher", official organ of the German-American Bund. Kappe left the United States in 1937 and may return to the United States as an agent for Germany. This individual is described as follows:

FBI Wanted Poster for Walter Kappe

(Photo courtesy: The Federal Bureau of Investigation)

the Deutsche Zentrale (German Central farm), 7863 York Road, Parma, with 300 in attendance. By this date Kessler's followers had already adopted the dress of their German Nazi counterparts. The Friends' storm troopers were uniformed in black breeches, boots and Sam Brown belts.

Bearing swastika armbands, the Friends greeted guests with the Nazi salute, which they also did in unison during the singing of Germany's traditional national anthem, "Deutschland Ueber Alles." There were other anthems sung as well, including "The Star Spangled Banner," and the Nazi fighting hymn, the "Horst Wessel Song." Strangely enough, the featured speaker was a church leader, the Rev. John Foisel, pastor of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cleveland. Citing the parable of the Good Samaritan, he gave a heartfelt sermon on why he supported Nazi Germany, and disliked the boycott placed on her by those opposed to Germany's excesses:

Beset by enemies on all sides, downtrodden and struck down every time she tries to get on her feet, Germany awakens my friendship, even though my ancestors left there 800 years ago. Germany is like a woman, necessary in the household of the world. That woman is your mother. Poor and distressed, she needs your help.

The boycott is harming not only Germany but the whole world. She has always imported three times as much as she exported. The boycott makes it impossible for her to import and accordingly affects all industry, especially that in the south of this country, where cotton growers feel the heavy loss. It is the worst thing that could happen to American industry, and the makers of the boycott are responsible for it.

Distributed at the meeting was also a giant array of Nazi propaganda, not only showing the strength of the new Germany, but also arguing for the necessity to offset the boycott harming it economically.⁶ Though Rev. Foisel offered a touching plea for supporting Nazi Germany, it was not long before the truly political and racist outlook of the group was illustrated to the public.

In October of 1934 the Friends brought together 500 of their ardent supporters to pledge support for their Nazified fatherland. The group heard B.M. Zahne, chairman of the German-American Independent Voters' League of New York, and all pledged to help fight the attacks on Germany. A bold speaker, Zahne blasted that it was the sacred duty of all the German-Americans "to get what is rightfully ours" through forceful political and economic action. He asserted that Germans did not begin the antagonisms against Jews, but that the Germans were now determined "to put their foot down on Communism. If under the heel we find the children of Israel, whose fault is it that they are there?" Gaining the full support of the Cleveland Friends, Zahne concluded that "the time must come when a Christian can go into business and stay in business."⁷ However, inextricably linked to current developments, the Friends did not present Nazi Germany as a perpetual victim for long.

In early 1935, 700 Clevelanders rallied to celebrate the Saar plebiscite. The plebiscite was of monumental consequence to Germans worldwide, for the residents of the Saar (traditionally a province of Germany on the border with France) had to vote on whether to stay with Germany or join France. The people of the Saar voted overwhelmingly to stay a part of the mighty German fatherland. As Kessler presided, the principal speaker at the rally was Fritz Gissibl, an organizer of the Teutonia Society and the district leader of the Friends of the New Germany. He entered Harmonie Hall with a massive ovation, and announced that the "Saar plebiscite was not only a vote for Germany, but a vote for Hitler and his National Socialism."⁸ He announced:

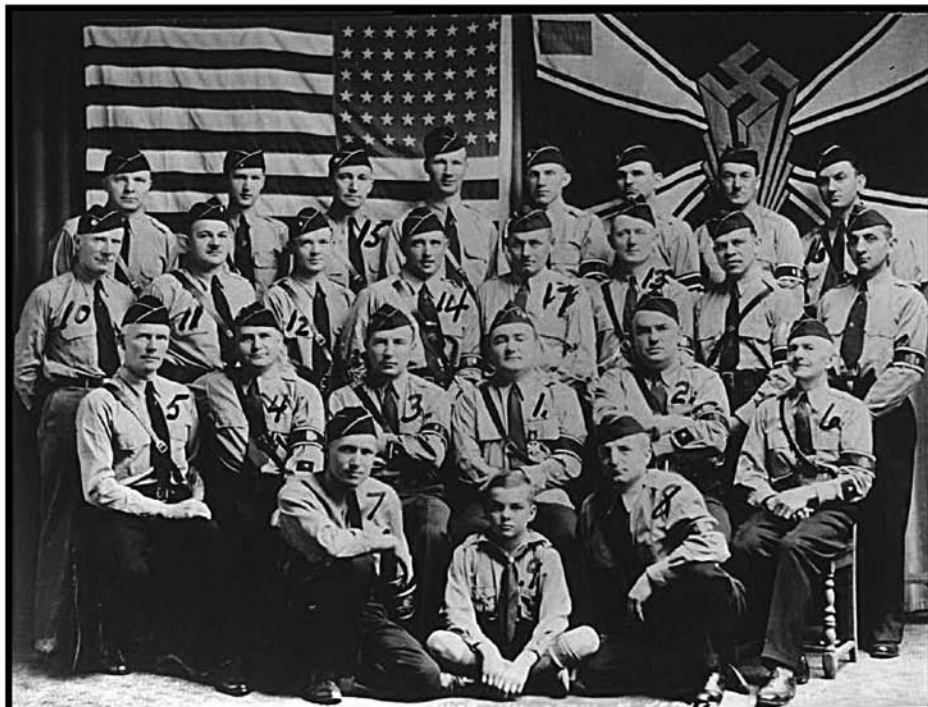
No one in the world can say that the election commissioners were unfair or the vote a forced one. It is simply a new example of the feeling of people of German blood for the new Germany. German-Americans today can again be proud of Germany's great achievement, and this will cause them to back up the man who is ruling Germany today.⁹

He further energized his speech by illustrating the importance of Hitler, not only in current events, but also as the savior of Germany for all time. To Gissibl, "Bismarck achieved only an outwardly united Germany. It is Hitler who has attained the sort of united Germany Bismarck visioned but never saw realized."¹⁰

Gissibl was able to rally the Friends not just around a love for Hitler and his work of transforming Germany, but also around a clear distrust of Jews. During a meeting in 1934, Gissibl thundered to a crowd of 400, though the detractors outside the Socialer Turnverein, 3919 Lorain Ave., that night numbered almost 2,000. The assailers shouted "Down with Hitler," and "Down with the Nazis," as 40 Cleveland policemen, under the leadership of Lt. John Luttner, marched on guard in front of the hall to prevent the demonstrators from entering. Though attacking anti-German propaganda and the boycott on German goods, Gissibl had an explanation for the beginning stages of the Holocaust, as Hitler began driving Jews from positions of power. He boomed:

Only the Jews in Germany who were corrupt were driven from office. The others were treated as fairly as any good citizens. Only those with guilty consciences would flee their country at a change of political parties.

The Jews in Germany do not need the money collected for them. It seems to me like a racketeering movement of the anti-Hitlerites ~ this collection of



Ordnungs Dienst (officers) of the Cleveland Bund, and a youth member, pose for a group photo, 1938. #1 is Martin Kessler, #2 is Walter Deichmann, #5 is Edmund Wax, #7 is William Woessner, and #10 is Hans Febel

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Martin Kessler addresses a crowd at the Deutsche Zentrale, 1937

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

huge sums of money. Where does that money go? No country in the world has as many votes back of its leaders as has Germany.

As Gissibl rallied the faithful solely in the German language, the attendees repeatedly erupted in cries of "bravo," and fervently began stamping on the floor to show support. Gissibl also covered more mundane concerns as well. He pleaded for America's German-Americans to cherish and keep their language and unique culture, and the importance of infusing their children with a zealous love for their rich heritage.¹¹ Though the Friends distinguished themselves in Cleveland as traditional and racist, they also had an ability to have a good time with their spreading Nazism.

On April 21, 1935, the Cleveland Friends celebrated Adolf Hitler's 46th birthday. They came together at Harmonie Hall, 2515 Franklin blvd., and employed quite a different means toward gathering support. Under the direction of Kessler, they constructed a two-act play, illustrating the supposed beauty of Nazism. In their own mystical world of right and wrong, they depicted the evil Communist forces and their steady conversion toward proper Nazi ideals. Yet the program in no ways stopped there. A poem was read by Friend Emma Bergstroem applauding the achievements of Adolf Hitler. A movie was also shown celebrating the great lives of Paul von Hindenburg, and, of course, Hitler.¹²

Though the Friends had definitely had some success, on the national level it became apparent by late 1935 that the Friends had serious organizational troubles, and America's Nazi following needed a more pure and defined group. In 1936 the following of the Friends was transformed into what became known as the Amerikadeutscher Volksbund (German-American Bund). The national leadership of the following was almost identical to the Friends, and as it turned out, Cleveland was not an exception.

It is vital that the Bund elicited followers almost exclusively from the ranks of German immigrants and those of direct German-American descent. By today's standards, this would have been a severe limitation on membership; however, during this period, German-Americans were by far the most influential nationality in Cleveland.¹³ A primary job of the Bund in Cleveland was acting as messengers of the Nazi Fatherland. Their role was to gather adherence to Nazism, through the instituting of Nazi values in other German-American organizations, to sway public opinion in favor of Nazi Germany, and to destroy all leftist elements.

THE DEUTSCHE ZENTRALE

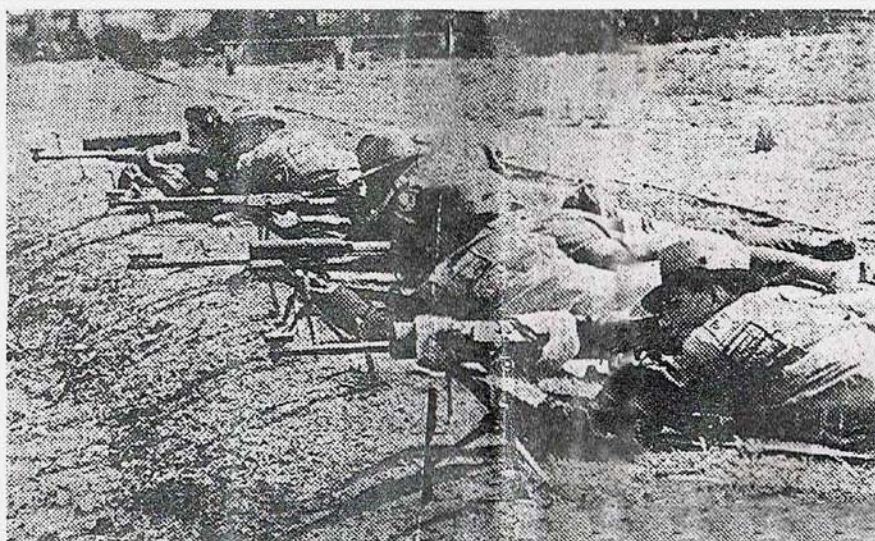
Established as a social organization in 1926, the Deutsche Zentrale (German Central farm), located at 7863 York Road, Parma, became the principle gathering place for Cleveland's German-American community. Quickly rising in importance, the name Deutsche Zentrale came both to mean the physical farm and one of the largest German-American organizations in Cleveland as a home to many social, cultural and athletic clubs. By the 1930s it boasted a membership in the thousands, occupying more than 30 acres with a modern meeting hall, swimming pool, rifle range, soccer field, tennis courts and other resources. Though many enjoyed what the Zentrale had to offer, the organization itself was made up primarily of German immigrants who arrived in America following World War I.¹⁴ During the Depression, the Zentrale was a haven for destitute German-Americans, who were able to find jobs through the organization's free employment service.¹⁵ In short, the Zentrale easily became a prime breeding ground for the German-American Bund.

Cleveland's Germans often did not accumulate in ethnic enclaves about the city, like many other immigrant groups. Therefore, the development of the Zentrale as a cultural haven was crucial. In fact, the Zentrale became a miniature Germany, infused



**The main building of the Deutsche Zentrale (German Central farm),
7863 York Road, Parma, during a festive evening, 1940**

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Firing range at the Deutsche Zentrale, summer of 1937

(Photo courtesy: Cleveland Press newspaper)

with the rich heritage of their forefathers. Besides regular gatherings, each autumn giant festivals called the “Jahrmarkt,” or “Wurst-Markt” were celebrated. These annual carnivals were part of the great German legacy, originating from the commercial cities of the Hanseatic League in the Later Middle Ages. The ancestors of today’s mighty Oktoberfest, these festivities were patterned after village markets that signaled the end of autumn harvests for millennia.

The Zentrale’s annual festivals had thousands of visitors, allowing Cleveland’s Germans to feel at home amid what they described as the farm’s own Black Forest. Every conceivable type of sausage was available, as was claret wine and other delicacies. To give the celebrations the truly Germanic feel, traditional brass bands and the Zentrale’s own orchestra entertained the visitors. Yet the most fascinating aspect of these carnivals was the attention given to the children. The farm’s pony rides and wondrous merry-go-rounds were overshadowed in 1934 by quite a stunning surprise for the kids. Almost 400 children took part in a program in which the famous Berlin character Onkel Telle was played. “Dressed in checked suit and high silk hat, he drove through the farm in a roadster loaded high with gifts for the youngsters. At dusk he led them through the wooded paths of the 40-acre farm [*sic*], telling them old German legends. Before his departure he donned a long overcoat with capacious pockets filled with cookies, for which the children dashed in a wild scramble.”¹⁶ With its many resources, the Zentrale captivated the imagination of Cleveland’s German youth, an asset the Bund was to later draw upon. The Zentrale was a representation of the mighty German Fatherland that the immigrants had chosen to leave behind; with its dark, rustic atmosphere and quaint festive ambiance it had a way of touching the heart of the romantic German spirit.

The Bund utilized the Zentrale as best they could, holding events and having Martin Kessler give speeches at the farm. Perched behind a podium and surrounded by Nazi flags, Kessler

would preach the Bund's doctrines, as uniformed storm troopers would guard the stage. Since the Zentrale farm was rather secluded in the then predominantly rural Parma, the Bund was able to hold meetings and festivities there without the threat of protestors. This became particularly important when the Bund used the farm as a center for their own Nazi youth movement as well. As will be seen, when the Bund later held gatherings in Cleveland halls, the protestors were an almost ever-present force to deal with.

By 1936 the Friends had officially become the Bund, and they decided there was no better way to show Cleveland how patriotic they were than to hold a giant Nazi gathering on the Fourth of July at the Zentrale. The large meeting was a district convention of the Bund, composing over 600 delegates from 14 Midwestern states. The meeting was also important because Cleveland Mayor Harold H. Burton and national Bund leader Fritz Kuhn were to speak. The Bund erected an outdoor stage for the event, complete with a giant black Nazi eagle surmounting it, and an elaborate display of swastika pennants for decoration. Yet just as the Nazi program began, it was as if an omen was sounded from the heavens. A terrific downpour assaulted the crowd, and 40 Bund guards, clad in Nazi uniforms, snapped to attention and dragged the benches into the main pavilion under a festive blare of brass.

As the meeting began in the severely crowded pavilion, many present, including small children, stood erect and greeted the speakers with the Nazi salute. Kuhn began the program by stating, "We are here to create sympathy between this country and Germany. We believe it is not disloyal for American citizens to honor their ancestors. We are political but non-partisan, and stand for the straight-cut man willing to serve his country, regardless of what nation he comes from." Yet Kuhn quickly got to the point. He firmly stated, "We are here to create a spirit of fight against Communistic corruption in this country and against unfair propaganda about Germany." Local Bund leader Martin Kessler also contributed to the event. He affirmed that members of the

Cleveland Bund were not “paid agents of Hitler, as some have accused, but American citizens who would no longer stand looking on while the honor of their mother country was dragged in the mud by the false reports of enemies.” He further blasted that “We are patriotic and nothing but. But we want friendship between the United States and our mother country.”

Mayor Burton then welcomed the Bund delegates to Cleveland. He first told the assemblage about his own racial background, relating that he was of Swiss and English descent. Burton explained that he had fought in World War I (on the American side), and that he was extremely proud of the cosmopolitan city of Cleveland. He announced to the American Nazis that “Independence Day is a fitting time for foreign-born groups or those of foreign descent to meet to carry out the high ideals of America.” The meeting concluded after Joseph Danner, Pittsburgh Bund leader, and George Froboese, Milwaukee Bund leader, spoke. After a morning meeting on July 5, the 600 Bund delegates attended the Great Lakes Exposition in Cleveland.¹⁷

Though holding meetings at the Zentrale from their very beginning as the Friends, by 1937 the Bund had effectively infiltrated the German farm, becoming co-owners of the giant organization.¹⁸ In fact, the Bund held so much power over the Zentrale that no major event was held without Martin Kessler’s active participation. Illustrating their influence, the Bund had the Zentrale’s bandstand festooned with permanent swastikas and erected a decorative entrance to the farm. Constantly trying to win German-Americans over to their side, the Bund openly made the Zentrale a center for the dissemination of pro-Nazi and anti-Jewish propaganda.

At the center of all Zentrale activities stood the Bund’s newsstand, its walls covered with the “American Gentile,” a violently anti-Semitic publication from Chicago. Yet many other publications were available for sale as well, including the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Now believed by most scholars as a

forgery, the Protocols have been a historic mainstay of anti-Semitism in many countries, supposedly revealing an outline by Jewish leaders for world domination in the early years of the century. Yet there were other anti-Semitic publications sold too, including *Bolshevism and Judaism* and *The Great Jewish Masque*. Loyal to the greater organization, the Bund's own publication was also being sold, the "Deutscher Weckruf." Yet last, but certainly not least, Adolf Hitler's own Mein Kampf was on hand.¹⁹

Though many Nazi Bund meetings were held at the Zentrale, what became most alarming to outsiders were the group's intimidating storm troopers using the farm's rifle range for target practice. The federal government became increasingly alarmed not only by the fact that the Bund preached the supposed glory of a foreign, totalitarian state, and wore strikingly similar uniforms to Nazis in Germany, but that they were also proficient in the use of firearms.

A League for Human Rights investigator visited the Zentrale's rifle range in the summer of 1937. There were people at the range when he arrived, some listening to a lecture at the range's booth on newly acquired guns. People working at the booth's counter were explaining that the guns available were state-of-the-art models used in the German Army at the time. Yet the telescope sights mounted on the top of the firearms elicited the most awe from the listeners, and the fact that it was easy to shoot-out the entire center of the targets with relative ease emphasized the point. Yet the talk ended abruptly when what appeared to be a Bund storm trooper came up to the speakers and abruptly told them to leave for the day.²⁰

FIREBRAND RISING

Cleveland's Hitler, Martin E. Kessler, was born April 20, 1899 in Transylvania, then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Described by many as an intelligent, passionate leader with a magnetic personality, Kessler was a man of four nations. He served

in the Empire's army during World War I, yet following the mighty conflict the Empire was effectively destroyed. With the rise of new nations and the drastic border changes in the former Empire, Kessler, now a 20-year-old veteran of German blood, found himself as a sergeant in the Romanian army. Military maneuvers were common in the former Empire, as the emerging power structures reformed. Kessler helped perform one such maneuver, leading a detachment of soldiers into the territory formerly occupied by Hungary. His services in the army automatically made him a Romanian citizen. However, he did not serve very long, for he left for Germany in 1921, and within three months obtained German citizenship. It was then that Kessler witnessed the many troubles plaguing the Weimar Republic, and later surmised what fascism had to offer the great German people. Leaving the Old World behind him, he came to Cleveland in 1923.²¹ Always stressing things Germanic, he claimed that he was born in the village of Kirchberg. When he was born the village's name was Kupod, and was changed to Chirpar when Romania gained possession of it following World War I. The severely antiquated name "Kirchberg" came from the Saxons, who settled the area centuries before.

An engineer draftsman by profession, Kessler's international background gave him much prestige among Cleveland's German-Americans. Through his experiences he found that the doctrines of Nazism offered a lesson to an America engulfed in the Great Depression. Kessler ardently stressed opposition to the foes of Nazi Germany in his adopted America, as he centralized the Cleveland Bund movement around the importance of informing people on the benefits of National Socialism. With the official Bund title of "Ortsgruppenleiter," (county group leader)²² Kessler stressed that, "We put emphasis on enlightening the American public as to the true state of affairs in Germany. We are concerned with the Jewish boycott and we are trying to do something about it. We fight all forms of leftists, radicalism and all reds."²³ Kessler explained that



Martin Kessler dramatically gesticulates for reporters, 1937

*Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library,
Cleveland State University*

the Bund was primarily an American organization, yet its members were mainly those who had German blood. He said that the Bund supported Germany's Nazis, and attacked those who referred to Adolf Hitler as a dictator. Kessler said that Hitler had been democratically elected by 98 percent of the German people, and that this overwhelming support was much more than President Roosevelt had received. He also made the fascinating assertion that if the Germans no longer wanted Hitler in power they could *easily* elect someone else.²⁴

Branded by the press as Cleveland's own "blustery, hefty Hitler-heiler,"²⁵ the charismatic Martin Kessler possessed captivating leadership abilities. Well known for his spellbinding oratory, when Kessler spoke people listened. Ever clad in his Nazi Bund uniform, Kessler would explode in tirades for his audiences, screaming and wildly flailing his arms about.²⁶ Not just putting on a fantastic show, Kessler was grasping at the deep passions of these Cleveland Germans, who were confused and torn between two worlds. To his followers, he convincingly argued that Hitler's work of transforming Germany from a weakened and troubled state to an organized and proud powerhouse showed that America could have the same success if similar actions were taken. He accomplished this by drawing from his experiences, while speaking a language (both figuratively and literally) that his followers could understand. In fact Kessler was so persuasive that one frightened League for Human Rights investigator, following attendance at a Bund meeting, admitted, "Kessler is a very able leader of the rabble-rousing type." As a fiery and persuasive speaker, Kessler had developed a powerful ability to influence people. The amazed investigator went on to say that "He is very shrewd and can incite others to say and do things. He is very careful of what he says or does himself and his remarks usually are made in such a way that they might be taken for sarcasm or as having been made in a joking manner."²⁷ Yet even more shocking was the League's report following the Bund's large Midwestern meeting in 1937. The



Martin Kessler strikes a passionate pose for reporters, 1937

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Cleveland Bund leaders show respect for Hitler on his 48th birthday celebration, in Harmonie Hall, 2515 Franklin Ave., 1937. From left are Walter Deichmann, an unknown woman, Adolf Hitler, Edith Buric and William Wieser.

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

League investigator found that Kessler was an able and menacing figure, even more so than national Bund leader Fritz Kuhn. With wonder, the investigator claimed that Kessler was a “much more capable leader than Kuhn and one much more to be feared than Kuhn because of his manner of winning people over to him and his cause.” Furthermore, the investigator said that this charismatic Cleveland Nazi had assembled “a group of very radical persons who will stop at nothing to gain their ends.”²⁸

By the end of 1937, Kessler’s Bund following reached its zenith. Many meetings were held during the last two months of the year, and membership in the Nazi group was soaring. Though reports varied widely, according to an independent study, at its height the Cleveland Bund members numbered about 1,200.²⁹ A primary reason for the interest in the Bund was the growing number of articles concerning the group in Cleveland newspapers. In all three of the major papers, pictures of Kessler wildly gesticulating in Nazi attire adorned articles telling of the aims and struggles of the group. In early December, Kessler happily stated that *any* publicity was good publicity, because after every article appeared in the papers Cleveland’s Germans showed more interest in the Bund.³⁰ However, the articles were intended to inform the public on the activities of the group, and with each new story the resistance to Cleveland’s Nazi Bund was growing as well. In time, Kessler and the other Bund members would learn how strong their adversaries were.

As Kessler became a blatant Nazi firebrand he both drew members toward and away from his organization. Though his name is not known, one Clevelander, surprisingly of leftist tendencies, saw America caught in the grip of the Depression, and decided to visit Nazi Germany to see for himself what Hitler had accomplished. However, the trip to the Fatherland became not just a quenching of curiosity, but a profound revelation. By the time this man came back to Cleveland, he had become an ardent Nazi, and wanted to support the cause here. He appeared before Cleveland’s

German Consul, and asked what groups he should join. Dutifully, the consul gave the new disciple the name, telephone number and address of a Cleveland Bund officer.³¹ Hence Cleveland's Nazi following gained a passionate new follower. Yet on the other hand, Bund member Alfred Kluth, of 3251 W. 99th St., was a member of the Cleveland group until he became terrified of Kessler's growing power. Kluth served as a member of the Bund's "Deutscher Konsum Verband," (D.K.V.), which fought the boycott of German goods. Though he was deeply interested in the Bund's beliefs, he quit when Kessler "became aggressive and militant." As Kessler became tyrannical, Kluth decided to flee the organization, staunchly stating "I'm through with everything."³²

As the leader of an openly Nazi group, Kessler found it his duty to defend the hatred of Jews and the persecution of them in Germany. Kessler believed that American Jews held far too much influence for their actual numbers. He stated that "more Americans and Christians [should] be given the opportunity" to ascend to prominent offices. Though teetering on the border of anti-Semitism, he actually claimed that the Bund had nothing against the Jews, and that indeed there were many fine Jews in America, but they simply held too much power.³³ For some Bund members, however, the stance against the Jews needed clarification. So Kessler facilitated a discussion on the Bund's rendition of Jewish history. A Bund member explained that Abraham, the ancestor of the Jews, was in reality the world's first "pimp," and that the written history of the Jews in ancient Egypt was completely false. Instead of being a downtrodden people they had really taken over control of the Egyptian "nation." They had to be driven out of power for the good of Egypt, much like the situation that Nazi Germany was in now.³⁴

Most interesting, however, was Kessler's defense concerning Nazi atrocities against Jews in Germany. Kessler maintained close contacts with Nazi Germany, and planned to justify the growing movement against the Jews in late 1937 to those Clevelanders that questioned the brutality of the Nazi regime. Kessler made

arrangements with one contact to supply statistics showing how many positions the Jews held in German society prior to the Nazi seizure of power. This material was so convincing that, according to Kessler, it would indeed show the doubting Clevelanders why Hitler's steady persecution and destruction of the Jews was necessary.³⁵

Kessler must have led an interesting family life. Fearing "persecution by the Jews," he claimed that they had threatened to burn him out of his apartment. According to him, his home was an easy target, with terrorizing phone calls and intimidating letters persistently bombarding him and his family. He later stated that after a time of struggle the Jews had eventually won their battle against him, forcing him out of his home.³⁶ Though this opposition was constantly at his doorstep, he did have familial support. His sister, Katherine J. Welter, assisted Kessler in the Bund's leadership. She operated a tearoom on the second floor of Cleveland's world famous Arcade, and for a time served as the head of the Bund's Women's Auxiliary. Her husband, Rudolph Welter, was also a Bund member. The Women's Auxiliary was, not surprisingly, very traditional in nature. Kessler explained that the female unit simply "prepared food and took care of the children."³⁷ Possessing great leadership abilities in her own right, Katherine Welter is an important figure in the history of Cleveland women. After her Bund following had disintegrated, she opened an all-women real estate office, Katherine J. Welter Real Estate, Inc., on Lake Shore Blvd., in 1941. Striving to make home ownership fairer, she assisted single professional women with securing mortgage loans. Gaining national prestige for her business, she even represented the Cleveland Area Board of Realtors at an international conference in Vienna, Austria, in 1956. She also won local and national competitions in dancing, belonging to the notable Arthur Murray Dance Studio.³⁸

Building an organization centered on German blood, Kessler obviously needed to appeal to Cleveland's Germans as a whole.

Importantly, he worked *through* other German-American organizations in order to gain legitimacy and members in his own. This worked by not only spreading propaganda, but also by gathering power within the organizations by using his "storm troopers" to elicit fear and foster a following for his own Nazi Bund. Whether or not Kessler's Bund expounded true German culture or not is a matter of debate. However, one staple of the German tradition was pronounced at all their Nazi meetings: they would thoroughly partake in monumental beer consumption.³⁹

When it came to the public, if indeed it was Kessler's plan to use force as a means toward gathering more support for his organization, he did not present it that way to the press. From the way Kessler painted the picture he and the Cleveland Bund were always the lovers of peace, and supported America far more than they did Nazi Germany. When asked about the militaristic aspects of the Bund, Kessler scoffed, "We do no drilling. The members here can't even march right."⁴⁰ Most interesting, however, is that Kessler officially stated that the true purpose of the Bund was to be an organization that wished to promote Nazism *without* violent conflict. He did this by emphasizing his hard-learned worldly experiences. To Kessler, the purpose of the Bund was "to keep this country from going through the same things that Germany and Spain have seen. We went through hell over there. That's why we came over here. We don't want it to happen again."⁴¹ And to the more general populace, Kessler attempted to provide comfort to the skeptics, those who feared what could be termed the "un-American" activities of the Bund. Kessler firmly asserted that the members of the Cleveland Bund were "pledged to uphold the Constitution of the United States and to defend it."⁴²

By early 1938, the dual images of the Nazi Bund had become clearly apparent. Outwardly loving America, and wishing to preserve her democratic principles, the Bund was secretly plotting a fascist course. Kessler's American-centered version of the Bund is no surprise since he was obviously attempting to legitimize his

organization in the eyes of the public, even though in secret the Bund was anything but peace loving and American-centered. While on the other hand, William Leick, and other local reporters, consistently portrayed Kessler as a dangerous, rabble-rousing bully, scheming to consolidate Cleveland's German-American groups under his grasp. The sharp contrast between appearances and reality made Martin Kessler a fascinating subject for the newspapers, a passionate advocate for Nazism screaming the benefits of fascism under the dark veil of Cleveland's Great Depression.

A FASCIST FOUNDATION

Germans have long had the stereotype that they are meticulous organizers, hard workers and staunchly devoted to their tasks. Cleveland's Nazi Bund was no different. Hierarchically organized and rigidly stratified, it was coordinated through the national fascist following under Fritz Kuhn. At the center of the local Bund division was the executive committee, composed of hardened members of the *Ordnungs Dienst* (The "Order Service", or OD), the militant Nazi core of the group. Yet the Cleveland Bund had other divisions as well. For the children a Bund youth department was created, as was a women's auxiliary. These three Bund departments were directly coordinated through the national Nazi organization.

The Cleveland Bund was operated like a military dictatorship under Fritz Kuhn. When Martin Kessler and other Cleveland Bund officers would get in contact with Kuhn, he often wouldn't take their views into consideration, he would just give orders. These orders became so understood in Cleveland that after Kuhn's leadership became solidified he didn't even have to say *words*: he would just rattle off a particular command *number* and the group would spring into action.⁴³ To make sure Kuhn knew how the Cleveland public viewed the Bund, anything published

about the local group was collected by Joseph Flubacher, local Bund reader, and sent personally to Kuhn in New York.⁴⁴

Under the direction of the charismatic Kessler, the most alarming aspect of the Cleveland Bund came to light through the group's OD storm troopers. William Wieser, of 200 Colonial Arcade, headed the storm trooper division. Officially known as the "Ordnungs Dienst Fuehrer," Wieser had his troops practice their rifle shooting at the Deutsche Zentrale in Parma.⁴⁵ Though others were to later say that the OD *ran* the shooting range, and appeared to be practicing for an American Nazi revolution, the leaders of the Zentrale firmly stated otherwise.⁴⁶ Kessler asserted it was essential that the OD be present at all the important Bund gatherings because through various occasions it became readily apparent that "Cleveland police were unable to furnish adequate police protection."⁴⁷ Yet even at its height in late 1937, regular meetings of the Cleveland Bund's militant core were still strikingly similar to the emerging Nazi party in Germany during the early 1920s. Born in the dark beer halls of Munich, Hitler's emerging Nazi party held meetings in their back rooms or cellars during the formative years of the Nazi following. Though a continent and more than a decade away, Kessler's own Nazi party had eerily similar gatherings in Cleveland.

The core of Kessler's Bund was its executive committee, composed of OD members ardent to the cause of American fascism, and their meetings offer a fascinating glimpse into how the heart of Nazism was growing in Cleveland. One League for Human Rights investigator attended such a meeting on December 10, 1937. He arrived at the home of Bund member Franz Pussel, 1318 W. 89th St., but found trouble when he attempted to enter. He first knocked on the door of the home and a woman appeared. When the investigator introduced himself the woman cut him short, suspiciously saying that she had never heard of him. He then stammered that he was there for the meeting of the Bund's OD. The woman then claimed that she had never heard of such a group, and



G. Wilhelm Kunze speaks at a 1938 Bund meeting in Manz Gardens, 950 E. 69th St.
Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Martin Kessler, center left, laughs with members of his Ordnungs Dienst, 1937.
Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

slammed the door in his face. The bewildered secret investigator lingered outside, when Martin Kessler suddenly appeared.

The hefty Kessler vouched for the investigator personally and began leading him through the home. As they rounded through the house, Kessler found the downstairs, and began waddling down to the cellar. As they descended the stairs together, the quiet of the home was replaced by the guttural voices of German men heartily caroling away. There, in the dark cellar of the Cleveland home appeared 25 Bund OD members in full Nazi uniform, yodeling together in song as they all consumed beer. Having a jolly social time, these 25 were the “guiding spirits” behind Cleveland’s Bund movement, and they were awaiting their leader Kessler, with whom they began their meeting. Discussing the dramatic and essential struggle of the Bund, Kessler outlined a future of sacrifice and conflict, a necessity of having to fight the many elements opposing them. Yet Kessler remained vehement about the Bund’s position not to waiver in the course of Nazism. This meeting was by no means brief, lasting until about 4 a.m.⁴⁸

Though some of Cleveland’s Germans were receptive to the aims of Nazism, others were not. Kessler lamented that in some circumstances the push to attract more Cleveland Germans to the cause, primarily through Nazi propaganda, resulted in violence. He said that some groups rebuffed the Bund’s overtures, and in extreme situations some Bund members were even beaten up. Surprisingly, though there were many outside of Cleveland’s German community that fought the Nazi following, Kessler claimed that it was actually some of the local German groups, who constantly fought the plans of the Bund, which caused his Nazi group the most trouble in late 1937.⁴⁹ Yet worst of all for the Cleveland Bund during this time was a growing antagonism from the Zentrale. What was the Bund to do, as the Zentrale, the cherished home for their activities and the center for German life, began to plot against them? Instead of mediation or reconciliation

the Bund decided to respond in a way in which they were familiar, in a way in which they were trained: militancy.

In a show of blatant Nazi pageantry, the OD members of the Cleveland Bund responded to their growing opposition by putting on a public show of strength. Borrowing horses, on Nov. 28, 1937, they invaded the Zentrale and performed a uniform mounted drill. As they paraded, motion pictures were taken, to be shown later as Bund propaganda around other American cities. The aim of the endeavor was simply to illustrate the power of the Bund.⁵⁰ This show of force did not sit well with the Zentrale, and the organization accordingly censured the Nazi Bund. An angry Kessler gave up the idea of working with the Zentrale, and instead plotted an overthrow of its leadership. He felt that the Bund had been as helpful as possible in the running of the Zentrale, and now the Zentrale had the audacity to attack them.⁵¹ Kessler wanted revenge, and though he plotted the plan in secret, it soon became public knowledge. *Cleveland Press* reporter William Leick put the plot in context, as the Bund was scheming to cease power of the important center of Cleveland Germandom, he stated:

Kessler, with a membership card in the Deutsche Zentrale which cost him \$1 a year, has succeeded in making himself the whip hand of that organization within three years. He introduced the Nazi flag on the Deutsche Zentrale and organized 'storm troopers' to 'keep order and discipline.' He has mapped a campaign, which he hopes will see him displacing Dr. Herbert S. Reichle as president of the organization at the next general meeting.⁵²

It is important that Kessler never gained leadership of the Zentrale, though the immense influence of the Bund in this large German-American organization was felt. Also of note is that though many German-American organizations associated with the Zentrale, it

was the Bund that most outwardly displayed connection with the new Germany, if in no other way than their striking similarity of their uniform to that of Nazi groups in Germany. Complete with armbands, campaign hats, and Sam Brown belts holding the strap across their chests, the Bund was not afraid to at least *appear* to be in tune with the Nazis in Germany.

THE MIDWESTERN RALLY

On November 13, 1937, a monumental mass Nazi rally was held at the Sons of Italy Auditorium, 7218 Euclid Ave., Cleveland. Not only was the gathering important because it was the Midwestern district meeting of the Bund with 300 delegates, 500 other “listeners” and Kuhn as the main speaker, but was the first time that the Bund’s greatest detractors had mobilized together in protest.⁵³ The meeting was the largest recorded gathering of Cleveland’s Bund, and showed how similarly the Nazi group organized themselves en masse to their German counterparts. In addition, this meeting was fascinating because it served to clarify the Bund’s outlook and plan for the future as well as display its rapidly galvanizing resistance.

According to Kessler, the purpose of this meeting was not only organizational in nature, but primarily to “clarify the Bund’s position in the public mind,” and to transact reports on the status of the Bund in the Midwest.⁵⁴ The meeting, modeled on other mass National Socialist demonstrations, was complete with an escort of about 50 uniformed storm troopers and an entire “color guard” of swastika and American flags.⁵⁵ However, as the Bund members attempted to enter the hall, they were confronted by a large group of protesters on the street and sidewalk. Members of various German-American workers’ organizations, people from a “Jewish Citizen’s Committee,” and members of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (now a part of the AFL/CIO) all came together on this occasion to denounce both the Bund and Nazism. As the

regular Bund storm troopers made their way into the hall they were berated with "hisses and catcalls." Yet it was not long before the pickets were stirred into a frenzy. According to a *Plain Dealer* writer, "Jeers and boos swelled to a roar as half a dozen youths in Volksbund uniforms with black-and-white armbands on which tiny swastikas showed, appeared on the terrace before the hall. When the six came down to the gate, pickets in a frenzy shouted, 'go back to your concentration camps,' 'bloodsuckers,' 'baby killers.'"⁵⁶

One of the cars entering the hall's parking lot at this time contained Kuhn and Kessler. Both were dressed in civilian clothes, and Kessler was playing the role of chauffeur as scornful yells of "Heil Hitler" greeted entrants to the hall. The pair easily slid their way through the pickets, who were then involved in chanting, "down with Hitler, up with democracy." Separating the pickets from the hall stood a high fence and a contingent of the Cleveland police force, under the direction of Sgt. William Scharf. When Kuhn and Kessler reached the back of the hall, they promptly changed into their Bund uniforms, and quickly appeared on the hall's terrace. The pair smugly waved and smiled at their picketing detractors below as the Iron Cross, Germany's highest military decoration, gleamed on Kuhn's chest. At the sight of the pair, the pickets went postal. Breaching the police line, they clung onto the high fence bars, together screaming, "murderers," and "swine," at the high Bund officials.⁵⁷

Inside the building, ominously illuminated red swastikas, positioned on either side of the stage, lit up the hall festooned with American and German flags. As the two American Nazi leaders mounted the stage, the audience dutifully welcomed them with their hands raised in the Nazi salute.⁵⁸ Kessler presided at the meeting, and introduced Kuhn, paradoxically, as the most hated and most loved man in America.⁵⁹ The traditional German national anthem, "Deutschland Ueber Alles" was sung along with the "Star Spangled Banner" and the infamous Nazi hymn "The Horst Wessel Song."⁶⁰

National Leader
FRITZ KUHN
will speak at the
MID-WESTERN RALLY

Kreistag

**Fest-
Programm**

Cleveland, O.
SONS OF ITALY
AUDITORIUM
7218 Euclid Ave.

Nov. 13
1937

8 P. M.
Admission 35c

German American Bund



Cover for Midwestern Bund rally, 1937

(Photo courtesy: Western Reserve Historical Society History Library)

Kuhn's speech attempted to rally the Bund's faithful by both assaulting their opposition and asserting that neither the American political parties nor labor unions could provide the answers to societal ills. He did this by mainly appealing to the workers. To him, National Socialism was the purest form of democracy available. Kuhn illustrated the Bund's position in America when he assaulted the "elements which are hiding their own un-Americanism behind their blasts at us."⁶¹ Most interestingly, he asserted that it was *through* the Bund that its members would become loyal American citizens. Kuhn announced that:

Our fight is against the Marxist elements in America, not democracy. If the time should ever come, the government of the United States would find that German-Americans stood united behind it in its hour of need. Workers realize that they have gained nothing from the Republican or the Democratic Party. Where will they turn? It is natural that they should follow false prophets such as John L. Lewis, who spends his days fighting the American Federation of Labor and his nights thinking up new ways to fool the workers. If travelers come back from Russia with sympathetic pictures of communism no one objects, but let anybody say word in favor of the new Germany and he is immediately called a Nazi. We have friends in America who recognize that we are not a secret organization. National Socialism is not for export, but it is the truest form of democracy. We in this organization are the dough which won't stop rising until every German-American realized his folk affinity, and by so doing, becomes a good American citizen.⁶²

He further stressed that German-Americans had been good citizens and contributed much to America; through everything they had always backed the American government. Kuhn pointed out that whether citizens or not, the Germans in America had fought adamantly for the United States in every war since the Revolution.⁶³ He ended his speech with a "Heil Hitler," but in his closing remarks finished with a "Heil America."⁶⁴

The charismatic Martin Kessler got the opportunity to speak at this large meeting as well. He wished friendly relations with foreign countries, including Germany, and introduced the Midwestern Bund delegates from Youngstown, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and Detroit. Kessler asserted that the Bund, and Nazism, operated as a buffer against communist infiltration. He claimed, "as long as the swastika stands beside the Stars and Stripes, the Stars and Stripes will be safe. But if the hammer and sickle comes up beside the American flag, the Stars and Stripes is doomed."⁶⁵ Kessler also had some local politics to mention too. Referring to the shouting pickets in front of the hall, he blasted that "Cleveland [City] Council seems to agree with the mob outside. The Council adopted a protest against our appearance and even sent a copy to the La Follette committee. We want to say here and now that no more loyal Americans exist than we German-Americans in the Volksbund."⁶⁶

Following the meeting a reception was held in the basement of the hall. Among others in attendance was a group of German war veterans. Oddly enough, they were not at the meeting to support the Bund, but rather to simply have a good time. They accomplished this by getting together, singing old war songs and, true to their German blood, drinking an enormous amount of beer.⁶⁷

Best illustrating the connection the Bund had with Nazi Germany at this time dealt with the question of the Jews. Kuhn stayed in Cleveland a few days after the meeting to help organize the local group and clarify the immediate difficulties at hand to the

Midwestern Bund leaders. With representatives from other cities still present, Kuhn expressed his anger at what the directions the Fatherland was then giving him. He stated that the original instructions for the Bund from Germany were to be extremely anti-Semitic in nature. Yet the fact that the Jewish boycott of German goods had been so disastrous to German business interests in this country necessitated a soft-pedaling of Jewish hatred by the Bund. Yet what infuriated Kuhn even more was Germany's order to allow Jewish leaders to represent German industry to offset the boycott. Kuhn had traveled personally to Washington, DC and discussed the matter with the German ambassador to no avail. Also, at a proposal to better gather members into the Bund by better salesmanship, Kuhn flew into a rage. He staunchly stated that "I want nothing to do with salesmanship, that is a Jewish invention and we will not use Jewish methods to build up our organization."⁶⁸

For whatever reason, the soft-pedaling of the race question was thrown aside only three months after the mighty Bund gathering. In a smaller meeting (with about 200 in attendance) at Manz Gardens, 950 E. 69th St., Cleveland, G. Wilhelm Kunze, a representative of the Bund's New York headquarters (and future national leader of the Bund), was the featured speaker on Feb. 15, 1938.

