

# Upon the Edge of Legality and Perceived Invincibility

## The German American Bund and its Connections with the German Nazi Party



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# Glossary

**Dickstein, Samuel:** Lithuanian born Jewish Senator representing New York's lower eastside. Main critic of the Friends of the New German and eventually the Bund. Started the McCormack-Dickstein Congressional Committee in 1933, later to become the House Un-American Activities Committee (Dies Committee). Dickstein would spend over \$6,000 of his own money to fight to expose Nazi threats.

**Camp Nordland:** The largest Bund summer camp. Situated in Andover New Jersey, the camp was raided after the explosion of the Hercules Powder Plant in 1940.

**DAWA:** The German-American Business League (*Deutsch Amerikanischer Wirtschafts Ausschuss*). Started by the Friends of the New Germany, DAWA was a primary reason why the Friends' membership was able to grow so fast.

**DKV:** German American Business League (*Deutscher Konsum Verband*). Founded by the German American Bund in 1933, was very similar to DAWA, but also organized holiday events and fundraisers.

**Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA):** Passed in 1937, the Foreign Agents Registration Act made it mandatory for members representing a political party of another nation to register with state department. Would be used unsuccessfully to defeat the Bund.

**Friends of the New Germany (FoNG):** Founded in 1933 by Hans Spanknöbel, the FoNG replaced the *Gauleitung-USA*, but fell apart due to investigation and disownment by the German government in 1935.

**Froboese, George:** Leader of the Midwestern *Gau*. Froboese would eventually take over as leader of the Bund after Kunze fled to Mexico in 1939. He would remain the group's leader until 1941.

***Gauleitung-USA (Gau-USA):*** Replaced the National Socialist Teutonia Association in 1932. Existed until 1933, when it was replaced by the Friends of the New Germany.

**German American Bund:** Founded in 1936, the Bund was the primary Nazi organ in the United States. It was led by Fritz Julius Kuhn and had supplanted the Friends of the New Germany.

**Gissibl, Fritz:** Founder of the National Socialist Teutonia Association in 1924. Along with Walter Kappe, Gissibl was the primary leader and would eventually lead the Friends of the New Germany after Spanknöbel fled the United States because of investigation in 1933.

**Hollywood Anti-Nazi League:** Founded in 1933 by Samuel Untermyer, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL) was an organization composed of the Hollywood elite who fought the Nazi threat in the United States. A main opponent of the German American Bund.

**House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC):** Led by Senator Martin J. Dies, the HUAC launched a congressional investigation into the German American Bund in 1939.

**Klapprott, August:** Leader of the Eastern *Gau*. Also controlled Camp Nordland, a Bund summer retreat in Andover New Jersey. His wife Helen Klapprott was a valuable member of the Bund, leading the *Frauenschaft*, an extended family organization.

**Kuhn, Fritz:** Leader of the German American Bund. Born in Munich in 1896, Kuhn served in the German Army before immigrating to the United States in 1928. Member of the Friends of the New Germany, Kuhn initiated the birth of the Bund in 1936 and led the movement until his arrest in 1939.

**Kunze, Wilhelm:** National Public Relations Director of the Bund. Became leader of the Bund after Kuhn's arrest.

**National Socialist Teutonia Association:** First organization in the United State with Nazi affinities. Founded by a group of German immigrants in 1924, the Teutonia Association would exist until 1932.

**Metcalf, John C.:** A German born reporter for the *Chicago Daily*. Infiltrated the Bund in 1937 and testified his findings in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee that following year.

**Ordungsdienst:** (OD) An organized security force which was established during the National Socialist Teutonia Association. It would exist through the Friends of the New Germany and continue until the German American Bund.

**Schwinn, Hermann:** Leader of the Western *Gau*. German born, Schwinn was considered one of the most dangerous men in California. He participated with Leopold McLagen and Henry Allen in the attempted assassination of Hollywood stars in 1937.

**Spanknöbel, Hans:** Created the Friends of the New Germany in 1933 and led the organization before leaving the country later that year. American born, Spanknöbel ensured that American Nazism would remain after the demise of the National Socialist Teutonia Association.

**Vooros, Helen:** Nineteen-year-old member of the Bund Youth Movement. She testified to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1939 and exposed 'immoralities' that hurt the Bund's image.

# Introduction

*“There is an invisible Government supported by German fund[s] and a party by the name of Kuhn is its chief. This organization is going to overthrow our government and then all Jews will be slaughtered.”*

- *Anonymous letter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1939.<sup>1</sup>*

A crowd of twenty thousand funneled into Madison Square Garden on the evening of February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1939. Undeterred by the cries of the hundred-thousand protesters outside, many looked forward to a night of anticipated brilliance and comradeship, a night that would highlight the movement that so many had dedicated their lives to. Upon the stage, a 35-foot-tall portrait of George Washington stood looking upon the podium below with a quizzical expression, as if foreshadowing the events of the evening. The night began with a rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner, followed by the pledge of allegiance. Tension flooded through the Garden as all sat in a state of anticipation, in total silence if not for the cries of picketers outside. James Wheeler Hill was first to speak. “My Fellow Christian Americans” he bellowed, “It is my privilege to welcome you to this impressive patriotic mass demonstration sponsored by the German American Bund.” Cries of “Free America!” flooded the arena.

This was a rally unlike any seen in Madison Square Garden, and save for the events these last four years, never seen again. Swastikas hung next to American flags. Copies of *Mein Kampf* were sold next to pamphlets exposing the ‘Invisible Enemy.’ Men, women and children, adorned in Nazi uniforms, cheered as speakers built a platform as antisemitic and hateful as the one in Germany. Writers would call the evening a “mass demonstration of aliens,” and Congress would denounce its participants, calling them “Traitors to [their] country.” Officially called the Pro-America Rally and George Washington Exercise, speakers that evening denounced democratic ideals in support of a Nazi party in the United States. One

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Letter to FBI, (name redacted)*, (July 6, 1939), FBI file for the German American Bund, part 02 of 11, (1939) pg. 79



man theorized whether or not George Washington would be friends with Adolf Hitler, were he alive today. Another attacked the media, calling upon “True Americans” to stand up to the “Jewish Conspiracy” which had infiltrated all aspects of American culture. Others quoted George Washington’s farewell speech, sprinkling in undertones of antisemitism and Nazism to appeal to the twenty-thousand strong. This evening encapsulated the German American Bund. The speeches at this rally were denounced nationwide, but many, if not all, within the organization saw it as a success. It led to the arrest of its leader, and the dissolution of the organization less than two years later.

The German American Bund existed from 1936 until 1941. During this five-year period, it captured an American audience and boast a following of over five-hundred thousand sympathizers. My interest in this American Nazi organization began in the Winter of 2019 in History 133D, a course taught by Professor Harold Marcuse focusing upon the Holocaust and other genocides. I learned of the Bund during a research project, on which I wrote about the 1939 Pro-America Rally and George Washington Birthday Exercise. Through this research I was introduced to the extremely complex organization represented by the Bund. I realized why so many authors wrote about it, as its existence in the United States seems nearly impossible, especially when looking back on it today. But one question remained unanswered in the sources I had read regarding this group, that being, the nature of the German American Bund’s relationship to Nazi Germany. Was this group a Nazi satellite used as a medium for espionage and sabotage, or just a group of individuals with shared loyalties? Susan Canedy in *American Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma*, Arnie Bernstein in *Swastika Nation* and Diamond Sander’s ever-referenced *The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924-1941* combine to paint an incredible portrait of the German American Bund, but yet, all three of these authors appear hesitant to make a definitive conclusion regarding the group’s true nature. Through my research I looked to both answer this question and ascertain why these authors have been hesitant to make this conclusion. To do this, I supplanted these sources with newspapers, congressional testimony, and hundreds of pages of Federal Bureau of Investigation documents. These primary sources only added to my perception of the German American Bund and allowed me to see the organization in its totality.

What I have found through my research is that it wasn't a question of the existence of this connection, but rather, to what extent did this connection link these two parties. Unfortunately, the levity of this relationship may never be known. This is largely in part to the Bund's underwhelming exit from the public sphere, but also due to a lack of evidence. Some, like Scott Freeland in *They too Were Americans* argue there is a lack of evidence connecting the Bund to Germany because no evidence ever existed, but I argue that this is a sole product of Fritz Julius Kuhn, and the lessons he learned from the Friends of the New Germany. Through a complete narrative of the German American Bund and the rise of Fritz Kuhn, I will show how Kuhn carried lessons with him from the demise of the Friends, and created a movement that appeared to be one, but in reality, existed as another. This allowed the Bund to exist on the edge of legality, and gave its leader Fritz Kuhn, the realms to a movement on the fringe of American politics. I have learned that the Bund's connection to Germany did exist and through an analysis of this little-known group, and through the proceeding ten chapters, I will paint a portrait of the German American Bund, with a focus on sources previously unmentioned in other works and demonstrate the complex relationship that existed between this group and Germany.

Chapter One focuses upon the rise of the Bund through the National Socialist Teutonia Association, the Friends of the New Germany, and the Jewish anti-Nazi boycott that gave the fascist movement momentum. A majority of this research finds itself in secondary sources, but with the addition of newspaper accounts and testimonies, I added elements of these groups that have not been focused on in previous works. Chapter Two is an image of Fritz Julius Kuhn, as any mention of the Bund would be incomplete without a reference to its charismatic leader. This chapter outlines Kuhn experience in the Friends of the New Germany, as during this period, Kuhn witnessed first-hand the downfall of a Nazi organization, and learned what must be done to make a movement of this caliber survive.