Once again, the Bund's detractors showed up in force. Yet instead of coming to peacefully picket, the angry detractors came armed with stink bombs and paving bricks. Evidently this time they really meant business. However, the Cleveland police came better prepared, preventing the "anti-fascists" from getting anywhere near Manz Gardens. During the course of the gathering, five police cruisers maintained an endless chain around the hall. Though the armed opposition was kept back, three unidentified, and quite menacing, "big-shouldered" men lingered outside in the street. They threatened the attendees, warning them "There will be trouble if you go in there," and "You won't find your car when you

come out." Not bothering most who entered, two drivers were seemingly intimidated, parking their cars farther down E. 69th St., after "proclaiming their Americanism."⁶⁹

The meeting was organized much like the Midwestern meeting, complete with illuminated swastikas on either side of the stage and American and Bund flags hanging. The tall, gray-coated Kunze entered the hall with Martin Kessler as the audience, mostly of women, awaited them.

Though the question of race and the position of the Jews was a troubled topic before for the Bund, now it was pushed full throttle. Kunze thundered that the Bund was fighting for true American principles: race, God and nation. He announced that the Bund was in sharp opposition to "the indiscriminate mixture of white Aryan gentiles with African and Asiatic peoples." And that "if the Jews were restricted to their proportions in the population, as in Germany, only 3 1/2 to 4 percent of the lawyers, doctors, editors and bankers would be Jewish, and let them try to be 4 percent of the mechanics and farmers." Yet even "as a small group controlling press, radio, schools and finances [they] could do great harm to the mental processes of the people."

Ironically enough, Kunze stated that the Nazi government had "taken the politics out of millions of atheistic kids and put religion back in." And that along these same moral lines, the Bund was "against atheism and for religious freedom and the codes of morals under which you and I were educated." Stating further that they were against "all subversive international movements and any political party which places anything above the nation, but we are for legitimate labor unions." Yet he pleaded for a spreading of these principles, "beyond the German-American element to all of our kind of Americans."

Just a few days before his arrival in Cleveland, Kunze directed a Bund meeting in Buffalo, N.Y., that wasn't so peaceful, and he felt the need to clarify his stance. As the Buffalo gathering began it quickly degenerated into an outright melee between Bund

members and their opposition, primarily members of the American Legion. Ultimately, five Buffalo police squads stormed into the meeting to break up the free-for-all fight. He stated that "In many cities we are on the best of terms with the American Legion and other veterans' organizations. In other cities it is the influence of certain groups that prevents these veterans' organizations from meeting us." Kunze also blasted the press with distorting the Buffalo Bund battle in the newspapers, terming it as "Jewish-controlled."⁷⁰

CLEVELAND'S HITLER YOUTH

The Bund in Cleveland, as elsewhere in the United States, placed a primary importance on their youth program, designed to give the young an education and indoctrination into Nazism and the supposed greatness of Hitler. In fact, the Bund's youth movement was an exact replica of Germany's Hitler Youth.⁷¹ This program, in large measure, utilized summer youth camps, which helped in many ways to train the youth for future military service in Germany. In 1937 Kessler represented the Cleveland Bund at the organization's July convention in New York. He visited the Bund's Camp Siegfried on Long Island, and witnessed some of the 15,000 German-American youths taking part. He pledged to make this model Nazi camp a reality in Cleveland.⁷²

On August 7, 1937, Cleveland's Bund opened their youth camp at the Deutsche Zentrale in Parma with the help of experienced instructors from New York City. Providing invaluable material, a secret agent (codenamed "P-9") for the League for Human Rights reported on the camp with the help of his nephew, who also operated undercover as a spy. The young informant (of German background) joined the camp and reported on their activities and daily life. The following investigation is fascinating because it illustrates the Bund's recurring dilemma, even among



Martin Kessler speaks about the Bund at the Deutsche Zentrale, 1937

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

the youth, of choosing an allegiance between Nazi Germany and the United States.

The Cleveland youth camp was outwardly organized like many other American summer camps, with physical exercise, games and nature hikes designed to keep the children busy.⁷³ Yet underneath a facade of normalcy there was a concerted effort to teach the youth about the beauty of Nazi Germany and its gallant struggle.

Otto Litschke was the manager of the camp and an OD Bund member. Through differing conversations, he informed P-9 about the organization of the camp. Litschke explained that all the boys were to have uniforms for drills, and that P-9 was to supply his nephew with the appropriate garments. This uniform consisted of a brown shirt with black tie, black pants or shorts and appropriate shoes. The camp was divided into girls and boys sections. Though the boys were to rough it in tents, the girls were provided with a dormitory supplied with a piano and a lady matron in charge. The girls also wore similar uniforms, yet the camp workers were not as strict about the girl's uniforms.⁷⁴ The boys in the camp came from all over the Cleveland area, some from Lakewood, Rocky River, East Cleveland, Parma, Brooklyn and others from "the Heights."⁷⁵

Litschke explained to P-9 that it was imperative that his nephew, like all German-American boys, learn the German language. With the young detective joining the camp, Litschke stated that he hoped "the young man likes the camp, and I know he will be happy with his own people."⁷⁶

At the camp, the dilemma of obedience between America and Germany was best illustrated through the treatment of the nation's flags. At the entrance to the camp two flags were erected, the American and the German Boy Scout Flag. As standard practice, when the flags were raised and lowered all the boys in the camp would form lines and give the Nazi salute.⁷⁷ The young spy noticed that many boys at the camp absolutely despised the American flag. On one occasion, some boys referred to Old Glory

as “that rag,” and angrily questioned, “Who cares about that flag?”⁷⁸ Talk of the American flag even aroused passionate obscenities from the boys, who even stated that they wanted nothing more than to “spit on the damned American flag.” Yet one of the boy leaders overheard what others were saying, and he screamed at them, claiming that if Litschke overheard what they were saying, he would have them beaten up and thrown out of the camp.⁷⁹

Nazi flags were also used for military drilling and marching purposes at the camp. Though the boys regularly drilled and marched with swastika flags, they never employed Old Glory.⁸⁰ The instruction on proper marching and military drills was an integral part of the camp. In fact, Litschke explained to P-9 that it was important that the boys be instructed in “military affairs” through well-organized marches and drills.⁸¹ The Bund’s youth publication for the summer of 1937, *Junges Volk*, which was disseminated to all American Bund camps, contained marches and songs taken from the Hitler Youth in Germany, many of which clearly celebrated militaristic violence, a love of the swastika and a devout faith in Hitler. One such song went as follows:

Youth, Youth ~ We are the future soldiers.

Youth, Youth ~ We are the ones to carry out future deeds.

Yes; through our fists will be smashed

who stands in our way.

Youth, Youth ~ We are the future soldiers.

Youth, Youth ~ We are the ones to carry out future deeds.

Fuehrer ~ We belong to you;

yes, we comrades belong to you.⁸²

Yet more alarming was the publication’s song glorifying the Nazi swastika and obedience to it. The song went as follows:

*We have sworn an oath to our flag,
 The flag is our faith in God, people and country,
 Whoever wants to rob it,
 may rather take our lives and hands,
 We shall care for the flag like for our good mother,
 Because the flag means tomorrow and honor and courage.*⁸³

For many of the boys, their purpose of being at Cleveland's Bund camp was to receive military training for the German Army. After a time, some of the boys believed that all of the training they received at the camp gave them a thorough introduction into the military, and that they could easily "go back home and fight any time they wanted to."⁸⁴

Any teacher or instructor of youth would agree that to make children understand important, sometimes complex, morals, values and attitudes, one must employ differing, sometimes unorthodox methods to get the message across. For the Bund, one popular method was through vivid campfire stories, often illustrating the necessity for struggle and the beauty of heroic deeds. One such story was about the brave adventures of a German boy during the First World War, and of the corresponding situation of the Jews at that time.⁸⁵ Another night a story dealt with courageous mountain climbers, and it informed the youth on how such activity helped to develop the men, mind and body.⁸⁶ Litschke explained that a "great deal" could be done in educating the children on a point, just so long as you kept them interested, and told the story in such a way as to properly drive-it-home.⁸⁷ Lectures about great Germans, and many songs, American and German, often accompanied the stories.⁸⁸

As the Nazis took power in Germany, to them it became necessary to practice the "Fuehrerprinzip" (Fuehrer principle), which, simply stated, was a standard, autocratic, blind obedience to superiors, designed to ensure the efficiency and hierarchical structure of the Nazi following. At Cleveland's youth camp this

was clearly evident. On one occasion, one of the girls became homesick and gave some instructors trouble about doing cleaning duty. Litschke told the other instructors that it was imperative "to enforce strict discipline and require all children to obey orders, which rule must be lived up to in any branch of the organization." However, the girl was made to assist in the cleaning without resorting to punishment. Litschke explained that it was necessary to teach the children to obey orders, and that they should be trained not to talk back or question authority. He said that the cleaning duties, among others, were "imposed to teach the children obedience, and to instill in their minds that orders are orders and must be obeyed."⁸⁹

In time the young spy was given a position in the camp as the captain of the guard. This was an important position because there was continual damage to the camp done by outside vandals. A couple of the tents had been cut and the German Boy Scout flag had been torn down. Even though the camp was to be under strict discipline, this by no means meant that the children were all treated unequal. In fact, the children were all told to not take advantage of the others. They were to all do the same amount of work, exercise and have the same amount of food. This was evident when P-9 brought his little spy some treats. The boy said "take that back home and keep it until I come back, but don't bring anything for me out here, as it is against the rules to eat anything that the others do not have, and I being captain of the guard, would not like to break that rule." Though the camp was hierarchically organized, it still fostered a sense of community.

For the children at the camp, they had plenty of room for marching, drilling and games. Behind the main pavilion was a large woods, tennis courts, athletic field and long-distance rifle range.⁹⁰ The field was about a quarter of a mile square and was used for drilling, running and games.

The young informant discovered that even at an early age some of the other boys in the camp had become ardent anti-Semites

and cultivated a deep appreciation for Hitler and his work with transforming Germany. Some of the boys the young detective talked to spoke of Hitler as a great man, and that his actions against the Jews in Germany were justified. They said that Hitler was making Germany a much better place to live than America through authoritarianism. The boys applauded laws they said Hitler instituted by making it illegal to spit on a wall, walking on the grass before buildings, and being placed under arrest for littering. Some openly stated that Germany would be a much better place if all the "damned Jews" were driven out of the country. As his talks went on, the boys used flagrant profanity as they claimed that the "damned Jews" were robbers in America as they were in Germany, and that they robbed their mothers almost every time transactions were made with them.

The camp was a resounding failure. The parents of the children involved had much criticism of the camp and its organization, claiming that they were not told what the purpose of the camp actually was and that the children were not well supervised. Another problem with the camp had to do with the instructors, generally young men imported from New York City. Though the instructors were Bund members they were, after all, young men. Young men being young men, they allegedly spent too much time flirting with the young female instructors, and neglected their duties in showing the youth proper drilling instructions. Two of the instructors were therefore fired for putting their personal passions above the needs of the Bund.⁹¹

Another attempt to gain support for Cleveland's Bund youth program was through a large Christmas party. By late 1937 the Cleveland Bund's youth movement had withered from about 100 members to only five. An attempt at recovery was this party, and some adult Bund members donated as much as \$25 a piece toward gifts for the children.⁹² Yet there was much pressure from other groups that participated in the party that all things pro-Nazi be left out. One of the major concerns came from the Zentrale, who now

insisted that there be no Nazi flags displayed, which, of course, greatly dismayed the Bund members.⁹³ Yet the party went on with gifts distributed to about 350 children. As promised, no political propaganda was discussed, and the German Consul made an appearance and read from the Bible about the birth of Christ. Yet many German societies that had promised to show did not, and one particularly missed was a group which was to sing Christmas carols.⁹⁴ For the Bund the party was a bit of a failure as their opposition was growing.

THE LIFE OF A BUND OFFICER

The members of the Cleveland Bund were primarily immigrants, and the passions, accomplishments and dreams they had reflected the traditions and culture of the Old World combined with the hope and promise they sought in America. One such man was William Adolf Woessner, a man of keen business sense who served the Bund both as its local treasurer and secretary. Born in the Black Forest region of Germany on Aug. 22, 1907, he came to America in 1929. He resided in New York City for about two years before settling in Cleveland.⁹⁵ Woessner probably became active in the Bund through his German friends. He left Germany with a group of companions who lived with him in New York before moving with him to Cleveland. One of these friends was active Bund member John Grabo, who helped distribute the Bund's Nazi propaganda throughout Cleveland.⁹⁶

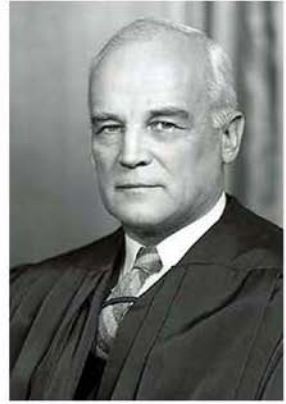
An outdoorsman, Woessner was a member of a local hiking club, and especially loved climbing mountains. In 1930 he helped lead a great tour of America with some of his other young German comrades. Acting as the group's treasurer, he planned for them to dance, sing and perform plays in German for paying audiences to help acquire funds for their tour. Keeping meticulous records of their trip, he collected many photographs of what he viewed as the bounty and beauty of America.⁹⁷ At the conclusion of their trip,



William Woessner
Photo courtesy: Woessner family photo album



Katherine Welter
Photo courtesy: Cleveland Press Newspaper



Harold H. Burton
Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



William Woessner (seated with dark cap) takes a break with his friends on his Western tour of America trip, 1930
Photo courtesy: Woessner family photo album



William Woessner leads a mountain hike with his friends on his Western tour of America trip, 1930

Photo courtesy: Woessner family photo album



William Woessner, dark jacket, shares a laugh with his friends on his Western tour of America trip, 1930

Photo courtesy: Woessner family photo album



William Woessner, center back, poses in front of his grocery store with his family and employees, circa 1950s

Photo courtesy: Woessner family photo album



The Parma police chief investigates another act of vandalism at the Deutsche Zentrale, 1942

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

many of his friends returned to Germany, while Woessner settled in Cleveland, working as a baker and grocer.⁹⁸

Becoming the local Bund's treasurer by the later 1930s, he also was a member of the formidable OD, proudly displaying his Bund uniform with his comrades in 1938.⁹⁹ His personality seemed to fit well with the Bund's organization. Throughout his life, Woessner was known as being obstinate, demanding, and not outwardly friendly, always firmly keeping his mind on business interests. Though these traits are rather stereotypically German, there was one aspect of his social life that seemed quite in conflict with the regular practices of the Cleveland Bund: he never drank alcohol. He also was particularly firm about his religious and political convictions. Woessner was a very adamant Lutheran, and seemed to be always angry about disputes concerning Catholics in Germany. Following World War II, he defined himself as a staunch Republican, firmly hating communism for engulfing half of Germany. With a stubborn personality, he was someone that people learned not to argue with.¹⁰⁰

Woessner played an important role for the Bund in 1938. As treasurer, he pressured other members to pay up their back dues, an important job because of the pressure on the Bund at the time to acquire enough funds to purchase a new center for their pro-Nazi activities.¹⁰¹ He importantly kept with the Cleveland Bund well into 1939, attaining the position of secretary, when membership had dropped dramatically and the group had been generally ostracized from most other area German-American organizations.¹⁰²

After America had gotten thrown into World War II, the FBI thoroughly investigated Woessner, and ultimately attempted to strip him of his American citizenship. Through a petition filed in US District Court by US Attorney Don C. Miller, Woessner was charged with subversive activities as being the local Bund's treasurer and secretary, and a feared member of the group's Ordnung's Dienst. Outlining his leadership and involvement in the group, it claimed he flagrantly displayed the swastika, and favored

a course of dictatorship for America. Most sadly, it alleged that when Woessner officially took the oath to become an American citizen in New York in 1935, "he made mental reservations" about his true allegiance.¹⁰³

Fortunately for Woessner, this petition never made it to trial, but it probably didn't help him that he still spoke in a thick German accent. He felt rather insulted that the FBI took an interest in him for his activities, though he never stated that he had been persecuted.¹⁰⁴

Like many other immigrants, he adapted and prospered in America while still holding onto certain aspects of the Old World. Though time passed, he always seemed to keep a love for the Fatherland, visiting Germany at least once every ten years. He also had over 50 German polkas memorized, and would teach them to others. Yet when it came to America, he had distinguished himself in the small business world. In 1946 he bought a small grocery store in Conneaut, Ohio. In 1952 he sold the store and bought the Kinsman Super Market in Cleveland's Kinsman neighborhood. The Kinsman store was very successful, and he operated it until his health began to fail in 1964, when he sold it and moved to Florida. He was very proud that throughout his tenure in ownership he never had a partner.¹⁰⁵

A TERRIFYING VISION

By early June, 1938, a horrific premonition confronted the Cleveland Bund: a second, bloody, American revolution was immanent. Chaos was soon to grip mighty America when "the Jews and their Communist friends" would come to clash with all the "true Americans," according to Bund officer Edmund Wax. Though the Cleveland Bund was struggling to expose the Jews "in their true light," *before* the melee, most Americans still were unaware of the threat. Yet whatever the circumstances, Wax proclaimed, "the Bund will fight for the American flag to the finish."¹⁰⁶

By the time that this forecast of doom was announced at a large Bund meeting, it was clearly evident that the Bund was suffering from the pressure of their adversaries: Cleveland's Bund was steadily becoming more fanatical. A variety of factors contributed to this dire situation. Many of Cleveland's other German groups disagreed with how Kessler had become so outspoken, and refused to meet together with the Bund; government probes of alleged "un-American activities" had begun to discredit the organization; instead of being neutral, area newspapers were presenting the group as being subversive in nature; membership was dropping, and active members were constantly delinquent with dues; and most importantly, the firebrand Kessler decided to go back to the Fatherland.

The charismatic Martin Kessler was the lifeblood of Cleveland's Bund, and the announcement of his departure filled the hefty fascist with sadness. When he announced his plans for departure in May, 1938, he said he regretted leaving "behind so many good friends." Yet he said that since the opposition had grown so much over the recent months he was unable to get a job, and would continue to have problems with employment in Cleveland "until the Jews are put in their place." With a heavy heart, Kessler told the "boys" to carry on their fight against their foes, and not to become discouraged at the inevitable setbacks they would encounter. It was at this gathering of his most loyal followers that Kessler wanted a group picture of his Ordnungs Dienst to remember his leadership in Cleveland. Though there were about 50 OD troops by this time, only 23 showed up for the picture, which they then had taken at the John Bukovnik Studio, 762 E. 185th St. Even though their Cleveland Nazi Bund flag was positioned properly, the American flag was ironically backward.¹⁰⁷

Kessler's farewell party was held June 4, 1938, for his travel back to the Fatherland four days later. This time his faithful followers were the ones hit with sorrow at the thought of Kessler no longer among their ranks. The party was held in the basement of

the West Side Sachsenheim, 7001 Denison Ave., with about 200 in attendance, some of which were from various other German societies. The hall was adorned with American and German flags, and the tables were arranged to form a gigantic horseshoe, with Kessler and his wife at the center and the highest officers surrounding them. Edmund Wax spoke first (for an entire hour), affirming that the Cleveland Bund would continue with Kessler's spirit, as if he remained among them. However, he noted that Kessler had found many enemies during his tenure in Cleveland. The Jews were trouble to the Bund following, of course, but they were no match for the cunning Kessler, who knew how to fight them. Yet the most disastrous were his "unknown enemies," Kessler's "own people, the German whose eyes have not been opened as yet." Wax stated that all the trouble now is behind him, for:

He is going back home, back to a country where there are seventy million Germans, where the seventy millions act and think as a unit. He will be among friends again, he will not have to worry about being betrayed or knifed in the back. He will be in a country where a man is measured by his character and not by his wealth. He will be closer to his beloved Fuehrer, which should make every good German happy.

Many others spoke, Bund members among other Cleveland Germans, all thanking Kessler for his contributions and urging the Bund to courageously fight onward. Farewell gifts were exchanged as well. The Cleveland Bund presented Kessler with a gift of over 100 dollars, and Kessler gave his following a picture of himself in full Nazi regalia, complete with medals he had "received from Hitler."¹⁰⁸ When seeing Kessler leaving, his Nazi followers showed their adoration for their passionate leader. Yet none seemed more pronounced than Bund member Hans Febel.

In a private discussion, Febel frankly stated that he didn't think Kessler would ever come back to America. He said that Adolf Hitler had become very familiar with Kessler and his work in organizing Cleveland's mighty Bund. Consequently, Kessler would be well rewarded in the Nazi Fatherland. Febel said he knew for *sure* that Hitler would personally see that Kessler would be given a good job and salary, and that he may even take Kessler into the "inner circle of the Nazi ranks."¹⁰⁹ Though it is rather doubtful that Hitler had such designs for Kessler, it remains fascinating that some Cleveland Bund members at least *believed* that Kessler was that important.

THE BUND COLLAPSES

In the wake of the horrors that Kristalnacht brought in 1938, it became clear to many Clevelanders that Nazism (in whatever form) was not something to be embraced. Yet the beginning of the end for Cleveland's Bund began a few months prior to the earth-shaking German pogrom during the night of November 9th. In June of 1938, Kessler attempted to seize control of the Zentrale, yet this plan was made public and Dr. Herbert S. Reichle, not much a friend of Nazism, was reelected as president and the Zentrale officers under the direction of Kessler were soundly defeated.¹¹⁰ Under Reichle's leadership, the Bund was not permitted to hold any meetings or events at the Zentrale (see chapter 4). This stand by Reichle, and other Zentrale officers, made it clear to Cleveland's Germans that the Bund was not something that should be followed; it should be something scorned and attacked for being subversive. Ousted from the farm and degraded by many of Cleveland's Germans, the Bund was in trouble.

After the Bund was removed from the Zentrale, it had immense trouble finding a new home, even though many of the Bund members contributed funds to find a new local center for Nazism. An earlier ouster had occurred through the owner of Manz

Gardens, who illustrated how effective the opponents to the Bund had become by May of 1938. Proprietor Paul Manz, tired of being accused of harboring Nazis, announced that the Bund could no longer meet at his establishment. He announced:

I don't want any trouble in my place. My hall is open to all organizations, regardless of race, creed or color. At first when Mr. Kessler and his organization came here, I dealt with them as I would with any other organization. But as their meetings developed, I feared trouble. In addition, my place has been getting so much bad publicity I thought it was time to put a stop to it.¹¹¹

Cleveland's Bund then thought that it would be wise to purchase their own farm. They embarked on two separate ventures to purchase a new rural center for Nazism, but both times the owners reneged at the last minute.¹¹²

The Bund, now ostracized from two of their homes, needed to find a center for their Nazi following. Before Kessler left the group for the Fatherland, he helped them outline a plan to create a new headquarters. After the unsuccessful attempts at finding a center in Cleveland's rural surroundings, they sought a home in either a large house or small building located near downtown. However, they knew that since their opposition was powerful, they would have to be careful who the landlord was (so that they would not be embarrassingly ousted again).¹¹³ As it turned out, one of their own storm troopers operated a German restaurant just outside downtown Cleveland, directly over the Detroit-Superior Bridge. What became a longtime fixture of Cleveland life, the Schwarzwald Cafe (later renamed Kiefer's Restaurant), 2519 Detroit Ave., was an ideal place for the Bund members to congregate.

The owner of the Schwarzwald was Cleveland Bund member William W. Kiefer, of 16300 Clifton Blvd., Lakewood.¹¹⁴

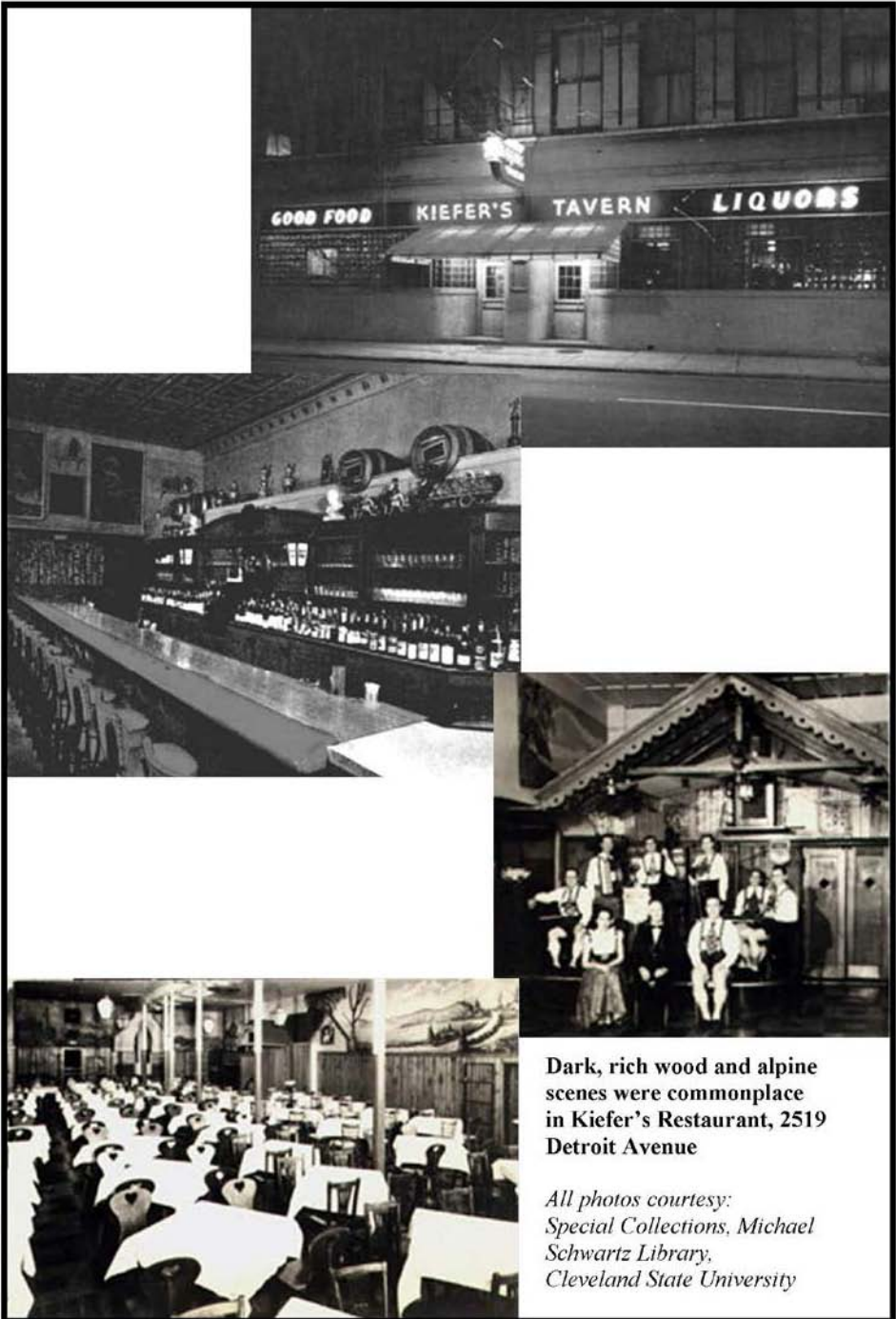
Kiefer was born in the Black Forest (Schwarzwald) section of Germany in 1901. Coming to Cleveland in his 20s, he first worked at a bakery and took a keen interest in meat cutting and sausage making. Along with his wife, Anna, his later booming business began as a modest sausage stand at the Great Lakes Exposition in 1936 (the same exposition that 600 Midwest Bund members attended). With the wonderful success of the stand, the couple was convinced that Cleveland needed a permanent place for German food. They decided on The Angle building at 2519 Detroit, then a thriving Irish neighborhood, and fondly named their Old World establishment after the region of Kiefer's childhood. Beginning with only the barest necessities, the Schwarzwald was opened in 1937, serving its guests from a three-burner starch stove. Quickly becoming the hot spot for Cleveland politicians and celebrities, it was a perfect place for the Bund to move after World War II began in 1939.¹¹⁵

Worried about how strong their opposition would be in Cleveland after Nazi Germany invaded Poland and ignited World War II, the Bund went underground, literally. Without their Nazi uniforms, and devoid of most of their following, the Bund held their secret meetings in the basement of the Schwarzwald Cafe. Though their public gatherings were only social meetings now (mostly card parties and movie showings), their last large undertaking was the publication of their own newspaper, *The Schwarzwald*, which they ran off on their own printing press there in the basement. The Nazi Bund presence was so pronounced at Kiefer's cafe that decades later the employees of the restaurant still remained reluctant to discuss them.¹¹⁶

Although Kessler had left the Bund still continued, albeit in a much more limited capacity. Edmund Wax took over the leadership of the Bund upon the departure of Kessler, but Wax was unable to allow the militaristic Nazi dress in the Bund, (due to the "Anti-Bund Bill," to be discussed later) and instead he adopted a policy of secrecy to everything concerning the group.¹¹⁷ Wax, like

other Bund members, was a German war veteran. He became an American citizen in 1929. Like Kessler, Wax also promoted the values of America, but unlike his predecessor, Wax claimed the Bund was *only* out for American interests. In the tumultuous year of 1939, Wax outlined the outlook of the Bund, he claimed that "We are just a patriotic organization. We are for George Washington all the time."¹¹⁸ With the immense pressure on the Bund from its detractors, under Wax the purpose of the Cleveland Bund made a fundamental change. Instead of using Nazi Germany as a model for how America should find its way toward salvation, Wax had a much more immediate dilemma to deal with in 1939. He stated that "Our big problem is to keep America out of war." When asked about the threat of an "immanent" Communist revolution that the Silvershirts claimed was coming, Wax said "I don't think there is any danger of revolution in this country. If we keep out of war there will be no revolution." *Cleveland Press* reporter William Miller described how deeply suspicious Wax seemed in a 1939 interview. When Miller asked Wax about his occupation, the writer described that "A shadow seemed to fall across his pale face, his blue eyes fill with brooding and foreboding." Wax lamented, "Why, I thought everyone knew I was a baker. But go to light on that. There are dark forces at work and they will try to get my job. The dark forces are everywhere."¹¹⁹

Although Wax claimed to be completely pro-American, it was discovered that Wax received money from the Nazi government through Karl Kapp, the German Consul in Cleveland. Wax claimed that the findings by federal agents spying on him were untrue. However, he did admit that he had relations with Kapp, but noted that there were many in the community that would also associate with the Consul, including the mayor of Cleveland himself.¹²⁰ By 1939 Wax claimed that official Cleveland Bund membership had dropped to about 160, although the great majority were extremely delinquent on paying their dues.¹²¹ By this date, however, the more moderate followers had fled the



Dark, rich wood and alpine scenes were commonplace in Kiefer's Restaurant, 2519 Detroit Avenue

All photos courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

organization, and what was left was its fanatical core. The Cleveland Bund now closely allied themselves to the city's Silvershirt detachment, a rabidly anti-Semitic fascist organization. They began attending each other's meetings, some of which were held on a farm at the corner of Pearl and Pleasant Valley roads in Middleburg Heights. The two Nazi groups began working together so closely in 1939 that they basically appeared to be the same organization.¹²²

As a Nazi group, the Cleveland Bund was entrusted by Germany to spread as much Nazi and anti-Jewish propaganda as possible. It was easier to disseminate material when they were located at the Zentrale, but now that they were without a home it became rather difficult. Bund member John Grabo, 716 E. 93rd. St., took on the job of spreading the Nazi propaganda received from German ships. A mechanic at Cleveland's White Sewing Machine Company, Grabo worked with his 15-year-old son to spread the propaganda among 100 subscribers. He also left Nazi materials in odd places about Cleveland, on downtown store counters and on the seats of streetcars and buses. These thousands of materials included the Bund's publication "Deutscher Weckruf," leaflets entitled "Onward Jewish Soldiers," and the Silvershirts primary publication, "Liberation."¹²³

Always tied to national and international developments, in 1939 the Cleveland Bund was negatively affected by the events surrounding them. On the side of their adversaries, the demise of national Bund leader Fritz Kuhn was an illustration that America's Nazi Bund was corrupt. Kuhn's descent from power was indeed a mighty paradox of the Nazi program. In many ways this prominent American Nazi defined himself by being closely allied to Adolf Hitler, and his meeting with Hitler during the Berlin Olympics in 1936 helped cement the relationship between the Bund and Nazi Germany. However, Kuhn was presenting Hitler with the funds he had collected to assist Nazi Germany with her continued buildup. Yet the Nazis noticed that the amount of the funds did not match

that which they were supposed to receive. After an investigation by U.S. officials it was found that Kuhn embezzled Bund funds. He was sentenced to Sing Sing prison off California for the duration of the war.¹²⁴ On the side of the Bund's ardent followers in Cleveland, they lost interest when Nazi Germany signed the Soviet-German Nonaggression Pact in 1939.¹²⁵ How could fascist Germany do this, they asked? The whole time communism was the enemy of Germany, now it was their friend? To many fascist Clevelanders this did not make sense, and the fact that it harmed Bund membership shows the close relationship that many saw that the Bund and Nazi Germany had.

In 1940 the few remaining Cleveland Bund members got quite a shock. Martin Kessler had surprisingly *returned* to Cleveland, officially finished with Nazism forever as he permanently took-on the roles of an industrial worker and family man. He said he had had enough of politics and wished to be left alone. "I don't want any stories printed about me. I've just started buying a new home. My family and I don't want to be bothered by numerous telephone calls and threatening letters. As soon as people find out where I live, it will be the same old story of calls and letters."¹²⁶ After America entered World War II, Kessler became employed as a draftsman at the Cleveland Apex Electric Company War Plant on Kuhlman Ave. Not assigned to war projects, he did commercial work on household equipment, such as washing machines and irons. After his identity and background was revealed in 1944, however, Kessler was promptly fired.¹²⁷

One question still remains: if Kessler was such an ardent proponent of Nazism, why did he leave Germany so soon? There are a few possible answers. One is that by being such an international globetrotter, he in effect became a man without a state. Many Clevelanders saw Kessler as an agent of Nazi Germany, who spoke the message of a *foreign* state. Ironically enough this was also the way the Germans felt about him, but as a foreign agent of America. By 1940, when he returned to Cleveland,

he sadly stated, "Both sides are against me, my old friends hate me. I don't want to say anything. I just want to be left alone."¹²⁸ But why did he ultimately choose Cleveland as his home again? As he spoke to *Cleveland Press* reporter William Miller on the subject, Kessler stated, "You can ask the American consul in Berlin. He said all Americans would have to leave. I did not want to lose my citizenship."¹²⁹ Most fascinating though, it was Miller who pointed-out that Kessler's flight from Germany possibly had to do with Kessler's wife not keeping her opinions quiet in the tightly monitored Nazi police state.

The interviewer didn't have time to ask him about the story being told in German circles that Kessler was ordered to leave Germany because his wife, missing her American appurtenances of living, became rather bored with Germany and was imprudent enough to say so at a social function where the remark was overheard by one of the self-appointed informers with which the country abounds.¹³⁰

Kessler, the man of four nations, the charismatic Nazi draftsman, now found himself without a cause, without a nation, and without a job. After a life torn between cultures and ideologies, Martin Kessler died in July, 1951, in Cleveland.¹³¹ Though the Bund still existed for a few years after Kessler had originally left for Germany, it was severely limited in membership and influence. By 1942 there were only five official members.¹³² Kessler's leadership held the Bund together as his flight marked the beginning of the end for the organization.

Despite Wax's efforts to mould the Bund into an entirely American-centered organization, the following slowly eroded. In 1941 Wax fled to Mexico, where he then went on to reach Germany.¹³³ In the last few years of the Bund's meager existence in Cleveland it was directed by Joseph Belohlavek, 4432 W. 60th St.

Belohlavek worked as a dentist in the two-story frame building, and lived above. He was born in Austria, and came to America in 1923. Belohlavek was arrested for draft evasion in July of 1942, and in an interview, Belohlavek's wife claimed that the Bund was restricted to social matters only. She said "The only meetings that were held were socials, card parties, and things like that."¹³⁴ Her husband was later convicted of the crime along with 23 other Bund leaders from various American cities (one of which was the new national Bund leader Wilhelm Kunze). However, all were released on June 12, 1945 by decree of the U.S. Supreme Court for lack of sufficient evidence against them.¹³⁵

While the war raged on in Europe, things got rough at the Schwarzwald Restaurant. In 1941 Anna Kiefer said that though business was going well at the restaurant before World War II began, once hostilities ignited business suffered immensely. She complained that "We've had nothing but trouble here. Our windows have been broken several times and business has suffered since Germany went to war. I think this is all because neighborhood competitors have been spreading false rumors. We run a clean and respectable place." When America itself was forced into World War II, William Kiefer became an immediate target of the federal government. Only the day after the assault on Pearl Harbor he was seized by the FBI along with other "enemy aliens" in Cleveland. The FBI confiscated a number of papers from the restaurant's office as well. A distraught Mrs. Kiefer firmly stated that the FBI was "welcome to anything they wanted, we've never done anything wrong." She also said that her husband had never been a member of the Bund, crying that "He has never done anything wrong. I don't know why he has been held." She also sadly affirmed that even through their difficult time, the couple had tried their hardest to be "good citizens of America."¹³⁶

Even after the Bund was officially destroyed, the Schwarzwald Cafe was the primary meeting place for German immigrants in Cleveland. During the decade of the 1940s they

flocked to this important downtown center of German life. Dropped off at the streetcar station underneath the bridge, it was common to see these Cleveland Germans lined up down the street on any given Saturday night. After the war was over, Kiefer was out of confinement and business again boomed, the name of the establishment changing to "Kiefer's Restaurant" to help disassociate it as the former home of the Bund.¹³⁷ With the Bund and Nazism now destroyed Cleveland's Nazi following was dead forever. Or was it? In the 1950s Kiefer allowed Cleveland's small "German American Business Men's Club" to hold their meetings in his restaurant. Among its stated purposes were to establish a "common meeting ground for business and professional men and women of German descent where their common welfare may be promoted and their sense of obligation to their own occupation and the community may be developed." Though seemingly of noble intentions, at least three of the club's members were formerly in the Cleveland Bund.¹³⁸

Not surprisingly, America's involvement in World War II quickly fostered a deep hatred of anything to do with Cleveland's Nazis. As noted, Kiefer's establishment was a target of attacks, but the most prominent assault was clearly on the Deutsche Zentrale. As the birthplace of the Cleveland Bund, the Zentrale was an easy target for vandals. The prime center of Cleveland's German life was severely molested on various occasions by unknown assaulters. After the attacks, over 800 windowpanes lay smashed, pianos were destroyed and fires were set.¹³⁹ Though in its final years the many social and legal attempts at destroying the Cleveland's Nazi Bund were largely successful, it was the arrest of Belohlavek that was the final deathblow to the charred remains of the Bund in Cleveland.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ Taken from an investigation by the *Cincinnati Freie Presse*, German language newspaper, published on July 29, 1942, found in "Paper Says Bund Now Dead in U.S.: Cincinnati German Publication Traces Rise and Fall," *Plain Dealer*, July 29, 1942. Importantly, some historians have wrongly stated that Kappe founded the Teutonia organization in Chicago or Detroit. This an easy mistake to make because they did not receive much press attention until the publication *Teutonia* was begun in Chicago. Yet the investigation documents that the organization itself had already been created in Cleveland.

² "Tells German Group Boycott Hurts U.S.," February 28, 1935.

³ Taken from: *Famous Cases and Criminals: George John Dasch and the Nazi Saboteurs*, The Federal Bureau of Investigation, <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/famous-cases/nazi-saboteurs>, and Harvey Ardman, *World War II: German Saboteurs Invade America in 1942*, *World War II Magazine*, February, 1997.

⁴ "Paper Says Bund Now Dead in U.S.: Cincinnati German Publication Traces Rise and Fall"

⁵ Theodore Andrica, "Says Pro-Nazis Active Here in German Groups," *Cleveland Press*, Nov. 15, 1937.

⁶ "Nazi Songs Ring Here At Festival: Friends of New Germany, Wearing Swastika, Say World Needs Reich," *Plain Dealer*, Sept. 2, 1934, p. A-5.

⁷ "500 Pledge Support To German League," *Cleveland Press*, Oct 15, 1934, and "300 Hear Defender of 'New Germany'" *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 16, 1934, p. 7. (The *Plain Dealer* was wrong in their estimation of Germans at the meeting, off by 200.)

⁸ "Shout 'Heil' For Hitler and Saar: 700 Clevelanders of German Groups Give Salute, Start Fund," *Plain Dealer*, Jan. 18, 1935. It is also notable that Martin Kessler, the then president of the Friends of the New Germany, was chairman of the meeting.

⁹ "Shout 'Heil' For Hitler and Saar"

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Flays Boycott As Anti-Nazis Picket," *Plain Dealer*, Sept. 19, 1934, p. 2.

¹² "Hitler Honored By German Group Here," *Cleveland Press*, April 22, 1935.

¹³ It important to note that "Germans formed one of Cleveland's largest and most influential nationality groups in the 19th and 20th centuries. Although not as large as the German communities in other northern cities, the local community had an important influence on the city's economic, educational and cultural life." under "Germans," David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski (eds.) [The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History](#). Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1987, p. 447.

¹⁴ The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History,

<http://ech.cwru/Scripts/Article.asp?ID=GCF>.

¹⁵ Joe Wendel, Ph.D., "Our German Central Farm," *The Nordamerikanische Wochen-Post*, Troy, Mich., November, 2000.

¹⁶ "400 Children Feted by German Central," *Plain Dealer*, Oct 8, 1934, p. 5,

"German Jahrmarkt Attended by 7,000," *Plain Dealer*, Sept. 24, 1934, p. 12,

"'Jahrmarket' Draws 2-Day Crowd of 7,000," *Plain Dealer*, Sept. 17, 1934, p. 4,

"700 at Wurst-Markt of German Central," *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 22, 1934, p. 7,

"German Festival Is Held in Forest," *Plain Dealer*, Sept. 13, 1937, p. 10.

¹⁷ "Boycott of Nazi Goods Protested," *Plain Dealer*, July 5, 1936, p. A5.

¹⁸ Ivan Platt, The League for Human Rights : Cleveland Jewry's fight against Naziism, 1933-1946, CSU Master's Thesis, 1977, p. 55.

¹⁹ All information from the last citation has been taken from Theodore Andrica, "Says Pro-Nazis Active Here in German Groups: Press Reporter Reveals How Volksbund 'Bores from Within' for Objectives," *Cleveland Press*, Nov. 15, 1937.

²⁰ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, Container 2, Folder 1. "Cleveland Investigator P-9 Reports," Aug. 14, 1937. Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

²¹ William Leick, "Records Show Martin Kessler, Nazi Chief Here, Is Man With 4 Countries," *Cleveland Press*, December 28, 1937, and "Raps Story Bund Is Military Body," *Plain Dealer*, July 21, 1937. It is also notable that Mr. Leick received his information concerning Kessler through "an investigation by the Bureau of Naturalization."

²² "Cleveland Bund Leaders Repentant," *Cleveland Press*, (exact date unknown), 1946. Found in Cleveland State University Press Collection under German-American Bund, U.S., 1937 - 46.

²³ Theodore Andrica. "Says Pro-Nazis active here in German Groups." *Cleveland Press*, November 15, 1937. Important as well was Kessler's imitation of Hitler's intense oratory, as Kessler posed colorfully for *Cleveland Press* photographers.

²⁴ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records , "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports," League records, container 2, folder 1, Dec. 15, 1937.

²⁵ "Kessler, Ex-Bund Chief Here, Now Working in War Plant," *Cleveland Press*, March 11, 1944, p. 1.

²⁶ Eugene Segal, "Cleveland Bund Leaders Repentant," *Cleveland Press*, (exact date unknown), 1946. Found in Cleveland State University Press Collection under German-American Bund, U.S., 1937 - 46.

²⁷ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, container 2 folder 1. "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports, Nov. 10, 1937."

²⁸ *Ibid.*, and, League reports, container 2 folder 1. "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports, Nov. 17, 1937."

²⁹ William Miller, "Says Bund Had 5 Members Here," *Cleveland Press*, July 8, 1942. The independent study was important because throughout the United States the Bund would routinely inflate and deflate membership numbers to correspond with the political climate of the time. For example, Kessler claimed in 1937, when the organization was at its height, that it held 135 regular and 600 supporting members, (from: Theodore Andrica. "Says Pro-Nazis active here in German Groups." *Cleveland Press*, Nov. 15, 1937). Yet one could ask: Why would Kessler *deflate* the number of members if it was actually closer to 1,200? Wouldn't such a high number illustrate that the Bund was indeed powerful and influential? Probably Kessler believed that if he presented the number as being so large it would make it appear that the Bund wasn't meticulous about membership requirements (which it was), or maybe it would seem that the Bund was simply a social organization, without attention given to the Nazi program. Yet when push came to shove, Kessler dropped the number even lower. In 1939, when the federal government was conducting a thorough investigation of the Bund, and many were assailing the group as "un-American," Kessler drastically lowered the membership numbers (at an attempt to throw the pressure off the Bund) to about 90 adults and 25 children. (from: "Says Cleveland Bund Was Much Exaggerated," *Cleveland Press*, April 3, 1939, p. 14.) Whatever the case, even the controversy over the numbers illustrates that many saw the Bund as something to be feared.

³⁰ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, container 2, folder 1. "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports, Dec. 3, 1937."

³¹ *Ibid*, report: Nov. 10, 1937."

³² Eugene Segal, "Cleveland Bund Leaders Repentant," *Cleveland Press*, (exact date unknown), 1946. Found in Cleveland State University Press Collection under German-American Bund, U.S., 1937 - 46.

³³ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports," container 2, folder 1, Dec. 15, 1937.

³⁴ *Ibid*, report: Nov. 10, 1937

³⁵ *Ibid*, report: Dec. 3, 1937.

³⁶ "Says Cleveland Bund Much Exaggerated," *Cleveland Press*, April 3, 1939, p. 14.

³⁷ Mss 3632, League for Human Rights Records, Container 2, Folder 1. Report of #211, May 22, 1938, Western Reserve Historical Society Library, and "Says Cleveland Bund Much Exaggerated," *Cleveland Press*, April 3, 1939, p. 14.

³⁸ Teddi Gibson, "Business Booms for Busy Realtor Despite Cutback," *Cleveland Press*, June 13, 1964. And also The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History online version for Welter, Katherine J. Kessler, <http://ech.cwru/Scripts/Article.asp?ID=WKJK>.

³⁹ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, "Report of 211, Re: Amerikadeutscher Volksbund," container 2, folder 1, June 4, 1938, and "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports," container 2, folder 1, Dec. 14, 1937, and *Ibid.* report: Nov. 17, 1937.

⁴⁰ "Raps Story Bund is Military Body." *Plain Dealer*, July 21, 1937.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.* This supposed love for the American Constitution is emblematic of the American national Bund as well, for the very first couple purposes of the Bund, according to the Bund's national Constitution, are strictly American-centered. The first states that the purpose of the Bund is "Above all to uphold and defend the Constitution and the Laws of the United States of America." The second purpose continues this, in the Bund's insistence "To respect and honor the Flag and institutions of the United Sates of America, and to cultivate their lofty ideals." Mss 3632, League for Human Rights Records, Container 2, Folder 1. "Constitution of the German American Bund, New York, 1937." Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

⁴³ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports," container 2, folder 1, Dec. 3, 1937.

⁴⁴ Theodore Andrica, "Says Pro-Nazis Active Here in German Groups," *Cleveland Press*, Nov. 15, 1937.

⁴⁵ Eugene Segal, "Cleveland Bund Leaders Repentant," *Cleveland Press*, 1948 (exact date unknown). Material found in Cleveland Press Collection clipping file: German-American Bund, Cleveland.

⁴⁶ "Asserts Bund And Klan Are Allies," *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 6, 1938, p. 6.

⁴⁷ "Says Cleveland Bund Was Much Exaggerated," *Cleveland Press*, April 3, 1939, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports," container 2, folder 1, Dec. 14, 1937.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* report of: Nov. 10, 1937.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* report of: Dec. 3, 1937.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* report of: Dec. 14, 1937.

⁵² William Leick, "Records Show Martin Kessler, Nazi Chief Here, Is Man With 4 Countries." *Cleveland Press*, December 28, 1937.

⁵³ From "300 Pro-Nazis Rally to hear 'Fuehrer' Kuhn," *Cleveland Press*, Nov. 12, 1937. And "Pickets Jeer as Pro-Nazis Rally," *Plain Dealer*, Nov. 14, 1937.

⁵⁴ "300 Pro-Nazis."

⁵⁵ William Leick, "Pro, Anti-Nazis Fight Week-End Word Battles: Storm Troopers Escort Kuhn Through Picket Lines at Bund Rally," *Cleveland Press*, Nov. 15 1937. And "Pickets Jeer."

⁵⁶ "Pickets Jeer," also, the Cleveland police guarding the Bund meeting were alarmed by the opposition, and quickly told the Bund youths to go back inside the hall. "Bronx cheers" followed them as they re-entered the hall.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., and "Pro, Anti-Nazis." About 700 in the crowd welcomed the American Fuehrer in such a way, including Dr. Hugo Karl Polt, then a German professor at Western Reserve University.

⁵⁹ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, Container 2, Folder 1. "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports, Nov. 17, 1937." Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

⁶⁰ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, Container 2, Folder 1. Taken from the official Bund program for the rally, "National Leader Fritz Kuhn will speak at the Mid-Western Rally, Kreistag Fest-Programm." Western Reserve Historical Society Library. The Horst Wessel Song was the dramatic fighting-song of an SA storm trooper who perished in a pitched battle with communists during the violent street fights between the rival organizations during the early 1920s. Under Hitler it became the rival national anthem of Germany. Of further interest in the blending of the Nazi Fatherland and staples of Americanism can be seen in Picture 1, where the Nazi Bund flag was raised in equality with the American (though the American flag was oddly backward).

⁶¹ "Pickets Jeer"

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, container 2, folder 1. "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports, Nov. 17, 1937."

⁶⁴ Ibid. and "Pro, Anti-Nazis."

⁶⁵ "Pickets Jeer"

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, container 2 folder 1. "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports, Nov. 17, 1937."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "200 Here Ignore Threat to Listen to Bund's Agent," *Plain Dealer*, Feb. 16, 1938, (both editions) and "Police Check Anti-Fascists as Nazi Speaks," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 16, 1938.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Susan Canedy, *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma*, Markgraf Publications Group, Menlo Park, Ca., 1990, p. 97.

⁷² "Raps Story Bund is Military Body: German Leader Here Says Charge is Bunk," *Plain Dealer*, July 21, 1937.

⁷³ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, container 2, folder 1, "Cleveland Investigator P-9 Reports," Aug. 10, 1937.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. report of Aug. 12, 1937.

⁷⁶ Ibid. reports of Aug. 10 and Aug. 11, 1937.

⁷⁷ Ibid. reports of Aug. 12 and Aug. 15, 1937.

⁷⁸ Ibid. report of Aug. 12, 1937.

⁷⁹ Ibid. report of Aug. 15, 1937.

⁸⁰ Ibid. report of Aug. 14, 1937.

⁸¹ Ibid. report of Aug. 11, 1937.

⁸² Taken from *Junges Volk*, No. 6, June 1937, p. 4. Found in Investigation of Un-American Activities, H. Res. 282, Appendix-Part III, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1941, pp. 1457-1458.

⁸³ Ibid. Taken from *Junges Volk*, No. 6, June 1937, p. 3.

⁸⁴ "Cleveland Investigator P-9 Reports," Aug. 15, 1937.

⁸⁵ Ibid. Report of Aug. 12, 1937.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Report of Aug. 14, 1937.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Report of Aug. 11, 1937.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Report of Aug. 14, 1937.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Report of Aug. 11, 1937.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Report of Aug. 14, 1937.

⁹¹ Ibid. Report of Aug. 15, 1937.

⁹² Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, container 2, folder 1, "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports," Dec. 8, 1937.

⁹³ Ibid. report of Dec. 14, 1937.

⁹⁴ Ibid. report of Dec. 24, 1937.

⁹⁵ Interview with Richard Woessner and Edward Reimer, 36860 Valleyview, Eastlake, Ohio, Nov. 27, 2000.

⁹⁶ William Miller, "Local Bund Chief Boasted He Got Cash From Consul," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 21, 1939, and Interview with Richard Woessner and Edward Reimer.

⁹⁷ From record book and photograph album of William Woessner.

⁹⁸ Interview with Richard Woessner and Edward Reimer, 36860 Valleyview, Eastlake, Nov. 27, 2000, and William Miller, "Local Bund Chief Boasted He Got Cash From Consul," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 21, 1939.

⁹⁹ All of the members, besides the youth, (in this book's cover picture) were members of the OD.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Richard Woessner and Edward Reimer.

¹⁰¹ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, "Report of 211," May 27, 1938, Container 2, Folder 1.

¹⁰² "Local Bund Chief Boasted He Got Cash From Consul," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 21, 1939.

¹⁰³ “Called ‘Bundist’ in Citizenship Suit,” *Plain Dealer*, February 18, 1943.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Richard Woessner and Edward Reimer

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, “Report of 211, Re: Amerikadeutscher Volksbund,” June 4, 1938, container 2, folder 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*: report of: May 22, 1938

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*: report of: June 4, 1938

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*: report of: May 27, 1938, Febel was also a zealous Cleveland Silvershirt member (see chapter 3).

¹¹⁰ “Nazi Leader here Leaves for Reich,” *Cleveland Press*, June 27, 1938.

¹¹¹ “Bars Hall to Nazi Bund Meetings Here,” *Cleveland Press*, May 5, 1938, p. 13.

¹¹² William Miller, “Local Bund Chief Boasted He Got Cash From Consul,” *Cleveland Press*, Aug 21, 1939.

¹¹³ The findings were in two documents: Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, “Report of 211,” May 27, 1938, and June 4, 1938.

¹¹⁴ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, “Report of 211,” May 22, 1938.

¹¹⁵ Barbara Weiss, “Haven for German Cooking: Kiefer of the flame,” *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 9, 1978, p. D-21, and “William Kiefer, ran German restaurant” (obituary), *Plain Dealer*, Dec. 2, 1990.

¹¹⁶ “Haven for German Cooking”, and William Miller, “Says Bund Had 5 Members Here,” *Cleveland Press*, July 8, 1942.

¹¹⁷ *Cleveland Press* reporter William Miller noted that: “For more than a year now, the Bund has managed to keep out of the public eye in Cleveland. This is not an accident but the result of a deliberate change in policy. The success of the policy may be measured by the fact that relatively few people know that Wax is the Bund’s leader. By contrast, his predecessor, Martin Kessler, was constantly in the news.” William Miller, “Local Bund Chief Boasted He Got Cash from Consul.” *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 21, 1939, p. 12.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ William Miller, “Shows Bund and Silver Shirts in Co-operation,” *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 22, 1939, p. 10.

¹²⁰ “Denies Rumor He Took Nazi Money.” *Plain Dealer*, August 22, 1939.

¹²¹ “Local Bund Chief Boasted He Got Cash From Consul”

¹²² “Shows Bund and Silver Shirts in Co-operation”

¹²³ “Local Bund Chief Boasted He Got Cash From Consul”

¹²⁴ “Paper Says Bund Now Dead In U.S.,” *Plain Dealer*, July 29, 1942.

¹²⁵ “Ex-Bund Leader Back,” *Plain Dealer*, May 8, 1940, and “Ex-Leader of Bund Here Quits Job in Germany, Returns Home,” *Cleveland News*, May 7, 1940.

¹²⁶ “Kessler, Ex-Bund Chief Here, Now Working in War Plant” *Cleveland Press*, March 11, 1944.

¹²⁷ Ibid., and "Former Fuehrer of Cleveland Bund Loses Job at Apex," *Cleveland Press*, March 16, 1944, p. 28, and "Reveal One Time Bundist Not Doing War Work," *Cleveland Press*, March 13, 1944. Kessler held positions at the Sommer & Adams Co., 18511 Euclid Ave., and the Cleveland Punch and Shear Works, 3917 St. Clair Ave., previous to working at Apex.

¹²⁸ William Miller, "Kessler Refuses Comment on Germany, Says 'Let Me Alone.'" *Cleveland Press*, May 20, 1940.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ "Kessler, Martin" (obituary), *Cleveland Press*, July 10, 1951.

¹³² William Miller, "Says Bund Had 5 members Here." *Cleveland Press*, July 8, 1942.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ "Jury Convicts 24 of 25 Ex-Bundists," *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 20, 1942, and "24 Bundists Set Free by High Court," *Plain Dealer*, June 12, 1945.

¹³⁶ "Seize Zanzinger; Free Favorito," *Cleveland Press*, Dec. 9, 1941, p.1.

¹³⁷ Barbara Weiss, "Haven for German Cooking: Kiefer of the flame," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 9, 1978, p. D-21. It is also of note that later the official name of the restaurant was changed to "Kiefer's Tavern," and as time went on, new owners also added Italian cuisine to the menu.

¹³⁸ Pamphlet found in file "German American Business Men's Club Inc." in the Cleveland Press Collection's clipping collection, Cleveland State University Library. The three former Cleveland Bund members were Joseph Flubacher, William Kiefer and Willy Winter.

¹³⁹ Joe Wendel, Ph.D., "Our German Central Farm," *The Nordamerikanische Wochen-Post*, Nov., 2000.

The Silvershirt Legion

Chapter 2

Cleveland's Silvershirt Legion was an armed, revolutionary, rabidly anti-Jewish, pro-Nazi organization under the national leadership of William Dudley Pelley. At its militantly nationalist core, the Cleveland outpost consisted of professionals, intellectuals and civic leaders, often meeting in secret to discuss what they believed were Jewish and communist plots to destroy America. Cultivating fear and distrust, they discussed the troubles of the Depression and how Adolf Hitler had dealt with similar problems in Germany. Surprisingly, the following was extremely elitist, and didn't care to swell its ranks with the "unenlightened" masses. Generally attracting people from high society, the Silvershirts constructed a league with many Cleveland area organizations. According to them, they needed more people and resources to protect America from imminent Jewish/communist revolts, ultimately leading to the Silvershirt dream of an American fascist revolution.

In a strange twist of history, the Silvershirts protected their subversive organization through their own police force, composed of seasoned veterans of the Russian Revolution, all too knowledgeable about Communist activity. Of major importance to the Silvershirts was their ardent mission to spread Nazi and anti-Semitic propaganda, to supposedly enlighten the public about

Jewish/Communist conspiracies. Born in the chaos of the Depression, the Silvershirts also practiced a dark religion, infused with occult references, mysticism and supposed supernatural power.

The actual organization of the Silvershirt following was outwardly complex, yet inwardly simple. The Silvershirts presented themselves as usually belonging to one of three organizations: the Silver Legion (usually referred to as the religious side), the Silvershirts (the political side), and the Association of Leagues to Combat Communism (the side of industrialists and businessmen). Even though these groups had a small degree of autonomy, they were basically the same organization under the leadership of Pelley. Cleveland "Truth Center" evangelist, and friend to the Silvershirt leaders, Sherman Anderson, best described the entire Cleveland movement. While claiming he was not a member, he said he knew much about it. He said "It would take me hours to tell you all about it. I would have to go way back in philosophy to tell you that. It's a little of everything. It's a religion, and a philosophy, and a political movement. It's spiritual. It's . . . everything!" When asked the object of the Silvershirts, he frankly stated that:

Well, we want to make this country a republic again. Ever since 1914 this country has been a democracy, not a republic. We are for a republic. People think this country was intended as a democracy. That's not what the founding fathers wanted. It was built as a republic. Democracy won't work. History has proved that wherever democracy has been tried it has always failed.

There have always been two kinds of people, those who think and those who don't. The great mass of people - the 'ill-housed and ill-clothed,' as Mr.

Roosevelt calls them - never had a thought and never will. They have never contributed anything to the advance of mankind. They drag down instead of building up. Everything that has been contributed has come from the other group, from those who think. A republic is ruled by this group. A democracy is ruled by the other.

When Anderson was then asked if he was for one-man control, he scoffed, "Oh, no. If we were we would be for Roosevelt. That's what we have now - autocracy."¹

THE WHITE RUSSIAN

Under incessant pressure from their enemies, the Cleveland Silvershirts employed their own police force throughout the city, officers who had previous experience in such matters: hardened veterans of the Russian Revolution. Under the ultimate coordination of Adolf Hitler, the troops were led in Cleveland by Lev Alexander Trofimov, a former White Russian submarine commander from the toppled regime of Czar Nicholas II.² During the mighty tumult of the Russian Revolution, Trofimov commanded the Czar's submarine *Leopard*, and he used at least one of his previous naval subordinates when he later reorganized his troops in Cleveland.³ The duty of Trofimov's troops was twofold: investigate Communist activity in Cleveland and probe potential Silvershirt members for questionable backgrounds.

Trofimov and his former Czarist officers brought a certain international glamour to Cleveland's Silvershirts. As natural anti-Communists, their experiences helped to further galvanize the Silvershirts against the far left.⁴ Trofimov was an immense and imposing figure, large in stature and strongly built. Trofimov's personality was magnified with a keen intellect, illustrated best



The Silvershirt Legion's "Safety Council" for Northeast Ohio poses in uniform, circa 1936

Photo courtesy: Ramsey Library at UNC Asheville



**Lev Alexander
Trofimov**

*Photo courtesy:
Cleveland Press
Newspaper*

**Igor I. Sikorsky,
circa 1938**

*Photo courtesy:
Library of Congress*



through his many inventions. In Cleveland he distinguished himself as a writer and book reviewer for area newspapers,⁵ and was placed in charge of the Silvershirts' publicity.⁶ He was also a successful Cleveland businessman, serving as president and treasurer of the Product Development and Engineering Corp., 4601 Euclid Ave., and a number of other firms in Cleveland and Willoughby.⁷

For the eager ears of Cleveland's Nazi Silvershirts, Trofimov's life story was one of struggle, accomplishment and ultimately sadness on an epic scale. Trofimov graduated from the Czar's naval academy in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1913. When World War I broke out, he was on the navy's training ship. He remembered the historic developments well in August of 1914. "I was on watch that night. Suddenly the radio started flashing, 'Smoke, smoke, smoke.' That meant mobilize. I ran to the captain's cabin to tell him. A night or two later I was on watch again when the radio sputtered, 'Fire, fire, fire.' That meant that war was declared."⁸ After some time in service he found that battleships moved too slowly for him. A distinguished naval officer, Trofimov was then appointed captain of the submarine *Leopard*, with a crew of 45 men and five officers, stationed in Reval on the Baltic Sea.⁹

Between assignments he labored tirelessly in the laboratory, and in time invented a weapon that ultimately changed the face of submarine warfare: the depth charge. During his many undersea voyages he struck upon the idea that bombs could be submerged with a gauge to ignite them at a certain depth. He claimed that in his laboratory he rigged an old coffee can with dynamite, an ordinary revolver trigger and a little gauge. Though crudely constructed (and rather dangerous) by today's standards, the world's first "depth bomb" exploded just as planned. After further research he finally made his hazardous bundles explode at three different depths, painting them red, white and blue to distinguish them.¹⁰ Widely used during World War I, Trofimov's depth charge



Captain Lev Trofimov's Russian submarine *Leopard* is seen in operation, top, and maintenance, bottom, during the Russian Revolution

Photo courtesy: Russian Fleet, XXI Century webpage:

http://blackseafleet-21.com/news/1-01-2013_podvodnaja-lodka-tipa-bars



struck horror into the hearts of his fellow submariners on both sides of the conflict. It then became a mainstay of naval warfare the world over, and helped spell the doom for many undersea warriors in wars ever since.

As World War I raged on, the *Leopard* and other Russian submarines busied themselves by filling the Gulf of Riga (today surrounded by Estonia and Latvia) with submarine mines for their German counterparts. Yet in time the Germans overran the territory surrounding the bay, and constructed their own minefields. The Russians desperately needed a plan to penetrate the sea territory. Trofimov explained that the *Leopard* was then ordered to find a way out of the debacle. He said "our sub was assigned to find the channel through the bay that we knew the Germans had left. Mines float at a certain height. So I figured if we sailed underneath we could reach the mouth of the Dvina River, and start back to find the channel - which we did."¹¹ Returning from a similar journey one day the *Leopard* got quite a shock. As soon as the submarine landed the crew learned that the Czar had been overthrown and Vladimir Lenin had snatched power (it must have been a very long voyage). Trofimov's crew was horrified as if they were one, together they gasped "impossible."¹²

Struck with this terrifying news, immediately Trofimov begun planning to escape from the rapidly spreading tentacles of communism. For some unknown reason instead of directing his escape through Europe, he took the long way: Siberia. First, he intentionally demoted himself to squelch suspicion, forging his passport papers as merely a mechanic. However, after careful consideration, he gave up the lofty idea of calling himself "Jean Jacques Rousseau" because he worried that by some extremely slim chance "there might be an educated Bolshevik" that may stand in his way.¹³ Instead he settled on the alias "Jean Jacquoff" for a journey spanning thousands of miles. Fleeing through the great expanse of Russia, he spent some time in Moscow and Turkestan,

personally viewing his nation being torn apart by the calamity of the Russian Revolution. He even traveled through a section of China before he finally arrived in Vladivostok, the extreme southeastern tip of Russia. From there he got a fare to Tokyo, where he would meet the Russian naval attaché there. The attaché met Trofimov with a bit of humor, since he was the first exile in his office. When first catching sight of the displaced submarine commander, the attaché remarked “ah, the first of the birds.”¹⁴

As if his great flight through the gigantic expanse of Eurasia wasn't enough, he then traveled the world's two greatest oceans. Yet by leaving so much behind already, why did he travel all the way to New York City? In 1918 Trofimov arrived in New York to meet up with an old yet influential Russian friend. The former submarine commander and famous inventor arrived in America with only a toothbrush and 50 cents. In 1919 he met up with his Russian companion, Igor I. Sikorsky, a genius in airplane design, the inventor of the modern helicopter, and a fellow refugee from the Communists. Trofimov immediately became Sikorsky's assistant, and together they developed what became the sophisticated twin-engine S-38, a trans-oceanic plane that soon cleared the way for commercial air transportation around the globe. With admirable engineering success under his belt, in the 1920s Trofimov came to Cleveland.¹⁵

Making Cleveland his home, Trofimov received his Master of Science degree at the then Case School of Applied Science. At Case he became a member of the Gamma Phi fraternity, and served as the school's athletic director. Applying his mind to inventive machine work, he eventually held 38 U.S. patents. A noted Cleveland inventor, he opened the “School of Inventive Practices,” which actually taught invention as an engineering and mechanical art, and in which Silvershirt leader Susan Sterling was to later hold stock in.¹⁶ However, though Trofimov remembered his toothbrush and 50 cents, it appears that he left everything else behind . . .

including the love for his wife, Tamara, a member of Russia's sub-nobility. Tamara escaped Russia three years after her husband, suffering much during the Revolution. She did gain a position teaching at a school in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), yet was unable to make enough money to even buy food. It took three years for Lev to secure enough passage money for his wife and daughter, yet it unfortunately turned out that Cleveland wasn't the ideal place for romance. When they were first reunited, Tamara asked Lev if he had been faithful to her. A surprised Lev then shot back, "I asked her if she had been faithful, too, and then began the fight. We've never been able to get along since we've been in Cleveland." Things then worsened in 1926, when Tamara said that she found two letters and a diary, which showed that her international husband no longer cared for her. In his defense, Lev claimed that his wife "was given to quarreling," and was difficult to get along with. Yet Common Pleas Judge Samuel Kramer refused to divorce the couple, claiming there was insufficient evidence to grant one. At this news Lev, a notable engineer, inventor and former submarine commander, broke down in tears.¹⁷ However, a few years later they did officially obtain a divorce, although they had been separated for some time.¹⁸

By 1931 Lev Trofimov was clearly interested in politics. Claiming that he kept in touch with the exiled Russian nobility, he publicly blasted communism, charging that the Romanoffs were destined to be rethroned. By the early 1930s he already belonged to the Cleveland "Russian-American Anti-Communist League," and was a prime candidate for the Silvershirt following.¹⁹ Trofimov was first attracted to the Silvershirt movement through reading "Liberation," William Dudley Pelley's primary propaganda magazine. Trofimov frankly stated, "I found that Pelley had the most truthful information on the real situation, both here and abroad, that I had encountered."²⁰ Becoming an enthusiastic Silvershirt, Trofimov collected a crew of his displaced comrades,

and reorganized them as a formidable, armed fascist legion in Cleveland.

A naturalized American citizen, Trofimov was a fervent nationalist. Yet he believed he was seeing the symptoms of a coming revolution in America, and reorganized his troops to tightly monitor Cleveland's Communists. Well educated on Communist revolutionary tactics through first-hand experience, Trofimov stationed a number of his "lieutenants" in various Cleveland locations to probe Communist activity.²¹ Through his investigations, he believed in early 1934 that the Communists were poised to ignite a revolution soon. According to him, the Communists had already infiltrated all of Cleveland's city utilities, planning to leave the city impotent when they would attempt to seize power.²²

Trofimov's troops were under strict dictatorial control, blasting communism and fondling fascism, never seriously considering democracy as way out of the Depression.²³ Fearing the power of the Communists, the troops were ready for a fight. The troops, along with all other Cleveland Silvershirts, were kept well trained in rifle shooting. Silvershirt member Robert S. Tulis was active in the East Cleveland Rifle Club, and used its facilities to instruct all Silvershirts in the art of firearms.²⁴ Trofimov also had his own powerful Cleveland Silvershirt committee, and claimed that he had at least "two millionaires" and one local bank vice president on it.²⁵

Though Trofimov and his troops were military experts, some were also talented engineers.²⁶ Trofimov, viewing the chaos of Cleveland's Depression, thought that the dire situation would be remedied if America were run like a piece of machinery. Spoken like a true engineer, it seemed to him that the troubles should be mechanically broken-down into their independent parts, and then fixed by a method of attacking the point of trouble. He further

stated that such a process necessitated a strong leader, and that it was characteristic of Jews to create division in such work.²⁷

Trofimov and his troops provided the Silvershirts with investigative work into applying members. With possible enemies attempting to penetrate the Silvershirts as spies, Trofimov said he had the men and resources available to get the entire history of anyone in Cleveland.²⁸ Trofimov instituted a rigorous program for investigating prospective members. In fact, every new recruit was probed and then had to be vouched for by two active Silvershirt members. They then had to answer a set of questions relating to their reasons for wanting to join the organization. Always under a strong veil of suspicion, if a recruit passed these requirements, their application and picture were then sent to Pelley's headquarters to be approved by him personally.²⁹ To the Silvershirts such a thorough probe would not only reveal suspect organizations that the person may be a member of, but most importantly, if they were or were associated with Jews.³⁰ Even though Trofimov was never the official head of the local Silvershirts, his immense power and dominating personality made him appear to be the true Cleveland leader.³¹

By the summer of 1938, Trofimov had become fervently anti-Semitic, though he had expressed distrust of Jews as early as 1934. He said that America was plagued with unemployment, starvation, bread lines and discontent, and that it was all the fault of the "hidden enemy," the Jews. He claimed that now the "Jewish International Bankers" were plotting the same course for America as they had for Russia. Trofimov supported a "Buy Gentile" movement in Cleveland, where Silvershirt members would strictly boycott Jewish enterprises. He claimed that Cleveland department stores Higbee's and Sterling and Welch Co. were safe to buy from because they were not under direct control of the Jews.³² He also boasted about a truly frightening connection he had. By 1938, Trofimov had become very close to several high-ranking U.S. Army

and Navy officers in Washington, who could be “depended on” when the eventual “showdown” would occur with the Jews in America.³³

Like he predicted in 1934, by 1938, Trofimov claimed that America was once again on the verge of a revolution, yet it wasn't really the Communists that were rallying for a revolt this time, but the Jews. To him, it was the Silvershirts' duty to inform the public and expose the culprits behind the impending revolutionary movement. He stated that it was almost time that the Silvershirts operate in the open, that it was essential that the American public be educated on the true conditions. Yet with the help of the American people, Trofimov believed, one thing, and one thing only, could halt revolution: a sudden and dramatic exposure of the sinister Jewish ringleaders.³⁴ In preparation for this immanent takeover, Trofimov prepared for the worst. With the help of Carl W. Ohlson, then commander of the Silvershirts' Lloyd Garrison Post, Trofimov constructed “mobilization points” in Cleveland where “food and arms” were stored. Forming a semicircle around the city, it would provide the Silvershirts with the opportunity to quickly strike back when the Communists would attempt an overthrow of the government. Trofimov even urged that a special Silvershirt “high-powered motorboat” be ready to furnish communication lines between the eastern and western sections of the organization, by way of the Great Lakes, in the event that all other means of communication were disrupted. When confronted by the press about these “mobilization points,” Ohlson claimed that they were strictly *defensive* in nature, organized to put down a Communist revolution, not to stage one on behalf of the Silvershirts.³⁵ A strong speaker, Trofimov made it difficult to dispute his stance and plans when he charged that if anyone should be able to recognize the signs of an impending Jewish-Communist revolution it would be him.

By 1939, however, things had changed for Trofimov. Two situations arose that distanced him from the Silvershirt movement. On the one hand, his strong stance and coordination of Silvershirt troops in Cleveland apparently made “someone” infuriated. For reasons unknown, this survivor of the Russian Revolution was struck with fear because he believed that “someone” was out to “get” him. He therefore withdrew from active participation in the Silvershirts. On the other hand, his personal business interests began to infringe on membership in the pro-Nazi group. Trofimov was an engineering officer in various Cleveland mechanical firms, and he increasingly became acquainted with U.S. government officials in Washington over military weapons development. Especially after America entered World War II, Trofimov became close to officials in the U.S. Ordnance Department on highly secret war work, traveling to Washington personally about once a month (yet he more frequently met with Cleveland ordnance men). His background with the Silvershirts was revealed. However, after a brief interrogation by the FBI in Washington he was allowed to continue his work and connections unhindered.³⁶

Trofimov was not the only prestigious Cleveland immigrant from the fallen Russian Empire. Prince Valentine Demharanoff, a legitimate member of the outcast Russian nobility, also voiced his experience in the Russian Revolution. Attending a Silvershirt meeting in April of 1936, he truly appeared to be a man from another world. At about 40 years old, the light-complected, medium-built prince was dressed quite strangely. In an outfit that commanded attention, he was wearing a black coat, yellow shirt, tan suede shoes, a striped tie, and black tuxedo trousers. Coming to America, the prince visited Miami, Fla., and was astounded at the wealth of Jews there. He stated that it seemed they were the only people in America who could afford riches in the Depression. The prince said that there was a minority of Jews in Russia before the revolution, but that they were clever enough to successfully incite

the citizenry against the government. He claimed that he saw the very same thing happening in America. Caught in the tumult of revolution, the prince told terrifying stories about how he had personally seen many people shot. According to him, the Jews sent out large numbers of spies (all gentiles) to gain all knowledge available about the troubled situation in Russia and inflame the masses toward rebellion. Yet after the spies had divulged all known information the Jews systematically executed them.³⁷

As veterans of a regime that fell to communism, Trofimov and his subordinates were ideal additions to the Silvershirt program in Cleveland. Educated in military affairs, they were perfect for performing investigative duties for an organization that ardently feared Communist/Jewish infiltration and opposition. Though it is well documented that Trofimov was never a fan of Communists, it remains an enigma whether he really saw the Russian Revolution as being instigated by the Jews when he was amid Russia's chaos. Did he honestly see the Jews executing the Revolution, or did he come to the conclusion after being placed under the coordination of Hitler? Or did he reach such a conclusion after being subjected to William Pelley's "Liberation" (and other anti-Semitic Silvershirt propaganda) in Cleveland? Whatever the case, Trofimov and his troops appeared to be glamorous, international fighters against the evil plague enveloping the world, ideal appendages to the Silvershirts, who became a popular addition to Cleveland's high society.

THE DOCTOR & THE WRITER

The Cleveland Silvershirts were officially led by two prominent area personalities, Dr. Chester L. Doron, a local osteopath, and Susan Sterling, a former writer for *The Cleveland News* and *The Lakewood Post*. Through their combined leadership the Silvershirt program penetrated the high rungs of Cleveland

society during the chaos of the Great Depression. Under constant surveillance from their powerful enemies, the pair shrouded themselves in secrecy, often publicly downplaying, and sometimes outright lying, about Cleveland's Silvershirt organization and ultimate goal. In fact, the two were steadily scheming to secretly indoctrinate as many people as possible, in preparation for an eventual Silvershirt overthrow of America's government and democratic institutions. To them, and the Silvershirts in general, a Jewish-led Communist revolution was constantly around the corner, and they needed to ally as many people to the ideals of Nazism and anti-Semitism as possible.

Dr. Chester L. Doron, of 26122 Lake Road, Bay Village, served as president of the Silvershirts' Cleveland branch. He inherited the leadership of the group from the original Silvershirt organizer Alice Tucker West, and transformed the group from primarily a religious following to a formidable fascist political force. Finding much difficulty, *Cleveland Press* reporters called on Dr. Doron at his office at 424 Truman Building in 1937 to discuss his outlook and plans for the future. Acting as his assistant, Dr. Doron's wife, Mildred Doron, gave the reporters a confusing runaround before the doctor grudgingly appeared. As the reporters waited they entertained themselves by perusing the reading materials available on the office table. The periodicals included a magazine named "Character Reading," which covered issues of "astrology, numerology, chemical character analysis, graphology and face reading" (not exactly easy reading). Also a large file of the "National Republic" was present, whose Cleveland representative was Charles A. Kennedy, friend of Susan Sterling. After a long wait the doctor confronted his unexpected, and rather unwelcome visitors. Described as being a "tall, well-built man, nearly bald. Calm blue eyes peered out from behind gold-rimmed spectacles" when he finally appeared. When asked about the Silvershirts, he said the political group's proper name was the "Silver Legion,"



Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Dr. Chester Doron's yacht, *Twin Stars*

Photo courtesy: Cleveland Press Newspaper



Fenn College professor, Dr. Millard Jordan

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

Advertisement for Alice Tucker West's Tucker School of Expression

Photo courtesy: Plain Dealer Newspaper, September 2, 1934

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(which was not true). He stated that when the group held meetings all they discussed was philosophy, (which also was not true). He said that anyone could enter the group if they wrote to William Pelley for an application, providing that they were Americans and Christian. Asked if this policy prohibited Jews from joining, Dr. Doron stated that it did, yet asserted that it was "not a fair question." He said, "There is no reason why we should admit them any more than the B'nai B'rith should admit Catholics or Masons. We are not anti-Jew, however."³⁸ Evidence was to show quite the contrary concerning the Silvershirts, and Dr. Doron personally.

In leading the Silvershirts, Dr. Doron in no ways distinguished himself as being a friend of Cleveland's Jews. In one meeting, held in April of 1936, he stated that from the time of the Garden of Eden the Jews had only one God: the "dollar sign." He claimed that there was a sharp difference between Christians and Jews over the issue of religious outlook. He said that Christians viewed things in spiritual matters while Jews only thought about "material things" on Earth. It was because of such differences that the Jews were able to attain much power over the Christians. When it came down to it, he claimed, the Christians have been manipulated over the generations by the Jews, who have tied all worth and advances over the issue of wealth. He said that because of this situation the gentiles were entering a period of "enlightenment," when the truth behind the selfish Jewish designs was coming out. At this meeting Dr. Doron had a visitor, Martin Kessler, head of Cleveland's German-American Bund. Due to this, Dr. Doron announced at the meeting that the Cleveland Nazis (the Bund) were completely behind William Pelley. He said that at a recent Bund gathering in Harmony Hall, the members were told of Pelley's plans, and all the Nazis that were present cheered.³⁹

It was not a secret that the Silvershirts supported an overthrow of the U.S. government. In another 1936 meeting, Dr. Doron told members what they could expect after William Pelley

took power: a society similarly organized like that of Nazi Germany. Yet Dr. Doron's fascinating answer illustrated that though Nazism and Communism were at polar opposites of the world's political spectrum, they had much in common through repressive totalitarianism. Dr. Doron said:

All manufacturing, merchandizing, etc., would be controlled by the government. Each man would be paid by the government because he would be working directly for it. No one person would amass a fortune of over \$100,000. Each individual would be paid according to his value or the type of work he did. Doctors would give free medicine and would be paid a salary by the government. There would be no foreign trade except by barter, unless other foreign nations would take the same plan of government over. Each and every individual would make a decent living wage and there would be no suffering or want.⁴⁰

When asked where Jews would fit into this new regime, Dr. Doron stated that "the Jew would get the same treatment accorded everyone else, but he would not fare as well because he is not a producer but a schemer, and gets the other fellow to do the hard work while he figures ways and means to chisel and grope the public."⁴¹ Even though Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia had radically different views of society and mankind, Dr. Doron showed that the extreme tip of each wing were almost identical.

Dr. Doron became a master of organizing in secret, an ideal head of the Cleveland Silvershirts. Also referred to in the Silvershirts as the Cleveland area "liaison officer" to William Pelley,⁴² Dr. Doron did not cast himself into the public eye by being outspoken, possibly jeopardizing the inner workings of the

organization. Instead, he was often found at meetings allowing other Silvershirt members and special speakers to denounce communism and the Jews while he labored behind the scenes. Though he attended most meetings, he mainly concerned himself with recruiting new members and reorganizing the Silvershirts into stronger "Safety Councils."⁴³ Evidently foreseeing pressure from the press, Dr. Doron, acting on directions from Pelley, found it necessary by April of 1936 to organize these special councils to help the following grow faster by breaking them up into semi-autonomous units (though they still met en masse at times). So by the time he was finally confronted by the press in August of 1937, as to how often the group meets, Dr. Doron could say that they had "not had a meeting for months."⁴⁴ By design, this drastic reorganization allowed the Cleveland Silvershirts to grow in secret, each council leader receiving "discourses" prepared by William Pelley and disseminated weekly.⁴⁵ In this way Dr. Doron was able to hold power and delegate authority without over exposing himself to his enemies and the press.

It has been said that in the end men want little more out of life than to build their castles and then defend them. Dr. Doron, a Lake Road resident of Bay Village, evidently took this belief to heart. As any true Villager knows, land in Bay comes at a premium, and to build one's fortifications it is sometimes at the anger of the neighbors. Dr. Doron's typically Bay Village conflict started over a small two-foot wall he and his wife had erected, claiming it was about four inches on their property. Their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. P.G. Beremand, saw it as a nuisance and wanted it removed, saying it penetrated *their* property by 18 inches. The Beremands complained that the Dorons "warned us if we insisted that they move the other wall, which encroached on our property, they would build one as high as our cottage and shut off the view. We might as well be living next to a factory now." Indeed the Dorons were out for revenge. Branded by the neighborhood as a "spite

wall," the new obstruction towered at eight feet tall, the highest wall in Bay Village. As if to add insult to injury, the Dorons painted their mammoth construction white. When pressed, Bay officials said that the project did not violate any ordinances.⁴⁶

Also stereotypical of a Villager, Dr. Doron owned a yacht, and was an active member of the Cleveland Yachting Club in Rocky River. After World War II broke out, Dr. Doron volunteered for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Reserves, Flotilla 51. Commanded by Lt. R.P. Wilson, Flotilla 51 was completely made up of other yacht club members. Dr. Doron was a member of the Reserves for five months, serving with his 36-foot power cruiser, *Twin Stars*. However, fingerprints, photographs and other data on the members of the unit were routinely sent to the FBI. After an investigation into Dr. Doron's background, he was dismissed from service, labeled as "undesirable." Though there was no reason given for the dismissal, there was no doubt that it had to do with his leadership in the Silvershirts.⁴⁷ It is not a little shocking that Dr. Doron was not permitted to serve in the Coast Guard reserves because of his Silvershirt background, while Trofimov was allowed access to some of America's most important secrets during World War II.

Silvershirt leader Susan Sterling, (her real name was Elsie Theuer⁴⁸), of 16211 Detroit Ave., Lakewood, captured the brunt of the public's attention and criticism. An active member of the organization since it was founded in Cleveland in 1934, Miss Sterling, the "master councilor"⁴⁹ helped galvanize the Silvershirts into a complex, yet rigidly organized and fervently anti-Semitic organization. Miss Sterling had distinguished herself in the area as a newspaper writer for *The Cleveland News* and *The Lakewood Post* through the National Endowment for the Arts.⁵⁰ During the later Depression years, she worked as a reporter for the local Suburban Publishing Co., which was completely run by her relatives.⁵¹ Miss Sterling claimed she became interested in the Silvershirts through a

group supported by the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce: the violently anti-Communist "Secret Seven." Her "friend and inspiration" in the Secret Seven was Col. Hayden Eames, who later became a member of Miss Sterling's Silvershirt "military affairs committee." Col. Eames made no mistake about his beliefs when interviewed by the *Cleveland Press* in July of 1937. He stated:

You may think I'm crazy, but I know what I am doing. The Communist program is developing exactly along the lines laid down 10 years ago by the chief commissar of the Third International. Have you ever seen Senate Document 14? Well, that would make you open your eyes. I don't know how you feel; I know how cynical newspapers are, but some of us are beginning to awaken to the fact that we are going to have to fight to keep what we have.⁵²

When Miss Sterling joined the Silvershirts in 1934, she already had contacts with many high-ranking Cleveland area businessmen who fondly viewed fascism. Even at this early date, Miss Sterling said that 12 men, heads of leading Cleveland department stores, met in secret once a week in connection with the Silvershirts. Called the "Liberation Group," their meetings were kept secret.⁵³ Miss Sterling kept close with Cleveland's fascistic businessmen and professionals as she slowly cultivated a powerful Silvershirt following.

Miss Sterling viewed the American government as being run and manipulated by Jews and Communists. She stated in 1934 that she had personally visited Washington, and that it was full of Jews, running the government and all of its projects. She said that the Communists and Socialists were working through President Roosevelt, and that all the members of his "Brain Trust" were Communists and Jews. Yet she claimed that the Jews had centralized their control through the National Recovery

Administration, manipulating the American economy for their purposes. She complained that the Silvershirts had difficulty getting a foothold in Cleveland because of the strong Jewish population, yet through proper leadership it was now spreading quickly.⁵⁴

At first extremely popular among Cleveland's elite, the Association of Leagues Against Communism was created by Susan Sterling to initiate the area's successful and wealthy into the Silvershirt following. By July of 1937, Miss Sterling's Association of Leagues had 89 "units" and 450 members. Many prominent Cleveland personalities joined the Association of Leagues for its fervent stand against communism, while Miss Sterling constantly injected anti-Semitism into the meetings.⁵⁵ Though communism was a constant target, it was revealed that the cardinal objective of the Association of Leagues was to turn America into a fascist state.⁵⁶

Miss Sterling's plan was not just to gain important people into the Silvershirt following, but to ally as many businesses as possible too, thereby increasing the hold of the Nazi group over Cleveland industry and finances. After new members were indoctrinated into the Association of Leagues, and became comfortable with Miss Sterling, they were then brought over to the official Silvershirt following, and attended the secret meetings that she held in her home. She claimed to be accomplishing her aims through "education," and had intellectuals to help spread her doctrines. One important leader of the Association of Leagues was Dr. Kenneth Scott, professor of classical languages at Western Reserve University. So involved in Miss Sterling's group, Dr. Scott left Cleveland for a trip to fascist Italy, telling friends that his journey was to "coordinate" the work of the Cleveland group with similar organizations there.⁵⁷

The tentacles that Miss Sterling was able to spread through Cleveland's industry and society were enormous. Many heads and prominent officers of societies, businesses, and even the

government joined the fascist and anti-Semitic Association of Leagues. These included:

Air-Maze Corporation
The American Legion
Clark Controller Company
Cleveland Chamber of Commerce
The Cleveland Club
Daughters of the American Revolution
The Developing and Engineering Company
The Knights of Columbus (Tom Ryan chapter)
The Knights Templars
The Ohio Inspection Bureau
May Oil Heating Company
The National Guard
National Sojourners
The Parent-Teachers' Association
Republic Steel
Western Reserve University
*(and various Masonic bodies)*⁵⁸

Though Susan Sterling could not claim the official support of each enterprise, the body of officers that she constructed was enormous, and together they could wield an extreme influence over Cleveland society.