Chapter Three focuses upon the political and societal environment of America during this period, demonstrating how the Bund was allowed to grow and flourish into the movement it would represent. This chapter speaks of the initiation of the German American Bund into the American political sphere, specifically, the efforts to 'Amerikanize' the organization. Chapter Four demonstrates the discrepancies

between the aims and purposes the group attested to in court compared to the aims and purposes distributed to members. Based on my own research, this chapter shows that two different German American Bunds that existed in this period. Chapter Five focuses upon the community aspect of the Bund, as while it had grown into a political movement, it still represented a German American community for many of its members. Much of the research in this section was taken out of Scott Freeland's *They Too were Americans* (2011), a book aimed at defending the German American Bund from attack and thus omits many key features of the group. While incredibly bias, Freeland's work demonstrated why individuals joined the Bund, and what convinced them to stay. Fit with photographs and memorabilia, much of his what he does mention of the Bund goes unmentioned in other works but is corroborated by newspapers and court testimony from the time of the organization.

Chapter Six outlines public opposition towards the Bund, including mobsters, writers and Hollywood actors. Much of this research originates from newspapers, as well as Steven Ross's *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against America* (2017). Chapter Seven outlines the response of the U.S. government, and the majority of research for this section was done through FBI files and House Un-American Activities Committee testimony in order to why this group was able to exist as long as it did., Chapter Eight is a complete analysis of the 1939 Madison Square Garden Rally, fit as this event is a perfect representation of the German American Bund. Not only did this evening encapsulate its existence, but due to the publicity the event received, led to the demise of the German American Bund. In chapter 9 my characterization of the German American Bund concludes with the arrest of Fritz Kuhn in May of 1939, and finally, in Chapter 10 I add some additional weight to the argument of whether or not this organization was associated with Germany with a specific focus on espionage rings as spoken about by Leon Torrou in *Nazi Spies in America* (1939), as well as Arthur Derourian's *Under Cover* (1946).

The German American Bund was a Nazi group on American soil during the interwar period of the 1930s. It was allowed to exist, and even thrive during this period. It was a complex organization with a spectrum of goals, members, and ideology. As it traversed into the late 1930s, the organization became extremely dangerous, and posed an obvious threat to American Democracy. This thesis was written to paint

a comprehensive picture of the German American Bund. It is a product of a year's research, and many hours of searching online for viable sources, that were not sufficiently examined in previous works. It analyzes the entire arc of the German American Bund and looks to understand the motives of its members and leaders. Throughout this paper, there are many parallels to today's political climate. The Bund, and its ability to thrive and grow, shows the dangers of leaving movements unchecked.

# 1. The Freikorps, a Drinking Club, and an Anti-Nazi Boycott

This introductory chapter outlines the history of the German American Bund. It begins with the National Socialist Teutonia Association in 1924 and continues through the *Gauleitung*-USA to the Friends of the New Germany in 1933. All three of these organizations had clear affinities and connections with Germany, and as seen with the Friends of the New Germany, these connections are what led to that group's demise.

## The Roots of an American Nazi Party

Just as the German American Bund was surrounded by controversy, it is only fitting that its birth reflects the confusion and turbulence that came to plague this organization. Not officially established until 1936, the legacy of the Bund began twelve years earlier in 1924 with the establishment of the National Socialist Teutonia Association by two determined German immigrants, Fritz Gissibl and Walter Kappe. Both fairly young – Gissibl was twenty-one and Kappe nineteen – they were quickly joined by Josef “Sepp” Schuster who, unlike both Kappe and Gissibl, had served in the Imperial German Army in World War I.<sup>1</sup> According to the *St. Louis Star*, Gissibl had actually been solicited for membership in the Ku Klux Klan, and, thinking the idea of an organized community as offered by the Klan was a ‘good one,’ adopted principles from it to create an all-German society with similar anti-Jewish and anti-black sentiment.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, at its roots, the Teutonia Association was a social club where likeminded men joined to talk about the politics of their homeland during their time in America. As with most social clubs, meetings revolved around drinking and continued long into the night.

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<sup>1</sup> Sander A. Diamond: “*The Nazi Movement in the United State, 1924-1941*” (New York, Cornell University Press, 1974), pg. 94.

<sup>2</sup> “Sketch of Fuhrer Fritz Kuhn Who Will Be Here Next Month” *St Louis Star-Times*, October 11, 1937, pg. 5.

Like so many other Germans characterizing themselves as “members of the lost generation,” Gissibl, Kappe and Schuster had fled Germany to escape suffering the aftereffects of World War I, worsened by the enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>3</sup> Identifying themselves as refugees, this wave of German immigrants would continue until the

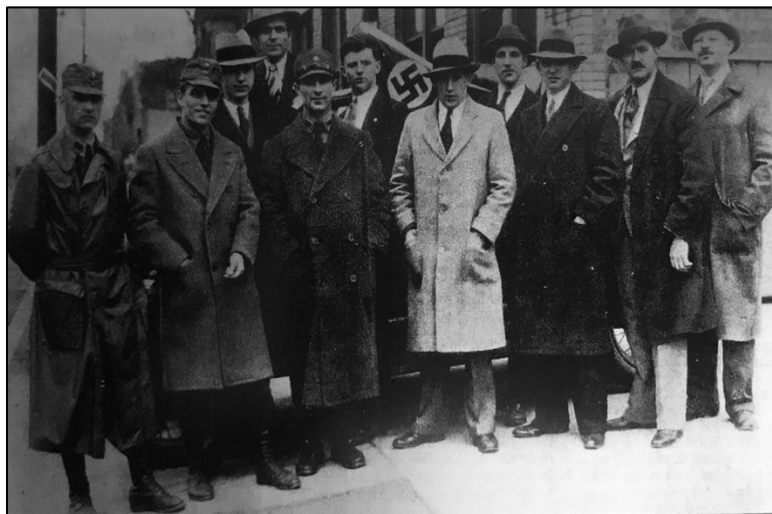


Figure 1: Founding members of the Teutonia Association. Fritz Gissibl, second from left. Hans Spanknöbel, second from right. Early 1920s. (*They Too were Americans*, pg. 13).

eve of World War II, bringing with them feelings of animosity and resentment towards the sanctions and terms of this treaty.\* By 1930, nearly 7 million people of German descent lived in America, and by 1933 over 600,000 German-born immigrants called the United States home.<sup>4</sup> In total, between 1918 and 1933 Americans saw an influx of 400,000 German nationals to the United States, many of them veterans of World War I. Many, like Gissibl and Kappe looked to escape their countries' deepening economic crisis, while others fled to escape the repercussions of their actions during and after World War I.<sup>5</sup> Plainly stated, the United States saw a tremendous increase in German immigrants, and groups like the Teutonia Association provided these immigrants both an environment similar to home and a place to discuss their dissatisfaction with Germany's treatment. The Teutonia Association also provided many with plans to return to Germany a place to both maintain their allegiance to German ideals and preserve their National Socialist agenda.

As its membership grew, the Teutonia Association became increasingly dominated by extremist politics and beliefs. The social club atmosphere quickly morphed into a fraternity crafted upon a shared

<sup>3</sup> Susan Cannedy, *America's Nazis: A History of the German American Bund*, (Menlo Park CA: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990), pg. 23.

\* The treaty of Versailles officially ended World War I and gave German territories to neighboring countries, while placing others under international supervision. Additionally, Germany was stripped of its overseas colonies, its military capabilities were severely restricted, and it was required to pay war reparations to Allied countries.

<sup>4</sup> Richard O'Connor, *The German Americans* (Boston: Little Brown, Brown and Company, 1968), p. 437, in Canedy, pg. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Diamond, Appendix I.

identification to Germany and a commitment to Nazi beliefs, in addition to the frequent pitcher of beer. With its headquarters in Chicago, the National Socialist Teutonia Association expanded to established units in Milwaukee, St. Louis, Missouri, Detroit, New York City, Cincinnati, and Newark, all cities with a high German population. The group's growth from a membership of three young men to more than five-hundred Nazi sympathizers in less than eight years rested upon four primary features: a permanent meeting place at the *Reichshalle* in Chicago; a newspaper, *Vorposten* ("Outpost") edited by Walter Kappe, which became an effective communicate for members across the Midwest; the *Ordnungsdienst* (OD), an organized security force to keep out the 'communist disruption,' and finally, the simple fact that many of the founding members of the Teutonia Association were young men.<sup>6</sup> These early members, most similar in age as Kappe and Gissibl, quickly laid down their roots in their new homeland, establishing connections and networks which grow into a community. While most, if not all, had plans to eventually return to Germany, many strayed away from this ambition and found themselves assimilating to greater or lesser degrees in metropolises scattered across the Midwest.

As the first major group in the United States with clear affinities to Nazism, the Teutonia Association established connections to other German American communities in an attempt to 'keep immigrants together,' and find likeminded Germans committed to the Nazi cause.<sup>7</sup> Discussing the politics of their homeland, one topic, besides the perceived unfairness of the Treaty of Versailles, consistently helped to unite these communities, namely the rise of Hitler in Germany. While many of the early members of the Teutonia Association were not card-carrying members of the Nazi party, most had served in the *Freikorps*, a paramilitary force made of German War Veterans and angered youth determined to restore honor to Germany. Displeased by the harsh repercussions of the Treaty of Versailles, the *Freikorps* supported the wills of nationalist ideologues who fought for Germany's honors through organized street brawls and bar fights.<sup>8</sup> Through this organization, the mentality of World War I remained, born of hardship

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<sup>6</sup> Scott Freeland, *They Too Were Americans: The German-American Bund in Words, Photos and Artifacts*, (San Jose, CA: R. James Bender Publishing), pg. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Yearbook of the German American Bund, 1937, found in Federal Bureau of Investigation, *German American Bund Origins* (1937) FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), part 01 of 11, pg. 126.