Miss Sterling secretly schemed the Silvershirt program through the Association of Leagues while blanketing press interviews with flagrant lies. She was known to distribute the violently anti-Jewish book, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, yet she claimed that her group was not anti-Semitic. Miss Sterling was asked if she was a leader of the Silvershirts by the press, she said no, even though she was often found around Cleveland carrying a large number of Silvershirt membership cards in her pocket. When

asked if she was even a member of the Silvershirts, she claimed that she couldn't be, "because they don't admit women." Yet Dr. Doron contradicted her statement, claiming that "certainly women can belong, anyone can belong who is an American and a Christian." She even went so far as to blast a friend of hers to look good to the press. Miss Sterling made the stunning statement that the Association of Leagues was also opposed to fascism, and that she personally "spies" on "Hitler agents in America." Chief among these "Hitler agents" was her friend Martin Kessler. She stated that she attends all German-American Bund meetings and makes complete reports on their "German activities." A bewildered Kessler claimed that he and Miss Sterling were friends, and that he had been a member of her organization for years. When asked by reporters what the activities were that she reported on, she changed the subject.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, over time her flagrant lies and backstabbing of old comrades severely tarnished her sterling reputation as a leader.

The dramatic rise of the Association of Leagues struck horror into the heart of Cleveland's Jewish population, and ultimately sent shock waves through Cleveland City Hall all the way to Washington. Cleveland's Jews dealt with the Bund and Silvershirts by steadily investigating their activities and sponsoring counter speakers when they found it necessary. Yet the striking ascent of the Association of Leagues was something that Cleveland's Jews believed they had to act on immediately; the Association of Leagues comprised an enormous amount of successful local business leaders, and if they could ally together in an anti-Semitic pact, it could possibly do the Jewish community great harm. An incensed Rabbi Armond E. Cohen, a representative of Cleveland's Jewish Center, sent scathing letters about the staunchly anti-Semitic organization to Cleveland City Hall and Washington, D.C., calling for investigations. Receiving the complaint, Cleveland Mayor Harold H. Burton recommended an inquiry into the group to City

Council. Burton cited the city's reputation as a center of friendliness and tolerance among races and religions,⁶⁰ and wanted "voluntary hearings" through Council to clear up "misinformation and suspicion of motives" between the two camps.⁶¹ Though City Council reviewed Burton's proposal, it found that it lacked the subpoena power to execute such a probe, and forwarded the request to the U.S. Civil Liberties Committee.⁶²

Branding Susan Sterling an important American fascist, the federal government sought testimony from her regarding American Nazism, only to find out for themselves how elusive she really was. In early December of 1937, a great mystery befell federal agents, a confusion the press called Lakewood's fascinating "Subpoena Susan Drama." It all began when federal agents for the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee went to the home of "Susan Sterling" in Lakewood to slap her with an impressive subpoena. They mistook her sister, Ruth Theuer, for her (she looked almost identical to her sister), and accidentally gave Ruth the subpoena. Ruth Theuer then rid herself of the summons after establishing her identity. The agents then turned over the subpoena to Deputy U.S. Marshals, who went back to the home and slapped it, again by accident, on Ruth Theuer. About a week later a rumor went flying through Lakewood that Susan Sterling had broken her leg, and was at Lakewood Hospital. The investigators then rushed to the scene with a man that knew Miss Sterling, but even he couldn't identify the woman. Soon the mystery began to unravel. After an irritated review of hospital records it was learned that the hospital had originally named the broken-legged person Elsie Theuer (aka Susan Sterling), but then someone changed the name to Ruth Theuer. Oddly enough, it was discovered that two different people wrote the first and last name of "Ruth Theuer" on the records. At the Lakewood Police Station a piece of carbon paper was found that probably was used to change the name of the injured person on a police report that ignited the latest commotion in the first place.

The investigators then called on a government employee who definitely could identify each sister by sight . . . their mailman. The woman was unquestionably identified as Ruth Theuer. The federal agents then left Ruth Theuer alone, for the last time, while her sister quickly gained the reputation among the investigators "as a combination of the Galloping Ghost and the Phantom of the Opera."⁶³ After all their running around, the investigators never found Susan Sterling.⁶⁴ Following the fiasco with the press and the embarrassment of being chased by investigators, Susan Sterling simply disappeared from public life.

THE DARK RELIGION

In a fascinating, and yet terrifying, blend of traditional Christianity, dark mysticism and rabid anti-Semitism, the Cleveland branch of the Silvershirt religion was an astonishing combination of love and hate. Often referred to as the "Silver Legion," the group primarily attracted Cleveland's elite through the leadership of "Chaplain" Alice Tucker West. Mrs. West conducted the quite fashionable Tucker School of Expression, 2066 E. 107th St., in Cleveland's University Circle district. The Tucker School taught the techniques of public speaking to children and adults, and became the major recruiting station for the Silver Legion's congregation during the Depression. In 1934, the year Mrs. West founded the Cleveland Silvershirt movement, she hinted at an "understanding with Berlin."⁶⁵ The originator of the city's Silvershirt movement in February of 1934, Mrs. West fostered a religious flavor to the organization. Yet her leadership was only temporary, because she stated that at the beginning there were 14 other Cleveland officers in the group, all men. She said, "I realize a man should be at the head of such a movement,"⁶⁶ and later handed leadership over to Dr. Doron while she continued to lead the religious side of the movement.

Under Mrs. West's leadership, Cleveland's Silver Legion followers believed that America was locked in an epic struggle between the forces of good and evil. To them, the good-hearted Christians were trying to overcome the sinister designs of the Jews, referred to as the "Antichrist." Sooner or later, they claimed, these two competing camps would erupt in a gargantuan battle.⁶⁷ In steady preparation for this immanent conflict, Mrs. West sought to awaken Cleveland's "thinking class" to what she believed was the menacing, undermining threat of the Jews and communism.⁶⁸

Permeated with alleged supernatural power, mystical signs and predestination, Mrs. West's followers believed they were on a religious crusade to save America from evil. Claiming the Bible was the firm foundation on which the Silver Legion was based, Mrs. West wanted to provide people with a "more logical and reasonable form of religion." In study sessions, the mostly female members would review works on physics and metaphysics, and discuss issues of astrology, fatalism (believing everything is determined by fate), theosophy (various occult beliefs), and reincarnation. To them, human souls originate from the "cosmic space," and live in people for a predestined time. At the moment of death the soul is again reunited with the cosmic space until it is needed once more in a human body. At the infinite level, the souls' destinations were determined as if they were on a gigantic scale, weighing the worth and goodness of the soul in question before it would once again fall toward its new home. Quite the convincing preacher, Mrs. West said that she discussed the Silver Legion's religious beliefs with a Roman Catholic, and although the mystical power and strong anti-Semitism went against all he had been taught, he believed it was "the most logical reasoning" he had ever encountered in religious matters.⁶⁹

The Silver Legion's followers even had their own "Golden Hour" church service. An odd mixture of Christianity and anti-Semitism, the Golden Hour was held the second and last Sunday of

each month at the Tucker School. One such service, on Feb. 26, 1939, illustrated this fascinating combination. Beginning promptly at 4 p.m., many traditional Christian hymns were sung by an all-female choir. The congregation joined in the singing, which was followed by a solo from two of the choir members. The two then held a recitation before the homily. Mrs. West then began her sermon, dealing entirely with Christ and the Jews. She preached that the Jews had been troublemakers in the time of Christ as they were now. Ardently trying to prove her point, she then blasted that the Jews had not changed their role in society over the ages: they had been distrusted as hypocrites then as they were now. At 5:30 the service was over, at which time the collection plate was passed.⁷⁰

Mrs. West was known as a very powerful and persuasive speaker. Possessing all the needed attributes of a good leader, she had a dominating personality while still appearing pleasant. Showing genuine concern for other people's troubles, she also was infused with a deep belief in the doctrines of the Silver Legion.⁷¹ The cause that she instilled in her followers was of deep hatred for Jews and Communists, while supporting the supposed greatness of William Pelley. In April of 1934 she claimed that Jews controlled all the big money in America, and they had manipulated the leadership in government, businesses, schools, newspapers, and even people's homes. She also warned that a great tide of communism was about to envelop America. She said that Cleveland's Communists had permanently erected a red flag over their headquarters recently, and that America was soon to be in great peril. To her, unless Americans rise up and fight these foes, before long the United States would have itself a Soviet government.⁷² Maintaining a captivating personality, Mrs. West eventually won over all of the Tucker School's faculty (and many of the students), to her religious mission.⁷³

Mrs. West's zealous Silvershirt crusade was propelled by alleged supernatural power. She claimed she was often given guidance by the voices from beyond. A master of spiritual connections, Mrs. West was well known in the ranks of the national Silvershirt leadership. She kept written correspondence with William Pelley, who often sought her advice. Searching for answers beyond the traditional means, she would review her mysterious contacts in the "unknown world" and report back to him. So engrossed in the fanatical superstitions of the Silver Legion, Mrs. West claimed she was given a divine mission with eerie similarities to the story of Jesus Christ. The spiritual world allegedly told Mrs. West that conditions for Cleveland's Christians were in great danger, and that she needed to take a firm stand for the faith. One day in 1934 the spiritual world supposedly contacted her and said that she was chosen to be the medium through which Cleveland's Christians would be enlightened. However, by becoming this medium she would suffer great pain and hardships, yet in the end it was necessary for the health of Christianity, it was "the cross she had to bare." Soon the great religious challenge materialized in front of her. By 1934 Mrs. West was the leader of the Silver Legion, yet the following had much trouble getting started. Out of nowhere a man with clear references and a seemingly honest desire to support the Silver Legion called on Mrs. West at the Tucker School. Mrs. West spoke with the man for hours, relaying everything she knew about the Silvershirts and Silver Legion.

The next day the *Cleveland Press* carried a large story about a prominent Cleveland woman who operated a private school in the University Circle area, and that she was the head of the Nazi movement in Cleveland. With her identity soon revealed, Mrs. West was in trouble: many of her students were Jewish. With this public revelation, all of the Tucker School's Jewish students

WOMAN HEADS NAZI-LIKE CULT IN CLEVELAND

"Silver Shirts" Mobilize on
Basis of Racial An-
tagonisms

"Shock troops" of the Silver Shirts were mobilizing in Cleveland today.

Enlistments in the Nazi-like forces were being received at local headquarters, a private school near University Circle.

Inquiry at the school disclosed that the woman who heads it is the leader of the movement here and that certain members of her faculty and student body officer it. She readily outlined the revolutionary program.

Interest in the Silver Shirts was quickened here last Saturday when Dr. John Dewey, professor emeritus of philosophy of Columbia University, speaking at the City Club, assailed it as un-American.

Organized Week Ago

Earlier in the month the Silver Shirt version of the Nazi philosophy was attacked by Richard E. Guststadt, national director of special activities for the B'nai B'rith, in a speech at the Temple.

In today's interview the woman chieftain said first organization of the local forces had taken place a week ago after months of preliminary meetings. She said plans for a large rally to be held at an undesignated hall a week from next Saturday.

Her account pictured the movement as a frankly revolutionary, militaristic enterprise, backgrounded with a weird intermixture of orthodox Christian teachings and occult practices.

racial and religious antagonisms, the movement is reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan of a decade ago, although the Silver Shirts take both Catholic and Protestant into membership, placing the "anti" emphasis on the Jew and Communism, and membership is not secret, she explained.

In this respect, and because of its strong militaristic flavor, the organization is suggestive of the Nazis of Germany under Adolph Hitler. The local leader intimated existence of an "understanding" between Berlin and Asheville, American headquarters.

The silver and blue-clad uniformed forces, calling themselves variously the Silver Shirts, the Silver Legion of America, the Christ Horde, the Christian Militia, and Pelley's shock troops, are intent upon suppressing Jewish activities in this country and in seizing the reins of government between now and 1936, visitors at the East Side school are told.

Shirt on Recruits

The Cleveland leader declined to state the size of the organization here. She indicated enlistment activities are going forward in more than a score of states, mainly in the south and west.

Some of the doctrines expounded at headquarters here are openly revolutionary, while others carry assurance that there is no intent to change the present structure of the government but rather to seize it and place its administration in the hands of Silver Shirts, with Chief Pelley at the head.

Like the Klan, the Silver Shirts formerly charged an entrance fee of \$10, but this was discontinued last month when a drive for "a million new members" was started. Recruits now pay \$1 a month to their local posts, plus \$10 for a uniform made up of service hat, silver shirt with scarlet "L" on shoulder, standing for "Liberation," blue corduroy trousers, leggings and tie.

This is for the "infantry." Cavalry troops have been formed in the West with headquarters at Los Angeles.

This "Nazi-Like Cult" article about the Cleveland Silver-shirts, and others like it, quickly allowed government law enforcement to see the group as a dangerous, subversive entity.

Photo courtesy: Cleveland Press Newspaper, Feb. 28, 1934

promptly dropped out. Yet Cleveland's Jewish community offered Mrs. West a way out of her debacle. At a special meeting, called by prominent Cleveland Jewish leader Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, it was decided that Mrs. West should be given the chance to renounce her anti-Semitism and support of Nazism. If she was to do so publicly, Rabbi Silver promised that all of her self-exiled students would return. Recognizing that this was the challenge that the spiritual world had warned her about, Mrs. West refused to recant. The next few days articles and pictures appeared in Cleveland newspapers, stating that Mrs. West was using the Tucker School as a front, and that she was an agent of a foreign power. Her school suffered terribly. Losing almost all her students, it cost her about \$6,000 in revenue. An outcast in the community, she was forced to move her school to 11430 Belleflower Road. Yet the publicity indeed had a dual effect. Now that her true views were public knowledge, she began collecting believers much more easily: people found a home for Nazism. Though it took a few years, Mrs. West eventually built up a large fascist following.⁷⁴

The press' coverage of the Silvershirts in 1934 had a major impact on the organization, both good and bad. When Mrs. West was first in the *Cleveland Press*, the newspaper described her following as a "Nazi-Like Cult" in the headline. Telling of the anti-Semitism and flagrant militarism of the movement, it boldly compared the Silvershirts to the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazis of Germany. The article also unveiled the Cleveland Silvershirt's 1934 scheme for a revolution. While also attempting to suppress Jewish activities and influence, it was unveiled that by 1936 Mrs. West's forces planned to have done their part to overthrow the American government, the final dream of the national Silvershirt movement.⁷⁵ Another cause for the Silvershirts' program and ideals to be made public was an alleged threat made to a Fenn College professor. Only after about a month of its founding, the Cleveland Silvershirts were under scrutiny again after a threat letter was received by

Millard L. Jordan, a professor of sociology and economics at Fenn College, Cleveland. Professor Jordan was conducting a class on the study of Communism when he received a letter signed "The Silver Shirts," and which warned of "punishment" if he did not amend the studies. Professor Jordan scoffed at the letter, saying "We intend to continue class discussions of leaders in the world's thought. What we intend to do is to present every side. Indoctrination of any sort is absolutely taboo at Fenn. Our students make up their own minds." Yet even though professor Jordan notified the authorities about the letter, he stuck to the tradition of academic knowledge. Though ignoring the threat, he surprisingly stated that he would gladly surrender one of his class periods to a Silvershirts representative for a presentation of facts on their organization. When contacted about the letter, Mrs. West claimed that she knew nothing about it.⁷⁶ Importantly, these and other articles helped to inform the public about the Silvershirt following, warning those not amiable to the group, while firmly giving Cleveland fanatics a right-wing cause that suited their purposes.

Though strongly anti-Semitic, the Silver Legion also had its friends in the Cleveland religious community. Two open supporters were the Rev. W.F. Dickens-Lewis, an area Presbyterian preacher, and Sherman Anderson, an outspoken and colorful evangelist of Cleveland's "Truth Center." In July of 1937, Anderson spoke in two *Cleveland Press* interviews about the Silvershirt program and the encroaching nature of communism in Cleveland. He stated that the city "has three left-wing newspapers and we'll start our own if they don't quit playing with the Communists." Yet when Anderson discussed the Silvershirts and the Jews he erupted in an "evangelistic fervor." His black eyes flashing, it appeared as though he was mounted behind a pulpit when he began gesticulating and screaming. He fervently declared:

I am not a Silver Shirt, officially. But if you want to know about the Silver Shirts why don't you write directly to their headquarters at Asheville, N.C., to Mr. Pelley, their national commander? I happen to know something about the Silver Shirts, and they have been grossly misrepresented. Why don't you read Mr. Pelley's book *No More Hunger*? Mr. Pelley is a brilliant man. People say he is anti-Jew. Well, if he is he has good reason to be. I am not against a Jew any more than I am against a Catholic. I am against any Jew who is un-American, but I would say the same thing about anybody, whether he is a Jew or not.⁷⁷

Though hardly an outspoken anti-Semite, Anderson was adamant about the alleged spread of communism in Cleveland. A religious leader, he saw communism as a very real threat to constitutional rights in America. Though he claimed he was not a Silvershirt, Anderson cast himself with them in a struggle he viewed as so intense that the American government was powerless against it.

In another spirited interview, Anderson declared "This is a fight for Americanism, for the principles of the Christian religion which these Communists would destroy. We will be prepared for any eventuality." And that "You can be sure that we will be ready, if the time ever comes when the constituted authorities cannot handle the situation." Though once again denying membership in the Silvershirts he indeed knew "a great deal about them." He then snapped back, saying, "What if I told you I was a member of the Silver Shirts? You would immediately make something out of it. Just because an organization wears shirts people try to pretend it is out to destroy the country. They try to hang a name on it and then kill it by ridicule."⁷⁸ Though speaking softly about the Jews it was clearly evident that at least the ideas of the Silvershirts had won over Anderson. To him, the Cleveland Communists posed a real

threat to American religious freedom, and he was more than willing to fight hard against them.

FLYING TOWARD FANATICISM

The impact of Nazi propaganda on Cleveland's Silvershirts was extreme. Though the chaos of Cleveland's Great Depression had brought members into this Nazi group, it was the bombardment of propaganda that pushed some of them toward fanaticism. Searching for salvation from the Depression's deprivation, some Silvershirts, in the dark of night, would crouch around their short-wave radios and listen to the voices from Germany. A world away, these voices told the tales of a seemingly indestructible Nazi Reich, a nation and people that had overcome the hardships of *their* depression, while conquering supposed Jewish plots. Riveted by the stories of a nation reborn, some Cleveland Silvershirts took their own extreme view of the events unfolding around them. The fear in their hearts erupting, some Silvershirts, in turn, told their own fantastic and terrifying stories of alleged Jewish conspiracies in America, illustrating the far-flung impact of Nazi Germany's mighty propaganda arsenal.

Martin Gall operated the Mystic Book Shop, 313 Caxton Bldg., the center for the distribution of the Silvershirts' Nazi and anti-Semitic propaganda in Cleveland. Typifying the belief that the Silvershirts were out to save Americans from the brink of disaster, a brazen sign confronted visitors to Gall's bookstore, titled: "Don't commit suicide before you visit the Mystic Book Shop." Other decorations were more fascinating. Mounted on the wall of the bookstore was a large picture of Jesus Christ, yet to one side of the picture was a sign bearing the slogan "Don't Die Dumb," and on the other side a sign begged the visitors to "Read the Unwritten History."⁷⁹ Described as being a boisterous, tobacco-chewing gambler,⁸⁰ Martin Gall was originally a meat cutter and food

salesman, later becoming a grocer. While working for Kraft Cheese as a salesman he converted many over to anti-Semitism, charging that Jews were planning to eventually annihilate the Christians.⁸¹ In cooperation with his brother, Mike, and his father-in-law, both Silvershirts, he owned a grocery store at 5320 State Road, Parma.⁸² From the outlook of a grocer, Mike Gall was horrified at the thought that vitamins and health foods were becoming popular. He claimed that Jewish companies were poisoning these foods, intentionally ruining the health of gentiles.⁸³ Their grocery store was the first place they distributed Silvershirt propaganda, taking the firm stance with outside salesmen, "no purchase of literature, no orders."⁸⁴ Martin Gall eventually acquired his bookstore through Cleveland's Air-Maze Corporation, which had many Silvershirts in its leadership, and which also lent office/retail space to Susan Sterling and other Silvershirt leaders.⁸⁵

Operating his bookstore, Martin reveled in distributing violently anti-Jewish material. He gleefully promoted the book *The Talmud Unmasked*, which supposedly revealed horrific Jewish plots against Christians. Yet Gall issued a stern warning when handing out the book. He told a purchaser that if they intended to read it they should have themselves locked into a room. According to Gall, the material in the book was so powerful that it would ignite a deep rage inside the reader until they exploded, desperately wanting "to go out and kill every Jew in sight."⁸⁶ Also available was the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which supposedly outlined a Jewish plot to overtake the world.⁸⁷ Yet Gall had many other pieces of propaganda for sale as well. A full range of current and past anti-Semitic material was also available, as was a major collection of William Dudley Pelley's works, German-American Bund material, the Silvershirts' publication "Liberation," and various other works obtained through Nazi Germany.⁸⁸ Yet hidden from public view, but available upon request, were manuscripts printed by the Rev. Charles Coughlin, including the pamphlet, "I Take My



Silvershirt member Martin Gall, left, is shown at work. Below, a man reads materials at the Mystic Book Shop, 313 Caxton Bldg., Cleveland, in 1940.

Photo courtesy: Cleveland Press Newspaper, Feb. 14, 1940.



Stand," in which Coughlin defends a group charged with conspiring to overthrow the U.S. government. Also was Coughlin's booklet, "The Rulers of Russia," which charged a Jewish banking house with financing the Russian Revolution. A piece of locally written material was available too, the book *Gods in Embryo*, by Mildred Doron, wife of Silvershirt president Dr. Doron.⁸⁹ In speaking with Gall, most of his conversations related to his books, which he felt free to quote for hours at a time.⁹⁰

Gall was disgusted at the chaos of Cleveland's Great Depression, and sought to learn the "real facts" about Nazism. He would gather great amounts of information from his short-wave radio, tuning in to Nazi Germany, and escaping the manipulation of America's "Jew controlled" press.⁹¹ Gall's "real facts" about Nazi Germany were fascinating. According to Gall, by May of 1940, Hitler had a technological marvel to pummel any enemy. This alleged weapon was a super ray gun, which rendered all equipment and guns useless while not affecting people. Yet it was Hitler's intelligence network that was a true wonder to Gall. According to him, Hitler had the ability to gather all information about his enemies' power and defenses. To do this, Hitler was justified in his first move to "clean out" the German Jews, and proceed toward world domination without their "subversive hindrance."⁹² Gall also made a charge against the U.S. government bordering on treason. In July of 1940, he claimed that there was a "Jewish Communistic Army" under the protection of the U.S. Justice Department and led by Leon Trotsky, then in exile in Mexico. This menacing Communist army was poised to overthrow the American government, according to Gall.

Gall was not the only Silvershirt that felt the mighty effects of Nazi propaganda. By 1940, Silvershirt member Louis K. Birinyi was an ailing, unsuccessful lawyer that viewed America as bordering on an abyss of revolution and invasion from Jewish interests. Birinyi was born in Hungary and came to America when

he was about 18. He studied law at Western Reserve University and settled in the Buckeye Road section of Cleveland, then a strong Hungarian enclave. Birinyi had been a rabid anti-Semite since the early 1920s, yet it was through the Silvershirts that he became comfortable with others holding similar views. Though by the end of 1940 he was still under 60 years old, his face was drawn and haggard, his hands and knees trembling with a sickened fervor. His outspoken dislike for Jews had been disastrous for his business, though he never conformed his views.⁹³ The Depression had cast a gloomy cloud over Birinyi's life, and the Silvershirts allowed him the opportunity to voice his opinions while he was moved by their penetrating propaganda.

Every night a group of Silvershirts met in Birinyi's office to listen to his short-wave radio, hearing the sounds of the Fatherland. Following their radio sessions the Silvershirts would discuss world politics and the fate of America. The impact of the Nazi propaganda was so extreme that the sickly Birinyi developed the most outrageous stories. By late 1940, one of his favorite allegations was that America was about to be invaded from the most unlikely of places: Canada. He charged that England was rapidly stockpiling war materials in Canada, and coercing Japan to attack from the east, leaving America open to invasion from the north. The English Jews had advanced so far as to plan which parts of a conquered America would be given to the various invaders, according to him. Spain was to get the southern states, Russia to get Alaska and the Northwest, and England to gain the East Coast. He also alleged that the English Jews had penetrated the White House and Congress, and that something drastic needed to be done. He planned to circulate a petition calling for the removal of Congress.⁹⁴

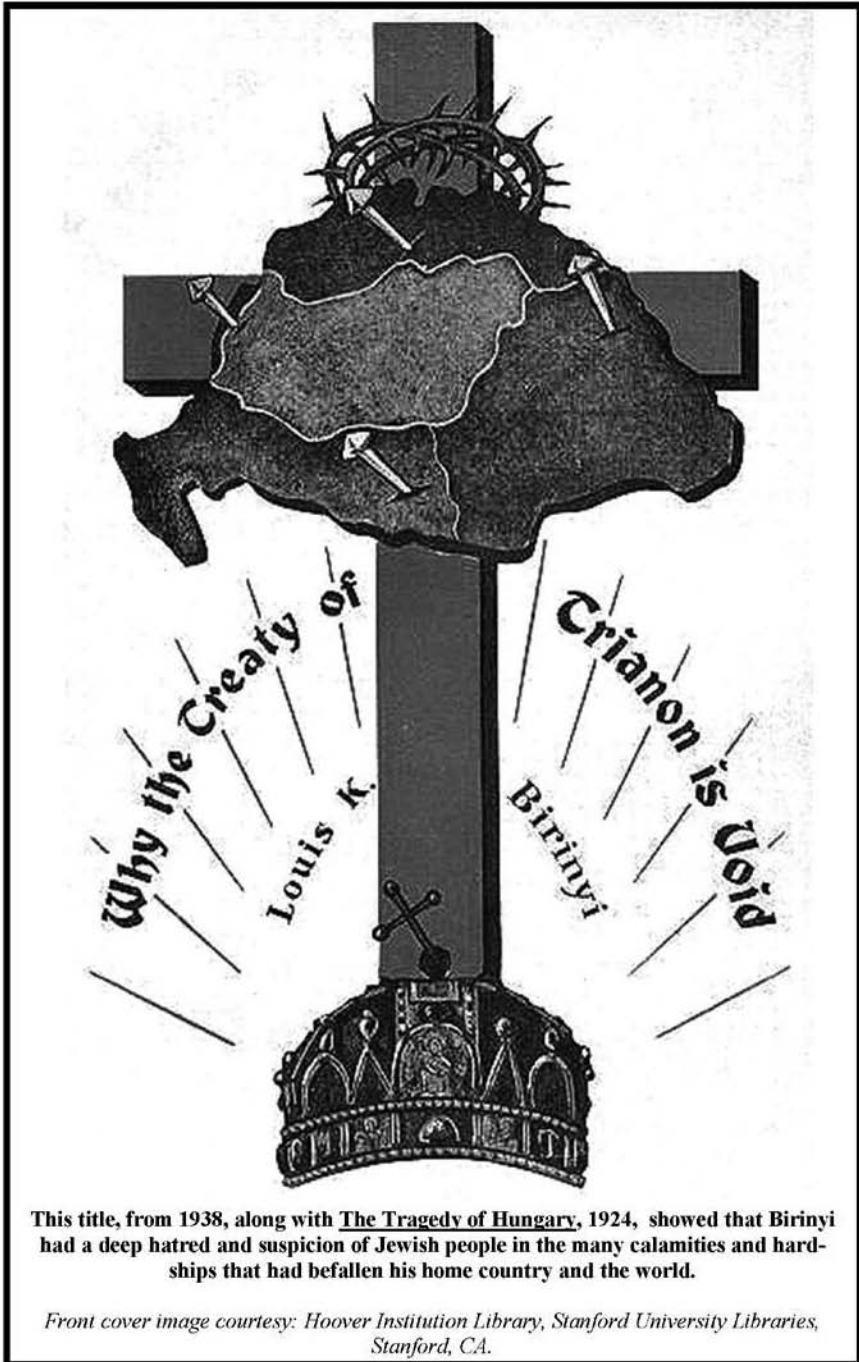
Interviewing Birinyi was no easy task. When talking about his beliefs, he would plummet into a trancelike state, faltering between seemingly aimless rambling and passionate assertions. Often drifting off subject and combining absurd examples for his

arguments, it was not always easy to grasp his stance. Yet his grand scheme for a way out of the Great Depression was clear. Sometimes appearing to be dreaming, he reclined in his office chair and outlined a radical plan for a new world order.⁹⁵

The supposed knowledge gained through Silvershirt and Nazi propaganda helped Birinyi construct a tyrannical plan for America. To Birinyi, drastic times called for drastic measures, and to him it meant that the wholesale slaughter of peoples would be justifiable for economic and societal prosperity. Though complex, his plan allegedly would provide food for everyone, and every able-bodied person would be given a job and security. The sick and disabled would also be provided for. Yet his plan was strict when it came to those outside of society. He blasted that “leeches and parasites” would better themselves or be killed. Any group or race of people attempting to hinder his plan would also be exterminated. And as a drastic move, it needed a strong leader, yet they had to be a foreigner, because a foreigner accomplished the work done in Germany: Hitler.⁹⁶

Though a flagrant supporter of Nazi Germany and Hitler, Birinyi was a Hungarian. A proud advocate for Jewish persecution, Birinyi claimed that Hitler had only copied the anti-Semitism of Hungary, and received his first support from the Hungarians.⁹⁷ Staying with his cultural roots, Birinyi attempted to form a special Silvershirt outpost, a Hungarian Lodge, in the Buckeye Road section. Birinyi was not alone in this endeavor. He gathered further support for this proposed outpost through Hungarian Silvershirt members John “The Baron” Krasnok, William Toth and David Vegh, all of which lived in or near the Buckeye Road section.⁹⁸ The attempt was to draw off the fierce anti-Communist attitude of many Hungarians in Cleveland. However, the plan never fully materialized.⁹⁹

Newell B. Wolf, 1074 Yellowstone Road, Cleveland Heights, was a Cleveland Silvershirt so fanatical about the cause that he was



kicked-out of the organization. In his twenties during the Depression, Wolf was greatly affected by the hardships, and sought out people to blame. Wolf was introduced into the closed Silvershirt meetings through Hans Febel, who operated the Silvershirts' Garrison Post in his remodeled garage. Upon investigation into the causes of the Depression, Wolf surmised that it was all the fault of the Jews and the "International Bankers" which plotted the ruin of America as they lined their pockets.

Even though he was educated, Wolf had difficulty holding employment. The troubled job market combined with his outspoken anti-Semitism forced him to often reside with his parents on Yellowstone Road. However, he was close to the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, and eventually obtained a position through them as a stenographer at the Equitable Life Assurance Society in the Union Commerce Building. Since he had a fair amount of time between jobs, he decided to educate himself on the reasons behind the Depression. Instead of allowing propaganda to come to him, he fervently sought-out literature in all mediums to find the answer to societal ills. His digging led him to study World War I and the period between 1918 and 1929. To him, the literature showed that the Jews had meticulously planned the whole era; the war, the prosperous 1920s in America, and the sudden crash in 1929 were all orchestrated to best suit their greed. Wolf then turned to studying Judaism, and supposedly found that throughout recorded history Jews had caused nothing but trouble. He blamed the Jews for Europe's depressions, and stated that the Jewish control of the media, finances and commerce were ultimately doomed. Wolf blasted that Europe's Christians were engaged in a revolution against Jewish control of their societies (especially in Germany, Italy and Spain), and that the revolution was bound to envelop America as well.

Still living with his parents, he ran into considerable friction at home. Since his parents often did not see his point of view, he

stayed as a roomer in various private homes until he discovered enough "evidence" to convince them about his ardent stand. His plan worked too well. Convincing his father, he again moved home. He then joined the Townsend Club, and decided to do traveling lecture work. However, he had so won over his father, Elmer Wolf, that Newell believed he was being hindered in his work. During an interview the Jews were only slightly defended when Elmer flew into a violent rage. He exploded in a savage burst of profanity, smashing every person of the Jewish race and faith with "every vile word in the English language; he damned them for 15 minutes and damned every newspaper for permitting itself to be controlled by Jewish propaganda." So engrossed in hating the Jews, Newell believed he had to escape his father because he had slipped beyond reason. Newell Wolf also became a roomer again because he had to be alone to prepare for his Townsend tour. In the end, his lecture circuit for the Townsend Club covered five states.

Joining the Silvershirts, Newell Wolf was immediately suspected of being a spy. The suspicion came from the fact that his father was a newspaper man (an advertising salesman for *The Cleveland News*), and through his last name, which merely *sounded* Jewish. Under scrutiny, he went to several closed meetings at Hans Febel's Garrison Post. Passionate about the Silvershirts' program, he took many notes and seemed overly willing to help build up the Silvershirt movement in Cleveland. The troubled Wolf, who had joined many groups to find his true comrades, had finally found people which he believed realized the truth about the situation in America and the grip that the Jews had on society. Yet several weeks after Wolf became a regular Silvershirt member, he attended a meeting where Roy Zackery, adjunct to William Pelley, was the main speaker. Wolf was ardently writing notes when the other Silvershirts approached him and asked him to explain what he was doing. As he was distracted, his briefcase was secretly searched, and it was discovered that he was a member of the Chamber of

Commerce. Immediately suspected of being a spy, he was cast out of the meeting hall.

Branding the Silvershirts as too narrow-minded, he joined various organizations, both right and left-wing, attempting to find one that suited him while gathering information on those he opposed. He joined the Young Communist League of America; the Technocrats; the Mothers Peace Clubs; the League for Peace and Democracy; and the America First Club. Wolf claimed he joined Communist groups, which he called "the tools of the Jews," to understand their methods of attack, so he could better fight them back when the time came.

Ousted from the only group where he truly felt at home, Wolf was pushed into fanaticism. In raving about the supposed manipulation of the Jews, in March of 1941, he reached a climaxing fervor. His face began changing colors, and his demented eyes appeared ready to pop out of their sockets, yet his hatred leapt fourth like flames from a mighty inferno. He blasted that the Depression was going to worsen as the Jews accumulated more power and control. In his fury he said that if things were not changed the Jews would become the masters of the world, and the gentiles the slaves, never able to fight back. He howled:

Clean out Washington, run the Jews and the Jew lovers from the federal offices, untie ourselves from international finance, and our troubles will be over. There will be no anti-American groups; there will be no reasons for such groups, as the American wage earner will have a security that he now knows is missing, therefore, the average wage earner joins this group and that group, looking for an out, and he will never find it, as long as Washington is controlled by foreign Jews and banks.¹⁰⁰

This young Silvershirt was trying to describe America's dire situation, but instead seemed to be telling his own troubled story. What remains fascinating about Wolf, unlike Gall and Birinyi, is that he supposedly reviewed works on the Depression from many sources, yet came to the same conclusion as the others: that the Jews were to blame for the Depression, and only a battle against this supposed evil power would render America free from the chains of deprivation. Wolf was incensed by propaganda researched by himself, and was moved toward fanaticism by his own hand.

RALLYING OVER REVOLUTION

Mobilizing the troops to combat an alleged immanent Communist revolution, and rife with a fervent hatred for Jews, the Cleveland Silvershirts sponsored rallies to awaken the public to what they saw as a terrifying threat to American society. Even though the Silvershirts had reorganized their group to foster a greater following in secret, they found it necessary to occasionally gather the most faithful together. The first meetings were open to the public, but became more secretive as America edged toward World War II. These rallies, spread over a period of years, helped remind the Silvershirt members that they would be called upon when the time came to physically combat a Communist revolution in Cleveland.

On April 1, 1936, the Cleveland Silvershirts sponsored a rally at the Hollenden Hotel, secretly organized by Susan Sterling, with national leader William Dudley Pelley as the featured speaker. Pelley appeared at the speaker's table in uniform, a black military looking coat strapped by a Sam Brown belt. After outlining the founding of the Silvershirts, Pelley said the Jews had accumulated so much wealth and power that soon they would begin firing their

“hired men,” President Roosevelt, Hoover and Borah, and show the world the real “power behind the throne.”

Pelley then made the bold prediction that the Jews would overthrow the American government in June, about three months away. The Jews would then declare a dictatorship, only lasting about 10 days. “At the end of those 10 days the people will be so aroused and conditions will be such that I’m glad I am a gentile,” Pelley said. He rambled about a mystical figure “17,” which had appeared 29 times during his life, and which allegedly was a period of years before he was to rise to power. He then explained and elaborated on the timing of the Communist revolt, claiming that by 1953 (17 years from now), “the Jews would be on the run,” and his own “Christian Commonwealth” forces would seize control of America.

An important meeting for the Cleveland Silvershirts, Dr. Doron and Cleveland Bund leader Martin Kessler were present along with over 100 others. The entire audience were young, successful business people, most of which seemed to be ethnically German. A national Silvershirt publication later applauded the strong German attendance at the meeting. It said that “The Chief’s first campaign audience was heavily attended by the German-American of Cleveland who everywhere [is] grasping the significance of the Christian Party movement as a factor in their own racial safety in this country.” During the meeting the audience was extremely attentive to Pelley’s discussion, and appeared “very sincere” in following him. Following the talk a collection basket was passed, into which nearly everyone deposited large bills.¹⁰¹

On Sept. 12, 1938 the Silvershirts held a rally downtown at Hotel Colonial. The speaker was Roy Zackery, national field commander and direct adjunct to Pelley. Though the meeting was not secret, it was restricted to those that knew the Silvershirt members who had come earlier. Zackery entered with a silver-colored shirt emblazoned with a large, red letter “L” sewn onto the

left breast. Zackery explained that the letter stood for "Liberation," the official Silvershirt publication, and (ironically) also for "Life" and "Love."

Zackery's two-hour speech was a conglomeration of attacks and praise, rallying the roughly 80 Silvershirts to combat communism with violence. Yet he first pleaded with the audience to "help return this Christian country to a Christian government." He then warned that:

The time is coming when you and I will be called on to take back our land from the alien despoilers and let Christians run this country. Communism cannot be licked by the ballot. We can stop communism by organizing a courageous, vigilant force of Christian men which will go out and stop this octopus in its tracks.

Communism must be stopped by physical force, the only thing Communists recognize. If our forefathers had not had the vision to have guns in their houses, the things this country stands for could not have come to pass.

He praised, not surprisingly, Adolf Hitler, who had removed Jews from public offices, "a job that had to be done," Zackery said. He also applauded Presidents Andrew Jackson and Woodrow Wilson, and surprisingly, Congressman Martin Dies of Texas, chairman of the Un-American Activities Committee.

However, in his lengthy address Zackery also blasted various people and groups. He assailed President Roosevelt's administration, claiming that it was completely linked to communism and "international Jewish financiers." He also attacked Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, chairman of the Civil Liberties Committee, Congressman Samuel Dickstein of New York,

the Committee for Industrial Organization, and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America.¹⁰²

On June 12, 1939 about 100 Silvershirts rallied at Harmonie Hall, 2512 Franklin Blvd. The guest speaker was Mr. Messer, one of the White Russian officers under Lev Trofimov.¹⁰³ The chairman of the gathering, an unnamed red-haired fellow, announced horrifying news. He said that plans must be hastily constructed to battle an immanent Communist revolution during the summer. He claimed "information in my possession," (probably from Trofimov's forces) led him to believe that a revolt was coming soon. Strangely enough, this red-haired doomsayer said he knew exactly what course of action the Communists would take in Cleveland. He claimed that they would first sever all telephone and telegraph services, then bombard all large buildings with smoke bombs. Lastly, the reds would commandeer local taxicabs, riding through the streets with machine guns seized from the National Guard and local police departments.

With this alleged knowledge coming to light, Messer had to place this impending revolt in the broader national context, and inform Cleveland's Silvershirt troops how to fight back. Yet while Messer began bellowing to his fellow followers, *Cleveland Press* writer William Miller reported a frightening sight: "Lean and gaunt, Mr. [Messer] held one hand on his hip as he talked in a reedy, effeminate voice. His face was cadaverous, cheeks sunken, mouth a tight line, eyes burning like coals in their deep recesses." Messer blasted that Zionism was the root of communism. He assailed ex-Congressman Harold Mosier, who, Messer said, at a recent gathering of the Young Americanist League had "denounced fascism, Nazism and communism, but did not mention the worstism of them all . . . Judaism." Messer then rattled off a list of high-ranking U.S. officials that had supposedly been murdered just when they were about to tell the truth about Jewish control of the government.

What were the Cleveland Silvershirts to do in such a terrifying crisis? Messer explained that the troops were to infiltrate arms plants to make sure that Communists could not sabotage them. Speaking with a sharp accent, and marching about in "military precision," he explained that in the event of revolution the Silvershirts should establish connections with all local munitions plants and workers, and become friendly with members of the National Guard. Mr. Bammerlin, a "hulking, beetle-browed giant of a man," and president of the Silvershirts' 4-L Club lodge, said that Silvershirts must be ready to rise in arms against the Communists when the time would come, and be able to recognize the dire situation at hand. He said that "It may come in the form of another bank holiday; or stock market crash, or it may come legally through the New Deal without anyone realizing what has happened." Bammerlin drew a frightening picture of Cleveland in a revolt. He stated that "The unenlightened will go downtown through the streets, but we, the enlightened, will know better than to go down there and get shot down. We will get together with others like us and make our own plans." Paraphrasing President Roosevelt, Messer concluded the meeting by stating "I'll see you in the fall if there isn't a Communist revolution."¹⁰⁴

By early 1941, Cleveland's Silvershirt organization had been pummeled by their opposition, and severely dwindled membership necessitated that meetings be kept under a dark veil of secrecy. On January 16, 1941, such a gathering was held, many of its attendees riddled with fear, suspicious of being monitored by the FBI and Jewish groups. Once again the speaker was Roy Zackery, who now tied Jewish plots to government agencies while telling of the slow demise of the Silvershirt following.

The meeting was extremely secretive, and the organizers went through great pains to insure that it was kept as covert as possible. The Silvershirts first met in small groups at various Cleveland area homes, with only a few key people in the scheme

knowing where the meeting was to take place. One such gathering place was the home of Martin Gall, 3918 Riverside Ave. The Silvershirts then crowded into as few cars as possible, so that at the destination there were not many cars in the vicinity, minimizing suspicion. After traveling by a "devious route," they arrived at a large house at 1426 Arthur Ave., Lakewood. Though the home was well lighted for the meeting, all the shades and curtains were drawn. The two large rooms in the front of the home were removed of their furniture and knickknacks, and collapsible chairs and coat racks awaited the faithful. About 45 people eventually made it to the gathering, filtering in through small groups.