<sup>8</sup> Canedy, pg. 30.

and deprivation and shown through the fight against leftist revolutionary cells and the will to establish a right-wing nationalism in a revival of militarism and chaos.<sup>9</sup> The Teutonia Association was made up of these *Freikorps* members who had fled Germany to escape prosecution for the actions they undertook as members of this group. Many who took their right-wing militaristic beliefs and ideology with them to the United States, were happy to see that the Teutonia Association provided them an outlet to meet likeminded Germans and discuss dissatisfaction with the communist threat. Many, including Josef “Sepp” Schuster, the leader of the OD, had even participated in the 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch attempted by Adolf Hitler\* and had been so inspired by future *Führer’s* abortive coup that they adopted the mission to spread the ideals of National Socialism during their time in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Openly antisemitic, the Nationalist Socialist Teutonia Association was also rabidly anti-communist, largely influenced by the current state of Germany at the time. Fritz Gissibl captured this attitude perfectly, speaking to a crowd at a Saturday night rally at the Deutsches Haus in Detroit, stating that:

Germany, today, is a nation divided. A struggle between socialism and communism is going on which ultimately must decide the future of the country. We are urging all the young German-Americans to have nothing to do with the Communistic movement. Although many think we are radical, as a matter of fact, we are very conservative.<sup>11</sup>

With its open allegiance to Nazism, and a pledge to fight communism, the association encouraged members to send money to the NSDAP headquarters in Munich to combat the rising *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (Communist Party of Germany). These efforts were supported by the leaders of the group, as Gissibl and Kappe worked to send a portion of the profits made from selling newspapers and pamphlets to fund the growing German Nazi Party.<sup>12</sup> As their contributions increased, the Association was rewarded with a thank you letter from Joseph Goebbels, then the regional leader of Nazi Party in Berlin.<sup>13</sup> While this

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg. 30.

\* Also known as the Munich Putsch, the Beer Hall Putsch was an attempted coup d’état by Adolf Hitler in 1923. Failing to take over the German state of Bavaria, Hitler was convicted of treason and sentenced to five years in prison.

<sup>10</sup> Sander, pg. 94.

<sup>11</sup> “German-Americans Hear Nationalist” *Detroit Free Press*, June 1, 1931, pg. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *File 97-27 Synopsis of Facts: German American Bund*, (December 22, 1942), pg. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Diamond, pg. 97.



shows evidence that the Nazi Party at least knew of the organization, there is little to show that they had a hand in its creation. From all accounts, the Teutonia Society appeared to be an organization started independently by Gissibl and Kappe. Besides occasional propaganda materials and the letter from Goebbels, the American organization received nothing from the official NSDAP in Germany, neither monetary nor instructional.

Despite its small size – 500 members across 12 units – in 1931 a coalition of loyal members wrote to the Nazi Party foreign headquarters in Hamburg, Germany to suggest that the Teutonia Association be commissioned to form the official Nazi Branch in the United States. In response, the NSDAP foreign sector assigned Hans Nieland, who was in charge of Hitler's forces in foreign countries, to investigate the group to measure its usefulness and potential as an American Nazi Party. Reporting back to Germany, Nieland described the National Socialist Teutonia Association as nothing more than enclaves of German American scattered across major American cities, "hoisting glass after glass of beer and achieving nothing."<sup>14</sup> With this poor characterization, the NSDAP denied the group official association, and, in an ironic twist, allowed Nieland to establish his own group, the *Gauleitung-USA*, after realizing the usefulness of an American Nazi party. By this time, most of the Teutonia Association's members had strong leanings towards the NSDAP and believing that their first loyalty was to the Party, left Teutonia to join the *Gauleitung-USA*. Faced with a membership that was sharply declining, Gissibl, then the leader, ordered the Teutonia Association to disband, and in 1932 joined the *Gau-USA* along with Walter Kappe and Josef Schuster.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike the Teutonia Society, the *Gauleitung-USA* was given status as the 'official standard-bearer' of National Socialism in America. This title would be short lived as upon Hitler's ascension to chancellor in 1933, many realized that the *Gauleitung-USA* was more of a temporary solution to a larger problem. Infighting was rampant within the organization as members struggled to win the recognition of Adolf Hitler. This only generated unfavorable press coverage and garnered the group an extremely poor reputation, which the NSDAP in Germany believed would reflect poorly on them. It became clear that Germany's efforts to

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<sup>14</sup> Canedy, pg. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Diamond, pg. 97.

spread Nazi ideology throughout the United States needed much improvement as the *Gau-USA*, full of its internal bickering, lack of leadership, and general disorganization, was eventually declared defunct less than a year after its inception in 1933.<sup>16</sup>

## The American Born *Führer*

Hans Spanknöbel, a member of both the National Socialist Teutonia Society and a ranking officer within the *Gauleitung-USA*, was undeterred by the previous failures of American Nazism. Not only did he still believe in an American Nazi movement, but he was also convinced that no other man was fit to marshal it than himself, a true, American born German. Obsessed with the power and fame associated with leadership, Spanknöbel had jockeyed for authority in both the Teutonia Society and the *Gau-USA* to no avail. The failure of the *Gauleitung-USA* provided Spanknöbel an opportunity that would initiate his rise to power, and in late 1933, traveled to Germany with the hopes of reviving an American movement. Through a combination of luck and sheer willpower, Spanknöbel's efforts were answered with an audience with Rudolf Hess, Hitler's top lieutenant. Crafting a grandiose fantasy of "thousands of German ex-patriots longing for a robust Nazi movement in their adopted homeland," the American convinced the Nazi lieutenant and received the go-ahead to lead his own movement.<sup>17</sup> Returning to the United States with official Nazi papers endorsing his plan, Spanknöbel made well to inform all previous members of the *Gauleitung-USA* and the National Socialist Teutonia Association of the power given to him from German government. At last, he would have the opportunity to lead a movement and show the world the power he could excerpt as American *Führer*.

Shortly after his return, in May of 1933, Spanknöbel called a conference in Chicago and announced the formation of the *Die Freunde des Neuen Deutschland* (Friends of the New Germany, FoNG).<sup>18</sup> Tasked with building an immense following, Spanknöbel used his previous ties to both defunct Nazi groups while

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<sup>16</sup> Canedy, pg. 50.

<sup>17</sup> Canedy, pg. 51

<sup>18</sup> Bradley Hart, *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in the United States*, (New York: St. Martin's Press), pg. 28.

attracting new American members with a lure of racial exclusiveness and a promise of an “invigorated German America.”<sup>19</sup> He was quickly able to build an “enthusiastic group of fighters [who were] opposed to the enemies of Adolf Hitler,” and in no time the Friends of the New Germany (FoNG) established a loyal base within the United States.<sup>20</sup> Unlike previous groups, the FoNG outwardly incorporated the symbolism of the country they represented, adopting swastikas and Sam Browne belts to the groups’ uniform while embracing the ‘Roman Salute’ accompanied by a prideful ‘Heil Hitler’ between members. Membership quickly rose as the group gained a tremendous following, inspiring many with its fervent, and often, reckless crusade of the National Socialist cause. Capitalizing on the large German worker pool at the Ford Motor Plant, the newly created group established a headquarters in Detroit, Michigan, and expanded across the United States with chapters popping up in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago and New York. Already more promising than either the *Gauleitung-USA* or the National Socialist Teutonia Association, the Friends of the New Germany combined the *Ordnungsdienst* (OD) from the Teutonia Society with Hitler’s Brown shirts and created an armed force whose reckless actions would cause headaches for the American *Führer* for years to come.<sup>21</sup>

Spanknöbel embraced the power associated with his position as *Der Führer* and began to travel the United States, delivering speeches targeting the threat of communism and of an ‘international Jewry.’ Urging his audience to join the fight, Spanknöbel vowed to ‘clean up America’ while preserving the strong German heritage, a code word that substituted Nazism.<sup>22</sup> Heavily saturated with racism, antisemitism and an outward support of Hitler, Spanknöbel’s speeches often caused a scene, initiating violence and dispute within his audience. Most Americans weren’t complicit with this pro-Nazi organization, and many unleashed their discontent with violence. In May 1934, a mob of 1,000 anti-Nazi protestors raided a New Jersey FoNG rally, in which fifteen people were injured and thirty-five arrested.<sup>23</sup> In Queens New York, a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pg. 51.

<sup>20</sup> 1937 German American Bund Yearbook, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Origin of the Bund*, (1937), FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), part 01 of 11, pg. 95.

<sup>21</sup> Hart, pg. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Canedy, pg. 51.

<sup>23</sup> “Mob of 1,000 Raids Jersey Nazi Rally,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1934, pg. 1.

rally broke out into eighteen separate brawls, with six of them turning into minor riots according to *The New York Times*. Undeterred by the response, the night ended with a group of 300 FoNG members marching through the streets New York singing Nazi songs and shouting “Heil Hitler!”<sup>24</sup> As the threat of violent retaliation grew, Spanknöbel began to heavily incorporate the OD as security at these events, hoping that they would help limit the violence in the crowd. To Spanknöbel’s dismay, the armed forces did the opposite, actually initiating the violence at rallies, and leading to the rumor that the OD was actually an organized corps of storm troopers which were disciplined and directed by foreign agents.<sup>25</sup>

Stories of an armed Nazi militaristic organization spread throughout the country capturing the attention of Congress in 1932, largely due to their controversial and violent acts. Noting the growing Nazi menace in Germany, and mindful of World War I experiences with German fifth columns,\* the United States quickly tried to put an end to Spanknöbel’s movement. In fact, many increasingly saw this organization as a threat, drawing comparisons between the FoNG and the early days of the Nazi Party. A writer for the Pittsburgh Press characterized this feeling toward the openly German associated group stating “At the time of the Munich ‘putsch’ the world laughed at Hitler. But he came back. We should remember that and take the budding American organization as seriously as it really is.”<sup>26</sup>

To combat this threat, Samuel Dickstein, chair of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, requested the deportation of Spanknöbel on the grounds that he had failed to register with the State Department as an agent of a foreign government. If found guilty, Spanknöbel would be arrested, and the Friends of the New Germany silenced. When the attempts of deportation fell through because Spanknöbel was an American born citizen, Congress instituted a Senatorial Investigation by the Dickstein-McCormack Congressional Investigatory Committee (later to become the Dies Committee) to probe the possibility of this group representing a fifth column. Responding to the investigation, the Friends of the New Germany quickly fell into a state of conflict as the United States Government began to uncover the

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<sup>24</sup> “Fists Fly at Rally of 9,000 Nazis Here, *New York Times*, April 9, 1934, pg. 1.

<sup>25</sup> “Nazi Plot in U.S. Charged at Conclave,” *Oakland Tribune*, May 11, 1934, pg. 10.

\* *The term fifth column relates to a secret group of sympathizers or supporters of an enemy that engage in espionage or sabotage within defense lines or borders*

<sup>26</sup> “Hitlerism Invades U.S., Prober Charges,” *Pittsburgh Press*, April 4, 1933, pg. 16

groups more radical aspects and questionable relationship to Germany. Spanknöbel would eventually flee the country in late 1933 to avoid arrest, leaving Fritz Gissibl in command and impeding the American Nazi movement.<sup>27</sup> One member, Karl Neumann, characterized the disappointment of this period, writing “Sometimes I think during the night that if our Führer, Adolf Hitler, ever saw the mess in New York, he would cry.”<sup>28</sup> As membership began to shrink, the Friends of the New Germany attempted one last effort to keep the group alive. Just as the group was following the path of both the *Gau-USA* and the Teutonia Association to dissolution, an opportunity arose to continue their existence from the most unlikely of places, an anti-Nazi boycott.

## A Double-Edged Sword

Shortly after Hitler’s ascent to office in January 1933, the American Jewish Congress, led by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, issued a statement condemning the violence of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party.<sup>29</sup> The Congress, working alongside Samuel Untermyer, a prominent lawyer and leader within the Jewish community, called upon its partners to help organize an American protest campaign and on March 27th 1933, held a protest rally at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Jewish groups across the country showed solidarity in this effort as nearly seventy other cities, including Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland and San Francisco, held similar protests.<sup>30</sup> With an overflow crowd of 55,000 at the Garden, the American Jewish Congress announced its boycott of Germany, German goods, and of any store selling German goods under the endorsement of American Federation of Labor president William Green, Senator Robert F. Wagner, former New York Governor Al Smith and several Christian Clergy members.<sup>31</sup> Characterized as the “Holy War against Hitler and the German people” by the press, this boycott quickly

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<sup>27</sup> House Un-American Activities Committee, 9-12 July, 1934, NYC 16, in Freeland, p 23.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Neuman to Rolf Hoffmann, Jan 1, 1934, T-81 / 27 / 24507, in Sander, pg. 180.

<sup>29</sup> “Boycott Advocated to Curb Hitlerism,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1933, pg. 10.

<sup>30</sup> “Jewish Leaders Here Protest Persecution by Hitler’s Government” *The San Francisco Examiner*, March 24, 1933, pg. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 2

exacerbated existing tensions between the American German and Jewish populations and provided a doorway for the Friends of the New Germany to capture national attention.<sup>32</sup>

A year later, fed up with the ostracization of German business and dearly in need of a movement to propel the group back into prominence, the Friends of the New Germany inserted themselves to help



German Americans. *Figure 2: The Friends of the New Germany's counter boycott. Note the banners on the upper balcony: "Join the DAWA" and "Fight the Boycott." 1934. (The New York Times, May 17, 1934.).*

With swastikas dominating the arena and over 750 policemen present to keep an eye on the crowd, as well as the OD, the Friends of the New Germany launched a counter-boycott at Madison Square Garden on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1934. Speaking to an audience over 20,000, leaders of the FoNG labeled the Jewish Boycott unconstitutional and defended the policies of Hitler to echoes of applause and encouragement. George Sylvester Viereck, a German born poet and close confidant of Adolf Hitler, gave the keynote address, stating that the boycott was “a double-edged sword,” going on to threaten that “It is a game that two can play at.”<sup>33</sup> The night ended as members adopted a resolution denouncing the anti-Nazi boycott as illegal. This coincided with the

<sup>32</sup> “Judea Declares War on Germany: Jews of All the World Unite in Action”, *Daily Express* [London], March 24, 1933, p 1.

<sup>33</sup> “Roosevelt Action to End Jewish Boycott Urged by Friends of New Germany at Rally,” *The Brooklyn Citizen*, May 18, 1934, pg. 5.

decision to write a letter to the President, urging Theodore Roosevelt to direct the Department of Justice to take all action “as the law prescribes” to end the boycott.<sup>34</sup>

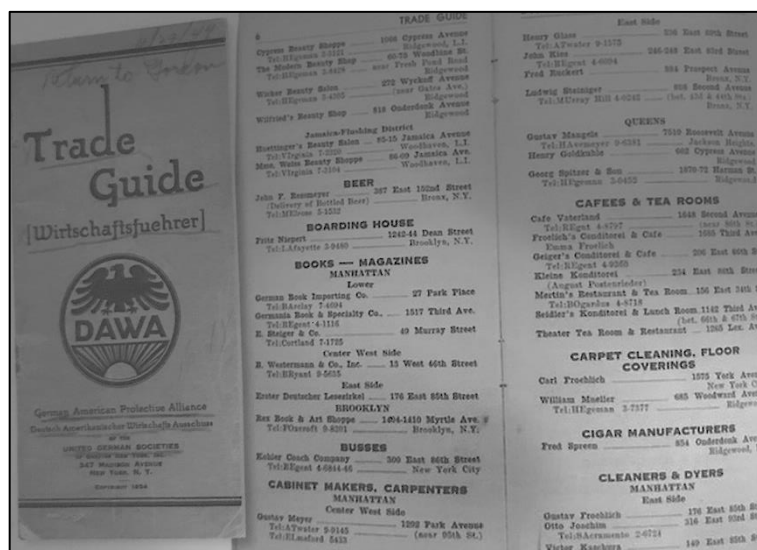


Figure 3: A DAWA business guide advertising participating businesses. 1936 (They too Were Americans, pg. 32)

Embracing the role as the protector of American-German business, the Friends of the New Germany countered the boycott by monitoring trade to ostracize Jewish merchants and promote German patrons through an economic partnership known as the German-American Business League (*Deutsch-Amerikanischer Wirtschafts-Ausschuss*) also known as

DAWA. For an annual membership fee of just \$3.00, participating businesses received a poster to hang in their windows certifying their membership of the league and their opposition to the Jewish boycott.<sup>35</sup> The name of the business was also published in a DAWA handbook along with a description of its products and services as well its address and telephone number. To further boost this economic countermeasure, customers of member stores received DAWA stamp books from participating stores and could earn a given number of stamps per purchase. Once the book was filled, they could be exchanged for \$1.25 of merchandise or cash at any DAWA store. Any store could join DAWA as long as they were ‘Aryan’ and the owners of the ‘Christian Faith.’<sup>36</sup>

The German American Business League quickly grew, as by December 1934 there were approximately 800 DAWA members stores in New York City alone.<sup>37</sup> The boycott had capitalized on existing antisemitic feelings and drew many into its ranks with the hopes to fight back against the Jewish

<sup>34</sup> “Nazis Here Launch a Counter Boycott” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1935.

<sup>35</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18 21-24, 28-29, August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3752.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pg. 3755.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pg. 3753.

foe. Many in the FoNG saw the counterboycott as an outlet to exercise the prejudice and discriminatory feelings that had been existent since the end of World War I. Josef ‘Sepp’ Schuster embodied these feelings of provoked action, warning the organizations taking part in the anti-German boycott “not to meddle in the affairs of the Friends of New Germany or there will be a fight.” Schuster finished his sentiment avowing to anti-Nazi leaders that the FoNG was prepared to resist them to the very end.<sup>38</sup>

Through the counter-boycott, the FoNG was able to initiate an economic war against Jewish businesses who they saw as starting the conflict. The anti-German nature of the boycott became a rallying point for the FoNG as many German community groups eventually folded into the growing organization. This increased its numbers by the thousands. These groups included the *Stahlhelm* (the Steel Helmets), the *Kriegerbund* (Warrior Covenant), the German Legion, the *Kyffhäuser Bund* (named after a mountain range in Germany) and the Hindenburg Society.<sup>39</sup> As more groups brought their members to the Friends of the New Germany, they brought with them new sources of funds, resources and networks to increase the groups power. This growth remodeled the FoNG introducing the organization to a German community composed of families striving for a better life in a new home.

To reflect this new attitude of community the Friends of New Germany instituted the *Frauenschaft* (Ladies auxiliary organization) and the *Jungenschaft* and *Mädchenschaft* (the boys and girls youth organizations) into its ranks. A family organization now, many still had concerns over key attitudes propagated by the group. Unafraid of the ongoing investigation by the McCormack-Dickstein Congressional Committee, the group still held meetings and rallies across the nation. Speeches still propagated an anti-black platform, combined with the ever-present antisemitism



Figure 4: A Jungenschaft unit from New Jersey. 1934. (*They too Were Americans*, pg. 36)

<sup>38</sup> “Nazi Rally Hits Steuben Society,” *Times Union* [New York], November 28, 1934, pg. 5

<sup>39</sup> “Nazis Here Launch a Counter Boycott,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1935, pg. 16.



and a combination of controversy and contention still surrounded the group.<sup>40</sup> The group had obvious Nazi sympathies, and it's obvious message to establish a friendly relationship with Nazi Germany constantly found the organization trouble. The *Ordnungsdienst* still instigated fights and brawls, and this continued to intensify the already strained relationship the group had with the law. The controversy of this group peaked in 1935 as just under a thousand members attended a German Day celebration in New York City, in which Gissibl led a verbal attack, denouncing 'Jewish Communism' and the German Steuben Society. This, along with stories which eventually circulated back to Germany of attacks on Jewish merchants and Nazi vandals painting swastikas on synagogues, convinced the German government finally pulled the plug on the idea of an American 'fifth column.'<sup>41</sup> Fed up with the headaches, the NSDAP initiated a propaganda campaign in 1935, publicly disavowing responsibility for the Friends of the New Germany, and cutting all ties associated between them and this Nazi organization. An official statement from Walderman Troet, official spokesman for the party, expressed a hope that the "Friends would come to their senses," and cease embarrassing the German Government.'<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, the FoNG continued to publicly pledge allegiance to Germany, forcing the NSDAP's to decree that all German nationals resign from the Friends of the New Germany, or risk losing their German citizenship.<sup>43</sup> Two months later this edict was reaffirmed by Rudolf Hess on Christmas day 1935. Issuing an official statement, Gissibl, who had taken the place of Spanknöbel, conceded to the wishes of his party, effectively ending the Friends of the New Germany.<sup>44</sup> The FoNG's outward allegiance to the NSDAP in Germany had hurt the organization, and flooded it with controversy. While the congressional investigation didn't lead to the demise of the group, it certainly pressured Germany into disavowing the organization in order to avoid responsibility. But yet, the idea of American Nazism would exist beyond this group, as the

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<sup>40</sup> Canedy, pg. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Canedy, pg. 66.