Penetrating the secret meeting was an overwhelming fear that they were being watched, and at least one present suspected another attendee of being a spy. The members earnestly believed that their homes and businesses were under constant surveillance by the FBI or Jewish groups, and that their car licenses have been recorded and their phone lines tapped. One present, Hugh Stanley, even stated that he had been "accosted by gangsters," and that spies were constantly trying to infiltrate his business. Yet Stanley had served in the U.S. Army Intelligence Service during World War I in Germany, and he claimed that he had "definite proof" that there were plots against him now. When he was in Germany for seven months, however, he said a couple "black marks" were placed on his Army record for certain activities he participated in.

Professor Sassaman, of Western Reserve University, was another nervous attendee, yet he was suspicious of a man *in* the crowd. Even though Martin Gall asked the gathering not to mention Sassaman's name outside, the professor was still worried. Sassaman noticed a young man who appeared to be alone in the room, and after discussing the matter with a Silvershirt leader was still not satisfied, believing the stranger to be a newspaper reporter. An irritated Sassaman scoffed, "Well, if this meeting is plastered all

over the newspapers and our names listed, that is where it came from.”

During the course of Zackery’s speech it became readily apparent why this meeting was so secretive. He first discussed the national Silvershirt following, saying that it would be completely reorganized, and renamed “The Fellowship Press.” Zackery said that William Pelley would not be officially connected with the following anymore, and that the printing press would be moved from Ashville, N.C., to Noblesville, Ind. He affirmed that as an organization the Silvershirts were effectively dead.

Though Zackery had blasted the Jews and the U.S. government before in Cleveland, now he fused the two together in alleged sinister conspiracies. He discussed the Jewish “House of Rothschild,” and how in 1933 they supposedly bankrupted Germany on purpose to seize land and money. Zackery extended this particular conspiracy to the U.S., where he claimed the “Jew International Bankers” also assisted in plotting an evil design to manipulate American currency. According to Zackery, the Jews imported a gigantic amount of gold into the U.S., and through scandalous manipulation, hoarded it inside Fort Knox, Ky., guarding it with a small army at government expense. He also blasted the U.S. immigration service, making the astounding claim (which he allegedly saw himself) that large ships would arrive in New York City and unload thousands of Jewish refugees. These refugees, since they were Jewish, would pile into taxicabs and just drive away into the city while non-Jewish foreigners had to be subjected to Ellis Island’s hardships and government red tape.

Though Zackery blasted the government and its policies throughout his long speech, nothing compared to what his conclusion actually was. With these (and many other) conspiracies coming to a head, he claimed that there was no longer any democracy left in the U.S. government. He said that the government was completely totalitarian, and he referred to

President Roosevelt as a dictator. To him, after all the trials and tribulations, the Constitution was dead. Yet he told of the new phoenix rising. Through his sources he allegedly learned that within six months the Nazis would have the English trapped in the Mediterranean by seizing Gibraltar through “secret manipulation” with Francisco Franco, dictator of Spain. Germany was also poised to capture the Suez Canal soon. After explaining the details of this supposed masterful strategy (yet without disclosing his source) he remarked, “Maybe I am speaking out of turn, but you may as well know.” Through an intelligent and forceful speech his conclusion was that eventually Nazi Germany would conquer the world.¹⁰⁵

PEARL HARBOR

By 1941 Cleveland’s Silvershirt organization had been smashed by their enemies, the press, and the government, although remnants surprisingly continued to limp along throughout World War II. By this time, almost all important Silvershirt leaders had fled the group; Lev A. Trofimov abandoned the organization’s police force to help coordinate U.S. arms manufacturing; Dr. Chester L. Doron refocused his time on his medical practice while serving in the Coast Guard reserves; Alice Tucker West dropped her anti-Semitic spiritual crusade and moved to California; and Susan Sterling, embarrassed by the press, and hunted by the government, retreated from public life. The only remaining leader of any consequence in Cleveland was Martin Gall. Though his Silvershirt bookstore had gone bankrupt, Gall kept close to William Pelley, and took it as his duty to coordinate the remnants of Cleveland’s once formidable Silvershirt Legion.

After years of Silvershirt gatherings, where paranoid plots of Communist revolts and elaborate Jewish conspiracies were supposedly brought to light, by 1941 the following had lost its heart, with only small, secret meetings at Martin Gall’s home being

the important action. True enough, the special committee organization of the Silvershirt following allowed them to operate in secret, continuing their small discussions while under increasingly immense pressure from the government. Other Silvershirt committees also continued to meet, though much smaller in number, and lacking the charismatic leadership of Trofimov, West, and the other former leaders. Never faltering in their stand that Communists and Jews were out to ruin America, the Silvershirts told of how the most fiendish plot yet had allegedly unraveled: the bombing of Pearl Harbor. However, other military developments were discussed as well, illustrating a firm belief that in the end, Hitler would be victorious.

During one meeting in September of 1941, Gall and the other members discussed the fall of the Soviet Union's mighty Leningrad. One attendee found it amusing that the Allies were trying to raise funds to fight the Germans, while the Nazis were powerful enough to fight their struggle without help. All present readily admitted that the Soviet forces were drastically inferior to the great Nazi war machine. Gall scoffed that in merely a few days the city bearing the name of the world's most famous Communist was destined to fall into Nazi hands. He asserted that Hitler didn't need the help of Italian armies, that the Nazis could handle the situation alone.¹⁰⁶ In the end, Gall could not have been more wrong about Leningrad. True, the German onslaught was atrocious, yet after 900 days of siege the city was finally saved from the Nazis in January of 1944. Overcoming all odds, Leningrad's defenders endured every hardship except the humiliation of defeat.

In March of 1942, Gall and other Silvershirt members made a special trip to Noblesville, Ind., to visit "the chief," William Pelley. In a later meeting, Cleveland Silvershirt Hugh Stanley explained that at the gathering Pelley told his remaining faithful that the bombing of Pearl Harbor was, not surprisingly, a horrific Jewish plot orchestrated by the U.S. government. Pelley claimed that he

became close to several U.S. Navy officers that were stationed at the base when the Japanese struck. He said that Admiral Richardson resigned his post after being ordered by Washington to pull America's entire Pacific Fleet into the harbor. Yet in his place, Admiral Kimmel, a Jew, hastily called as many ships as possible into the harbor right before the attack. Furthermore, these officers claimed that every Japanese aviator that was shot down had precise maps as to where all American ships would be located, top secret information that only Washington could know. According to Pelley, the officers believed that they were double-crossed by Washington, and therefore refused to fight for America in her time of need.

After talking with Pelley, Cleveland's remaining Silvershirts became momentarily reenergized, developing a fresh conspiracy about one of their enemy's grip on America. Stanley warned that there are about 60,000 Spanish Communists in America, after having been thrown out of Spain. This gargantuan horde allegedly went through Mexico and invaded the U.S. through El Paso, Texas, and other border cities. Claiming they were Mexicans, this Communist legion then became employed in Pennsylvania steel mills. Finding a new home, these angered exiles then formed themselves into "squads and companies," ready for action at a moment's notice. Gall stated that things were reaching a boiling point in America, yet applauded the Spain's dictator Francisco Franco, who ousted the undesirables from his land in the first place. Gall found it admirable that Franco only began with 50 men and won a fascist revolution.¹⁰⁷

Though Silvershirt membership had severely dwindled, members were added to the following from the ashes of Cleveland's German-American Bund. By the time of the Bund's demise, the two Nazi groups had become so intertwined that they often operated as one organization. They shared the same meeting arena, Harmonie Hall, 2515 Franklin Ave., and cooperated in

distributing each other's propaganda. The groups also held "picnics" together at a farm located on the corner of Pearl and Pleasant Valley Roads in Middleburg Heights. Dissemination of propaganda was a mainstay of these meetings, as were fiery Nazi and anti-Jewish speeches. During at least one picnic, local Bund head Edmund Wax served as an "honored guest." Wax made sure that funds be obtained weekly through the German government not only was put toward assisting the shrinking Cleveland Bund, but the city's Silvershirt following as well. With both Nazi groups suffering from a host of troubles by this time, the members of the organizations linked together, sharing notes and sometimes swapping leaders, so that if one group were to be abolished the other would carry on.¹⁰⁸

The unifying force between Cleveland's Silvershirts and Bund was Hans Febel, who was an active member of both groups. A skilled craftsman, he opened his own small institution, the "Trade Art School," at 1548 E. 32nd St. Febel received massive amounts of propaganda from fascist and Nazi groups around the country, and filtered them into Cleveland. He also kept abreast of emerging Nazi groups, and did his best to keep in contact with them. By 1938, Febel became the Cleveland's East Side commander of the Silvershirts' Lloyd Garrison Post. The meetings for the post were then held in a remodeled garage in the rear of his home.¹⁰⁹

Bund and Silvershirt member R.A. Schatz illustrated why he believed the Bund following so rapidly collapsed in the later 1930s. He said that the main drawback to anti-Jewish and even Communist groups is that they always insisted on flying foreign flags and wearing uniforms. Schatz claimed that he had always been opposed to Bund members displaying Nazi flags or wearing uniforms in public or at social functions. He said that the Bund began placing members in uniforms "to act as guards and display power," because there was a growing problem with German Communists at meetings. However, outsiders began calling these

uniformed detachments “Storm Troopers,” and continuously linked them to Hitler, which did great harm to the Bund.¹¹⁰

During the course of World War II, the Silvershirt following steadily dwindled, and even Gall began to lose interest as he involved himself in a shady business deal. Gall became interested in a grocery store that his father-in-law, Mr. Wladyka, operated at 5320 State Road, Parma. Always the salesman and gambler, Gall cunningly manipulated the system of food rationing. Lacking much education, Wladyka was bewildered as the rationing of food products began, and debated about whether to stay in business. At that time Gall, who was then representing the Cleveland Provision Company as a salesman, called on Wladyka often, and somehow managed to send much merchandise to the store. As goods became scarcer, Gall confronted Wladyka, stating, “Boss, let’s go into business.” Even though Gall had little to no money or credit, he became partners with Wladyka. With experience in sales, and known as being a “loud-mouthed individual,” Gall bluffed wholesalers into believing that the pair needed much more merchandise than they really necessary. Even though the pair could never hope to sell as much as they took in, Gall backed the purchases through Wladyka’s credit, which was excellent. Gall ordered everything available, and the operation began looking more like a warehouse than a neighborhood grocery store. Becoming the hot spot for shopping in the area, the store offered customers whole cases of products, while other stores only had a few cans. Gall even developed his own sales strategy that helped the business grow. He used “tie-in” sales, where he told customers that if they wanted what was for sale they had to spend a little money,” which made the operation prosper. Yet by 1945 business had dropped considerably, and Wladyka was tired of taking orders from Gall. Wladyka wanted to leave Gall and start up his own grocery store in Parma. Gall had accumulated enough money to

pay-off Wladyka for his share in the business and run the store on his own.

In all that Gall involved himself with it remains an enigma what his real designs were. On the one hand it was discovered that in his dealings with the Silvershirts he was constantly targeting his sights on how much money he could pull in from the often wealthy and influential following. On the other hand he was a genuine, ardent follower of William Pelley, and when push came to shove, he even testified on behalf of his beloved "chief." Gall and his brother Michael testified during Pelley's trial in Indianapolis. Martin Gall's only connection to the proceedings, which he admitted, was that he was a distributor of the Silvershirt publication "Liberation." However, after the Silvershirt following had slipped considerably, and not much money was coming into Gall's pocket, he abandoned the group. It was finally confirmed in late 1945 that Cleveland's Silvershirt organization was completely dead.¹¹¹ A terrifying product of Cleveland's Great Depression, the elitist Nazi Silvershirts, who cultivated a fervent distrust for Jews and Communists and prepared their following for an immanent revolution, had announced their last conspiracy.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ "Says No Silver Shirts Here, but Carries Member Cards," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 2, 1937. Of note, although one organization under William Dudley Pelly, the following would call themselves a multitude of names, including "the Silvers," "the Silvershirts," the "Silver Legion," the "Association of Leagues." To make it easier, the author just refers to them as what they termed their "Silvershirt Legion."

² "Silvershirts: Silvershirts in Cleveland," League for Human Rights records, Western Reserve Historical Society Library, Container 4, Folder 3. When researching Lev Trofimov it must be kept in mind that since his name was rather ethnic it was often misspelled in the documents (a situation the author of this book can relate to). For example, in the League for Human Rights records his last

name appeared as “Trofiman,” “Trafimow,” and “Tofimov,” along with sometimes being spelled correctly. The League also misspelled his first name as “Leo.” On only one occasion *The Cleveland Press* misspelled his last name as “Trofimova.” Also, the League for Human Rights discovered that he had been a White Russian (an ethnic group situated in today’s nation of Byelorussia). In the press he was merely called “Russian,” though this was sometimes a general term for subjects of the Russian Empire. Even though many people in this gigantic nation were not ethnic Russians, they were often so labeled.

³ “Tucker School of Expression,” League records, Container 5, Folder 6, April 25, 1934.

⁴ “Silvershirts,” League records, Container 4, Folder 3.

⁵ “211 Reports,” League records, Container 5, Folder 6, June 6, 1938.

⁶ “Tucker School of Expression,” League records, Container 5, Folder 6, April 21, 1934.

⁷ “211 Reports,” League records, Container 5, Folder 6, June 6, 1938, and “Lev A. Trofimov,” *Cleveland Press*, Jan. 27, 1965.

⁸ Agnes Holmquist, “Russian Here Thinks Soviets Will Fall, Romanoffs Return,” *Cleveland News*, Sept. 11, 1931.

⁹ *Ibid.*, and William Miller, “Research Expert, a Russian Native, Aids Silver Shirts,” *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 30, 1939, p. 14.

¹⁰ “Russian Here Thinks Soviets Will Fall, Romanoffs Return.” It is of note that Trofimov is not currently credited with inventing the modern depth charge. The inventor of the device was not known or investigated for decades after World War I. Yet the British Museum of Naval Firepower gave credit, not surprisingly, to one of their own. The British inventor Herbert Taylor is currently credited with the invention. <http://www.explosion.org.uk/restor.html>.

¹¹ “Russian Here Thinks Soviets Will Fall, Romanoffs Return”

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, and “Knows Russia,” *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 28, 1930.

¹⁵ “Russian Here Thinks Soviets Will Fall, Romanoffs Return,” and “Lev A. Trofimov,” *Cleveland Press*, Jan. 27, 1965, and biographical page on “Igor I. Sikorsky,” <http://www.sikorskyarchives.com/siksky2.html>, maintained by the Igor I. Sikorsky Historical Archives, Inc.

¹⁶ “Russian Here Thinks Soviets Will Fall, Romanoffs Return,” and William Miller, “Research Expert, a Russian Native, Aids Silver Shirts,” *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 30, 1939, p. 14, and “Lev A. Trofimov,” *Cleveland Press*, Jan. 27, 1965, and William Miller, “Acrotorque Co. Engineer Was Silver Shirt Member,” *Cleveland Press*, Sept. 16, 1944.

- ¹⁷ "Russian Couple Denied a Divorce," *Plain Dealer*, (both editions), Feb. 25, 1926.
- ¹⁸ "Lev A. Trofimov," *Cleveland Press*, Jan. 27, 1965.
- ¹⁹ "Russian Here Thinks Soviets Will Fall, Romanoffs Return"
- ²⁰ William Miller, "Research Expert, a Russian Native, Aids Silver Shirts," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 30, 1939, p. 14.
- ²¹ "Tucker School of Expression," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, April 25, 1934, and "'Front' Not Active in This Vicinity," *Cleveland Press*, Jan. 16, 1940, p. 12.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ "Silvershirts: Silvershirts in Cleveland," League records, Container 4, Folder 3.
- ²⁴ "Martin Gall: S.F.M. Reports," League records, Container 6, Folder 1, Dec. 12, 1945.
- ²⁵ "Acrotorque Co. Engineer"
- ²⁶ "Silvershirts: Silvershirts in Cleveland," League records, Container 4, Folder 3.
- ²⁷ "Tucker School of Expression," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, April 25, 1934.
- ²⁸ "211 Reports," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, June 6, 1938.
- ²⁹ "Tucker School of Expression," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, April 25, 1934.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ "Silvershirts: Silvershirts in Cleveland," League records, Container 4, Folder 3.
- ³² "211 Reports," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, June 6, 1938.
- ³³ "Acrotorque Co. Engineer"
- ³⁴ "211 Reports," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, June 6, 1938.
- ³⁵ "'Front' Not Active in This Vicinity," *Cleveland Press*, Jan. 16, 1940, p. 12.
- ³⁶ "Acrotorque Co. Engineer", and "Research Expert, a Russian Native, Aids Silver Shirts," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 30, 1939, p. 14, and William Miller, "FBI Told Engineer Was Silver Shirt," *Cleveland Press*, Sept. 17, 1942, p. 7.
- ³⁷ "Minute Men: Cleveland Operating 7751," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, April 8, 1936.
- ³⁸ "Says No Silver Shirts Here, but Carries Member Cards," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 2, 1937.
- ³⁹ "Minute Men: Cleveland Operating 7751," League records, April 6, 1936, Container 5, Folder 6.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² "211 Reports," League records, June 6, 1938, Container 5, Folder 6.
- ⁴³ "Minute Men: Cleveland Operating 7751," League records, April 1, 1936, Container 5, Folder 6, and "Minute Men: Cleveland Operating 7751," League

records, April 6, 1936, Container 5, Folder 6, and "Minute Men: Cleveland Operating 7751," League records, April 8, 1936, Container 5, Folder 6.

⁴⁴ "Says No Silver Shirts Here, but Carries Member Cards," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 2, 1937.

⁴⁵ "Hitler Linked to League Units," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 7, 1937.

⁴⁶ "Neighbors Cry 'Spite' as Brick Fence Rises," *Cleveland Press*, May 6, 1946.

⁴⁷ William Miller, "City's Ex-Silver Shirt Boss Is Dropped by Coast Guard," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 29, 1942.

⁴⁸ "Subpoena Susan' Drama Has Federal Agents Dizzy," *Cleveland Press*, Dec. 17, 1937. Also of importance is that the alias "Susan Sterling" was quite a clever pun. Of course, the last name was a play on words with the standard quality for silver, in obvious connection with the Silvershirts. Yet also clever was the initials for the alias, "S.S.," which also served as an abbreviation for "Silver Shirts."

⁴⁹ "Says No Silver Shirts Here, but Carries Member Cards," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 2, 1937.

⁵⁰ "Tucker School of Expression: 404 Reports," League records, April 21, 1934, Container 5, Folder 6.

⁵¹ "Minute Men: Cleveland Operating 7751," League records, April 3, 1936, Container 5, Folder 6, and "Susan Sterling Formed 'Association of Leagues,'" *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 7, 1938.

⁵² "Civic Leaders Members of Anti-Communist League," *Cleveland Press*, July 30, 1937.

⁵³ "Tucker School of Expression: 404 Reports," League records, April 21, 1934, Container 5, Folder 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ "Civic Leaders Members of Anti-Communist League," *Cleveland Press*, July 30, 1937, and "5 Groups Rule Drive Here on Communism," *Cleveland Press*, July 31, 1937, and "Silvershirts: Leagues to Combat Communism," League records, (no date), Container 4, Folder 3.

⁵⁶ "Susan Sterling Again In News," *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 8, 1937.

⁵⁷ "Civic Leaders Members of Anti-Communist League," *Cleveland Press*, July 30, 1937, and "5 Groups Rule Drive Here on Communism," and "Silvershirts: Leagues to Combat Communism," League records, (no date), Container 4, Folder 3.

⁵⁸ "Susan Sterling Again in News", and "5 Groups Rule Drive Here on Communism," and "Silvershirts: Leagues to Combat Communism," League records, (no date), Container 4, Folder 3.

⁵⁹ "Civic Leaders Members of Anti-Communist League," *Cleveland Press*, July 30, 1937, and "5 Groups Rule Drive Here on Communism," *Cleveland Press*, July 31,

1937, and "Says No Silver Shirts Here, but Carries Member Cards," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 2, 1937.

⁶⁰ Burton's assertion was not exactly accurate. During the period of the Great Depression, Cleveland was one of the most racially and ethnically segregated cities in the nation.

⁶¹ "Burton Urges League Probe," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 12, 1937.

⁶² "Ask Probe by U.S.," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 26, 1937.

⁶³ "'Subpoena Susan' Drama"

⁶⁴ "Susan Sterling Formed 'Association of Leagues,'" *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 7, 1938.

⁶⁵ "Hitler Linked to League Units: Silver Shirt Meeting in Hollenden Was Arranged by Miss Sterling," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 7, 1937.

⁶⁶ "'Silver Shirts' Leader Says he Died, Returned," *Cleveland Press*, March 1, 1934.

⁶⁷ "Tucker School of Expression: 404 Reports," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, April 21, 1934.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Alice Tucker West: 114 Reports," League records, Container 4, Folder 3, May 8, 1942.

⁷¹ "Tucker School of Expression: 404 Reports," League records, Container 5, Folder 6, April 17, 1934.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "Alice Tucker West: 114 Reports," League records, Container 4, Folder 3, May 8, 1942.

⁷⁵ "Woman Heads Nazi-Like Cult in Cleveland: 'Silver Shirts' Mobilize on Basis of Racial Antagonisms," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 28, 1934.

⁷⁶ "'Silver Shirts' Threat Probed," *Cleveland Press*, March 30, 1934.

⁷⁷ "Civic Leaders Members of Anti-Communist League," *Cleveland Press*, July 30, 1937.

⁷⁸ "5 Groups Rule Drive Here on Communism: Secretary Boasts of Backers; Some Named Members Indignant in Denial," *Cleveland Press*, July 31, 1937.

⁷⁹ "Loyal Pelleyite Isn't Too Bookish," *Plain Dealer*, Feb. 15, 1940.

⁸⁰ "Martin Gall: S.F.M. Reports," League records, Dec. 12, 1945.

⁸¹ "Mystic Book Store - Martin Gall: 318 Reports," League records, March 7, 1940, Container 5, Folder 6.

⁸² "Silverhirts: Silverhirts in Cleveland," League records, Container 4, Folder 3.

⁸³ "Mystic Book Store - Martin Gall: 318 Reports," League records, March 7, 1940, Container 5, Folder 6

⁸⁴ Ibid.

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- ⁸⁵ "Silvershirts: Silvershirts in Cleveland," League records, Container 4, Folder 3.
- ⁸⁶ "Mystic Book Store - Martin Gall: 318 Reports," League records, March 7, 1940, Container 5, Folder 6
- ⁸⁷ "677 Reports," League records, Oct. 19, 1941, Container 6, Folder 1.
- ⁸⁸ "Mystic Book Store - Martin Gall: 318 Reports," League records, March 7, 1940, Container 5, Folder 6, "Martin Gall: 318 Reports," League records, May 20, 1940, and "Martin Gall: 318 Reports," League records, April 15, 1940, and "Silver Shirts Open Shop Here," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 14, 1940. Also of importance, Gall lost his bookstore in 1940, yet continued to sell propaganda from his home at 3819 Riverside Ave. By this time he had an enormous amount of propaganda, valued at at least \$5,000. His collection included all of the literature that William Dudley Pelley ever published.
- ⁸⁹ William Miller, "Silver Shirts Open Shop Here," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 14, 1940.
- ⁹⁰ "Mystic Book Store - Martin Gall: 318 Reports," League records, March 7, 1940, Container 5, Folder 6.
- ⁹¹ "Martin Gall: 318 Reports," League records, May 20, 1940.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*
- ⁹³ "Louis K. Birinyi: 114 Reports," League records, Dec. 26, 1940.
- ⁹⁴ "Ibid., and "Louis K. Birinyi: Buckeye Road Silver Shirts," League records, June 30, 1941
- ⁹⁵ "Louis K. Birinyi: Buckeye Road Silver Shirts"
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁷ "Louis K. Birinyi: 114 Reports"
- ⁹⁸ "Silvershirts: Silvershirts in Cleveland," League records, Container 4, Folder 3.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁰ All information from last citation found in "Newell B. Wolf: 114 Reports," League records, March 29, 1941.
- ¹⁰¹ "Hitler Linked to League Units," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 7, 1937, and "Minute Men: Cleveland Operating 7751," League records, April 1, 1936, Container 5, Folder 6. It is of note that Martin Kessler was never mentioned by name. The writer of the League report only referred to him as "a short stocky man," who was "head of the 'Nazi' party in Cleveland."
- ¹⁰² "75 Silver Shirts Rally Downtown," *Plain Dealer*, Sept. 13, 1938.
- ¹⁰³ "Silvershirts: Silvershirts in Cleveland," League records, (no date), Container 4, Folder 3. The following newspaper article in which Mr. Messer is mentioned erroneously referred to him as "Mr. Sesser."
- ¹⁰⁴ William Miller, "Tells Silver Shirts to Contact Arms Workers Here," *Cleveland Press*, June 13, 1939, p. 2.
- ¹⁰⁵ "S.S.: 318 Reports," League records, Jan. 16, 1941, Container 5, Folder 6.

¹⁰⁶ "S.S.: G.R. Reports," League records, Sept. 23, 1941, Container 6, Folder 1.

¹⁰⁷ "S.S. - The Galileans: G.R. Reports," League records, March 30, 1942.

¹⁰⁸ William Miller, "Shows Bund and Silver Shirts in Co-operation," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 22, 1939, p. 10, and "Martin Gall: S.F.M. Reports," League records, Dec. 12, 1945, Container 6, Folder 1.

¹⁰⁹ "Newell B. Wolf: 114 Reports," League records, March 29, 1941, Container 5, Folder 6, and "211 Reports," League records, June 6, 1938, Container 5, Folder 6.

¹¹⁰ "211 Reports," League records, June 6, 1938, Container 5, Folder 6.

¹¹¹ "Martin Gall: S.F.M. Reports," League records, Dec. 12, 1945, Container 6, Folder 1.

The Propaganda Machine

Chapter 3

During the years of the Great Depression a steady flow of Nazi propaganda and funds flowed through the Cleveland community. Propaganda was circulated through basically every medium: from books, pamphlets and newspapers to newsreels/movies and speeches (in fact there was more German Nazi propaganda flowing into the United States annually than from any other totalitarian nation¹). Also, the transfer of funds from Cleveland's German-Americans to Nazi Germany (and vice-versa) was a common event during this time. Both of these occurrences were reflections of a desire to spread and support what Germans of both the Fatherland and America saw as answers to the chaos of the Great Depression.

The dissemination of Cleveland Nazi propaganda and funds primarily was directed through the office of the Cleveland German Consul, who was not only responsible for the Cleveland area, but for the entire Midwestern region of the United States. It is important to understand that the consul was an official diplomatic agent of the German government, and it was his basic functions to circulate propaganda about Germany, work as an intermediary between American and German businesses and publicly speak about the virtues and policies of Germany. The consul worked intimately with the German-American Bund, and continually supplied it with funds and support. In fact, Fritz Kuhn confessed

that the Bund had made special arrangements with Adolf Hitler himself to have all official diplomatic agents of Germany in the United States (including the German ambassador and all inferior consular agents) directly under the Bund's control.² However, the German consuls were steadily given more power over propaganda as the Bund lost prominence in America, until they controlled it completely.³ During this period, Rolf Kassler and Karl Kapp were the most outspoken Cleveland consuls that held this prominent position.

THE REICH'S AMBASSADORS

Dr. Rolf Kassler was only 27 years old when he was appointed as Cleveland's German consul in 1934. He was born in Halle, Germany, and studied law at the universities of Greifswald on the Baltic Sea and Bonn on the Rhine. He had also studied at schools in Paris and Edinburgh, where he learned French and English. He then practiced law in Germany for three years while working on his doctorate dissertation concerning the relations of German contract-law to French and Italian Law.⁴

Just previous to Kassler arriving in Cleveland, he had a fascinating experience with what was then one of Nazi Germany's major social programs. In the early years of German Nazism, a primary goal of the authorities was to destroy all socio-economic classes, and reconfigure society so that as little stood between individual German people as possible. The idea behind this cultural movement was to make the nation strong again, to make the people unified as one "volk" under the swastika.⁵ During this time, labor camps were established throughout the countryside to help foster this movement toward a greater German uniformity. Kassler himself had attended such a labor camp for eight weeks, just previous to his appointment in Cleveland. He described it as being "one of the most interesting experiences I had, for I lived together

and under the same conditions with young men of all social classes, and we all became very good friends.”⁶ He described everyday life at the camp:

Early in the morning we went to the fields and did digging and other manual labor and at noon we came back with a healthy appetite and enjoyed our hearty meals very much. After an hour of relaxation we started again, but this time to the athletic field near the camp, and we took part in all kinds of sports. In the evening we all gathered around big wooden tables, exchanging our views and ideas and singing lovely old German folk songs.⁷

This initiation for Kassler into the new Nazi program is important, for it illustrates that he had just recently found a German awareness with his peers, whatever their social standing, right before he arrived in Cleveland to expound the joys of Nazism.

However, in his letter he also expressed a great admiration for America, especially in terms of its international importance. More importantly though, he illustrated how America largely fulfilled the important German lust for “lebensraum” (“living space”). Lebensraum was the feeling that each individual German needed so much land and resources to live and prosper. The Nazi feeling was that Germany was denied her rightful space, and that therefore territorial expansion was not only wanted, but also needed for survival. Kassler found such lebensraum in America, for he noted, “I always noticed that young Germans of my age are greatly interested in American life and American problems. Yet I think it is very difficult for them to realize without having been here, the large dimensions and the enormous variety of landscape, climate and life in this country.”⁸ To Kassler, as often thought by many today, America has ample living space for her people.



Dr. Rolf Kessler

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

In order to announce and culturally translate Germany's policies, Kassler began the consular tradition of explaining his homeland's continuing military buildup and territorial expansion. During the 1935 German Day cultural festival at Edgewater Park in Cleveland, Kassler, the lead speaker, emphasized how Germany had begun building herself back up (including militarily, and in violation of the Versailles Treaty). He stated that "through Hitler's energy, the Fatherland has been freed from shameful chains and has attained what every nation needs for existence: honor, equal rights and the right to defend herself against her enemies. A strong Germany is necessary for European peace. A strong army and a strong labor service are of equal importance."⁹ Yet the buildup of Germany's forces created a continuing dilemma for France and England: How long would they take Germany recreating her armed forces?

On March 7, 1936, German military forces moved into what had been Germany's demilitarized zone, the Rhineland. The Rhineland's reoccupation by German troops was seen by many Germans as Hitler's superior abilities in the realm of international affairs. Once again, Hitler was willing to risk war to achieve what many felt was a reestablishment of German prestige. Kassler emphasized the German position that France had violated the Treaties of Locarno in making an alliance with the Soviet Union. The Treaties of Locarno were a series of agreements, signed in 1925 in conjunction with the League of Nations and designed to promote security in Europe following World War I. The Rhineland was established as a neutral demilitarized zone to help ensure a lasting peace, yet to the Nazis it remained an area of Germany that they could not fully control. Kassler argued that the occupation of the Rhineland was essential to German security. He claimed, "Adolf Hitler's declarations in the Reichstag and the action taken by the German government in connection with the demilitarized Rhineland zone are only of a defensive character."¹⁰

Yet oddly against the general Nazi feeling that the Locarno Treaties were an affront to German security entirely, Kassler claimed the opposite. He said, "Germany's security, guaranteed by the Locarno Treaty has been greatly reduced by the recent ratification of the Franco-Russian alliance. Through this Franco-Russian pact, France broke, without doubt, the Locarno treaty."¹¹ Kassler, an educated authority on international law, went to point out the specific French violations under Locarno and the League of Nations. He found that Hitler had no choice in his push into the Rhineland, and that in doing so, Germany had assured herself more leverage in future defensive agreements. He claimed that because of France's disloyalty to the agreements, "the German government was confronted with the necessity of making use of the defense possibilities in the demilitarized Rhineland zone." And that "the purely defensive character of the German action can be seen from Hitler's new offer to conclude long-term defense treaties with France and Belgium."¹²

Karl Kapp succeeded Kassler to the Cleveland post in 1936, with an impressive record of international governmental service behind him. He served in the German military during World War I, until a bullet wound in 1916 made him unfit for further service. He then entered the consular service, and was stationed in Constantinople, Budapest and Damascus during the rest of the war. As a university student during this time as well, he mastered Arabic and Persian. Following the war he was stationed in Jerusalem until 1926, when he was transferred to Bombay, India. He became an avid sportsman in Bombay, joining several hunting and riding clubs. Kapp even joined the 1934 German expedition to climb Mount Nanga Parbat. Yet when he first arrived in Cleveland for the consul position, he was not only unacquainted with the Cleveland area, but with America in general.¹³ As he became familiar with Cleveland, his speeches often reflected the historical events unfolding, as he emphasized the official Nazi positions.

Though Cleveland's German-American Bund had originally been in charge of Nazi propaganda in the city, as the Bund withered away, the job fell to the German consul. It was later found that Kapp not only became the center of Nazi propaganda in the city, but also one of the primary peddlers of the propaganda nationwide. In Germany, an essential role of the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment, begun in 1933 and led by Joseph Goebbels, was to gauge public opinion and manipulate information to best serve the purposes of National Socialism. To the Nazis, the way to attain this goal was total control of the media. Yet as National Socialism spread abroad, it became necessary for *filters* of Nazi propaganda to exist. The purpose of these filters were to adapt Nazi propaganda to best fit the site and situation of its destination, and then to decide where the propaganda was to be sent. It was found that Karl Kapp was one very instrumental filter in America.¹⁴

The sheer variety and massive volume of propaganda directed by Kapp in the latter years of the Great Depression bear testimony to Nazi Germany's struggle to win-over America as an ally. Consequently, Kapp was afforded a staff of 10 for his consulate offices on the 14th floor of the Midland Building downtown, the largest consulate staff in Cleveland. Visitors were greeted by a large, oval enameled, pink colored emblem on which the words "Deutsches Konsulat" were inscribed above a winged swastika.¹⁵

For Kapp, the key to effectively distributing Nazi propaganda, in its various forms, was to sometimes delegate authority to prominent local personalities. One such man was the Rev. John Foisel, of 761 Eddy Road, and pastor of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cleveland. As *Cleveland Press* reporter William Leick described him, Foisel was not the type one would think to be a Nazi sympathizer. He was a quiet, slender, middle-aged, balding, unassuming minister, living in a small home.



Cleveland German consul Karl Kapp addresses a local crowd

*Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library,
Cleveland State University*

However, Foisel spoke out on behalf of Nazi Germany as early as 1934, by invitation of Martin Kessler's Nazi group. In 1937, Foisel inherited the direction of the city's German Educational Service from the German consulate. As the local director of the service, Foisel took his orders from Ernst Kotz, the chief of the Service in New York. In turn, Kotz took his orders from Alfred Rosenberg in Germany, the new prophet of Nazi "kultur," who was directly under Joseph Goebbels.

Operating as an official "cell" of propaganda, Foisel disseminated, free of charge, phonograph records containing both German music and Nazi propaganda to radio stations willing to hold a "German hour" under Foisel's direction. While Leick (himself a native-born German) interviewed Foisel at his house, Foisel's copy of the *Deutsche Weckruf*, official newspaper of the German-American Bund sat between them. Foisel spoke freely regarding his position as director of the German Educational Service, saying that it "is interested in furthering German Kultur and doing everything in its power to help the development and spreading of the German language." Yet he also added that, "naturally, we are not interested in giving aid to those who are against the New Germany, but we do help those who are friendly to our cause."¹⁶

In 1938 Karl Kapp traveled to Detroit as one of the most important official Nazi agents in America. In honor of Henry Ford's 75th birthday, Kapp awarded the famous American innovator the Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle, the highest honor Nazi Germany could give to a foreigner. Ford was the first American to receive the honor, and only the fourth person ever. (Another to receive the honor was Benito Mussolini.) Detroit's German consul, Fritz Hailer, was also present as Kapp gave the award. Following the presentation, Kapp read the citation accompanying the medal at Ford's birthday dinner, with 1,500 in attendance. The citation read, "in recognition of [Ford's] pioneering



Cleveland German Consul Karl Kapp, right, bestows the Nazi medal, “The Supreme Order of the German Eagle” to American Industrialist Henry Ford, while Fritz Heller, Detroit’s German consul, shake’s Ford’s hand. The occasion was Ford’s 75th birthday, 1938.

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Otto Fricke, left, chats with U.S. Senator Ernest Lundeen of Minnesota, 1940

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

in making motor cars available for the masses." After the party Adolf Hitler personally sent congratulations to Ford.¹⁷

Beginning on May 9, 1938, a series of German radio programs from a Nazi propaganda bureau were to begin broadcasting from Berlin to Ohio. Ohio was the first area to be "honored" by Berlin by such a "goodwill gesture." Yet there was also a planned exchange of broadcasts, and cultural selections typical of Ohio were to be sent back to the Fatherland. A record prepared earlier was to be broadcast to Berlin with selections from the Ohio State University band, with the "Buckeye Battle Cry," "Fight the Team" and "Carmen Ohio" being among them.¹⁸ Though some forms of propaganda appeared politically harmless, others were not.

One prominent example of Kapp's massive propaganda distribution network was through attorney Frank B. Burch of Akron. In the end, Burch admitted to receiving \$10,000 from Kapp for circulation of 25,000 Nazi pamphlets around the United States, and in turn supplying Kapp with a carefully compiled list of 30,000 American names and addresses to disseminate propaganda to.¹⁹

Burch was a notable Akron attorney and a distinguished leader in public affairs. He was a member of the Akron Chamber of Commerce, had been elected to the State Senate in 1923, and later served as a Republican State Central Committeeman for the 14th District of Ohio. His law practice had suffered during the Great Depression, and he was noted for often blaming his business failures on Roosevelt and the New Deal.²⁰ Curious about Nazism, he wrote to Kapp in 1939, asking questions about the Bund, German concentration camps and religious toleration in the Third Reich. Kapp answered that "the Bund is an American organization," and that the German government has "no influence whatsoever over it." Kapp also asserted "without exaggeration it can be stated that no loyal German has ever served in a concentration camp." Yet most interesting was Kapp's response

about religion. According to Kapp, in the Third Reich, "nobody has ever been persecuted on account of his religion."²¹

It was not long before Burch and Kapp held regular correspondence and became quite close. Burch supplied Kapp with lists of prominent area citizens that he knew may be interested in anti-British, anti-Roosevelt, anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda. Burch purchased thousands of different Nazi propaganda pamphlets and books, using money that Kapp supplied him (with the financing coming from the German government).²² Burch also helped to found the Akron branch of the America First Committee. This committee emerged nationally as sympathetic to Nazism, and defined itself by its anti-administration stance. Notable leaders of the group were Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh, Henry Ford and Robert E. Wood, chairman of the board of Sears, Roebuck and Company. This committee was also popular with the Ku Klux Klan.²³

Following an investigation into Burch's activities, the Akron lawyer was reprimanded. Ironically enough, it was not the dissemination of propaganda that got Burch into trouble with the law . . . It was his failure to register as a foreign agent. Burch's guilty plea brought about the first conviction of an individual under the Foreign Agents' Registration Act of 1938. Since he was accepting funds from a foreign government, and circulating foreign-sponsored literature, he was supposed to register as a foreign agent. However, Burch claimed ignorance of this law, yet since he was an attorney himself, the court refused to accept this.²⁴ Burch's own counsel, Nicholas J. Chiascione, outwardly insulted Burch in his defense. He told the court that Burch "appreciates now, however, that in taking the money from Kapp he was not only naive but possessed of a magnitude of gullibility."²⁵ For the government, however, Burch's case was to serve as an example to others. William P. Maloney, chief of the Justice Department's "propaganda squad," told the court that "the 'unhappy plight' of

Burch should serve as a warning to all Americans, whether individuals or groups, to take heed lest their backers turn out to be Herr Goebbels and his gangster associates."²⁶

As a result of his failure to register as a foreign agent, Burch was fined \$1,000, yet given a suspended prison sentence due to his age (67) and failing health.²⁷ However, in late 1942, a panel formally disbarred Burch for "misconduct and unprofessional conduct involving moral turpitude."²⁸ To the judges, a main part of Burch's "moral turpitude" was his constant and fervent anti-Semitism. The judges' findings of Burch's hatred of Jews reflect the acceptance of limited anti-Semitism in America at that time. In a lengthy opinion, the judges found that Burch's:

Anti-Semitism and his interest in opposing our being involved in the war both appear to have been intense and not merely ordinary. He had already become embittered, and he believes that the decline in the volume of his law practice and the war in Europe are all due to the activities of the Jews.²⁹

The case of Burch serves to underscore how even some prominent, civic-minded Americans believed that National Socialism was a valid answer to America's economic and societal ills.

Another vehicle that Kapp used for receiving propaganda in Cleveland was the Transocean News Service (TNS), which was directed from New York City by Manfred Zapp, whose sole purpose since his arrival in the United States, from Berlin, was to disseminate the TNS. The service had begun before Hitler's rise to power, and had distinguished itself as a legitimate agency, much like the United Press or Associated Press. Yet under Goebbels, it became a primary organ for sending National Socialist propaganda abroad.³⁰ The basic use of the service was for German-American newspaper publications (though it was used for many other

functions as well). The major Cleveland German-American newspaper, the *Waechter Und Anzeiger*, was a major subscriber to the TNS service.³¹

However, German-American newspapers often had a rather small circulation, and it became necessary for many publications to receive their connection to the TNS for free if they wished to continue to publish. In one instance, the editor of the Cincinnati *Freie Presse*, Ludwig Schmitt, beseeched Kapp to allow him to receive the TNS for free. To the anger of the United States government, this meant that the TNS was supplied to such newspapers solely by the financing and arrangement of the German government. Yet Schmitt's plea to Kapp (and ultimately to Zapp) is interesting in the reasoning he used to acquire free service. In a letter sent to Kapp on July 19, 1939, Schmitt wrote that despite many troubles, he continues to work on the paper, "solely in the realization that my leaving the paper would bring it completely under Jewish domination." But to him, German cultural considerations had been cast aside for German business information. This business, Schmitt claimed, was increasingly being run by Jewish elements, and that only receiving the TNS on a free basis could help thwart this increasing "Jewish domination." Schmitt claimed that "business considerations determine the conduct of business and they most willingly give in to every bit of pressure by the Jews. A Viennese Jewish refugee, who worked as editor on the Vienna *Morgenpost*, is already waiting for the day when I give up my work." Yet that in the end, "In all my actions my wish was decisive to maintain the newspaper in accordance with its former reputation as a warm-hearted defender of the German course."³² When this letter, and the others considering Schmitt's unfortunate position were received, Kapp forwarded them to Zapp, and Schmitt was able to retain the TNS on the free basis.