<sup>42</sup> "Nazis are Angered by 'Friends' Here." *The New York Times*, October 3, 1935, pg. 10.

<sup>43</sup> "Nazi Activity Here Limited by Hitler," *The New York Times*, December 25, 1935, pg. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pg. 2.

possibility of an American *Führer* hadn't died with the Friends of the New Germany, but had been transferred to another more contentious leader, Fritz Julius Kuhn.

## 2. Dreams of a “Glorious Fascist Government”

Sinister face; a face coarse as burlap, forbidding and fantastic, square-jawed and fleshly with a bulbous nose and cold grey eyes which were deep-set and vindictive. It was a face which had smoldered in hate so long that it had become hateful and frightening in intensity.... His mouth was unusual. His upper lip covered the lower completely so that there was nothing but a wide and flexible slit which screwed itself into all sorts of grimaces as *der führer* tried to say in English what this mind evolved in German.”<sup>1</sup>

Description of Fritz Kuhn by John Roy Carlson, 1943

Characterized as a misfit by the papers, Fritz Kuhn rose from a lowly German immigrant to a celebrity sensation in less than ten years. Epitomizing “all that was evil and dangerous about National Socialism” Kuhn would resurrect the failures of his predecessors and become the closest to establish a Fourth Reich in the United States. He would take the lessons learned from the failure of the FoNG and create an organization that was so pro-American that its connection with Germany would be in question its entire existence. Kuhn specialized in deception, and through an analysis of his life, it becomes clear that the Bund's movement began to resemble the wills and political wishes of its voracious leader.

### From the Freikorps to the Ford Factory

Fritz Julius Kuhn was born May 15th, 1896 in Munich, Germany to Karl and Anna Kuhn. One of twelve children, Fritz appeared to possess none of the qualities necessary to play the role he would

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<sup>1</sup> John Roy Carlson, *Undercover*, (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1943), pg. 47.

eventually find himself in. He was, as a confidential informant for the FBI would later label him, the ‘Black Sheep’ of his family.<sup>2</sup> Like so many other Germans his age, he took up arms to fight for his fatherland in 1914. Excelling in armed combat, Kuhn rose to the ranks of Lieutenant, serving on the French, Italian, Serbian and Romanian fronts, where he was wounded three times and ultimately awarded the Iron Cross First Class, Germany’s highest military honor for rank-and-file soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Returning to civilian life after Germany’s defeat, Kuhn reflected the common attitudes of many veterans, as the devastating loss on the battlefield was only made worse by the enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles. Searching for an outlet for his frustration Kuhn joined the *Freikorps* shortly after his return to Munich. The same group that was home to many members of the Teutonia Association, and Kuhn was likely radicalized by this paramilitary organization, eventually joining the Nazi party in 1921. Later Kuhn would tell the Federal Bureau of Investigation that he had participated in the famous Beer Hall Putsch in Munich, but this has never been verified.<sup>4</sup>

While earning a master’s in chemical engineering at the University of Munich in 1922, Kuhn took advantage of his time, stealing the overcoats of his peers as well as platinum crucibles from the Chemistry Laboratory. Earning himself a four month stay at Munich’s Stadelheim Prison, his father Karl Kuhn, looking to keep his son out of trouble, directed him towards a family friend for employment, Mr. Reinhold Spitz who owned a fabric factory located in Munich Germany. Later describing Fritz Kuhn as a man of weak character, Spitz set him up as a shipping clerk in charge of transporting bolts of fabric from one floor to another. After about three months, Spitz began to realize that much of his material was unaccounted for. Suspecting his newest employee of stealing, Spitz watched Kuhn through a small window above a work room and observed that his shipping clerk had been cutting off a portion of the fabric and handing it off to an unidentified man outside the facility. Dismissing Kuhn immediately, Spitz estimated that Kuhn stole roughly 3,000 marks worth of material during his time at the factory. Despite this claim, Spitz never pressed

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<sup>2</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum on Fritz Julius Kuhn*, (May 13, 1939), pg. 3, in FBI, File for Fritz Julius Kuhn, (1942), part 02 of 10, pg. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>4</sup>

any charges because of his friendly relationship with Fritz's father.<sup>5</sup> Running out of hope for his twenty-five-year-old son, Karl Kuhn worked to save up money to send his son to Mexico hoping to set his son straight in a new environment. Leaving Germany in 1923, Kuhn and his wife Elsa, whom he had married earlier that year in March, settled in Tampico Mexico to start a new life while also escaping the economic collapse of Germany.<sup>6</sup>

Awaiting entry into the United States, Kuhn worked as a lab chemist for the La Corona Oil Company while making a little bit extra on the side teaching at the College of Mexico City in 1927.<sup>7</sup> It was also in Mexico where both of the Kuhn's children were born.<sup>8</sup> Finally gaining a visa in 1928, Kuhn passed through Laredo Texas, and like so many German immigrants, found a home in Detroit, Michigan working at the Ford Motor Plant. Settling into his new home, Kuhn, now 31 years old, found many similarities between his



Figure 5: Fritz Kuhn speaking at a Bund rally. 1937. (New York Times, September 9, 1937).

new home in America and the Germany he had left behind. The Ford Motor Plant was vehemently antisemitic, endorsing many aspects written by its founder, Henry Ford, years earlier in the Dearborn Independent's series titled *The International Jew*. Denying Jewish doctors to serve in the plant's hospitals, Ford had created his idea of a perfect society, culminating in an antisemitic empire based out of the American Midwest. It was at this plant that Kuhn was introduced to the movement he would define less

<sup>5</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for the Director*, (May 12, 1939), FBI file for Fritz Julius Kuhn, (1942), part 01 of 10, pg. 14

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Canedy *American Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* (Menlo Park, CA: Markgraf Publications Group, 1999), pg. 79.

<sup>8</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum on Fritz Julius Kuhn*, (May 13, 1939), pg. 1, FBI File for Fritz Julius Kuhn, (1942), Part 02 of 10, pg. 29.

than ten years later. Kuhn worked at Ford Motor Company from 1930 until 1937. In the course of this period, he would be fired three times, and hired back three times, ultimately spending the most time as an X-ray technician working for 80cents an hour.<sup>9</sup> During this period, Kuhn sought cultural comfort in the local German American fraternity and ultimately joined the Friends of the New Germany in summer of 1933. Kuhn rose quick through the ranks of the FoNG. Becoming a United States citizen in 1934, by 1935 he had ascended to the position of Midwestern *Gauleiter* as Fritz Gissibl appointed him a provisional leader of one of the groups three American chapters. Spending so much time with this fascist organization, Kuhn's position at the Ford Motor Plant quickly was supplanted with spreading the ideals of the Friends of the New Germany. Disciplined multiple times for practicing speeches while on the clock Kuhn would formally end his time with the Ford Motors in January of 1937 and fully commit to the movement.<sup>10</sup>

Characterized by Susan Canedy as “a large, imposing man, standing 5’11 and weighing slightly over 200 pounds, with a strong face framed by graying brown hair”, Kuhn summoned the spirit of Adolf Hitler to rally up his Detroit unit.<sup>11</sup> He was a demanding leader, described as intelligent by former members, all while speaking with an aggressive force that created the image of an extremely professional, dedicated, and slightly distant man who inspired great admiration and trust. Challenging them to take a more aggressive attitude towards the spread of National Socialism, Kuhn also heightened the commitment of members to the movement, requiring members to pattern their dress similar to the Nazi uniform members wore in Germany.<sup>12</sup> The Friends of the New Germany provided Kuhn everything he hoped for in America. Inspired by the Fatherland, the Friends were infused with an atmosphere of order and discipline adopted straight from Hitler's strict bureaucratic system in Germany. With a paramilitary order to guard the group, the Friends of the New Germany distributed propaganda across the nation advertising a peaceful relationship between the United States and Germany through the Nazi ideology. Envious of Fritz Gissibl's

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Canedy, pg. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Canedy, pg. 45.

position as leader of this group, Kuhn finally found his chance for power as the group became defunct in 1935.