Before the beginning of the Second World War, Kapp's speeches continually stressed Germany's love for peace, while attempting to fulfill her desire for lebensraum for her people. On September 29, 1938, the Munich Conference seemed to assure both of these goals, as Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland was basically given to Germany. This feat was well applauded by Kapp as it was for England's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who joyfully proclaimed that the agreement meant "peace for our time." Kapp announced "we thank our Fuehrer, Adolf Hitler, Mr. Chamberlain, Mussolini, Mr. Daladier and President Roosevelt for preserving the world's peace."³³ Dr. Herbert S. Reichle, president of the Deutsche Zentrale, also announced at Kapp's meeting, "the German nation has much to be thankful for today. We are glad to see that the war which started in 1914 has ended finally in 1938."³⁴

This feeling of Germany finding peace, while achieving her goals of lebensraum, was also expressed at a belated 1939 May Day celebration at the Deutsche Zentrale in Parma. Richly festooned with Nazi flags, Kapp explained how Germany had undone the burdens cast on them by World War I's end, and how Germany was pioneering the peace process. He stated "after getting rid of the shackles of the Versailles Treaty and after obtaining 'living space' for its people, Germany has no other desires but peace." He spoke about historical reasons for the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and quoted Hitler and Bismarck. He further went on to say that the Hitler regime wished only "harmonious relations" with the Protestant and Catholic churches, and that the "German people should be proud of the fact they have materially aided in building up this world and that they have played an important part in developing America." He finished his speech, and led the audience in a large "Sieg Heil."³⁵ Only four months later, on September 1, 1939, German troops stormed into Poland and ignited the largest and most destructive war in the history of mankind.

Even though it was Germany that had invaded Poland, the Nazi government propagated the image that Germans were the ones persecuted in the conflict. Immediately following the invasion, the German government began sending many "atrocities letters" to Cleveland Lutheran pastors. The letters claimed to have been written by the Rev. Ernst Patzer, German pastor of Trinity Church in Andrespol, near Lodz, Poland. Patzer wrote a long record of alleged Polish atrocities against him and other Germans. He outwardly asked for sympathy for the Nazi cause through American churches. Patzer told of "uninterrupted persecution of our community and our church" by Polish authorities. He also told of "horrible slaughtering of the Germans in Tomaschow and Konstantinow." He claimed to have fled to Danzig, Germany, after being called the "Hitler of Andrespol," and had to send his wife and children to a refugee camp before he was reunited with them in Berlin by a Nazi welfare organization.³⁶

During this stressful year of 1939, a proclamation by the German government struck fear into the hearts of Cleveland's young Germans, even though they were thousands of miles from the Fatherland. Various German organizations in the city were notified that Germans of age were required to register at the consulate for compulsory military and labor service in Germany. Knowing that the consuls were powerful, people openly expressed fears that they could be arrested or punished by Kapp or his agents if they didn't register. The consulate quickly explained that it only applied to German *citizens*, not to any Americans, and that similar proclamations had been made for three years, without many people paying it mind. The consulate firmly stated, "It is preposterous to intimate that German citizens who do not register at the consulate are liable to arrest and fine. The consulate has no authority to arrest anyone, since it does not enjoy the right of extra-territoriality."³⁷ Yet the fact that people became terrified over the proclamation in a

time of crisis illustrates how powerful the Third Reich really seemed to some, even in Cleveland.

Ultimately Germany's appeals to Cleveland's German citizens to return to their homeland to serve shows that there was still a significant foreign contingent of native Germans in the city in 1939. This was not so for other nationalities. When the *Cleveland Press* asked Italian consul, Dr. Romeo Montecchi, about his nation's rules regarding the return of men for military service in this tense time, Montecchi said it wasn't even an issue. Montecchi stated, "There are no Italians of military service age any more. They are either old or American citizens," and his consulate does nothing about it. The situation was similar for the Romanian consulate. The Romanian consul, George Anagnostache, explained that his nation's law required every Romanian man of age to register at the consulate once a year. "In practice, however, those who live here are taken off the records of the Roumanian army. No one has been or is compelled to serve abroad," he stated.³⁸ Though these official declarations may seem mundane to us now, they were at the time of the utmost interest to Clevelanders even American-born, for some nations continued to see children of emigrants as actually *their* citizens.³⁹

Kapp, and other German consuls around the U.S. increasingly found themselves at the heart of the political argument for Nazism. Since by late 1939 the German-American Bund was virtually dead in Cleveland, Kapp found himself as the only major Nazi voice in the city, and the only entity which could effectively disseminate the Nazi message.

Copying a tradition created in Nazi Germany, the Winterhilfe, or Winter Relief fund, was organized annually by the Cleveland consul. On the first Sunday of every month between October and March, Germans were only to eat one meal, usually soup, and donate money to a general fund. In this way food was saved and money was collected to be used for the aid of suffering

Germans somewhere (depending on the year it could be in Germany itself; Czechoslovakia; Austria; Poland, etc.). A meeting of Cleveland's Germans, usually to view Nazi propaganda films, marked the day. As organized, the Cleveland consul would send half the money back to somewhere in Europe, and spend the other half on destitute Germans in Cleveland.⁴⁰

As could be imagined, the number of needy Germans during the Depression was huge, and it put a large strain on the consulate, which complained about giving to local charities and families because it said that all the local needy "believe every consular office is rich and has unlimited funds."⁴¹ As part of the program, political films of Hitler and other Nazis would be watched to mark the occasions. The money collected in Cleveland steadily rose during the 1930s, from a few hundred dollars a year to \$3,000 in 1940.⁴²

On May 5, 1940, Kapp addressed over 1,000 people at a meeting he arranged at the Deutsche Zentrale in Parma. Yet instead of making assurances of peace, Kapp expressed the belief that a deceitful England was doomed to be smashed by Germany. For he noted, "Germany has ended conditions whereby the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer, and the plutocratic nations must follow."⁴³ Importantly, Kapp now painted England as a hypocritical monster, claiming to be struggling for subject peoples, and promoting free trade, while in actuality they were the world's colonial giant, and fervently engaged in organizing trade for themselves alone. To Kapp, of course, Germany was at war with them to end this flagrant hypocrisy. Kapp announced:

Britain ought to give up Gibraltar, Malta, Singapore, Hong Kong; in short withdraw from all parts of the world it dominates by force. It is idle to talk of freedom when one nation possesses bases in other countries and displays its might there in peacetime. When one nation has everything it is easy to talk

humanity. Today fewer and fewer persons believe these lies. No one can put this sinking imperialism on its legs again.⁴⁴

Kapp also affirmed his belief that England was stifling trade. He announced "there shall be no free commerce in this world until the one single country which today controls all strategic points on the high seas ceases to control them. That is what Germany is striving to do and nothing else."⁴⁵ At this time the Soviet Union was not yet at war with Germany, in fact the two countries outwardly had friendly relations. Yet in Kapp's speech, he let slip the idea that the German desire for lebensraum would in time turn to the east. He claimed that "civilization to the east of Europe was propagated by Germany in the past and Germany will continue to do so in the future."⁴⁶ He concluded his speech by appealing to the audience to be loyal to America, calling it "a great and beautiful land," and asking for three "Sieg Heils" in honor of Hitler. A thunderous chorus of voices followed his lead, as it led to half of the audience holding Nazi salutes as the "Horst Wessel Song" was sung.⁴⁷ In his speeches, Kapp asserted the Nazi viewpoint on the developing stages of the Second World War. He was effectively able to mould Nazi policy to fit America's position in the world.

Though at this meeting Kapp received much praise from the crowd for his take on German affairs, the press assailed his attempts. Before Germany ignited World War II, *Cleveland Press* writers often applauded Kapp's work to preserve German culture and traditions in Cleveland. Yet this changed with Germany becoming outwardly expansionist. According to an authorless editorial article published the same day as the one explaining Kapp's May 5, 1940 meeting, Kapp implied that democracy "is a bust, and we will all have to go totalitarian."⁴⁸ Yet the *Cleveland Press* declared:

History will decide whether things turn out that way. But for the time being it will be easier to keep the technical neutrality of this country from flaming into war if German consuls will refrain from crying down our way of life and propagandizing for tyranny in our own land. Under the liberty we are determined to preserve, Consul Kapp was free to proclaim his Hitlerian propaganda before those who like it, and today we are free to express our dislike.⁴⁹

On June 16, 1941, Kapp was vacationing in a cabin in Cook's Forest, high in the hills of Pennsylvania. He received a call from his consular office in Cleveland warning him that Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles had announced that all German consulates were to be closed, and that all consuls should be out of the United States by July 10. Kapp packed his belongings in a hurry and had left the cabin in less than 15 minutes. In his own hasty flight, he only left behind, ironically enough, a newspaper clipping of Rudolph Hess' flight to England and a single pair of pajamas. Welles simply stated that Kapp had to leave "because German consular officials and other Nazi agents have been engaged in activities harmful to the United States."⁵⁰

THE RECRUITER & THE SAINT

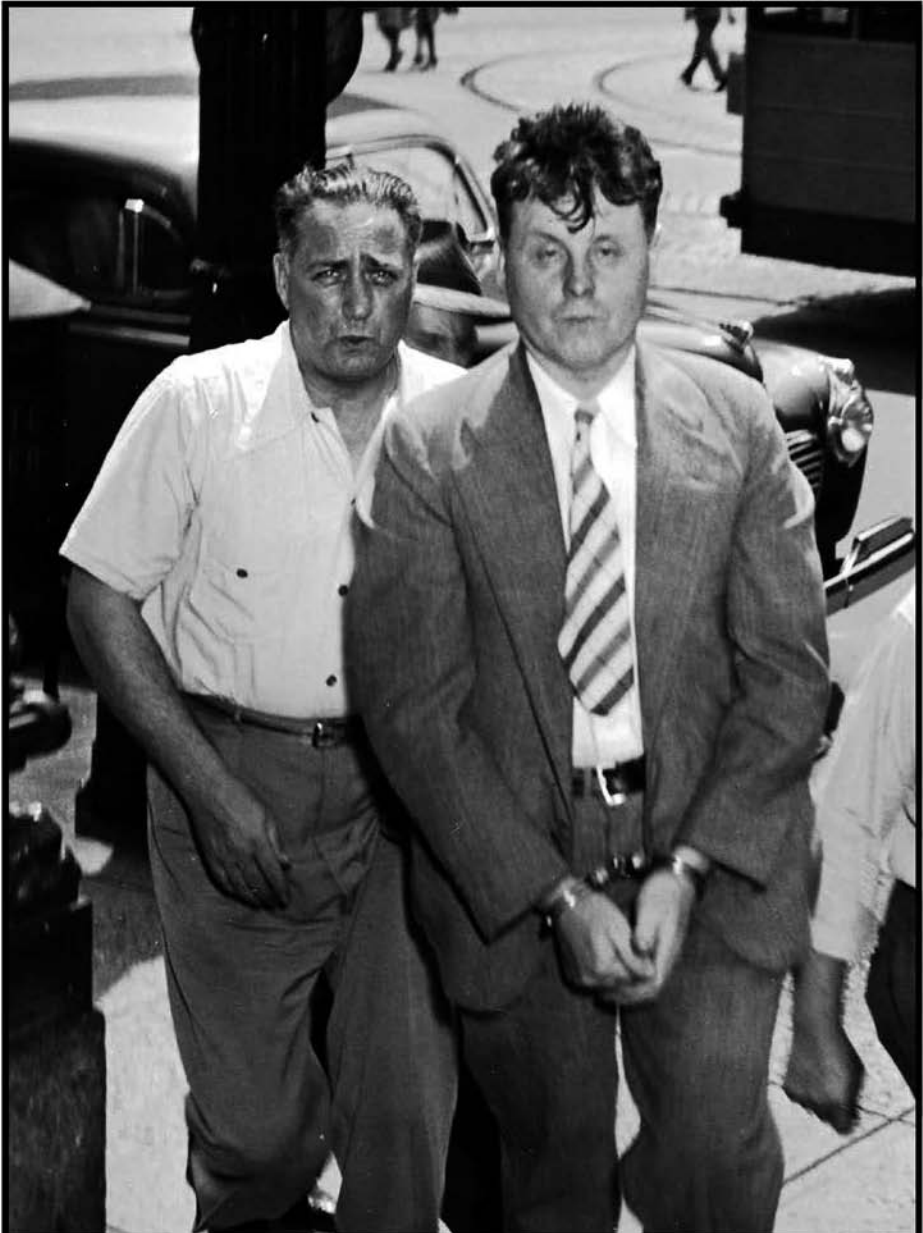
By early 1939, Nazi Germany was feverishly erecting its mighty war machine. Poised to initiate the bloodiest war in history, the Reich desperately needed skilled tradesmen to fill slots vacated by those in the armed services. Germany sounded a call for her sons to return home. Guaranteed a job with a competitive wage, a furnished home and benefits, Cleveland's German-Americans were offered a tempting exit from America's Great Depression.

The guiding spirit behind Cleveland's "Jobs in Germany" project was Karl Zanzinger, a tool specialist and patternmaker at the gigantic Fisher Body Company plant, and a former secretary of the Deutsche Zentrale. He was born in Friensbach-Crailshein, near Manheim, Germany, and his right foot was shot off while serving the Fatherland in World War I. Zanzinger came to Cleveland in 1929, but didn't apply for U.S. citizenship until 1940 because he was worried that he may lose his pension of \$25 a month from the German government. Still a German at heart, he felt deep sorrow at seeing his fellow Germans struggle so hard in America when their Fatherland offered so much. He was pleased to arrange for workers to return to Germany while he collected \$35 a head. He stated:

It was quite tragic to see scores of unemployed German mechanics on the verge of starvation. All this while Germany is experiencing an acute labor shortage. I got in touch with some industrial concerns in Germany and a plan was worked out. The skilled mechanic who returns to Germany is guaranteed a job and the average hourly scale is from one mark to 1.50, which in American money means around 40 to 50 cents. He gets good quarters and all the privileges now enjoyed by German workers. Why should German mechanics starve in America when they can get good jobs in Germany? What is wrong in that?⁵¹

Cleveland was one of the largest targets for the exodus project, second only behind Detroit. In the end, 85 Cleveland machinists and their families made the voyage back to Germany.

Adolf Hitler instituted many industrial and engineering projects, yet few have endured and succeeded as much as the famous, albeit tiny, "peoples' car." As it turned out, all of Zanzinger's workers became employed at the Volkswagen plant in



Handcuffed, Karl Zanzinger, right, is shown being led into his arraignment in Cleveland by U.S. Deputy Marshall Norman Black, left, on July 30, 1941.

Photo courtesy: Acme Photos

Fallersleben, on the outskirts of Berlin. Ultimately they helped alleviate the constant demands made by Hitler that Volkswagen production be increased.⁵²

German-Americans rallied together at the Harmonie Singing Club, 2515 Franklin Ave., to wish them goodbye, though some weren't at all sad to leave. Paul Wuest and his wife, Clevelanders for 17 years, saw the opportunity as a relief. Wuest, a press operator at the Midland Steel Products Co., W. 106th St. and Madison Ave., was bullet-scarred from his services in the German army during World War I. After experiencing the Great Depression, both Wuest and his wife said they were "glad" to return to Germany. When asked about the exodus, Karl Kapp said that such things were merely routine, that "German-Americans are going back to Germany every day."⁵³

With the war clouds looming over America in 1941, Zanzinger was arrested by the FBI at his apartment at 1217 E. 80th St., on charges that he served as an unregistered foreign agent in his labor recruiting. Federal Judge Robert N. Wilkin, who later heard his case, issued the warrant. The government was made aware of Zanzinger's activities and stance through the press, which reported the caustic comments about America from those that left for Germany.⁵⁴ Rushing to his assistance was Otto Fricke, ready to defend a fellow German. After his arrest, the government branded Zanzinger one of its most important prisoners, the first Ohioan nabbed in the national roundup of suspected Axis agents. His bond was set at the whopping sum of \$15,000, quite hefty for the Depression, and illustrating the significance of the prisoner.⁵⁵ Zanzinger remained in custody until Fricke could help raise the funds. Fricke attacked the government, claiming there were constitutional provisions against setting "excessively high bond."⁵⁶ Yet Fricke, who probably received the money from Cleveland's German organizations, presented astounded Federal Court clerks with the huge sum. However, when asked if he got the funds from

the groups he pleaded, "please don't ask me that," and that he "was not at liberty to disclose where the money came from."⁵⁷ With the government firmly setting their sights on Zanzinger, it quickly became apparent that his defense needed reinforcements.

Zanzinger needed someone better acquainted with criminal law, and with a specialty in immigration. They called on Attorney John B. Osmun, of 21353 Lake Road, Rocky River, a highly controversial yet intelligent crusader for justice, who wasn't afraid to risk everything for what he believed. Though the Depression brought-out the worst in many people, a few genuinely struggled to assist the destitute. Utilizing his resources and intellect, Osmun's career was dedicated to assisting the downtrodden.

John Osmun appropriately began his admirable career quite literally with a bang. He was born July 15, 1898, in Marion, Ohio, and at the tender age of 11 secured a position as a pipe organ pumper and bell ringer at his parish, the Episcopal Church of Marion. One day he was maintaining the organ's pressure through his pumping procedure while the church choir practiced their hymns to God. Boys being boys, he lost attention to his duties and instead began practicing his basketball shots in the church basement. So engrossed in honing his skills, he neglected to pump. In a short time the choir began to sing, and a couple feeble notes limped from the organ. Snapping to his senses, the young Osmun rushed to his station and began pumping furiously. In his haste he drastically overcompensated, forcing the air pressure to soar. When the organist stroked another key it unleashed an unholy roar, striking outright terror into the pious singers.⁵⁸

Osmun graduated from Ohio Northern University, and came to Cleveland to practice law. Between 1925 and 1933 he served as assistant U.S. district attorney, handling immigration and tax cases.⁵⁹ He then went into private practice with Arthur Ganger, establishing their office in the East Ohio Gas Building.⁶⁰ Outspoken and shrewd, he also took a keen interest in politics.

Osmun served as the Greater Cleveland chairman of the controversial America First Committee. Nationally headed by the famous (and controversial) aviator Col. Charles A. Lindbergh, the committee was famous for its fervent isolationist stance, and, in time, infamous for its anti-Semitism. In a program at Lakewood Public Library, Osmun spoke to the committee's Lakewood members. He bitterly disputed the idea that America should join the war on the side of England. He blasted Judge Robert Wilkin, who urged military aid to the Allies. Osmun said, "He wants these new citizens of the United States to spit in the faces of the Nazis for the sake of the British. I wonder if he remembers how Lloyd George and Clemenceau spit in the faces of the Americans in 1919."⁶¹ Ironically enough, only a few weeks later Osmun found himself in Wilkin's courtroom. Though Osmun didn't like the idea of America and England getting cozier, he argued for world peace, viewing Hitler as a very real threat. He stated:

The joint declaration of common principles of Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill does not provide for eliminating Hitlers. It does provide, thank God, for the elimination of Adolf Hitler. It is the belief of the American people that Adolf Hitler is the result of the vindictive provisions of the Versailles treaty, which America refused to sign. The declaration is a declaration of status quo. It must be amended to provide for 'existing obligations' as of Nov. 11, 1918, or in another 20 years another Hitler will arise to plague the world.⁶²

His stance was interesting in that he placed the blame of Hitler's rise on the Versailles treaty, and typical to his profession in the belief that the wording of any declaration could snap the rise of a foreign tyrant.

Though he was intelligent and outspoken, when talking politics he wasn't always received well. The dark economic troubles of the Depression, unparalleled in American history, fostered the emergence of many radical ideas to alleviate the hardships. One extremely popular scheme, the Townsend Plan, promised to cure America's ills. It proposed heaping great sums of money on the impoverished elderly, who would then spend their new wealth, bolstering American production and trade. Though a work of genius on paper, in reality it would have demolished the economy, slamming the great expense of the plan primarily on the already troubled middle class. Yet the following of the plan was gigantic and adamant about its passage; not surprisingly, it consisted of those that stood to gain. To his misfortune, Osmun experienced the passions of the Townsendites first hand. At a Republican rally at Wilson School, Lakewood, Osmun attempted to denounce Congressman Anthony A. Fleger, one of the primary proponents of the Townsend Plan. As Osmun began to speak an amazing spectacle broke out. The meeting was for the Republican Party, and Osmun, a Republican, was blasting Fleger, a Democrat. Yet the Townsendites were so behind their plan that political parties made no difference. Osmun thundered, "Congressman Fleger hasn't done anything in Congress." A few voices yelled back "he has too," then a chorus of listeners screamed "you're all wet," "sit down," and "shut up." An interval followed, yet Osmun was berated again, each time he tried to speak he was drowned out. The audience erupted into laughter as Osmun appeared like a confused mime, gesturing and opening and closing his mouth without being able to utter a sound. Humiliated, the chairman pulled Osmun from the stage.⁶³

Though he took an interest in politics, it was clearly his dedication to helping the downtrodden and oppressed that made him a shining pillar of the community. Though he was a fervent isolationist, Osmun came to sharp differences with the America

First Committee. In September of 1941, Lindbergh blasted Jews as “warmongers,” and claimed that they were part of a plot to drag America into the war. An appalled Osmun demanded repudiation of the charge, arguing that it was unfair to label any religious group in such a manner. Many at Cleveland’s America First chapter were shocked by Osmun’s stance. Various spokesmen at chapter headquarters said that Osmun was heading for trouble. One outraged woman, who refused to identify herself, said, “It’s ridiculous, all of us here think highly of Mr. Lindbergh and agree with him. If Osmun wants to do that, it’s his business.”⁶⁴ Disgusted at not receiving his repudiation, Osmun resigned, scoffing, “I can’t back up any stand like that, and from now on I won’t have a thing to do with the committee.” Offended by the committee that he had successfully led, he said he stood with Herbert Hoover, “in that no religious group should be so designated.”⁶⁵

Throughout American history, immigrants have been vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice, often easy targets for scapegoating politicians and other scoundrels of seemingly every variety. Incensed at injustice, Osmun staked his career and reputation on informing aliens about important changes that the Alien Registration Act of 1940 instituted. Osmun wrote an editorial (which oddly appeared like an advertisement) in Cleveland’s weekly Italian newspaper *L’Araldo* in August of 1940. In his letter he explained that the changes in the laws were complex, and that aliens could possibly be persecuted and/or deported if they were ill informed on the new policies. The government was appalled. Earl G. Harrison, director of the alien registration division of the Department of Justice branded Osmun’s “advertisement” as a “most flagrant violation of professional ethics.” Harrison scoffed at Osmun’s letter, saying that it contained “both false and misleading statements,” and that the aliens would be best served if they came to the government first, not a lawyer. Harrison further filed a complaint with the Cleveland Bar Association. Under fire, Osmun



John B. Osmun

Photo courtesy: The Cleveland Press Newspaper



Frank B. Burch

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Samuel H. Silbert

Photo courtesy: "Judge Samuel H. Silbert, Dedication, 3 Clev.Marshall L. Rev. 5 (1954)"



Earl G. Harrison

Photo courtesy: <http://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/our-history-7>

claimed, "the impulse behind the letter was to suggest that respectable and law-abiding aliens whose immigration status is questionable seek the advice of their lawyers regarding it, rather than hesitate to register under the law or to fail to register through the bad advice of incompetent persons." And that, "It is true I believe that the alien registration law should not be used as a trap for aliens who may be subject to deportation for illegal entry."⁶⁶ Despite opposition, Osmun always tried to defend the vulnerable.

In most cases America's downtrodden are rather clearly defined groups, but the truth is that any family, regardless of race, religion or social position can have its own victims. Osmun was bold enough to challenge Common Pleas Judge Samuel H Silbert over his procedures regarding something that is seldom easy for families, and has unfortunately grown immensely in recent years: divorce. Silbert's policies intentionally elongated divorce procedures with the idea that the couple would better work things out themselves through a "cooling off" period. Silbert allowed no divorces for couples married less than a year, and wouldn't hear cases until at least five months after the papers were filed. Following the proceedings he would wait 30 days before issuing his ruling. Osmun attacked his procedure as "pernicious and evil," claiming that Silbert "is doing society, the litigants and the judiciary of this state more harm than good, his rules will result in a clogged docket which will bring contempt from every citizen and lawyer in the county." Yet what infuriated Osmun the most was that his rules ultimately affected children. He said that "delayed justice is no justice at all, it gives rise to suspicions of corruption and corruption itself. The really vicious aspect of the rules for delayed justice is the precarious situation in which children of the litigants are left until the case finally is ended."⁶⁷

Osmun was a fighter for what he believed was right, sometimes literally. He was an intelligent and talented lawyer, and he didn't like being condescended. In a highly passionate case,

exploding courtroom friction between Osmun and attorney Eugene Reider forced the bailiff to clear out the court because Osmun felt that he and his client were being insulted. The heated argument spilled-over into the witness room, and with a climaxing insult Osmun went postal. As Osmun explained, "He put his nose right in my face in a very vicious, menacing and mendacious manner. He paused after the word 'son' and then went on with the rest of it." Osmun immediately flew into a rage, flooring Reider with five or six punches to the head and face before others rushed to break them up.⁶⁸ In any event, Osmun was not someone to take lightly.

Osmun's experience in immigration law and his commitment to the oppressed made him the ideal candidate for Zanzinger's defense. He decided to serve as co-counsel because he believed that Zanzinger "is not now and never has been a member of the Nazi party of Germany. He has always been known as an honorable and trustworthy man."⁶⁹ When Osmun inherited the case there were four charges against Zanzinger, all of which he pleaded innocent to. He was charged with acting as an unregistered agent of the Nazi government; German heavy industry; the German Labor Front; and the Nazi Strength Through Joy movement. Osmun filed a demurrer to them, and all were dropped except for the Nazi government agent charge.⁷⁰

Organizing Zanzinger's defense, Osmun struck upon a novel idea. Since Zanzinger was charged as a Nazi agent, Osmun wanted to gather evidence from the heart of the beast. Through three motions, his defense would center on depositions collected through the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. Appointing the secretary of the embassy as commissioner, the defense and prosecution would draw up lists of questions to be answered by selected witnesses. Therefore it would not be necessary for any of the attorneys to travel to Berlin. The top witness sought was Alwin Guendoe, head of the German program to recruit American labor, "and sundry other witnesses," said Osmun. After all, Osmun claimed that

Zanzinger had the constitutional right to gather evidence anywhere in the world to aid his defense. He claimed that it would be an unfair error to refuse such a process.⁷¹ Unfortunately for Zanzinger, history was not on his side.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, forcing America into the war. Though his case was still pending, Zanzinger and other alleged Axis backers were nabbed by the FBI. There were a number of other prisoners arrested in the initial Cleveland roundup, comprising four Germans and two Japanese. Among those grabbed was former Bund member William Kiefer, operator of the Schwarzwald Cafe, Masanaka Kameoka, Cleveland's "honorary" Japanese consul, and John Poffek, an Austrian who was working as a Republic Steel worker said to have "made unpatriotic remarks."⁷²

Asked about the roundup, Lee V. Boardman, head agent of the FBI's Cleveland office, only stated "I have been authorized by J. Edgar Hoover to report that the men being held are alien enemies."⁷³ Though first incarcerated in County Jail, the suspects were ultimately moved to the old Seventh Precinct Police Station, Jones Road and Broadway S.E., which was specially transformed for the alleged Axis agents. When completed, the roundup included three Japanese, 14 Germans and one Italian.⁷⁴

With America now involved in World War II, Zanzinger's case clearly took a turn for the worse. Even though suspicions were running high, Attorney General Francis Biddle urged cool heads, pleading for Americans to avoid any "persecution of our non-citizens." Describing the delicate situation that the alleged Cleveland Axis agents were in, Biddle reminded the public that they were fighting the war over freedom and the democratic process, the process that also extended to the aliens. He stated that:

The United States is now at war, it is essential at such a time as this that we keep our heads, keep our

tempers above all, and that we keep clearly in mind what we are defending.

There are living in the United States today aliens who make up only 3.5 percent of our total population. These aliens for the most part are here legally and are loyal to our country's institutions. Four out of five of them have family ties in this country and in most cases American-born children.

The great majority of our alien population will continue to be loyal to our democratic principles if we, the citizens of the United States, permit them to be. We must remember that most of them came here from other lands because they revere and respect the freedoms which America is able to offer them.⁷⁵

Yet with the outbreak of war, Judge Wilkin dismissed Osmun's motions for testimony from Berlin. Wilkin stated that diplomatic ties had been destroyed and that arrangements for deposition collection there would be impossible. Further, he ruled that the requested testimony, whatever it would be, could not be vital to Zanzinger's defense.⁷⁶

The very different fates of Zanzinger and Osmun were decided only two days apart. Zanzinger never received a trial. No official announcement was made when Biddle ordered Zanzinger to be interned for the duration of the war on February 11, 1942. Acting on the recommendation of a Cleveland aliens' appeal board, Zanzinger was sent to a federal internment camp.⁷⁷ Only two days later Osmun's life took a drastic turn as well. The former fervent isolationist was ordered into the U.S. Army. Holding a commission in the reserves since 1928, he was instructed to report to Fort Hayes, Columbus, for induction as a second lieutenant.⁷⁸

Despite time and circumstances, men often are infused with determined loyalty to their homeland. Much like the Cleveland

worker who said he was glad to leave America because his Fatherland needed him, Osmun was “glad to go” into the Army to serve *his* country.⁷⁹ Through his outstanding service in the war he rose in rank to captain, acting as a legal officer for almost four years.⁸⁰ Zanzinger and Osmun had come together from different ends of society over the issue of American justice, and couldn’t have gone their separate ways more differently.

THE IVORY TOWER

It is needless to say that one of the most cherished freedoms that we Americans hold is the freedom of speech. Yet long before our founding documents were written, the universities of Europe had developed their own freedom of speech in the halls of medieval academia. The ivory tower became rather a world unto itself, even literally, as municipal laws could not penetrate its gates. Though town and gown problems arouse, academia flourished, and continues to flourish, as one of the most beautiful traditions of Western civilization. This tradition of academic immunity even stood firm, hundreds of years later and a continent away, during the deprivation of Cleveland’s Great Depression.

During this troubled time, the halls of Western Reserve University in Cleveland became a forum for controversial discussions, and a place for Nazi propaganda to be pushed. During World War I, Dr. Charles F. Thwing, then president of the university, refused to have the German language expelled, despite ardent opposition. To him, German was not solely the language of the Kaiser, but also Schiller and Goethe.⁸¹ But it was during the Depression that the focal point of the school’s Nazi supporters came from the university’s German department. In October of 1935, the German department’s head, Dr. Hans Trautman, publicly expressed that he was in favor of Adolf Hitler.⁸² Yet for these academics, the ivory tower allowed them to freely to express their

views. Despite opposition from The League for Human Rights, among others, the academics often could not be silenced, even if they were open supporters of Nazism.⁸³

The university imported trained propagandists to come to Cleveland and lecture about the supposed joys of Hitler and Nazi Germany. One such propagandist was Dr. Gotthilf Bronisch, counselor to the mayor of the city of Berlin, who arrived in 1935. The university's German Club and the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce sponsored his trip, and he delivered a talk on how, through Hitler's design, cities can be built without slums. Later, in 1941, Bronisch left Germany and became an American citizen. He became secretary of a supposedly anti-Nazi group, called the Loyal Americans of German Descent. However, the League for Human Rights later helped raise serious doubts about Bronisch's commitment to democracy.⁸⁴

In 1936, the university's German department, coordinated with the university's School of Applied Social Sciences, had Dr. Erna Von Abendroth sent from Germany to Cleveland to inform the school's students and faculty about the education of girls in Nazi Germany. The audience that received her consisted of students and faculty of the school, numbering about 300. Abendroth was an odd appearance, described as "a fine stalwart woman about sixty years of age, wearing a uniform something like a Methodist Deaconess." She first described the process of educating Germany's youth in depth. She then followed her lecture with a "pathetic little film" illustrating women working during their "working service year." The women were shown feeding chickens, pitching hay and kneading dough. Following the film, it was reported that some of the students complained about the boring content, being of the opinion, "I don't need to go to Germany to complete my education, I can knead dough at home." Instead of refuting the idea that women in Nazi Germany were thrust into a subordinated position, which was the reason for the

film, she actually reinforced it.⁸⁵ The lesson of Dr. Abendroth is that though she may have been a trained propagandist, it didn't necessarily mean that she was very good at it.

However, one of the primary academic forces pushing for a better understanding of Nazi Germany, and (arguably) supporting the fascist cause was Oberlin College professor Karl Frederick Geiser. Born in Iowa in 1869, his parents had left their homeland of Germany only two years before. Geiser attained a BA in 1893 and a Ph.B. in 1896 at Upper Iowa University. He received his Ph.D. at Yale University in 1900, and also studied at the University of Berlin and at Harvard University Law School. With his rich education in history, political science and economics, he taught at various schools, gaining a reputation for truly engaging his students intellectually. Appointed as the first professor of political science at Oberlin College, he later became the head of the department as others were hired. Responsible for setting the curriculum, he pushed the department to flourish, eventually raising it to international importance. Serving his adopted institution, Geiser helped form faculty councils for the college's administrative structure; he struggled for and won the right of his students' to vote at the village's polls on Election Day; and he successfully coordinated a campaign to allow his students to smoke on campus.⁸⁶

Though his personal impact was felt academically at Oberlin, his influence also extended to the town as well. A master of political science, Geiser made a dramatic impact on the village of Oberlin itself. He was a founder of Oberlin's city manager form of government, and was elected to the first Council created (1926-1931). He also was instrumental in the establishment of municipal lighting systems in the village and surrounding areas.⁸⁷

Yet the consuming passion of Geiser's life was unquestionably the history, politics, culture, and people of Germany. He took numerous trips to the Fatherland throughout his

life, and lectured and studied at six major German universities around the nation. He also worked as a consultant regarding the people, politics and government of Germany on different occasions. In time, he became recognized as one of the preeminent scholars of Germany in America.⁸⁸ Needless to say, his passion for Germany was to give him much friction over the years.

During the course of World War I, Geiser refused to amend his strong German outlook, though under much pressure. He simply declined to cave in to popular opinion at the time and “revise history” to make the Germans out to be depraved savages bent on atrocity in his classes. Furthermore, he refused to glorify the war because he didn’t want to see his students “butchered in a mud hole.” This stance got him investigated by “secret service agents,” though they were unable to find that he was being seditious. Due to flagrant agitation to fire Geiser during the war, Oberlin’s College Board of Trustees formed a special committee to investigate his actions. Yet he refused to back down, and in 1919 the committee affirmed Geiser’s academic freedom.⁸⁹

When the Nazis seized Germany in the early 1930s, Geiser was quick to assess and support the new regime. He stated he fully agreed with Hitler’s actions of disregarding the Versailles treaty and the withdrawal of Germany from the League of Nations. Geiser explained:

The world is in two camps, capitalism and communism. Germany said communism did not ring true and would have none of it. We must remember that the Hitler government does stand for capitalism.

We think of Hitlerism as the seizure of power by an unscrupulous leader. But isn’t it true that Mussolini marched on Rome and seized the power while Hitler was elected?⁹⁰

As Geiser gave speeches and wrote articles about the Nazi regime throughout the 1930s, he steadily built up a strong argument for his case. What must be remembered is that Geiser was an extremely intelligent man, and he solidly stood behind Nazi Germany, and continued to develop a fascinating argument, despite ever growing opposition and ridicule. Acting as a the translator of culture from Germany to America, in October of 1934, Geiser had published an article titled "What Germany Thinks," in Oberlin's alumni magazine, which was oddly written as though Germany itself was talking to the reader. Amid his presentation for the Nazi cause he compared the discrimination of Germany's Jews to blacks in America, and firmly links America's racism to Hitler's. He stated:

You Americans seventy years after the Civil War, are still discriminating against 12 million Negroes, and you are excluding immigration on the basis of race and nationality. If you had read Hitler's *Mein Kampf* you will know that he justifies his racial theory by American practice.⁹¹

Geiser increasingly spoke in Cleveland during the 1930s. He began his speaking in front of the Cleveland City Club in 1933, but eventually was taken in under the wing of Western Reserve University's German department, where under their auspices he spoke frequently in front of other groups too.⁹² By early 1935, it became obvious through his public remarks that he was solidly behind Hitler and the Nazis. In February Geiser gave a speech in front of a Cleveland religious gathering at Public Hall, and downplayed the fears people had about fascism and Nazism. He said that these ideologies were actually situational, and are misunderstood by Americans. However, he also made a dark

prediction that a worldwide battle between communism and fascism was immanent.⁹³

The following month Geiser went even a step further, and attempted to lionize the Hitler regime as an historic breakthrough in government. In a speech at the Western Reserve University regarding a recent visit to the Fatherland he took, Geiser stated how the concepts of Nazi Germany were much like that of the ancient Greeks. He said, "Hitler conceives of the state as an aggregation of individuals who will live for the state and as a part of the state. The Germans of today have the same idea of the state as did Plato and Aristotle." He clarified that this state of Hitler's was by no means communist or socialist, but something pure and golden. To Geiser:

As in Plato's *Republic*, every man has his place according to merit, Hitler believes that every man should be dealt with according to his due, that no man is to be exterminated but to be given his place according to his abilities to fill that place, as Plato outlined in the *Republic*.⁹⁴

Furthermore, he put his education and reputation on the line when he stated that the Nazis had contributed much to the study of political science through Hitler's "Fuehrer Principle." To him, "Germany has a classless society under leadership. This leader principle is a contribution to political science thinking. Because I am a student of political science I have given much study to this great contribution to political philosophy." Geiser's lecture went on to discuss the importance of what the German government attained. He stated, "The Hitler government is a true democracy and not a dictatorship," and that Nazism "is the most interesting experiment in the world today, or maybe at any time, and it is the most intelligent." To close his speech, Geiser also proclaimed what he

really saw in the German people under the swastika: "I see in them a great people, perhaps the greatest on earth. Out of this turmoil will come the greatest ideas in government."⁹⁵

This was too much for the officials of Oberlin College. Bowing to pressure from the public, and succumbing to pressure from the general faculty of Oberlin, the college president, Ernest Hatch Wilkins, pushed Geiser to retire, possibly against his wishes.⁹⁶ The party for Geiser's retirement at the end of the 1934-1935 academic year was a cause for great praise and gratitude to be bestowed upon him, for decades of exemplary service to Oberlin College. In true academic style, over 50 former students gathered to thank Geiser for never backing down from his convictions "through hell and high water." These men, some of which were now important municipal, state or national officials, all expressed gratitude to the distinguished professor. Also, for every man that attended there were a dozen letters sent to the party, some from the best-known political scientists and historians in America.⁹⁷ Of the many praises these letters contained, one labeled him as the "possessor of the priceless gift of intellectual honesty," and another called him, "one who never allowed blind patriotism to override his sense of justice."⁹⁸ Even though the *Cleveland Press* had reported on Geiser's Nazi leanings, at the end of his academic career, they even dipped their banner to this seasoned intellectual. In an editorial the newspaper referred to his many students, for "He taught them to think for themselves, to look for causes rather than memorize effects, and accept nothing as true which they could not prove to their own satisfaction." But the highest accolade the newspaper bestowed was the loss of this professor for Oberlin, for his retirement marked "the passing of an institution," and stated that "Dr. Geiser takes away from Oberlin a mind which age could neither tire nor tarnish. He will be missed."⁹⁹

Without the burden of Oberlin College's public image on the line, Geiser now could work and lecture unhindered. He wrote



**Oberlin College professor
Karl Frederick Geiser**

*Photo courtesy: Special Collections,
Michael Schwartz Library,
Cleveland State University*



**With his Nazi pin squarely on his lapel, German consul Karl Kapp, left, relaxes
during a German Day celebration.**

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

voluminously on government, and translated important German books, most notably the book *Modern Capitalism* by Werner Sombart, a six volume refutation of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*.¹⁰⁰ Geiser also continued to defend the acts of Nazi Germany as it steadily rolled toward World War II. Stating that he didn't condone the purge of the Jews in 1938, he actually blamed it on the Allies, which he said had refused to let Germany properly develop under democracy after World War I. Furthermore, though the Nazis had been in power for years, he said that the government was still in a state of revolution, and consequently was "transitional" in nature. He stated that the French Revolution and the American Revolution were also scenes of chaos in their own right, so why not Germany in hers? And he affirmed that "when Germany once more is on her feet economically, persecution of Jews and other mistakes of the present regime will end."¹⁰¹

As if Geiser had not been a controversial figure before, on Nov. 25, 1938, he accepted The Order of the German Eagle, 1st Degree, bestowed personally by Adolf Hitler. Yet Geiser defended his award, stating, "I have consistently attempted to maintain the historical attitude of understanding and interpreting Germany." In true philosophical style he also told of his reasoning, for, "I firmly believe that a detached attitude of good will and understanding will do far more toward world peace than an emotional condemnation of present symptoms detached from essential causes."¹⁰² In response to Geiser's acceptance of Hitler's award, the *Cleveland Press* offered a fascinating rebuttal: while attacking the authoritarianism of Nazi Germany, it also harbored an understanding for Geiser's action. It stated:

The government that drives out an Einstein, a Mann, and a host of other eminent thinkers, can hardly pose as a patron of the art of education, the essence of

which is tolerance and respect for intellectual accomplishment.

There is a romantic glitter about the decoration of a foreign government, which seems to make its greatest appeal to citizens of a democratic country where such pomp is ordinarily lacking.¹⁰³

There was only one other man who received this award from Hitler in Ohio: Dr. Frederick Konrad Kruger, a professor of political science at Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio. A German by birth, Kruger became an American citizen in 1930. He received his education in America and Germany, and taught at the University of California, Midland College and Omaha University. He also operated as an American exchange professor in Germany, lecturing on American government and politics at the University of Goettingen, and foreign affairs at the Deutsche Hochschule fuer Politik. He traveled through Europe in the mid-1930s, and had been teaching at Wittenberg College since 1923.¹⁰⁴

Kruger participated in the gigantic 1934 German Day celebrations in Cleveland. When others were skeptical of Hitler's new government, and tumultuous rise to power, Kruger defended the Nazis, and linked it to German-Americans. He thundered that "German Americans should, regardless of individual criticism of certain phases of the present regime in Germany, be pleased, that the revolution under Hitler has restored honesty and efficiency in home government, religion and morality in society and the spirit of national dignity in foreign affairs."¹⁰⁵ From the beginning of Hitler's reign, Kruger was ready and able to defend the work of the Nazis.

Kruger later gave a speech on the "Future of European Peace" before the Foreign Affairs Council at Hotel Cleveland on Dec. 10, 1938. An immense amount of controversy erupted before his speech, due to his acceptance of Hitler's award. Yet Col. Otto Miller, council president, brushed off opposition to the talk, saying

that he couldn't see how the award would affect Kruger's speech. Kruger largely discussed Germany's recent territorial acquisitions, and what Hitler supposedly had in store for the future. Before Kruger began, however, he asked the newspaper reporters to be fair in their reports on him, saying that the American press was too often biased against Germany, and that "he knew newspaper men and knew their limitations."¹⁰⁶

Kruger fully explained the outlook of Germany's expansion. He explained that the reason for the recent annexations of the Sudetenland and Austria were simply to bring all the Germans of central Europe together. As far as the territorial grabs outlined in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* were concerned, Kruger said they were antiquated, and that "he has changed his feelings toward France," and furthermore "has no territorial designs on the Danube Basin or the Balkans." (All of these areas were ultimately to fall under Hitler's domination in the years that followed.) Yet Kruger told what the place of this Greater Germany meant for Europe. He stated:

An economic Middle Europe under German leadership is in no way a menace to the peace of the rest of Europe. The new order which brought chaos has been replaced by the less pretentious old order. The clashing interests of Europe today are not between France and Germany or Germany and Britain, but between the Mediterranean powers.¹⁰⁷

Also discussed by Kruger was the "problem" of the Jews in Germany at that time. Were they an *internal* problem of Germany? Kruger answered the question much like Geiser had: compare the Jews' situation to that of the American blacks. He stated, "Unless Jews are considered an internal problem of Germany how can we

consider the foreign policy of the United States without considering the Negro question?"¹⁰⁸

In a 1939 speech, Kruger spoke before the Congress of Social Problems at Ohio State University. As to the question of whether America should aid the other Western democracies in fighting the "fascist aggressors," Kruger asked his own question, "Is an aggressor a nation that rebels against a status quo which imposes unfair, stifling territorial bounds and puts a yoke on the necks of millions of people?" Kruger also took the opportunity to attack President Roosevelt's approach to the European dilemmas as being biased.¹⁰⁹ In analyzing his approach, it is amusing to see how much Kruger's arguments were indeed like Geiser's.