After Hess's orders to disband the Friends of the New Germany, Fritz Gissibl returned to Germany to begin his role as a valuable cog in Joseph Goebbels propaganda machine.<sup>13</sup> Before he left, he appointed his most diligent officer to lead the now defunct organization, handing the reins and full control to Fritz Julius Kuhn, beginning his journey towards being one of the most reviled actors in 1930's America. As the pro-tem authority, Kuhn's attire began to emulate the uniform of *Der Fuhrer* himself. Adorning a military-style jacket, crisp pants held up by a Sam Belt, and decorated by the ever-present swastika upon his sleeve, Kuhn maintained a hardened stance combined with a fierce demeanor, demanding respect from his loyalists, and fear from his opponents.<sup>14</sup>

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1936 at a conference in Buffalo New York on the eastern shores of Lake Erie, Kuhn addressed the crowd of American fascists about the future of the Friends of the New Germany. Surrendering to the commands sent from Germany, Kuhn declared the organization defunct, but announced the formation of a new group aimed at spreading the ideals of National Socialism; *Der Amerikadeutscher Volksbund*, translated to the German American Bund. Distributing an official booklet announcing this transition, *Awake and Act* explained the reasoning for this name change, stating that

The Friends of the New Germany did great and glorious work during the past years. It was always at all times an aggressive organization, and the German American Volksbund will continue to be as active and aggressive, yes, it will even intensify its attacks upon lies and political incendiarism, against Marxism and Bolshevism, and will not shrink its duty to wage war with every available power. But a change of name seems dictated by good judgement if we are now to accomplish our ends.<sup>15</sup>

Kuhn insisted that this was not a matter of simply substituting the Friends of the New Germany under a different title but was rather the initiation of a new movement aimed at becoming an active part in the affairs of the country. Targeted at advancing the ideology of the Nazi party throughout the United States, Kuhn

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<sup>13</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *File 97-27 Synopsis of Facts: German American Bund*, (December 22, 1942), pg. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Canedy, pg. 49

<sup>15</sup> Fritz Kuhn, *Awake and Act: Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund*; (New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, April 17, 1936) pg. 2.

wrote that the Bund would be aimed at educating the American people to become friends with Hitler's Nazi Germany. Two weeks later Fritz Julius Kuhn was officially sworn in as the German American Bund *Bundesleiter*. Rising from a cog in Henry Ford's motor company to the position as leader of the American Nazi movement in less than three years, Kuhn was now poised to finally emulate his idol Adolf Hitler and bring a 'glorious fascist government' to the United States.

### 3. An 'Amerikan' Movement

"The new order in the homeland, with its deep and challenging ideas, has brought to us a new conception of our allegiance. We shall always practice loyalty and allegiance as citizens of this country linked with the destiny of our ancestral race. Hence we call ourselves American Germans and our movement the German American Volksbund."<sup>1</sup>

Fritz Kuhn, 1937

The Formula Today Is:

Either actively with us ---- or against us. There can no longer be any neutrality in any place where our enlightenment has penetrated. To remain neutral for their own means; to take an attitude against us, against an upright taking care of our interests of Germandom in the United States of America.<sup>2</sup>

German American Bund Yearbook, 1936

The German American Bund was an antisemitic organization. It spread hateful, pro-Nazi rhetoric across the United States, attempting to indoctrinate Americans into an environment of hate and prejudice. What this chapter shows is not only how Fritz Kuhn looked to hide the Bund behind a veil of Americanness, but also, how the Bund was able to insert itself into an antisemitic wave that had been present within the United States for decades. Much of the Bund's rhetoric, while horrible and hateful by today's standards, was condoned during this period, if not accepted. To say the least, the Bund's antisemitism was not on the fringes of the American political environment during this period. This is a main reason why the group was

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<sup>1</sup> Fritz Kuhn, *Awake and Act: Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund*; (New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, April 17, 1936) pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup> German American Bund, *1936 Yearbook*, pg. 28 in Federal Bureau of Investigation, *1936 Yearbook*, (1936), FBI file for the German American Bund, no. 01 of 11, pg. 95.

able to gather such a following, and why Kuhns vision for one million Bund members by 1941 wasn't so implausible.

## Free America!

Tasked with creating an American Nazi movement out of the ashes of the Friends of the New Germany, Fritz Kuhn went to work to further the influence of the German American Bund after its inception in April 1936. Aspiring to have one million members by 1940, the *Bundesführer* corrected the mistakes he had witnessed first-hand in the FoNG in an attempt to avoid the controversy that had plagued the now defunct group. Unlike this previous organization, the German American Bund would be an 'American political force,' and through the change in name, a political force that appeared to be uninfluenced by Germany. This was the key, as it was the public association to Germany that had ultimately doomed the Friends of New Germany.

A major ideological difference between the Bund and the FoNG was the Bund's commitment to America, and its allegiance not only to the American Constitution, but to the ideals the country adhered to. Fritz Kuhn, unlike Hans Spanknöbel and Fritz Gissibl, the previous leaders of the FoNG, recognized the importance of politics to further their movement, and the importance image and representation. His first order upon assentation to *Bundesführer* reflected this notion, as he made U.S. citizenship mandatory for members and removed all non-U.S. citizens from the ranks of the Bund. Always with an alternative motive, not only did this decision draw the Bund away from Germany, but it also increased their political potential as well. Without citizenship, members wouldn't have voting power, and without the power to vote, they would provide no help or use to the political aspirations of the Bund. With American citizenship now a requirement of the Bund, Kuhn had effectively ostracized the non-citizen German followers of the group, as many would leave the United States and return to Germany.<sup>3</sup> Tasked with finding a following of eligible voters to carry the political aspirations of the Bund, it makes sense why Kuhn would Americanize the Bund.

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<sup>3</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18, 21-24, 28-29,



Under Kuhn, the Bund achieved national notoriety and helped to coalesce the xenophobia that engulfed the United States. While the FoNG had been influential enough to strain American-German relations, they had been viewed by many throughout their existence as an obvious German attempt to mobilize a fifth column in the United States. The Bund, on the other hand, would be a group of American Germans, committed first to America and free of German influence. Without this influence, Kuhn could claim that the group was a one-hundred percent American movement, free from foreign infiltration and control. This meant that the German American Bund, while a Nazi organization, was neither endorsed nor affiliated with the Nazi Party in Germany and was an entirely separate organization. Kuhn testified this in a pamphlet labeled *Awake and Act*, published shortly after the creation of the German American Bund in 1936, stating that the “The Bund is American in its inception and in its field of endeavor, German in its idealism and character.”<sup>4</sup>

Through Kuhn’s Americanization of the Bund, the organization began to resemble an entirely different establishment than either the Friends of the New Germany or the Teutonia Association. The most blatant of these gestures of assimilation was the adoption of ‘Free America!’ a moniker that would flood the meetings and rallies of the Bund across America. An example of Bund’s efforts to distance themselves from the appearance of German influence, “Free America” replaced the “Heil Hitler” greeting used throughout the Friends of the New Germany and quickly became a calling card for American Fascism.<sup>5</sup> Broken down, this expression is difficult to decipher within the context of the German American Bund. What exactly was this group freeing America from, and why did Kuhn think that this slogan would attract the prospective American element that this movement needed? These questions can be answered through an analysis of an inexplicable ideology that had traversed from the Friends of New Germany to cement itself as a defining attraction of the German American Bund: antisemitism.

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August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3811.

<sup>4</sup> Kuhn, pg. 3

<sup>5</sup> John Roy Carlson, *Undercover*, (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1943), p. 46.

While camouflaged under many different denominations (anti-Communist, anti-Hollywood, anti-Roosevelt, anti-Bolshevik) the German American Bund was an antisemitic organization. It projected and spread anti-Jewish sentiment that appealed to an American audience through a national attitude that had existed upon U.S. shores long before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing this, the Kuhn created an organization that would join the wave of antisemitism that the German American Bund would eventually define.

## Carrying the Torch

To adequately understand the popularity of the German American Bund during this period, it is important to first understand the political environment of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and analyze the attitudes and perspectives that allowed the Bund not only to exist, but to flourish within the United States. Antisemitism has its roots in what Seymour Martin Lipset refers to as a ‘disease’ that had formed from the long-term competitive relationship between Judaism and its ‘daughter religions.’<sup>6</sup> While many Europeans would bring these antagonistic beliefs and negative stereotypes with them as they immigrated to the United States, organized antisemitism was a relatively new phenomenon, introduced as a movement in the U.S. shortly after the first World War.<sup>7</sup> Its roots were the result of existent antisemitic attitudes combined with anti-immigrant nationalistic responses to an influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. This wave can be seen as nearly 1.75 million Jews that would arrive to the United States between 1900 and 1924. This wave of immigration was also felt on the West Coast, where during this period California would welcome thousands of Asian immigrants through Angel Island.

Faced with a shortage in labor and increased competition among workers, the United States government responded to this influx with the Immigration Act of 1924. Known as the Johnson-Reed Act, it established a quota system that would level the wave of immigrants in hopes of protecting nationalistic interests.<sup>8</sup> While stemming the flow of ‘unwanted immigrants’ from citizenship, it also encouraged the

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<sup>6</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, “A Unique People in an Exceptional Country,” *Society* 28, (1990), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Lucilla Cremoni, “Antisemitism and populism in the United States in the 1930s: The case of Father Coughlin,” in *Patterns of Prejudice*, ed. (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis), p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Lipset, pg. 6

movement of ‘prioritized immigrants’ from western and northern Europe. Despite primarily targeting immigrants from China and Japan, the act limited immigration from southern and eastern Europe, both primarily Jewish regions. By excluding a region in Europe that had many potential Jewish immigrants while encouraging immigrants from primarily Christian areas of Europe, the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 instilled the idea that Jewish immigrants were somehow different than the rest of Europeans, giving legitimacy to the theory of the superiority of the Nordic race, a principal belief of antisemitism.

Despite the quota system, Jewish immigration would continue to rise through the decade, as the economic decline spurred by the Great Depression in 1929 and Hitler’s rise to power four years later would only increase the number of Jewish refugees fleeing to the United States. Many Jewish immigrants found similar attitudes that they thought they had left in Europe. The most harmful of these antisemitic organizations, the Ku Klux Klan, promoted antisemitism across the United States, achieving national prominence in 1920 through its promotion of a violent platform of native white supremacy that opposed all foreigners, specifically ‘Negroes, Catholics and Jews.’<sup>9</sup> While the Klan would help spread this ideology of racial supremacy, Henry Ford would turn it into an organized movement, capitalizing upon his platform of influence to spread his antisemitic beliefs throughout the 1920’s. As Ford’s grasp on the movement would eventually decline as the decade closed, Father Charles E. Coughlin would take the baton and spread antisemitic conspiracies and rhetoric across United States all the way until 1942. Mixing existing antisemitism with political controversy and accusations, Coughlin would bring the movement to the forefront of American culture, spreading an ideology of opposition to the New Deal, fear of radicalism and communism, and sympathy with the Nazi Party. Both Coughlin and Ford would both normalize and promote antisemitism, creating an environment in which anti-Jewish beliefs were not only condoned but accepted throughout the United States. It was through these figures in which the Bund found an existing movement, joining over 121 other antisemitic organizations striving to rid America of the ‘Jewish Menace.’<sup>10</sup> Both Coughlin and Ford were masters of propaganda and conspiracy and by analyzing their

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<sup>9</sup> Lipset, pg. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 10.

contributions to the American antisemitic movement one can understand the environment which enabled the Bund to foster and grow.