Though Kruger's discussions did make news, public attention still largely centered on Frederick Geiser. Alarmed by his open support and defense of Nazi Germany, The League for Human Rights attempted to fight him. However, being a distinguished professor emeritus, and a recognized authority on Germany, they had trouble finding people with enough intellectual clout to fight him effectively.¹¹⁰ Yet there were those that tried. In a tremendous clash of wills, Geiser went head-to-head with a noted anti-Nazi, Dr. Jean Pajus, research director of the Foreign Affairs Council of Cleveland College on Jan. 14, 1939 at the Cleveland City Club. This was to be the last public support Geiser was to show for Nazi Germany. What ensued between these two learned men was a passionate clash on the ultimate aims of Hitler and the Nazis. Even though Geiser was drilled by questions and insulted by the audience, he characteristically refused to back down.

Hot on the table was the issue of the Munich Pact, signed by England and France the previous year to give Hitler the Czech Sudetenland. Geiser declared that Germany was in the business of fervently fighting communism and, "The Munich Pact is the first actual cooperation among nations in Europe for 300 years." He also took a jab at President Roosevelt when he stated, "The Munich Pact

caused hope and stocks to rise over the whole world. Every time Roosevelt speaks hopes and stocks fall.”¹¹¹ Geiser argued that Americans had to understand the plight the Germans were going through, in that:

This is a revolution, and was there ever a revolution without émigrés? Can you have a revolution and keep everybody happy? Revolution is terrible and reconstruction brings terrible things in its wake. I think Chamberlain will do more for permanent world peace with his umbrella than those who advocate guns.¹¹²

Dr. Pajus countered that Germany’s fight against communism was actually a horrible hypocrisy. He affirmed the historical irony that Germany had actually assisted in the spread of communism, and now wants to be seen as the crusader against it. After all, “Germany helped communism get a start in Russia when it gave Lenin and Trotsky money to get from Switzerland to Russia and denied arms to Poland in 1920 when Poland wanted to fight off communism.”¹¹³

In fully defending Nazi Germany, Geiser smashed back a question by honestly asking, “When and where has Hitler actually been an aggressor?” At this comment, an uproar of laughter shook the hall. Yet Geiser stood his ground, “I mean it,” he said, and he summarized Germany’s actions in the Sudetanland, stating, after all, “who is to define international law?” Berated by a multitude of unfriendly questions, City Club president Marc J. Grossman (who presided), often interrupted, and asked the audience to direct more questions to Pajus, to give the old professor a rest.¹¹⁴

Pajus fielded a question regarding one of his own assertions: that life in Germany now was “a living death.” If this was so, the questioner asked, why does Hitler constantly win plebiscites by

staggering majorities? Pajus explained, "The point of a bayonet is a powerful persuader. I might point out that a Catholic archbishop who refused to vote was put to death."¹¹⁵ This fundamental difference between America and Germany, freedom of expression, was probably the most important point debated between the intellectuals.

In a time when the totalitarian nations of earth were repressing individual's rights, Pajus was grateful "for himself and his opponent to be able to appear in a meeting where free speech and open discussion of disputed questions" were possible. A question naturally focused on Geiser as to why a meeting like this, where men are free to be critical of their government, is not possible in Germany. Geiser countered, "I'm not sure they couldn't have . . ." however, laughter again shook the meeting, and the professor was unable to answer further. Yet then a more passionate, and perhaps personal, question was thrown at Geiser by a man named Harry F. Payer. He asked, "Does Dr. Geiser have a revulsion to persecution of the Catholics, Protestants and Jews in Germany?" With seemingly the entire meeting breathing down his neck, Geiser shot back:

I'll answer that by asking Mr. Payer "Has he left off beating his wife?" When one asks you, do you condone cruelties, it comes nearer to insulting the intelligence of an honest man. What I say is that we won't get what we want here by pursuing our present course. We haven't given Germany a chance. We have presupposed it to be wrong in everything.¹¹⁶

With the opening of the World War in September, Geiser fell publicly silent on the defense of Germany. Though Germany may not have been "wrong in everything," it became obvious that it was not as peaceful as Geiser had promoted it. For the remainder of his

life, Geiser was largely ostracized by the Oberlin community, though he did continue to do his research.¹¹⁷ At the age of 81, the controversial professor died on April 1, 1951.¹¹⁸

Even though Cleveland was a major receiver of Nazi propaganda, it must be remembered that for many people there was confusion over what was material concerning German culture and what was really Nazi propaganda. What is fascinating to look at, however, is how supporters of Nazism often fervently claimed that Adolf Hitler meant peace, when he was obviously being aggressive. Considering the time in which these Nazi supporters lived, it is perhaps somewhat acceptable that they argued for all the Germans of Europe to get together as one nation. Yet would they have really known that Hitler was in fact a megalomaniac, and designed to eventually take over the world? In downplaying Hitler's racial policies, were they really aware of what the Nazis were capable of? Today, in looking back, their words and actions often appear ludicrous to us. However, since this is a nation that allows free speech, we must give a slice of credit to these men who were fighting for that which they believed was right, especially when it appeared that they were completely alone in their passions.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ This was an important discovery of the United States government, seeing as how propaganda was also flowing into this country from the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy and the Empire of Japan. The mere fact that Nazi propaganda was greater than all the others is extraordinary, considering that the others had been at the practice for at least a decade previous to the German. Findings of the: *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States* (Dies Committee), H. Res. 282, Appendix-Part III: Preliminary Report on Totalitarian Propaganda in the United States. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1941. p. 1384. I find it also necessary to clarify what exactly "totalitarian propaganda" meant. According to the government, this meant material, which is "devoted to extolling the advantages of life under totalitarian

rule. A wholly false picture is drawn of the material and cultural benefits bestowed by the dictators upon their own peoples." And that this propaganda "is calculated to arouse our hatred toward certain nontotalitarian governments and peoples with whom we are on friendly terms." Found in *Ibid.*, p. 1385.

² *Ibid.*, Appendix-Part IV: German-American Bund. p. 1459.

³ With the Bund's failure imminent, Joseph Goebbels decided to personally oversee America's Nazi propaganda dissemination. His clerks in the Propaganda Ministry utilized American telephone books for addresses, and sent tens of thousands of Americans propaganda, in many different forms, and to all reaches of the United States. Found in: Harold Lavine and James Wechsler's *International Propaganda and Communications: War Propaganda and the United States*, Arno Press, New York, 1972, p. 247.

⁴ This information was taken from a prepared letter by Kassler to Cleveland news reporters. It was found in the CSU Library's Cleveland Press Collection, under the people file "Kassler, Rolf."

⁵ The Nazis did this for a variety of reasons. One being that an increased nationalism would make the people better suited to fight what the Nazis saw as their enemies: The Versailles Treaty, communism and other leftist movements and, of course, the Jews. Another reason was that in making the country more uniform, it enabled the impact of Nazi propaganda to become more acute.

⁶ Letter by Kassler

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ "Kassler Lauds Hitler Regime," *Cleveland Press*, July 1, 1935.

¹⁰ "Defends Hitler's Rhineland Push: Acting Consul Says Occupation is Warranted as Protective Measure," *Plain Dealer*, March 8, 1936.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "German Consul is on Job from India," *Plain Dealer*, September 1, 1936.

¹⁴ Findings of the: *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States* (Dies Committee), H. Res. 282, Appendix-Part VII: First Section - Nazi Activities. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1943. pp. 19-21.

¹⁵ Theodore Andrica, "Staff of 10 Assists Consul Karl Kapp in Handling German Business Here," *Cleveland Press*, March 18, 1941, p. 8.

¹⁶ William Leick, "Pastor Here Is Agent For Nazi Records," *Cleveland Press*, Nov. 16, 1937.

¹⁷ David L. Lewis, *The Public Image of Henry Ford: An American Folk Hero and His Company*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1976, p. 149.

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- ¹⁸ "Nazis to Broadcast Program for Ohio," *Plain Dealer*, April 28, 1938.
- ¹⁹ "Akron Attorney Admits Nazi Link: Pleads Guilty to Failure to Register as Agent," *Cleveland Press*, October 15, 1941, p. 14.
- ²⁰ Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn, *Sabotage: The Secret War Against America*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York, 1942, pp. 220-225.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.* Evidence that the two had grown close was demonstrated in letters found sent between them. Kapp closed such letters with "kindest regards to you and Mrs. Burch," and that Kapp hoped to "see you in Akron soon." Many pamphlets and books that Burch received described President Roosevelt as being under the control of "international Jews." It is also of note that all of Kapp's monetary transactions with Burch were done with cash to better avoid detection.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 206.
- ²⁴ "Akron Attorney Admits Nazi Link," *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 15, 1941, p. 14.
- ²⁵ "Akron Lawyer Admits His Guilt," *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 15, 1941.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ "Akron Man Fined \$1,000 on Propaganda Charge," *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 17, 1941.
- ²⁸ "Burch Disbarred by 6-Judge Panel," *Plain Dealer*, Dec. 18, 1942.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.* Unfortunately I could find no record that Burch was an anti-Semite before or after becoming acquainted with Kapp.
- ³⁰ Dies Committee, H. Res. 282, Appendix-Part VII: First Section - Nazi Activities. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1943, p. 19.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*: Appendix-Part II, p. 1029.
- ³² *Ibid.*: Appendix-Part II, pp. 995-998. Schmitt also warmly ends his lengthy letter by insisting that if he is able to keep the TNS it "will *really* be used in the proper manner, I remain, with Heil Hitler."
- ³³ "Germans Here Praise Hitler: Consul Thanks 'Our Fuehrer,' Hearers Follow with Nazi Salute," *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 10, 1938.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ "Hitler Activities Explained in Talk by German Consul: Kapp Tells Clevelanders Fuehrer is Desirous of Lasting Peace," *Cleveland Press*, May 8, 1939, p 13.
- ³⁶ "Nazi Letters Flood Pastors Here," *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 26, 1939.
- ³⁷ "Nazi Call in Area is Termed 'Routine,'" *Plain Dealer*, June 29, 1939, and Theodore Andrica, "German Call Here Is Explained as Only Routine," *Cleveland Press*, June 28, 1939, p. 14.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.* (The English spelling of "Roumania" has changed since 1939.)
- ³⁹ "Germans Here Are Exempted," *Cleveland Press*, March 27, 1936.

⁴⁰ "Consul Aide Tells of Raising Fund Here for German Relief," *Cleveland News*, Nov. 17, 1938.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "Dr. Kapp Outlines Germany's Aims, Predicts Victory," *Cleveland Press*, May 6, 1940, p. 10, and Theodore Andrica, "Cheer Hitler in Nazi Movie Here," *Cleveland Press*, June 7, 1940, p. 19.

⁴³ Gunnar Beckman, "Tells 1,000 Here Nazis Lead Way," *Plain Dealer*, May 6, 1940.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, and "Dr. Kapp Outlines Germany's Aims, Predicts Victory," *Cleveland Press*, May 6, 1940, p. 10.

⁴⁵ "Dr. Kapp Outlines Germany's Aims, Predicts Victory"

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ "Consul Kapp Tells Us," *Cleveland Press*, May 6, 1940, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Howard Beaufait, "News Reporter Solves the Mystery of Herr Kapp's Lost Pair of Pajamas," *Cleveland News*, June 27, 1941.

⁵¹ Theodore Andrica, "U.S. Germans Get Offer of Jobs in Reich: Skilled Mechanics Here Guaranteed Posts Abroad," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 21, 1939, p.1. Also, it is notable that Zanzinger refused to tell who it was that approved the applications.

⁵² Randall Brown, "'Raid' on Skilled Labor Takes 85 Clevelanders to Nazi Jobs," *Cleveland News*, March 16, 1939.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ "Nazi Labor Agent Fails to Make Bond: Zanzinger Held in Jail; Bail Set at \$15,000," *Cleveland Press*, July 31, 1941, p.10.

⁵⁵ "High Bond Keeps Nazi Agent in Jail: First Arrest Made Here in Nation-Wide Hunt," *Plain Dealer*, July 31, 1941.

⁵⁶ "Nazi Labor Agent Fails to Make Bond"

⁵⁷ "Nazi Worker Freed on \$15,000 Bond," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 13, 1941, p. 1.

⁵⁸ "20 Years Ago He, Too, Was a Fellow Pumper," *Plain Dealer*, Nov. 5, 1929, and biographical brief: "John B. Osmun," *Plain Dealer*, July 13, 1938. Moreover, in his youth he also worked with then future President Warren G. Harding, who published the *Marion Star*.

⁵⁹ "Osmun Resigns as Aid of Mahon: Assistant U.S. Attorney Opens Own Law Office," *Cleveland Press*, April 11, 1933, and "John B. Osmun," *Plain Dealer*, July 13, 1938.

⁶⁰ "Osmun Resigns as Aid of Mahon."

⁶¹ "Tells America First U.S. Is Not Needed," *Plain Dealer*, Sept. 5, 1941.

⁶² "America First Aide Issues Statement," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 15, 1941, p. 22.

⁶³ Ralph Kelly, "G.O.P Rally Boos G.O.P.'s Speaker: Townsendites Resent Attack on Democratic Fieger," *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 20, 1938.

⁶⁴ "Osmun Hits Attack by Lindbergh: Seeks Repudiation of 'Smear Against Jews,'" *Cleveland Press*, Sept. 18, 1941.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, and "Osmun Takes Over Zanzinger Defense: Tells of Resignation From America First Committee," *Cleveland Press*, Sept. 24, 1941. Yet other reasons existed for Osmun to resign: Taking on Zanzinger's case could place him in a potential conflict (with an America First chairman defending an alleged Nazi); and, as he later claimed, the running of the committee in Cleveland was taking too much time away from his busy law practice.

⁶⁶ Theodore Andrica, "Attorney Here Accused in Alien Registration Action," *Cleveland Press*, Aug. 30, 1940, p.1, and "Attorney's Letter to Aliens Attacked," *Plain Dealer*, Aug. 31, 1940.

⁶⁷ "Silbert Hit for Delays in Handling Divorces," *Cleveland Press*, Dec. 30, 1948.

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⁷⁴ H. L. Samford, "Zanzinger Case is Pushed by U.S.: Canton Clerk Meanwhile Bound Over to Jury," *Plain Dealer*, Dec. 13, 1941.

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⁸⁰ "Silbert Hit for Delays."

⁸¹ "To Preserve a Culture," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 19, 1937.

⁸² Ivan Platt, *The League for Human Rights: Cleveland Jewry's Fight Against Naziism, 1933-1946*, Cleveland State University master's thesis (history), 1977, p. 52 and 53.

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⁸⁴ Ibid.

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⁸⁶ "Rg 30/241 – Karl Frederick Geiser (1869-1951)," Oberlin College Archives, <http://www.oberlin.edu/~archive/holdings/finding/RG30/SG241/biography.html>, Charles W. Lawrence, "50 Sit Again At Dr. Geiser's Feet," *Plain Dealer*, June 16, 1935, and "Embattled Professor: Oberlin College Debates the Third Reich," by Geoffrey Blodgett, *Timeline* (August-September 1992): 2-19.

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⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "Upholds German Right to Equality," *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 15, 1933, and "Contends League Has Lost Prestige," *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 14, 1933.

⁹¹ Mss 3632, League for Human Rights Records, Container 2, Folder 1. Karl Geiser, "What Germany Thinks," *The Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, October, 1934, p. 10, Western Reserve Historical Society Library, and "Hitler Pictured Favorably Here," *Plain Dealer*, March 27, 1935.

⁹² "Hitler Pictured Favorably Here," *Plain Dealer*, March 27, 1935, and "Upholds German Right to Equality," *Plain Dealer*, Oct 15, 1933, and "Liberal Faces Oberlin Ouster," *Cleveland Press*, Nov. 10, 1934.

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⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Rg 30/241 – Karl Frederick Geiser" (However, the website has its dates wrong. Geiser retired in 1935, not 1934, and he received the Order of the German Eagle in 1938, not 1934.)

⁹⁷ These included William B. Munroe, Charles E. Merriam, Raymond Moley, Charles A. Beard and Felix Frankfurter.

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¹⁰⁵ Theodore Andrica, "Resolution of German-American Meet Protests Boycott on Teuton Goods," *Cleveland Press*, June 9, 1934.

¹⁰⁶ Spencer D. Irwin, "Denies Nazis Hope To Divide Poland," *Plain Dealer*, Dec. 11, 1938.

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¹¹⁷ "Rg 30/241 – Karl Frederick Geiser"

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The German Societies

Chapter 4

Cleveland should have been named “Zeisbergerland.” Ten years before Moses Cleaveland’s party founded the city on the Cuyahoga in 1796, Moravian missionaries David Zeisberger and his assistant, John Heckewelder, established Pilgerruh (Pilgrims’ Rest) where Valley View is today. The German pair built this Christian colony of converted Native Americans in the shadow of barbarism. The settlement was founded immediately after the horrific massacre of Gnadenhutten, Ohio, when almost one hundred of the Indian converts were butchered. Zeisberger and Heckewelder wanted to continue their work in a more hospitable place. Yet despite their pious mission, the settlement was forced to disband by New England investors, who had “purchased” the land from afar, and weren’t keen about Zeisberger’s community remaining there. In leaving, Heckewelder sadly departed what he saw as a beautiful land of plenty, pronouncing that Cleveland, “will hereafter be a place of great importance.”¹

At first the village of Cleveland began to grow with the faint pattering of German feet echoing in its alleys. Though not large in number, a rare look at these brave German pioneers showed the suffering and pain of their plight, and yet the raw fortitude and passion of their experience. In 1818, a reporter for the *Cleveland Gazette and Commercial Register* celebrated the scene, when on August 18, “Four or five families of immigrants from Germany

passed through the village. They traveled on foot, the women carrying large bags on their heads. Their condition appeared miserable but their countenance bespoke health and contentment."²

By the close of the 19th century, Cleveland's German-speaking immigrants were about forty percent of the population. Adapting to their newfound land, the city's Germans formed themselves into a multitude of societies, including social clubs, cultural organizations, literary clubs, schools, art guilds, concert orchestras and singing societies, publishing houses, colleges, benevolent societies, hospitals, religious clubs, gymnastic and sports groups and ethnic newspapers. However, the clouds of war have a way of changing culture, and World War I hit Cleveland's Germans hard. As a result of the Great War, German Hospital was renamed Fairview General Hospital; Cleveland schools tore the German language from their curriculum; and by decree of City Council, many streets with German names were given more American-sounding titles. However, probably the most culturally destructive aspect of this time was the disbanding of many German societies, as a general hatred for anything German was cultivated.³ These passions of public distrust and animosity were indeed a long time in relenting.

This atmosphere of fear pervaded into the 1920s and Great Depression, when German societies reemerged in a time of political extremes and acute cultural awareness. With the rise of Nazism in Germany, Cleveland's German societies often came under the scrutiny of groups and individuals who feared that these German societies were actually small satellites of Hitler's totalitarian machine.

THE GATHERINGS

To better illustrate and discuss the mighty achievements of German-Americans in Cleveland, the city's Germans would, on

special occasions, mass together in giant meetings. These German Day meetings were traditional gatherings concerned with German culture, and had gone on for years prior to the decade of the Great Depression. But with the rise of Nazism in Germany, and a seemingly endless Depression ravaging America, the subjects discussed easily shifted from culture to politics.

In June of 1934, the German Day festivities stretched on for four days in Cleveland, with thousands of participants. The most notable of speakers were professors, doctors, newspapermen and preachers. Among their ranks were German-American figures which would later promote the Nazi cause vehemently: Professor Karl Geiser of Oberlin College, Professor Frederick Konrad Kruger of Wittenberg College, and The Rev. John Foisel, of St. John's Lutheran Church. Yet these notables aside, the speakers came from a multitude of German-American societies, far and wide. Many resolutions were passed through this German-American congress, amid the speeches concerning what Nazism really meant for the world.

A prime topic of conversation at the gathering was the boycott on German goods in America, pushed by the enemies of Hitler's Germany. Representing the gigantic Steuben Society of America, Mrs. Marie MacDonald stated that the declaration of the boycott is essentially a declaration of war, and attacked the Versailles Treaty, blaming the Allies for pushing it on Germany. She stated:

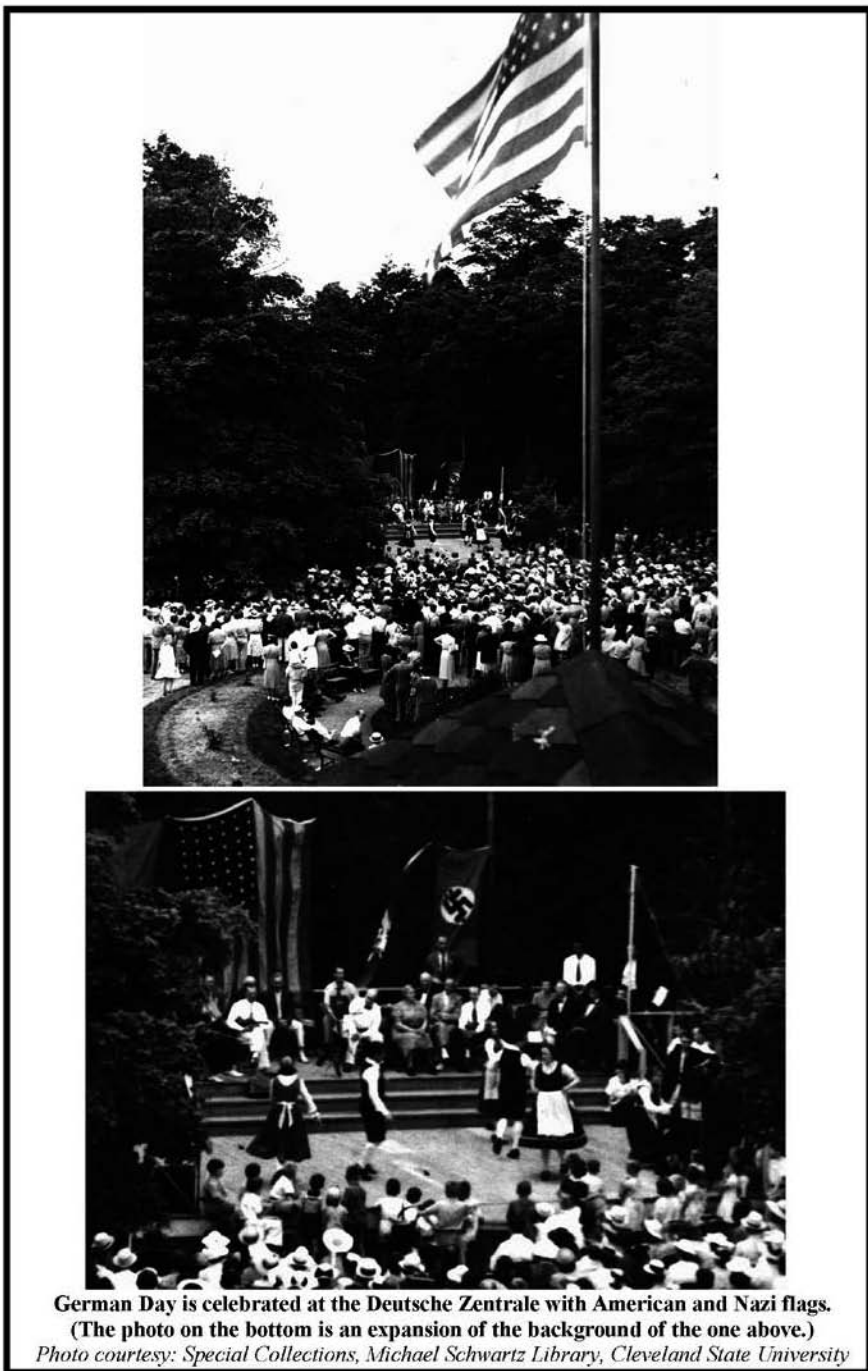
When the Allies are pointing the finger of scorn at Germany today, let them remember that when Germany was asked to sign the armistice she was asked to become a republic, an idea utterly alien to the German people. They forced impossible reparations upon her and gave no help to the poor,

dumb, struggling republic. Now let them take the consequences of their own injustice.⁴

However, while Mrs. MacDonald seemed ominous, the official line of her society was much more peace loving. It declared that, "We condemn all activities which in any manner tend to array nationality against nationality, race against race and creed against creed as being antagonistic to the ideals of our country, subversive of its institutions and as threatening the future peaceful relations between our citizens."⁵

Within the debate between peace and racial hatred, the issue of the boycott also was cause for warning by the Steuben Society. For the society claimed, "the Jews of Germany in whose interest the boycott is proclaimed have repeatedly appealed to the outside world to desist from actions against Germany which in their further effect might tend to inflame already highly wrought feelings."⁶ Though the boycott was begun because of German hatred toward Jews, not the other the way around, the passionate feelings regarding the boycott erupted in the congress as well.

Since the congress had a multitude of societies represented at it, it had to be organized with official delegates. Yet the passions erupted when the proposed delegates from DAWA were refused seats. The controversial DAWA (German American Protective Alliance) was a group of German-Americans ardently against the boycott, and which often expressed pro-Nazi sentiments. The DAWA leaders pushed an almost militant opposition to the boycott, and wished the congress to express sympathy with their views. The main objective of the group was to promote a strong counter-boycott, by boycotting businesses that were boycotting German goods. With the leaders of the congress afraid of public attacks, and especially against *any type* of boycott, the DAWA was permitted to remain at the conference as visitors, "without voice or



German Day is celebrated at the Deutsche Zentrale with American and Nazi flags.

(The photo on the bottom is an expansion of the background of the one above.)

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

vote," in the proceedings. The Rev. John Foisel openly expressed regret that injustice was done to them.⁷

However, Foisel was not the only reverend to voice his feelings in support of Nazi Germany. The principal speaker of the congress, Rev. Fritz O. Evers of Baltimore, expressed how upset he was that Hitler's Germany was being condemned. He asserted, "It is to be deeply deplored that only passing phases of a tremendous revolutionary upheaval are kept in the eyes and minds of the American people and that the truly great accomplishments of the new leadership in Germany is bringing about order out of chaos and a nation unified in form and will are lost sight of."⁸

Even though Evers was showing his support of Hitler's new Germany, a counterpart upstaged him by integrating religion into the passionate applause for early Nazi achievements. The Rev. W. Joseph Schmidt, of the Evangelical Church of Black Creek, Wis., announced to the Cleveland assemblage what Nazism meant, as if he were preaching to his congregation. He pronounced:

The most important accomplishment in Germany today is the unity of the German people. This unity is the answer to the people's prayer. The result of this unity in Germany is that party and class hatred have disappeared. All people, may they be workers or students, are the same. There is no more class distinction in the fatherland. This is such a tremendous accomplishment over the past I am of the opinion that we, Americans of German descent, should follow it and try to accomplish our unity here.⁹

Though unity and an end to class hatred may have been the goals of many Americans during this time, the idea of using Nazi Germany as a model was not, of course, accepted by everyone.

Such discussions, which appeared to glorify the work of Nazism, made others outside the congress deeply suspicious of their activities.

The United Anti-Fascist Committee filed protest with the Cleveland mayor over the meeting of the congress, claiming it was actually a Nazi organization. Ernst Wagenknecht, secretary of the committee, said in the group's protest that they would "initiate a counter campaign" against the congress. He stated that the resolution of his group had been voted on in a meeting at the Cleveland City Club, attended by delegates from 120 different organizations, representing a total of 37,000 members.¹⁰ This counter campaign materialized in the form of leaflets on the street protesting the German Day celebrations. Yet the Anti-Fascist Committee was not alone in their stand against Nazi sympathy. The League for Human Rights took the opportunity to defend her fervent stand for the boycott on German goods. The league stated, "Germany will regain her world markets when the acts of oppression and tyranny of the present government are repudiated and the infamous laws discriminating against men, women and children because of race are stricken from her statute books. Until then the boycott will go on."¹¹ Though those in support of Hitler's new government were given a giant forum to voice their views in the early years of Nazism, it is important that those opposed to his policies also spoke out.

Cleveland's 1934 German Day celebrations were massive. Cleveland Stadium and Hotel Hollenden were the central locations for the thousands of visitors and participants. German Day was climaxed by a parade of 3,000 of America's Germans, stretching a mile long. Typical German bands, traditional and unusual German costumes, and drill teams marched through the streets. Yet it was members of the German Rifle Club, from Cleveland's Deutsche Zentrale, that attracted the most favorable attention. Both men and

women, clad in white uniforms marched in synchronization, bearing their rifles. A giant picnic was held at the Deutsche Zentrale, and the parade's exercises finished in the stadium, with an attendance of 10,000, to climax the four-day festivities on June 11.¹² Though the practice of Nazism was in its early stages in Germany, it was already evident that it would be controversial to discuss its merits and policies here.

Where the 1934 German Day congress was an important meeting of Cleveland's Germans to discuss the rise of Hitler and the new Nazi Germany, other smaller meetings continued throughout the 1930s. Yet it was not until 1937 that another major German-American congress was established in the city to discuss the importance of the German race. It was no accident then that Martin Kessler and Fritz Kuhn were delegates at this meeting, since 1937 was the height of the German-American Bund. This congress was called the "German Round Table," and many of its members came from the Cleveland German-American Olympic Committee of 1936. (Cleveland's Germans cared much about the 1936 Olympics because, of course, they were held in Hitler's Berlin.) The reason behind the creation of the Round Table was to solidify the Cleveland Germans as a nationality group through their societies, and serve as a general cultural and social gathering. The Round Table was headed by Dr. Otto A. Glasser, chief of the bio-physical department of the Cleveland Clinic.¹³

Supporters of the Round Table claimed that its creation was to help the Germans lose the "unfortunate predicament of being placed in the middle," between the metropolitan city of Cleveland and the totalitarianism of Nazi Germany. At the announcement of this Round Table, the press was ecstatic that Cleveland's Germans would unite their societies, and define themselves contrary to what Hitler was propagandizing. The Cleveland newspapers *The Plain Dealer* and *The Cleveland Press* welcomed the news, each with

editorials filled with praise. Their titles were "Place of German Culture," and "To Preserve a Culture," and they commended the immense impact of Germans on America, noting their contributions to art, literature, science and music, apart from Germany's militaristic and authoritarian traditions.¹⁴ The *Cleveland Press* stated:

Here in America, a land dedicated to intellectual and political freedom, founded upon the fusion of many cultures: English, Dutch, German, French and others, and hospitable to every religion, it is fitting that citizens of German descent emphasize those broad tolerant principles which once made Germany the focal point of the intellectual world.¹⁵

Even though "tolerant principles" were a part of the Round Table, the cultural aspects seemed overclouded by the practice of Nazi politics at the gathering. The Round Table gathering lasted for two days, begun on March 6, at a packed Guild Hall, in the Builders Exchange Building. Dr. Rolf Kassler, Cleveland's German Consul, (and official spreader of Nazi propaganda) brought greetings from the German government, and stated that Nazi Germany was watching the Round Table with great interest. He welcomed the delegates with a full Nazi salute, as Nazi swastika flags about the table flanked him.¹⁶

Dr. Glasser introduced the delegates from the multitude of societies, but none received as warm a welcome as Fritz Kuhn, national leader of the German-American Bund. When Kuhn was introduced, the crowd gave him a rousing ovation, and he responded with a modified Nazi salute. When his enthusiastic ovation died down, he stated his greetings to the crowd from the whole of the German-American Bund. Dr. Norbert Zimmer, of Hanover, Germany, made the chief address. He began by stiffly



**Crowd at German Day, Cleveland Municipal Stadium,
June 10, 1934**

*Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library,
Cleveland State University*



Entrance to Deutsche Zentrale on German Day, 1940

*Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library,
Cleveland State University*

forming the Nazi salute, with his shoulder high and arm stiffly out. In his lecture, Zimmer described how his society, The Society for Germans in Other Lands, had investigated the racial origins of Germans in the American Midwest. He described the dozens of small communities in the Midwest, which have retained their Germanic place names, folk dances, language, traditions, and costumes in their "native purity." He described these traditional Germans in America, and how their traditions have remained more staunchly German than anywhere else outside of the Fatherland. He noted that there are nonetheless farmers in Ohio whose children still speak German, even though they had left the Fatherland nine generations ago. These Germans, he said, should be a role model for German-Americans in our country's major cities, which still remain disorganized. He affirmed, "The study of one's racial origins makes for a spirit of mutual understanding leading to peace based on confidence in the world."

Yet Zimmer knew that some perceived his visit to Cleveland as a danger. He stated, "We who come to visit you from Germany do not represent a threat to you. The threat lies rather with those who cast suspicions abroad, pulling strange statements out of the clear sky and painting them in gaudy colors." Zimmer concluded by showing movies of America's Midwest Germans.¹⁷

On the second day of the Round Table conference, with over 500 in attendance, Dr. Glasser introduced Ohio Supreme Court Judge Arthur H. Day. Day said that he was half German, and proud of his heritage. Day proclaimed, several times, that he felt a "tremendous thrill at the privilege" of being asked to speak at the Round Table. He stated that no American ethnicity had made "a finer or more worthwhile contribution to American institutions, life or whatever is fine."

A series of other speakers gave accounts of Germans in Ohio, among them being Elsie Weitz, president of the German

Cultural Garden Association. She discussed how a group of Germans emigrated from Wurttemberg in 1817, to settle on 12,000 acres of land in Zoar, 70 miles south of Cleveland. Under the leadership of the mystic Jacob Boehme, the Germans established a commune, which lasted until 1898. Weitz showed slides of old Zoar, which was supplemented by a color movie of the modern village. The Round Table was concluded with the singing of the traditional German anthem "Deutschland Ueber Alles," and the Nazi hymn, "The Horst Wessel Song."¹⁸

However, even before the swastikas of the Round Table were hoisted, Leon Wiesenfeld, editor of Cleveland's *Jewish World*, was less than impressed by the outpouring of journalistic sympathy for the German meeting. In an open letter to the *Plain Dealer* and *Cleveland Press*, Wiesenfeld charged that the Round Table was actually assembled "to disseminate the insidious Nazi dogmas rather than spread German culture." Wiesenfeld listed a number of the Round Table members and explained their varied Nazi sympathies and activities. Wiesenfeld blasted that:

The alleged objects these leaders outlined are self-contradictory when we know the origin of the organization. Their noble aspirations are clearly revealed when we know their background. This open letter is written in the earnest hope that you will be more cautious before lending editorial support of your invaluable newspapers to efforts so decidedly subversive to American principles and democracy.¹⁹

Wiesenfeld also described how the Round Table was allegedly another trick to push propaganda by painting it as culture. It is somewhat astonishing to see how the major newspapers supported the Round Table so quickly, when at the same time they were

writing editorial objections to what the German Consul and German-American Bund were doing in Cleveland. Perhaps the newspapers always felt like they were attacking the city's Germans, and the Round Table, for once, appeared to be a genuine organization to promote culture without politics. Needless to say, for Cleveland's Germans during the Depression, there was a very blurred line between what was German and what was Nazi.

RIDING THE FENCE

Though there were those Cleveland Germans that took ardent stands on the emergence of Nazism and the Bund, there were many that were caught in the middle of this cultured dilemma as well. The Greater Cleveland area, at the time of the 1930's, had literally hundreds of German-American societies.²⁰ For most of the Depression, Cleveland's German community largely rode the fence in the debate about Nazism and the pressure to incorporate Nazi doctrine into their organizations.

The two major umbrella organizations, the Stadtverband (or United German Societies) and the Deutsche Zentrale (or German Central Organization) together comprised voices from many of the city's Germans and incorporated Bund members and Nazi insignias at some points, and became neutral to Nazism and the Bund at others. They were used as umbrella organizations for the German-American groups of the Cleveland area to send representatives and express views en masse that were important to their respective societies.²¹ Importantly, these two massive groups did not compete with one another, but rather helped form a united voice for the children of the Fatherland.

As noted in chapter one, the vast Zentrale emerged in Cleveland as the primary meeting-grounds for many German groups and individuals. The first president of the Zentrale, Otto L.

WIR WÜNSCHEN DEM

Amerikadeutschen
Volksbund

EINEN ERFOLGREICHEN

KREISTAG

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From the 1937 “Kreistag” pamphlet advertising the Midwestern Bund meeting in Cleveland, this ad was taken out by the Deutsche Zentrale. The top section reads:

**“We wish the German-American Bund a successful
district meeting
- the Deutsche Zentrale:
The German community of Greater Cleveland”**

Photo courtesy: Western Reserve Historical Society History Library

Fricke had to deal with the influence of the Bund, and, emblematic of many Cleveland Germans, he allowed *some* incorporation of Bund activity at the farm. Importantly, Fricke, unlike local Bund leader Martin Kessler, was a native of the German lands. Being born in Prussia in 1886, Fricke arrived in Cleveland in 1909 where he took up the study of law and devoted much time to "his greatest interest, to rouse German people to greater participation in public affairs."²² Though he lost his presidency in the Zentrale by 1935, his work of keeping the influence of Nazi programs quiet can be seen in the records of the Stadtverband.

A growing terror of many outside the city's German community was that the fascist Bund was infiltrating the Zentrale and the Stadtverband, to the extent that in time, these massive umbrella organizations would become thoroughly Nazified. *Cleveland Press* reporter Theodore Andrica best described this fear:

This is how the "infiltration" method works. The active members of the Bund become members in as many German organizations as possible. They attend all

meetings of these groups. They soon manage to be elected to the executive committees of the respective organizations.

The Stadtverband, or the United German Societies, is an organization of delegates from 40 various German societies, including sick benefit and singing societies. Its president, Otto L. Fricke, is not known to be a member of Martin Kessler's pro Nazi Bund but Kessler is an executive board member of the Stadtverband and is one of the most active persons in it.²³



Otto L. Fricke

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Dr. Norbert Zimmer

Photo courtesy: Cleveland Press Newspaper



Dr. Otto Glasser

Photo courtesy: Cleveland Press Newspaper



Arthur Day

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library Cleveland State University

In the Stadtverband's records it is evident that extreme pressure was felt to Nazify the influential groups. With Kessler as an executive board member, and other Bund officers present, the fascist group held important sway over the Stadtverband. Even if Kessler missed a meeting, there was always a Bund official present to oversee developments in the meetings.²⁴ If Kessler did not attend the meeting, (a possible reason for which will be discussed) another leader of the Bund took his place. This illustrates, if not Kessler's importance in the Stadtverband, the weight the Bund placed on keeping a voice in the proceedings.

In the Stadtverband's minutes, it is evident that Fricke and the Stadtverband took a teetering middle-ground stance in relation to what emerged in their minutes as the ominous "Jewish question." As the Stadtverband debated about what was to be done with the Jews, Kessler and the Bund made their presence and opinions known at the meetings.²⁵ The important thing to remember is that Kessler only appeared when decisions regarding Nazism, the "Jewish question," or the Bund were concerned.²⁶ In the minutes of the Stadtverband one can see how the uneasy question of the Jews was played-out, as loyalties to America and Nazi Germany were clashing, and persecution of America's Germans was feared. Cleveland's Germans had to make a choice between whether to accept or persecute the Jews in America. This was particularly the case at a meeting in the Social Gymnasium (Socialen Turnhalle) when the "Friends of the New Germany" under Kessler began to have pull in 1933. Fricke played an integral role in this decision making process, and his reasoning and the Stadtverband's reaction to the "Jewish question" was emblematic of many of the city's Germans: ride the fence.

Jewish question: Fricke again organized a special commission, which is concerned with the Jewish

question in Germany. Often these things cast themselves on us here. Mr. Fricke's particular interpretation on this is that there are organizations in America paying particular attention to us now. Therefore it would be an appropriate position for us to defend the Jews at this time, for open persecution we receive from watchful organizations lie behind cultural biases. We must insure that all questions on this subject are answered carefully, for there may be dangerous after-effects . . . This being the stance of our executive committee, not too much discussion is promoted, but some further talks are assumed.²⁷

It is important that the fear of persecution from outside forces in reference to the "Jewish question" forced Fricke and the Stadtverband (for the time being) to *defend* the Jews. Yet the way in which the minutes are written, it shows significant anxiety over the stance they should take regarding this important racial question.

Even though Kessler and Bund officers brought up the question of the Jews in the group's meetings, they were not alone. Another major voice promoting the Nazi cause in the Stadtverband was Dr. Frederick Wilhelm Walz, a former city councilman, and a respected local authority on German culture. Though there is no evidence officially connecting Walz to the Bund, he discussed the "Jewish question" with the Stadtverband,²⁸ and planned to make a trip to Germany to see the conditions in the Fatherland firsthand. The elderly Walz finally conducted his five-week study of the Nazi system in 1938. While lounging on his porch, he discussed his findings with a *Plain Dealer* reporter when he returned to Cleveland. Puffing comfortably on a little black cigar he bought in Bremen, and caressing his graying beard, he affirmed, "Things are better there than at any time since the World War." Concerning the

erupting international crisis at the time he stated, "People in Germany are not talking of war, but I noticed they are prepared. At one home we visited, they had gas masks for all members of the family – just in case." But most importantly to Walz, he insisted that all the Germans were "for Hitler 100 percent."

Even though Dr. Walz was impressed by the Nazi system, his wife was dismayed. Mrs. Walz had toured with the doctor, but expressed her experience as profoundly different than previous visits. She appeared on the porch next to her humble husband, and described her trip with a trace of sadness. She stated, "Everything in Germany is so useful now. It is impossible to buy fine laces, needlepoint embroidery and bric-a-brac that we used to get there. There is nothing fancy about the Germany of today. Everything is so businesslike now that it isn't as much fun as it used to be."²⁹ Despite the fact that Nazi Germany became infamous for the way it impacted society, it seems not all people opposed to it thought it was evil for the same reasons.

While there indeed were strong supporters of Nazism within the Stadtverband, the fear of public retaliation forced Fricke and the group to correspond with the assailing of Nazi anti-Semitism in the early years of the Nazi dictatorship. At a later meeting of the umbrella group, when they once again considered the "Jewish question" in their hall, they emerged with a different problem at hand as well. This time they enlisted the help of Mr. Laette, a Stadtverband officer who was good at politics. The group's minutes confronted the "*Jewish question*: Discussion of this question has emerged again, because of the boycott [against German goods] and other situations. We have instructed Laette to put in a word with the Jewish newspapers so that we are free from pressure, and under our stance we will not suffer."³⁰ Though the Bund and Kessler were a part of the Stadtverband, the Stadtverband's records illustrate influence toward anti-Semitism in large measure *without*

their help. Yet it is essential that the wavering toward anti-Semitism was curbed through the tender steps of Fricke, for his personal fear of social and economic retribution.

The oratory of Fricke was interesting when it specifically concerned German-Americans in a speech in 1940. While many German-Americans in Cleveland were disillusioned with keeping ties to the Fatherland, Fricke still emphasized the importance of the German American influence in the United States. In a speech given at the Zentrale's German Day celebration in 1940, Fricke noted that such "celebrations were milestones and reviews of the activities of our blood in the fields of science, religion, art and industry in America. And we have a right to be proud of this record: everywhere men of German lineage reached the highest pinnacles of success."³¹ Yet when it came to events in the old country, he surprisingly keeps with the (often) Nazi "stab in the back" feeling that Germany was indeed a victim of the Allies' greed immediately after the First World War. "Today again a war rages in Europe. This war is the result of the injustices of the Peace Treaty of Versailles and the shortsightedness and craftiness of so-called statesmen, who wanted to keep the German nation impotent and in practical slavery."³² However, when ultimate allegiance must be pledged, he importantly stated that it should have been vested *solely* in the United States, for he stated that "we Americans of German stock are not interested in Europe. We are Americans first, last and all the time."³³

After Fricke left the presidency of the Zentrale, Herbert S. Reichle became not only the acting president of the organization but the head of the Stadtverband as well. Dr. Reichle was born in New Jersey and found his calling in pathology. He studied in Freiberg, Germany and finished his education in America at Columbia University and the Western Reserve University's Institute of Pathology.³⁴ It was under Reichle's leadership that the

Bund found a home on the Zentrale's farm in Parma. By 1937, the Bund had become so integral to the life of the Zentrale's farm that *Cleveland Press* reporter Theodore Andrica interchangeably referred to the farm being the property of the Zentrale and the Bund. This was emblematic in the title of one of his articles: "Swastika, Emblem of Germany, Missing at Parma Volksbund Farm." Andrica tells us about the 45 children that were participating in a summer camp run by the Bund on the farm in 1937. However, "some of the boys wear the regulation brown uniform of the youth department of the Amerikadeutscher Volksbund, but the majority wear regular summer clothing like other American children do."³⁵ Importantly, Reichle, if not supporting the Bund's activities, at least allowed the Bund to express their views at the farm.

Even though Reichle and the Deutsche Zentrale were always under suspicion of supporting Nazi activities, the group was not afraid to voice its opinion if they felt that Germans were being persecuted, even if this persecution allegedly came from Jews. In June of 1938, the League for Human Rights posted an advertisement in the *Waechter und Anzeiger*, German language newspaper. An angered Zentrale passed a resolution condemning the League for carrying "on a petty persecution of German Americans." Reichle signed the resolution, which also blasted that the League's works are a "gross violation of American sportsmanship and an obvious incitement to racial antipathies which we, as representatives of the German Americans of Cleveland, have always opposed." Yet the Zentrale also took the opportunity to ardently assault how the League, and the Jews supposedly controlling it, affected people. The Zentrale blasted that the League was guilty of "terrorism kept from the public eye," to attack, "German Americans of repute in business and professional life, with the purpose of destroying the reputation and material prosperity of these individuals."³⁶ Although the Zentrale was

Deutsche Weihnachtsfeier

mit

Kinderbescheerung

gemeinsam veranstaltet von

DEUTSCHE ZENTRALE
BUND DEUTSCHER VETERANEN, Hindenburg Einheit
AMERIKADEUTSCHER VOLKSBUND

am 18. Dezember 1937

abends 8 Uhr in der Halle des

SOCIALEN TURNVEREINS
LORAIN AVENUE

EINTRITT 35 CENTS

Jedes Kind erhaelt ein Geschenk und hat freien Eintritt.



**The German-American Bund and German Veterans are shown
sponsoring a children's Christmas party hosted at the
Deutsche Zentrale, 1937**

Photo courtesy: Western Reserve Historical Society History Library

supposedly fighting for all of Cleveland's German-Americans, the real question (taking into consideration what the League for Human Rights was putting its efforts into fighting against and exposing) is whether the Zentrale was really sticking up for its pro-Nazi members or not.

The middle-ground stance of the Zentrale in relation to the Bund is epitomized by the unwillingness of Reichle to cave-in to Bund influence. Reichle best illustrated this point during the German Day celebration at the farm in 1938. An undercover spy for the League for Human Rights indicated that despite threats of retaliation, Reichle refused to let the Bund wear their uniforms at the farm during this occasion. That in order to attend the festivities, Reichle stipulated:

No Bund members would be permitted on the farm in uniform, that meant they would have to remove their Sam Brown belts and campaign hats. The uniformed group which consisted of about 40 members definitely refused to do this, and a large group of non-uniformed members sided with them.

Several uniformed members were for forming a group and crashing into the farm. Reichle became informed of the situation and called several Parma Police officers to keep order and to remove any uniformed Bund member.³⁷

Though there was no incident, Reichle had made a definitive step. He allowed Bund activities to a point on the farm, yet he was willing to disperse the Bund before being influenced by the pressure they exerted. This power struggle seemed to be strictly between Reichle and the Bund, for even though the uniformed Bund members were not allowed access, shades of Nazism were

still prevalent. For among the traditional national anthems of both Germany and America sung at the end of the festivities, the Horst Wessel Song, (once again, the Nazi anthem) was also played. During both of the German songs "a large number of those attending raised their right hand in a Nazi salute. Dr. Reichle and Fricke did not do this."³⁸

Yet the Bund was less than thrilled with Reichle's actions against them, and they intended to exact an ironic revenge. After they were cast out, about 100 disgruntled Bundsmen met at a local cafe and plotted to bring down Reichle. A lesser known Bundsman, Heinrich Esch "gave a short talk, relating that he had heard that it was the Cleveland Bund that built up the Zentrale Farm, and it was the Bund that made Dr. Reichle president of the farm, and now Reichle has turned against the Bund. That the Bund can break Reichle, just as easily as they made him. His weak spot is known and through this weak spot he can be broken."³⁹ While the Bund plotted the complete demise of Reichle, the most interesting aspect is how they planned to accomplish it. The Bund recognized that Reichle held a prominent position in the community, not just among German-Americans in the Zentrale but among many others because of his job as a pathologist. Yet the Bund knew *their* sour position in the Cleveland community, so they decided that by promoting Reichle as one of them that his ultimate downfall would occur. For there were Bund members that "believed that the weak spot of Reichle is his position with the City Hospital. Let rumors be spread that Reichle is a secret member of the Bund and he would lose his job. This would break him."⁴⁰

There indeed was significant suspicion placed on any leader of the German-American community in Cleveland with possible involvement of the Bund during these trying years. And with enough dissemination of malicious rumors about a prominent man in the community, mere suspicion could easily lead to a general

attack of an individual, most importantly through the press. In his article in 1941, *Cleveland News* writer Randall Brown, whether through factual information or the abundance of rumor, pinned Reichle as being one of the clearest adherents of Nazism. "Politically, Clevelanders knew him as an open Nazi sympathizer, eager to see Germany win the war and almost fanatically admiring Adolf Hitler."⁴¹

Whether or not Reichle was indeed a Nazi sympathizer is a subject of speculation. However, what makes his case ever more interesting is the fact that he left the country just a couple weeks before the FBI began a thorough investigation of alleged Nazi activities in Cleveland in 1941. Quickly taking a leave of absence from his post at the hospital, Reichle headed for Mexico where he allegedly was afflicted with an illness, prolonging his departure.⁴² After overstaying his leave in Mexico, he was consequently dismissed from his post in the hospital and confronted by a reporter in Mexico City regarding the suspension of his job, "Of course, I'd like to be reinstated, and shall ask for it. I want to find out what this is all about. What happened, I guess, is that the international crisis has made things different." Yet what complicated things more was that he described his wife as being "seriously ill," and that she and their sons were already in Munich, Germany.⁴³

Not surprisingly, Reichle never returned to Cleveland. It was learned after World War II that Reichle had spent the duration of the conflict in Germany with his family. Yet the question of why he fled may not be simply answered by supposed Nazi sympathies. The United States "State Department investigated and learned that American-born Reichle took the oath of allegiance to the Reich on Jan. 15, 1921, during a four-year stay in Germany on an American passport. This means that Reichle illegally held his job at City Hospital from 1933 to the summer of 1941, when he mysteriously

disappeared. Civil Service rules require that public job holders be American citizens."⁴⁴ The tangled web that Reichle spun for himself in some ways seemed ludicrous; why spread your work and allegiance around the globe? To us now it seems to make little sense, but to Reichle the lure of the Fatherland and the bounty of America must have been one that tore at the conscience of this pillar of the community. Reichle's experience, and the experiences of the giant German societies, were fascinating chronicles of how the conflict of allegiance, culture and politics created a climate of great anxiety and pressure in the midst of the Depression and the spread of Nazism abroad.

STRUGGLING OVER NAZISM

Even though much of the politics concerning Nazism revolved around the Zentrale and the Stadtverband, many other German societies also dealt directly with the issues, as some German groups were even *created* to fight Nazism. The German groups that followed the Bund at least to some extent steadily lost interest as the larger umbrella organizations came against them. Not wanting to be ostracized from the greater German-American community, these groups dropped away from the Nazi following. Other groups, however, were always in complete opposition to the Bund and Nazism, with a significant number of members that had fled the Hitler dictatorship. The story of these smaller groups is not only linked to the political opinions of their following, but also the national and international events affecting all German-Americans.

At the height of the Bund's influence in Cleveland, the strongest of its supporters were German veterans groups, particularly The Hindenburg Unit. The most obvious link that the organizations had to Kessler's party were that many of the Bund members were also German veterans of World War I. The

organizations were primarily friendly with one another because the German veterans were infinitely familiar with militarism and order of the German variety. Since for a time Hitler seemed to embody the order that the Kaiser had instilled, the two groups had something in common. This was most apparent by 1937, when the veterans and the Bund came to jointly own the Deutsche Zentrale farm in Parma.⁴⁵

As time went on, however, the veterans saw the Bund as increasingly controversial, and since they themselves were men who had fought against the United States before, they knew that there was already suspicion of their activities in America. Steadily these veterans distanced themselves from current politics, and rather enjoyed just discussing the Great War with comrades and drinking volumes of beer.⁴⁶ By mid-1938, the veterans had disagreed with how Kessler had been handling his leadership, and many refused to meet with the Bund.⁴⁷ Yet the official break between the veterans and the Bund came in September of 1938, when the two major German veteran groups, Der Stahlhelm and The Hindenburg Unit, were combined into the United German Veterans. Under the command of Alfred Adl, the group wanted to better cultivate relationships with veteran organizations from all nations.⁴⁸ Trying now to fit better into the American mainstream, the veterans had no place for the Bund.

Some of Cleveland's German-American groups found themselves in the middle when it came to Nazism. One such group was the German Rifle Club. The club, composed of both men and women, enjoyed competitive shooting matches at the large Deutsche Zentrale farm. The members would wear white uniforms, and would participate publicly in parades and other social gatherings.⁴⁹ The problem the Rifle Club had was with the storm trooper contingent of the German-American Bund, the Ordnungsdienst, who also used the farm's shooting range for target



Not all of Cleveland's Germans were preoccupied with passionate politics. These band members at the Deutsche Zentrale's German Day of 1938 had beer on their mind. Given that the Depression limited people's funds, they said, "We'll play for a beer," and so they did!

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Herbert S. Reichle

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

**Theodore Andrica,
Nationalities
Editor,
Cleveland
Press
Newspaper**



Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

practice.⁵⁰ With both groups using the same range, and with an ever-present distrust of the city's Germans, some believed that the Rifle Club was a part of the Bund, which it wasn't.⁵¹

The questioning of the use of the shooting range came to a head with a federal investigation by the Dies Committee on "Un-American activities" in Cleveland in 1938. The connection between Bund-controlled shooting ranges in other American cities and Cleveland was made through testimony of John C. Metcalfe, who was a former Bund storm trooper, and then operated as an investigator for the committee. What drew attention to Metcalfe, and others in the press, was a special shooting tournament between Cleveland's German Rifle Club members and a picked team of sharpshooters in Nazi Berlin. The two rifle ranges communicated by wire.⁵² To Metcalfe and the committee this was evidence enough that the Zentrale was Nazi-controlled, though the participants in the Rifle Club had no affiliation with the Bund whatsoever.

Dr. Herbert Reichle made a trip to Washington to testify in front of the committee. Reichle explained that though he had a problem with the Bund before, he had kicked them out of the farm. In fact, "the German Rifle Club was among my most loyal support in throwing the Bund out. That ought to speak for itself." He further went on to explain that "the rifle club is a member of the American Rifle Association, and United States Army officers superintend its meets. Its president, Joseph Kasper, is in the National Guard. Assertions that the Central or the rifle club are dictated by the Bund are simply ridiculous."⁵³ What Reichle did not explain, however, is how the Ordnungs Dienst did use the rifle range in the past, which had caused all the confusion in the first place. Yet admitting such a fact would have put the Zentrale under much more scrutiny, and even may have destroyed the large German center completely.

Though some groups supported the Bund, and others were caught in the middle, some were also adamantly opposed to the Bund and Nazism altogether. One of these groups spread their own cultural propaganda through a unique medium: song. At the very height of the Bund's power in Cleveland, in 1937, the German Workingmen's Singing Society, (or Arbeiter Saengerbund), intended to let the world hear the German folk and workers' songs that were being banned in Nazi Germany. The Saengerbund was actually a gigantic chorus of singers, with representatives from a variety of Cleveland's German singing societies. The total number of singers at the three-day choral demonstration in September numbered 3,000 people, at the time one of the largest choruses to sing a radio broadcast in history. Those attending, but not singing, numbered 2,000.

Under the direction of Rudolph Schuster, the Saengerbund was assisted by members of the Cleveland Orchestra, who helped by providing instrumental backup for some of the pieces. Over the course of the three days, the chorus sang at both the Equestrium, 6800 Denison Ave., and at the Eintracht farm, North Royalton. Yet politics also was ever-present. As the singers caroled away in the Equestrium, they were carefully watched by a gigantic picture of Karl Marx, draped in black. At the conclusion of a gigantic piece named *Freiheitsklänge* (sounds of liberty) by Schuster, the massed choruses all rose together and sang the Internationale, the world-recognized socialist and communist hymn. Between pieces various speakers assailed the work of Nazism, and at the conclusion of the performances, delegates met at their headquarters, 4308 Franklin Avenue, to pass resolutions against fascism and Nazism.⁵⁴

Though the singers were a powerful voice against Nazism in Cleveland, the primary German force fighting the Bund came from those German-Americans who remembered the persecution their Cleveland community felt during World War I. The German-

American Cultural League was at the forefront of the city's German resistance to the Bund. The Cultural League began in Cleveland solely to thwart the persecution of German-Americans, instigated by the activities of the Bund and the work of the Nazis in Germany. Though it did not become popular in Cleveland until the second half of the 1930's, the Cultural League offered not only a polemic stance to Nazism and the Bund but also attracted many supporters.⁵⁵

The stated goal of the Cultural League was "to spread German culture as opposed to Nazi Kultur, and to stem the rising tide of racial, class and religious hatreds."⁵⁶ The opposition to German-Americans adhering to the doctrines of Nazism was shown through the first large meeting in 1937. At this meeting, Dr. Erich von Schroetter, in exile from Nazi Germany, assaulted the likes of the Bund. Schroetter spoke with disgust as he ridiculed those "groups which pledge loyalty to the United States while swearing to obey orders of a foreign leader."⁵⁷ Also at this meeting was Dr. Simons, formerly a director in the School of Politics in Berlin, who reinforced Schroetter's stance by claiming that America had the right to set the parameters for subversive groups. To him it was justifiable to abridge the rights of organizations like the Bund, for they threaten the liberty of those that were solely American. He stated: "If the American union is ready to grant that its citizens are also loyal to a totalitarian state, it is undermining its own foundations."⁵⁸

If the Cultural League did not have a strong foundation *before* in their opposition to Nazism and the Bund, 1938's Kristalnacht truly cemented their position. In the wake of the horrors of Kristalnacht in Germany, an emergency Cleveland meeting was immediately held. The Cultural League drew speakers not only from their own ranks, but also from the Jewish and African-American communities as well. At this momentous



Cleveland's German community met often to discuss their racial and ethnic identity during the Depression. Here is an image of a conference lunch on German-American racial and cultural relations at the East Side Sachsenheim, 1937

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University



Crowd scene at German Day in Edgewater Park, 1933

Photo courtesy: Special Collections, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University

meeting, the Cultural League passed a resolution assailing the "injustice, brutality and robbery committed by the Hitler government."⁵⁹ Importantly, just a day before this meeting the NAACP in Cleveland passed a resolution ridiculing "the inhuman treatment of Jews in Germany and Italy."⁶⁰ And of course, the issue of the Nazis in Germany had the keen interest of Cleveland's Jews as well. Rabbi Armond E. Cohen best represented the Jewish community in Cleveland when he stated the true impact of Kristalnacht at that time, and what the retaliation would be. "Only such brutalities could shock democratic people of America into their sensibilities and rally them to the preservation of democratic government." And optimistically Cohen claimed, "Democracy has awakened and is on the march. President Roosevelt's plan to defend the North American continent is the first defensive that democracy has launched."⁶¹

The assailing of Nazism and the Bund by the Cultural League continued from 1937 onward, never in the least compromising, but steadily intensifying their ardent position. On September 2nd, 1939 the Cultural League had another emergency meeting at Hotel Allerton. This time it was not the persecution of an ethnic group that was discussed but the invasion of Poland and the beginning of the Second World War. In their official appeal, the Cultural League also included the "resentment" that many German-Americans felt would be headed their way as a result of the power of Hitler's Reich:

Hitler has started a war which will cause resentment against Germans all over the world. German-Americans are already feeling this resentment. It is becoming increasingly difficult for German-Americans to find employment because of the anti-democratic actions of paid Hitler agents. Hitler must be defeated. His victory

would mean the victory of barbarism over civilization. Hitler's defeat must be your victory, a victory of free and democratic Germany.⁶²

The persecution of German-Americans during the First World War was also on the minds of those present at Hotel Allerton. Gustav Dabringhaus, who presided at the meeting of the Cultural League, discussed this outspoken group, and, "urged all present to go out among friends and tell them the aims of the society, so that there will not be that hate and discrimination against Germans in America that there was in the last war."⁶³ The work of the Cultural League and Saengerbund definitely showed that not all Germans were in support of Nazism, and in fact thousands more were outwardly opposed to it even in 1937, when the pro and anti-Nazis had blasted the city's German societies into two camps. By 1938, the German newspaper *Waechter und Anzeiger* announced that the plight of Cleveland's Germans was bleak. They boomed, "During the World War the condition of Germans in America was not completely hopeless because they were united. But today they are completely disrupted they are not only in two camps, they are completely 'pulverized,' if one may say so. Each is standing in a different camp."⁶⁴ As the Depression progressed, there was an increasing pull for German societies to take a firm stand on Nazism, which in many ways reflected what individual German-Americans had to decide on too.

THE GOVERNMENT INTERVENES

The rise of the German-American Bund, and Nazism in general, was of immediate concern and debate at all levels of American government. In the decade of the Great Depression many extremist groups and individuals rose to prominence on either side

of the political spectrum, each promising to cure America's ills in their own totalitarian ways. Consequently, often unwarranted government probes and allegations shook and tore at the activities and memberships of Cleveland's German societies. Most obvious of these government assaults at the federal level came from the Dies Committee, ruthlessly exploring "Un-American Activities." Their investigations and embarrassing public show-trials left many of Cleveland's Germans afraid to participate in cultural events, for fear that they too would be labeled as Nazi agitators, as their pressure became more intense at the end of the 1930s. Although the national government was much more in the spotlight, there was considerable pressure from both Ohio's state government, and the Cleveland city government as well.

At the local level, the Cleveland City government was less than thrilled with Nazism developing in Europe (and especially with a Nazi organization growing in their own back yard) and Resolutions of opposition helped to thwart the potential following of the Bund, even in the very early years of Nazism in Germany. But City Council took the most care to condemn the ethnic hatred and abridgement of civil rights in Nazi Germany, and didn't look very fondly on the German-American Bund for imitating Hitler's storm troopers in their own city either.

Cleveland's City Council took the opportunity to attack Nazism at the very outset. In an emergency resolution adopted by city council and approved by the mayor in 1933, Nazism was thoroughly condemned. This early anti-Nazi resolution of the Cleveland City Council showed what the Bund had to contend with as they established a Nazi group in the Cleveland area. The council blasted, "It is reported that Jewish citizens and residents of Germany, as well as other racial and religious minorities, are being persecuted, abused, mistreated and discriminated against because of race and religion." However, it was their historical description of

what was happening to Germany's minorities that the city found most disturbing. For, "The treatment now being accorded to Jewish citizens and residents of Germany, as well as other minorities, is indicative of the prejudices of the Middle Ages and may disturb the peace and good will of the world."

Taking a firm stance against the work of Hitler and his Nazis, the city council pushed for their voice to importantly be heard at the national, and even international level. Accordingly, the council announced that, "We hereby appeal to the United States Government, through its duly accredited representatives to take such diplomatic action as may be necessary in filing protest with the German Government in the interest of justice and humanity."⁶⁵ What is interesting about this early resolution is that it drew a historical line between the Middle Ages and Germany in 1933. One could also say that this resolution was an eerie premonition of doom, as the city found that Nazism may indeed upset the peace of the world. Easily said, from very early on Nazism and the Bund would have a tough time adapting to the much more pluralistic society of Cleveland.⁶⁶

Although the mayor was to later attack the work of the Bund and Nazism, he appeared a little confused about his stance at first. On the one hand, Cleveland Mayor Harold H. Burton was charged early on by Cleveland's Jewish community as being biased against Jews when it came to making city appointments. It took him a bit of time to rectify his position. Yet on the other hand, Burton attended at least one German-American Bund meeting in Cleveland. After visiting the Nazi group, he gave routine praise of their activities. Once again, he had to make a difficult apology to Cleveland's Jewish community after a giant furor erupted over his comments.⁶⁷

These instances aside, the Bund, like the Nazi party in Germany, was not viewed highly by the Cleveland mayor and City Council. The council filed an emergency resolution when they

found out about the impending Midwestern Gathering of the Bund in 1937, the largest recorded meeting of the Bund in Cleveland. Officially filing protest, the Cleveland City government spoke out not only against the "racial hatred" promoted by the Bund but also their affiliation with a foreign power.

City Council found that the Bund was a group that, "Gives allegiance to a foreign dictator and expresses opposition to democracy, civil liberties and free unionism." Furthermore, they found that the Bund was working on activities "of a subversive character," and that Cleveland was not the place for such a group because, "The history of Cleveland has been the history of a citizenry deeply interested in the protection of civil rights and democracy." At this time City Council firmly wanted to "place itself on record as opposed to this attempt to plant the seeds of Fascism, racial hatred and distrust in our community." And speaking for all the people of Cleveland, the council wanted also to "inform the German-American Bund that their meeting is viewed with disapproval by the liberty-loving people of this city."⁶⁸ With the emphasis being on the "liberty loving" people of Cleveland, city council worded their opposition in a unique way, connecting the attack on the Bund to what it really meant to be an American. Furthermore, the importance of not stirring-up the problems between races also seems evident, as the City Council promotes the racial equality of the city as being one of its most important attributes.

Even though City Council had clearly voiced their opposition to Nazism previously, it was in 1938 that it came out the most strongly. In the wake of Kristalnacht, in which the Nazis made their first definitive moves to destroy the Jews of Europe, Cleveland City Council erupted in opposition. The council explained "The ruthless campaign of bloody cruelty against the Jews and Catholics," of Germany was in actuality, "based upon a

bigotry and hatred for those who desire to worship God in the manner of their ancestors," and that the actions of Hitler's legions, "has shocked the sensibilities of the civilized world." But most importantly, City Council explained that what was actually the beginning of the Holocaust had immense importance to the people of Cleveland. For after all, "The implications of the return to barbarism of medieval days of a nation in this enlightened age, are of momentous consequence to the citizens of this city." To properly assail the horrific work of the Nazis, and explain to Clevelanders why they so ardently protested their actions against the Jews, City Council staunchly blasted:

That this council expresses the horror with which this community has received the news of the barbaric wave of terror unleashed upon persons of Jewish and Catholic religious belief in Germany, and vigorously condemns the resort to such unwarranted persecution of innocent persons on the mere pretext of reprisal for an act of an alleged member of the persecuted group, when the obvious purpose of such inhumane and barbaric treatment is the economic improvement of a nation impoverished, and protest the acts and decrees of the Nazi Government which terrorize, pauperize and attempt to ostracize a whole people for the sole offense of worshipping their Creator according to the dictates of conscience.⁶⁹

What remains fascinating is that it was as though City Council took personal insult with the persecution of Kristalnacht. The city acted as though the barbarism had occurred in their own back yard, for to them the act was "of momentous consequence to the citizens of this city." Further, it is of note that the city viewed this pogrom not

only as social depravity, but also as an economic bonus of the Nazi regime. This bonus that the city saw the Nazis gaining was ironically "economic improvement" *through* persecution itself. Most importantly, however, was what was not written. Through their resolutions over the years, City Council had basically predicted what would happen with the Nazis, even from the outset of the Nazi regime. It was as if the council was showing that the Germans were deprived of their religious, civil and human rights from the beginning . . . and this was the horrific result of inaction against them.

At the state level, there was also considerable opposition to the German-American Bund and Nazism in general. In the wake of large, embarrassing Nazi Bund meetings, with swastika flags flying, and storm troopers marching and saluting, some states decided to curb their right to expression by pushing the issue of national security. Recommended for passage by the Military Affairs Committee of Ohio's General Assembly in 1939, was a bill, which would ban civilians from wearing military uniforms of foreign states . . . a direct attack on the Bund. The measure was modeled on that of the New York legislature, which passed a similar law banning foreign military uniforms. In the Ohio Senate, a Jew, (R., Cuyahoga), a Catholic, Lawrence A. Kane (R., Hamilton), and a Protestant, Robert A. Pollock (R., Stark), were the three sponsors of the measure.⁷⁰ The proposed law stipulated:

It shall be unlawful for any person to appear in any public place or in public view attired in any uniform similar to that worn by the military, semi-military, naval, police or other official or semi-official forces of any foreign state, nation or government, or attired in any distinctive part or parts of such uniform or to

assemble in any public place with other persons similarly attired.⁷¹

Labeled as the "Anti-Bund Bill," it also provided that no operator of a public hall could admit such an assemblage.⁷² Violators were to be subject to a fine of \$500, and costs, as well as a six-month prison sentence, or both. Exemptions were made, however, for theatrical or motion picture productions, lawful foreign representatives, and fraternal or benevolent organizations that had worn uniforms 10 years prior to the act.⁷³ While the bill was up for debate, the legislature of New Jersey passed their own law which also forbid people from imitating drill formations, symbols or salutes of foreign governments.⁷⁴

With the bill working its way through the General Assembly, the Cleveland newspaper, *The Cleveland Press*, made a surprisingly strong stand against the Bund and Nazism. Any journalist knows that the word "hate" is an extremely strong, and potentially dangerous, term to use when describing the way the newspaper feels about someone or something. Yet by 1939, the newspaper was all too happy to use the term to describe what they thought about the "Anti-Bund Bill" in an editorial:

The senators voting for this measure were glad of the opportunity to manifest their hatred of Naziism. We are glad they hate Naziism and we hope members of the House hate it just as intensely. This newspaper hates everything the Nazis stand for, and we hate every effort, foreign or native, to introduce even the most remote hint of military coercion into our domestic affairs.⁷⁵

Though the disdain of the press was nothing new to the Bund, the active work of state and local government creating resolutions opposed to their activities, and attempting legislation at abridging their freedoms of speech and assemblage for the public good, did mortal harm to a group that claimed that it was always pro-American. Probably the most damaging to the Bund was the attack on their Nazi-styled uniforms, for much of their aura had to do with their connection to militarism. The attacks on the Bund also served to create enormous public suspicion, and later even attacks, on many traditional German-American groups and activities, which had little or nothing to do with Nazism, as well.

CONCLUSION

The Stadtverband and the Zentrale served as a meeting ground for many German-Americans as the practicing of their old-world ways could be rewarded in this new land. Though the Zentrale (with many other German-American societies) rode the fence in allegiance to the Bund and Nazism, it provided a meeting place for many groups affiliated with the Fatherland to come together. The Deutsche Zentrale still serves as a cultural outlet for many German-American groups in the Cleveland area. Despite vandalism during the war the Zentrale's farm has survived and is still in operation in Parma, as membership has soared in recent years.

The dilemma that emerged for German-Americans in Cleveland gradually lightened as America slowly drifted into war. Though the Second World War clearly delineated the death of the Bund in Cleveland many factors also contributed to their demise. The flight of Kessler, the magnitude of the opposition to the Bund, most importantly from fellow German-Americans, together with governmental action ultimately sounded the death knell for the

Bund. When looking at Kessler, Fricke, Reichle and the other German-Americans of Cleveland during this period we must remember that they were men whose passions and devotion were torn between two worlds. They had the unfortunate experience of falling into the fray between their beloved Fatherland and their new land of opportunity.

Before one places judgment, one must take a close look at the division of loyalty that these men faced. The rise and demise of the Bund in Cleveland can indeed be seen through America's relations with Germany, which helped to direct the influence and following of the Bund. Significantly, the Bund in Cleveland appeared to many as a foreign disease. However, one must take into account the fears many had concerning the growth of communism and the economic deprivation of the Great Depression during the 1930's. The Bund imitated the likes of Hitler, who to them found the true answer to his country's ills. In the end it is essential that the Bund did *not* have to openly embrace anti-Semitism for many in the Cleveland community to ardently resist Nazism arriving in America. The Bund in Cleveland did in fact sharply sway public opinion, though to their misfortune it was often in direct opposition to their group; for as a phenomenon, the life of the Bund in Cleveland was not just important in itself. In the end the German-American community was sadly caught in the tempest, while the furor that the Bund's opposition excited definitively enthroned American resistance toward Nazism, helping to shape what side America took in the Second World War.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ William F. Miller, "The Germans," *The Plain Dealer Magazine*, March 3, 1991, pgs 10 & 11.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Condemn Boycott and Racial Tilts," *Plain Dealer*, June 9, 1934, p. 1. Mrs. MacDonald was the editor of the society's monthly publication.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "O.L. Fricke is Head of 'Congress,'" *Plain Dealer*, June 10, 1934. DAWA stands (in German) for Deutsche-Americanischer Wirtschafts-Ausschuss.

⁸ "3,000 Parade for German Day Here," *Plain Dealer*, June 11, 1934, p. 13.

⁹ Theodore Andrica, "Speaker Here Lauds Unity of People and Lack of Class Hatred in Germany," *Cleveland Press*, June 8, 1934.

¹⁰ "German American Congress Protested," *Cleveland Press*, May 27, 1934.

¹¹ "Germans Leave After Stadium Demonstration," *Cleveland Press*, June 11, 1934.

¹² "3,000 Parade for German Day Here," *Plain Dealer*, June 11, 1934, p. 13.

¹³ John P. Leacacos, "Seek Revitalized View of Germany," *Plain Dealer*, Feb. 19, 1937, and "Central Agency for all German Groups to Meet," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 19, 1937.

¹⁴ "To Preserve a Culture," *Cleveland Press*, Feb. 19, 1937, and "Place of German Culture," *Plain Dealer*, Feb. 19, 1937.

¹⁵ "To Preserve a Culture"

¹⁶ John Leacacos, "German Leaders Open Conference," *Plain Dealer*, March 7, 1937.

¹⁷ Ibid., and Theodore Andrica, "Germans Plan Detailed Study of Ohio History," *Cleveland Press*, March 8, 1937.

¹⁸ "Discuss German Influence in Ohio," *Plain Dealer*, March 8, 1937, and Theodore Andrica, "Germans Plan Detailed Study of Ohio History," *Cleveland Press*, March 8, 1937.

¹⁹ "Jewish Editor Raps German Round Table," *Plain Dealer*, February 27, 1937. Wiesenfeld published his letter in his own newspaper also.

²⁰ According to the *Cleveland Press*, this number by 1937 had reached 547. "To Preserve a Culture." *Cleveland Press*, February 19, 1937.

²¹ Importantly, the Zentrale was a member of the Stadtverband, not the other way around.

²² John Mihal, "Cosmopolitan Snapshots: One-Minute Biography of Otto L. Fricke." *Cleveland News*, 29 June, 1935.

²³ Theodore Andrica, "Says Pro-Nazis Active here in German Groups." *Cleveland Press*. 15 November, 1937.

²⁴ Cleveland Stadt-Verband (United German Societies) Minutes, 1931-1940. 1 Vol, Mss. 3635. 5/9/40, (p 151). Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ In a meeting of the Stadtverband in 1934, Kessler was most active in the case of new dissemination of Nazi propaganda in Cleveland, in this case the import and showing of Nazi films. Ibid. 7/11/34, (p 68).

²⁷ Ibid. 5/16/33, (p 45).

²⁸ Ibid. 5/16/33, (p 45).

²⁹ "Dr. Walz Asserts Germany is Ready," *Plain Dealer*, September 10, 1938, p.5.

³⁰ Cleveland Stadt-Verband (United German Societies) Minutes, 1931-1940. 1 Vol, Mss. 3635. 7/18/33, (p 49). Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

³¹ Also of note in his speech, Fricke rather berates the reporters present at the occasion for their biases against the Zentrale, and their sometimes poor translations of German. For in the end of his speech he proclaimed to the gathering that "I have spoken to you in the American language, because we have people with us today who came here only to nail us to the cross, and I do not want their *translation* [my emphasis] of anything I said." Speech given at German Day, found in the Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University, on microfilm. In clipping folder, (Otto L. Fricke: 1935-1951), June 16, 1940.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Randall Brown, (untitled article) *ClevelandNews*, 28 July 1941. Found in Cleveland Press Collection clipping file, under Herbert S. Reichle.

³⁵ Furthermore, Andrica notes that "If you expect to see swastika flags flying all over the children's camp of the Amerikadeutscher Volksbund, a pro-Nazi organization on the farm of the Deutsche Zentrale, York road, Parma, you will be disappointed." What Andrica explains is the subtlety of the Zentrale, that though the Bund worked on activities at the farm, they were by no means pronounced enough to cause much attention. Theodore Andrica, "Swastika, Emblem of Germany, Missing at Parma Volksbund Farm." *Cleveland Press*, 13 August, 1937.

³⁶ "Group Protests Ad in German Paper," *Plain Dealer*, June 16, 1938.

³⁷ Mss 3632, League for Human Rights Records, Container 2, Folder 1. "201 Reports. Sunday, June 19, 1938." Western Reserve Historical Society History Library.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Randall Brown, (untitled article) *News*, 28 July 1941. Found in Cleveland Press Collection clipping file, under Herbert S. Reichle.

⁴² "Reichle Left City Before Nazi Roundup: Hospital Aide, Active in German Groups, Writes from Mexico." *Cleveland Press*, 8 July 1941, p 1.

⁴³ Webb Seely, "Dr. Reichle Reveals His Own Account of Mystery 'Incident' to News Man." *Cleveland News*, 11 July, 1941.

⁴⁴ Eugene Segal, "Learn Fugitive City Aide Secret German Citizen." *Cleveland Press*, 30 March, 1948, p 1.

⁴⁵ Ivan Platt, The League for Human Rights : Cleveland Jewry's fight against Naziism, 1933-1946, CSU Master's Thesis, 1977, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Mss 3632 League for Human Rights Records, container 2 folder 1. "Cleveland Investigator X-5 Reports, Nov. 17, 1937."

⁴⁷ League Records, "Report of 211, Re: Amerikadeutscher Volksbund," May 22, 1938, container 2, folder 1

⁴⁸ "German Veterans Join," *Plain Dealer*, September 9, 1938.

⁴⁹ "3,000 Parade for German Day Here," *Plain Dealer*, June 11, 1934, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Eugene Segal, "Cleveland Bund Leaders Repentant," *Cleveland Press*, 1948 (exact date unknown). Material found in Cleveland Press Collection clipping file: German-American Bund, Cleveland.

⁵¹ "Asserts Bund And Klan Are Allies," *Plain Dealer*, Oct. 6, 1938, p. 6.

⁵² "Quiz Names Gun Club Here, Bund," *Cleveland News*, September 5, 1938.

⁵³ "Asserts Bund"

⁵⁴ "German Song Fest Scorns Hitler Ban," *Plain Dealer*, September 5, 1937, and "Workmen Singers Will Bring 5,000," *Plain Dealer*, September 3, 1937, and "5,000 At Picnic of German Singers," *Plain Dealer*, September 7, 1937, and "3,000 in German Chorus on Radio," *Plain Dealer*, September 6, 1937, p.2.

⁵⁵ Eleanor Prech, "Round the World in Cleveland." *Cleveland Press*, 4 September, 1939, p 11. In one particular meeting alone of the League, 4000 people were in attendance. Many of the speakers and leaders of the Saengerbund were also leaders of the Cultural League.

⁵⁶ Gibson Dildine, "Asks Countrymen to Defeat Hitler: German-American League Charges Enslavement," *Plain Dealer*, 3 September, 1939.

⁵⁷ "Loyalty to Two Nations Assailed." *Plain Dealer*, 15 November 1937.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Norbert Yassanye, "German Cultural Group Hits Hitler." *Plain Dealer*, 19 November, 1938.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Gibson Dildine, "Asks Countrymen To Defeat Hitler: German-American League Charges Enslavement." *Plain Dealer*, 3 September, 1939.

⁶³ Eleanor Prech, "Round the World in Cleveland." *Cleveland Press*, 4 September, 1939. P 11. Also worthy of mention at this time was the Cleveland newspaper *The Cleveland Press*. The paper expressed their political views in authorless editorial pieces, officially giving the stance of the paper. Concerning this meeting of the League, the *Cleveland Press* wrote that "We were pleased to have this demonstration in Cleveland of the fact that not all Americans of German descent, by any means, are sympathetic with the present Nazi regime. This regime is openly defended by few Americans of any stock. We hope the day never comes when our righteous hatred of what it stands for brings about the kind of prejudice against all things German, such as afflicted the country in the last World War." "Germans Against Hitler." *Cleveland Press*, 6 September, 1939. P.10.

⁶⁴ Chads O. Skinner, "Scouts City for Nazi School Plan," *Plain Dealer*, April 28, 1938.

⁶⁵ File Number 99609, Effective March 30th, 1933. Resolution, Cleveland City Council Archives, City Hall. Lines 1, 6, and 11-14.

⁶⁶ During this time, Cleveland was one of the most segregated cities in the country. So why do I refer to it here (as in other places) as *pluralistic*? In the first case, one must remember that Nazi persecution took place against any element that did not conform to their ideal of a superior human. Though this unquestionably included people of differing "races," it also had much to do with religion. Possibly the City Council took more offense at the religious persecution of the Jews and others, and merely included the importance of racial oppression to *sound* justified. For though Cleveland had unequal, racially segregated areas, it was in no way short of diverse religious institutions, and by the early 1930s it could be said that Cleveland was indeed "a city of steeples." The claim could be made that the City Council was hypocritical, that indeed they found that persecution was evil only if it was not *their* brand of oppression. It is also possible that the City Council placed more importance on the status of the Jewish community, and consequently, neglected other minorities such as blacks. In any regard, it is easy to say that during this time Cleveland was far more pluralistic than any city in Germany.

⁶⁷ Lloyd P. Gartner, History of the Jews of Cleveland, Western Reserve Historical Society & Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, second edition, 1987, p. 302.

⁶⁸ File Number 107559, Effective November 18, 1937. Resolution, Cleveland City Council Archives, City Hall. Lines 3-6, 9-11.

⁶⁹ File Number 2138-38, Effective November 21st, 1938. Resolution, Cleveland City Council Archives, City Hall. P. 1, Lines 1-5, 12-14 and p. 2, Lines 3-12.

⁷⁰ "Senate to Act on Ban on Uniforms," *Cleveland Press*, May 22, 1939, and "Bill Would Prohibit Nazi Uniforms Here," *Cleveland Press*, May 17, 1939, p. 14.

⁷¹ "Senate to Act on Ban"

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ralph J. Donaldson, "Anti Bund Bill Wins in Ohio Senate." *Plain Dealer*, May 23, 1939.

⁷⁵ "Rebuke to Nazis," *Cleveland Press*, May 23, 1939, p. 10.

Conclusion

Today people are much more “white” than they used to be. During the age of the Great Depression, what ethnic group you identified with most made up a significant part of your personal identity, both individually and as a part of a larger community. True, there are still many ethnic and cultural festivals in the Cleveland area. But the attendance (of those who actually belong to that specific group) usually numbers in the hundreds, or perhaps a couple thousand. During the Depression, these numbers were regularly in the tens of thousands.

Cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, class and political identities were often very intertwined, and therefore very complex to understand, particularly to outsiders. What we fail to fully appreciate today is that the following of, and opposition to, Nazism, for many had often to do as much with deep traditions and intricate cultural loyalties than contemporary politics or even rational decision-making.

Hindsight tells us that following Nazism wasn't a very good idea. Yet the massive social and economic convulsions that the Great Depression brought to Cleveland allowed some people to feel that repression, government-directed violence and institutional racism would be acceptable tradeoffs for assured economic stability, stratified social control and a resurgent pride in nationalism.

It indeed is difficult for us today to comprehend the troubles that people suffered during the Depression, but these difficulties were also no excuse for the horrors that Nazism ultimately unleashed on humanity. It is of note that although it is clearly documented that the German-American Bund and Silvershirt Legion resorted to violence to achieve their ends in other parts of the United States, there is no evidence that says that any violence was employed in Cleveland to achieve their ends (although there were claims that from their passionate opposition, the Nazi groups were actually the targets of violence themselves).

For the national leaders of the Bund and Silvershirts, things did not end well. Fritz Kuhn was found to have embezzled thousands from the Bund, spending a portion of the money on his mistress. He was first sent to prison for embezzlement and tax evasion, and later was held for the remainder of the war as an enemy agent. He then had his citizenship stripped, and was deported after World War II to Germany, who then tried and imprisoned him also. He got a job as a chemist shortly before he died in 1951.¹ After making disparaging remarks about the US government's handling of the attack on Pearl Harbor, in 1942, William Dudley Pelley was arrested and charged with sedition and high treason. He was convicted and sentenced to 15 years, but was paroled in 1952. He died in 1965 in Noblesville, Indiana.²

In conclusion, this book illustrates the Great Depression's rise and fall of the Nazi following in probably the most unlikely of places. Although today the people, plots and propaganda chronicled in this book easily appear eccentric, irrational, scary, obtuse, and even sometimes comical, they introduced a very real, dynamic threat into an already confused, dangerous and frightening chapter in American history. We should always stay vigilant in keeping an eye on threats to democracy and our cherished way of American life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After careful consideration, I refuse to write this section about myself in the third person, it would be just too silly. I have been a lifelong Cleveland area resident. I grew up in Bay Village and received my BA in history and political science from Ashland University in 1998, and my MA in history from Cleveland State University in 1999. In addition, I got a secondary education license for social studies. My varied job experience has included work as a newspaper copy editor, lifeguard, library research assistant, food service worker, lesson plan writer, community college instructor, e-check emissions examiner and high school social studies teacher.

I'm currently an adjunct history instructor at Notre Dame College, and an advanced industrial inspector at Swagelok Company in Solon. I have travelled my fair share, particularly in Western and Central Europe, where I have spent time sightseeing, studying and working. My favorite foreign language is German. I have always had a passion for interesting history, and good beer, as this book testifies. After spending way too long working on this book, I openly welcome all questions, concerns, criticism and praise of this work. Please feel free to contact me directly at: mcikraji@yahoo.com.

CHAPTER NOTES

¹ Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974, and Susan Canedy, *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma*. Menlo Park, Ca: Markgraf Publications Group. 1990, and Magda Lauwers-Rech, *Nazi Germany and the American Germanists*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 1995, and "Long Island Nazis: A Local Synthesis of Transnational Politics", *Journal of Long Island History*, Spring, 2010, and "Fritz Kuhn, Former Bund Chief, Ordered Back to Germany". *The Evening Independent*. September 7, 1945.

² Scott Beekman, *William Dudley Pelley: A Life in Right-wing Extremism and the Occult*, Syracuse University Press, 2005.