Henry Ford, industrialist, business magnate, and founder of Ford Motor Company had achieved a celebrity following during the early twentieth century largely in part to his development of the assembly line technique of mass production. Using his platform and fame to reach the minds of millions, Ford began to publish the Dearborn *Independent* in 1919 as an effort to launch a systematic campaign denouncing the Jewish race while accentuating a suspected conspiracy. The *Independent* found a following within America's burgeoning economy of the 1920's and became so popular that Hitler and the Nazi Party would eventually import copies and use them in German translations as part of an organized campaign of agitation.<sup>11</sup>

Capitalizing upon the popularity of the *Independent*, Henry Ford went even deeper to propagate his lies publishing *The International Jew*, a four-volume set of antisemitic booklets distributed over the course of two years starting in May 1920. The blatant antisemitism proposed throughout these works was supported by journalists and critics alike, and evidence suggests that it spurred the *Independent's* growth as more and more Americans subscribed to Ford's harmful beliefs.<sup>12</sup> Fully titled *The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem*, Ford touched upon such topics as "How Jews in the U.S. Conceal Their Strength," "Does a Definite Jewish World Program Exist?" and, among others, "Jewish Rights Clash with American Rights."<sup>13</sup> Appealing to the historic antisemitic beliefs, Ford was able to tug on the strings of nativism and conspiracy to become the most influential antisemite of the early 1900s. Despite being denounced by many, including former presidents Woodrow Wilson and William Taft, Ford still reached an audience of just under one million subscribers, second only to the *New York Daily News* as the most subscribed-to periodicals.<sup>14</sup> Controversy concerning Ford's views would ultimately lead to his downfall. In 1927 He was sued for libel by a Chicago lawyer attacking the articles of an especially offensive

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Watts, *the People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century*, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2006), pg. 378.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pg. 380

<sup>13</sup> "The International Jew: The World's Problem," Dearborn *Independent*, May 22, 1920, in Watts, pg. 380

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg. 382.

*Independent*. Issuing a public apology to the Jewish people, Ford would eventually abolish the paper in December of that year, bringing an end to the antisemitic movement of the 1920's.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, Ford's tangled web of half-formed ideas, distorted perceptions and impulsive yet deeply felt readings of the world around him, would inspire others to achieve similar fame, specifically a Detroit preacher known as the 'Priest of Little Flower.'

Father Charles Edward Coughlin was born in Canada in 1891 but would settle in the Protestant suburb community of Royal Oak, Michigan, three miles from Detroit. Characterized as the founder of the 'ideologues and demagogues' movement, Coughlin would go on to build a radio empire composed of a mixture of antisemitic and conservative Catholic religious radio programs.<sup>16</sup> Kicked off of the CBS airwaves for his controversial theories and a victim of Klan intimidation, Father Coughlin was a household name in the mid-1930s, garnering momentum as an anti-Klan advocate while taking advantage of the recent advent of the radio to establish a 'Radio Parish' to reach Americans across the nation.<sup>17</sup> Coughlin not only provided spiritual council to his audience, but after the 1929 stock market crash, began to voice his political opinions through 'educational talks' and 'lectures.' These had a specific focus, outlining a denunciation of 'socialism, communism, and kindred fallacious social and economic theories.'<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately many of these views were underscored with an international Jewish conspiracy, as like Henry Ford, Coughlin propagated these anti-Jewish conspiracies into the homes of millions of Americans, warning listeners of an 'invisible international government' with the power and wealth to 'enslave the masses'<sup>19</sup>

Through his radio empire, the Priest of Little Flower rose to such popularity that a Gallup poll found that in December of 1938, a full twenty-two percent of Americans admitted to listening to Coughlin's program.<sup>20</sup> This figure translates to an estimated monthly audience of nearly twenty-nine million listeners,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pg. 395.

<sup>16</sup> Cremoni, pg. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Mugglebee, *Father Coughlin, the Radio Priest, of the Shrine of the Little Flower* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Co., 1933), 183, in Bradley Hart, *Hitler's American Friends*, (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2018), p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> 'Washington's farewell address,' broadcast 21, February, 1937 (published in *Social Justice*, 1 March, 1937, 8-9) in Cremoni, pg. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Bradley Hart, *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in the United States*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), pg. 70.

a number larger than any other radio personality of that era, not only rivaling, but surpassing Rush Limbaugh's audience in the 1990s, a man accredited as having one of the largest radio followings ever recorded. Along with his radio program, Coughlin also published a weekly newspaper starting in 1936, ironically titled *Social Justice*, in which he would propagate his antisemitic views, later to be accompanied by adjoining anti-British, anti-Roosevelt and anti-Communist rhetoric.<sup>21</sup> Reaching an estimated 250,000 – 300,000 readers, *Social Justice* would advertise and endorse such controversial books as Ford's *International Jew*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and *The Jews* by Hilaire Belloc.<sup>22</sup> Coughlin was so trusted and his influence so undeniable that in 1936, a full 7 percent of Americans, roughly 9 million people, admitted to being more likely to vote for a political candidate simply because of Coughlin's endorsement.<sup>23</sup> This was the same man who propagated the teachings of numerology to suggest that Franklin D. Roosevelt was the anti-Christ while warning many of the threats of a “Red New Deal.”<sup>24</sup> Through these mediums, Father Coughlin capitalized upon already existent feelings of hostility towards Jews while affirming the beliefs of many through his harmful rhetoric. He undoubtedly indoctrinated millions into the movement that Henry Ford had initiated, a movement that the Bund would define.

While it may be easy to look at the actions of Coughlin and Ford and denounce them as a fringe position on the political spectrum, their beliefs penetrated every class, creed and profession within American culture. Far from the margin of accepted ideology this genre of vehement antisemitism infiltrated all forms of media across the nation. Popular newspapers endorsed and propagated anti-Jewish rhetoric as such article titles as the *Brooklyn Eagle*'s “Charity Rackets and the American Jew,”<sup>25</sup> and the *Star Tribune* of Minneapolis's “Does the World Still Need the Jew,”<sup>26</sup> illustrate the attitude of the era. In politics, Pennsylvania Representative Louis T. McFadden introduced antisemitic un-verified reports in the records of the 1933 Senatorial proceedings accusing Jews of controlling the nation's financial institutions, media

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<sup>21</sup> “Christians Will Not Support the New Red Deal” *Social Justice* [Detroit MI], July 7, 1941, pg. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Cremoni, pg. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Conducted by Gallup Organization, June 29 - July 3, 1936, based on 1,500 personal interviews. Sample: National adult. Sample size is approximate, in Hart, pg. 77.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Who's 666’ *Social Justice* [Detroit MI], August 25, 1941, pg. 7.

<sup>25</sup> “Charity Rackets and the American Jew” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 4, 1934, pg. 70.

<sup>26</sup> “Does the World Still Need the Jew?” *Star Tribune*, June 11, 1934, pg. 9

outlets, government and even presidency, only further legitimizing these beliefs.<sup>27</sup> This coincided with the belief that Congress was ruled by Jewish influence, despite the fact that only 3 out of the 435 members of the Seventy-Third Congress were Jewish.<sup>28</sup> Least to say, many believed the words of these influential figures, and would see their beliefs affirmed within the chambers of the United States Congress. Often, antisemitism wasn't as pronounced or mainstream as the propaganda in Coughlin's *Social Justice* or Henry Ford's *International Jew*. It was illustrated through more subtle measures including housing red lining, 'gentlemen's agreements,' blocking Jewish Americans from social clubs and organizations, and other subversive steps to exclude Jewish Americans from equal status and marginalizing them to subjugation and prosecution.<sup>29</sup>

The German American Bund found its place within this movement in a crowd of hundreds of other antisemitic organizations, finding both allies and competition through the likes of the Silver Shirts, the Christian Front, the American White Guard, and among others, the ironically named American Patriots. In this environment, the Bund would seek to unite these groups and blossom into the cusp of a political movement, as its deep antisemitism combined with its anti-Communist rhetoric would appeal to many Americans and draw them towards its ranks.

Outside of this antisemitism, the German American Bund's attitude of patriotism and loyalty would appeal to many members while avoiding the controversy that had led to the Friends of the New Germany's decline. Above all, Kuhn would declare that the German American Bund was an American group, and as one, it pledged its allegiance:

... to honor and defend the Constitution, the flag and institutions of the United States of America; to combat all atheistic teachings and abuses of the pulpits; to oppose all racial intermixture between Aryans and Asiatics, Africans, and other non-Aryans; to fight communism; to break up the dictatorship of the Jewish-international minority; to strive for a true peace; and to defend the right to cherish the German language and German customs.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Steven Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017) pg. 49.

<sup>28</sup> McFadden quoted in Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History Up to World War II* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 108, in Ross, pg. 49.

<sup>29</sup> Ross, pg. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Constitution of the German American Bund, Article II: Aim, 5, (New York, 1937), in House Committee on Un-American Activities

These aims demonstrate what Susan Canedy refers to as the ‘triadic nature’ of the Bundist philosophy. Through Kuhn, the Bund was strongly American, but it was also committed to National Socialism and the ideals of instilling a German American community. But yet, the Bund had no trouble reconciling these differences. National Socialism was the core ideology, fueled by a call to unify Germanom



Figure 6: A Parade at Camp Nordland. 1938. (*They too Were American*, pg. 108)

with Americanism, and it was preached and spread by this organization to its membership which would increase in the years to come.

The Bund’s ideology was complicated. It outwardly proclaimed that it was against communism, Zionism, Nazism and Fascism, but yet, the members dressed in uniforms based off of Nazi apparel in Germany and meetings were incomplete without a Swastika banner. The Bund stridently claimed that it was neither officially nor financially supported by the National Socialist government of Germany, but as we will see later, this claim was often disputed and served to be a constant source of controversy which is still argued over today. These statements show how the Bund wanted to be viewed by America, as an organization that was first loyal to American ideals but composed of German American patriots. In actuality, Kuhn looked to Americanism and patriotism to cloak the National Socialist ideals of the Bund, allowing it to gain enough momentum to effectively instill a German element within American politics.

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(Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18, 21-24, 28-29, August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn) pg. 3714.



## The Cusp of a Political Movement

Fritz Kuhn would testify to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1939 that the key difference between the German American Bund and the now defunct Friends of the New Germany was that the Bund's purpose went beyond the social community which the FoNG had morphed into. While it still existed as a source of German community, Kuhn began to push the group towards a higher calling, one to instill a 'German element' throughout the United States.<sup>31</sup> In his own words:

The Bund ... represents the last possibility of American Germanism to rise from the condition of down-trodden, war-subjugated disavowed nationality, contented with its lot to the status of a sound, great, proud nationality through which we and our descendants may live according to our own God-given way.<sup>32</sup>

Despite forming a new organization, many of the fears and prejudices existent during the era of the Friends of the New Germany had traversed into the Bund. The animosity towards the Treaty of Versailles was ever present among members (particularly those members who had fought in World War I), and this, combined with the subjugation of Germany, instilled a feeling of victimization, and skewing the perspectives of many members that Germans were being marginalized and mistreated by the masses. On top of this, the anti-Nazi boycott, which continued until the United States entered the Second World War in 1941, had only grown since the days of Hans Spanknöbel and Peter Gissibl. By 1937 the boycott was supported by nearly one-hundred-and-fifty organizations both Jewish and non-Jewish, including the aforementioned American Jewish Congress, American League for Defense of Jewish Rights, B'nai B'rith, the Jewish Labor Committee and an assembly of Jewish War Veterans.<sup>33</sup>

As the initial anti-Nazi boycott giving way to the growth of the Friends of New Germany, the common narrative accepted at the time by many fascist and antisemitic organizations was that the actions

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<sup>31</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18, 21-24, 28-29, August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn) pg. 3770.

<sup>32</sup> Appendix, Part IV of the U.S. Congress, House, Special Committee Hearings on Un-American Activities, 77<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1941, pp. 1490-1620, in Canedy, pg. 88.

<sup>33</sup> "149 Groups to Push Anti-Nazi Boycott" *The New York Times*, June 28, 1937, pg. 7.

of the American Jewish Congress were furthering the means of Jewish domination in American economics. Many, antisemites with already hostile attitudes towards the Jewish community, were able to capitalize upon a scapegoat for their economic misfortunes, and through the Friends of the New Germany and the eventual German American Bund, were welcomed into a community that not only accepted but promoted these antisemitic attitudes of a Jewish conspiracy taking hold of America. Thus, revisiting the initial slogan of the German American Bund with this ideology in mind, "Free America" can be revised to an America free from Jewish influence, solely composed of pure 'Aryan' creed.<sup>34</sup> This became a goal of the German American Bund, and with Fritz Kuhn at the helm of the organization, he worked to begin his fight against "anti-German agitation" and "to unite with all Americans defending Aryan Culture and Code of Ethics."<sup>35</sup> Rallying against the anti-Nazi boycott Kuhn instilled a hope upon his members "to build a great American movement of liberation under the Swastika" - the common symbol of defenders of Aryan nationalism.<sup>36</sup>

## 4. The Two Faces of the Bund

What would this great American movement consist of? Through an analysis of two documents telling the 'Aims and Purposes' of the group, it becomes clear that two Bund's exist, both aimed at a different movement and both in contradiction of the other. In addition, the existence of these documents speaks to the legitimacy of this group, as its existence as something similar to a political party demonstrates the true threat this group posed. Through the American aims of the Bund, the organization did not appear outwardly associated with Germany as the FoNG had been. This allowed the group not only to exist, but to foster the following it attracted. Largely a product of Fritz Kuhn's efforts to draw attention away from Germany, the Bund began to resemble an American group on the outside, while existing as a Nazi movement within.

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<sup>34</sup> Canedy, pg. 78.

<sup>35</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. McMaron, Assistant Attorney General*, (June 9, 1939), pg. 1, FBI file for the German American Bund Part (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 46.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pg. 48.

## Aims and Purposes

Diving into the official Aims and Purposes mentioned in the Constitution of the German American Bund, we see a stark difference between the movement mentioned here and the movement mentioned in *Awake and Act*, a pamphlet distributed upon the Bund's inception. Split into twelve bullets, the official Aims and Purposes of the Bund convey an organization that is first committed to Constitution and laws of the United States, and secondarily to Germany. It paints a picture of an organization that looks to unite Germany with the United States, while providing a German American community complete with "the ancient German ideals of liberty, justice honor and education."<sup>1</sup> Finally, the document closes with a final aim, to be a 'desirable and respected class of law-abiding citizens of the United States.'<sup>2</sup> These Aims and Purposes speak nothing of the political movement that Fritz Kuhn created, and paint the Bund as nothing more than a social organization. Clearly emphasizing Americanness and commitment to the institutions of the law and government, these aims clearly shows that the Kuhn learned from the experience of the FoNG in regard to reputation and appearance. These censored aims may be a product of defense, referencing the hope of Kuhn that if any negative attention was projected towards the Bund, the official Aims and Purposes of the group would paint a picture of American organization and exonerate them from prosecution. In a sense, these aims, and purposes are solely a political document, demonstrating how Kuhn wanted the Bund to be seen by those on the outside of it. These Aims and Purposes would later be published in Bund newspapers to fight Federal Investigation, and the 'Americanness' of the Bund's constitution helped to protect the Bund its association with Germany.

Conversely, *Awake and Act*, paints a more realistic portrait of the German American Bund. Referenced throughout this thesis, the pamphlet details a different set of aims and purposes, a set that is more radical and extreme. Still supporting a commitment to America, *Awake and Act*, vocalizes the idea of unity, rather than a connection between the United States and Germany, and proposes a will to 'convert our

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the German American Bund, Article II: Aim, 5, (New York, 1937), House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18, 21-24, 28-29, August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn) pg. 3714.

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of the German American Bund, Article II: Aim, 12, (New York, 1937), House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18, 21-24, 28-29, August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn) pg. 3714.

American fellow citizens' into a friendship with the Nazi Party and its ideals.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the Bund's commitment to find a merger between these two powers can be seen as an effort to spread National Socialism throughout the United States, similarly to how the Friends of New Germany had. Bigger than a community, *Awake and Act* seeks to set aside petty grievances and unite all German Americans regardless of class or background. Only when this is done, can the Bund conciliate a German American element and become a dominant political force in the United States.

One of the biggest discrepancy between these two documents is the antisemitic rhetoric. Nowhere in the official Aims and Purposes of the constitution is this mentioned, but in *Awake and Act*, the principles of antisemitism, camouflaged under anti-Communism and a variety of other labels, are advertised as the main function of the organization. Identifying the Communists as the biggest threat to civilization, the Bund asks its followers to 'stimulate the spirit of devotion' and fight in the uncompromising battle against Marxism, Bolshevism and 'their auxiliaries.'<sup>4</sup> This battle wouldn't be won with weapons, but with education and the teachings of an international Jewish conspiracy. Citing the economic collapse in Germany, Kuhn blames the economic turmoil of the 1930's on "the international Jewish attack of world Marxism," even going as far as to advertise that once it 'has finished with the Reich' it would be directed against other countries, with the United States as a 'cherished target.'<sup>5</sup> Only through National Socialism could this conspiracy be unmasked, and by joining the American organ of this party, one could fight this conspiracy on the political battlefield and spread the spirit of the National Socialistic point of view. These two documents are indicative of the general atmosphere of the German American Bund. They demonstrate how the Bund wished to be perceived by the public and show what this organization really valued and aspired to become. As will be shown later, because of the appearance of an American organization, the Bund delayed the efforts of the American government to prosecute them as they had the Friends of the New

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<sup>3</sup> Fritz Kuhn, *Awake and Act: Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund: The Task Before the Bund*; (New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, April 17, 1936) pg. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Fritz Kuhn, *Awake and Act: Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund: An Effective Campaign of Education*; (New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, April 17, 1936) pg. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Fritz Kuhn *Awake and Act: Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund: Bolshevism Unmasked*; (New York: Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, April 17, 1936) pg. 4.

Germany. These two portraits, both painted by Fritz Julius Kuhn, show an uncanny mastery and understanding of public image and reputation. It shows the lessons learned from the FoNG, and the ability to exist as one and appear as another would allow the Bund to attract members interested both ideologues. This is how the organization grew such an immense following, as by advertising an American-German community, spoken about in the official Aims and Purposes, and at the same time as a medium to fight the ‘un-named enemy’ the Bund was able to foster a diverse following, all, whether knowingly or not, endorsing to the National Socialist party movement.

## A Complete Movement

In writing this, I would be remiss not to include a description of the organization and composition of the German American Bund. Only when looking at the construction and structure of this group can one truly perceive how large this movement was and subsequently comprehend the legitimacy of its aims and attitudes and the possible threat they presented. Breaking down the rank of authority, atop the Bund, Fritz Julius Kuhn sat as *Bundesführer*; representing ultimate power and control over the activities of the group. Below him sat the National Secretary, Treasurer, a press agent, and other public relations officials. Next were the officials of the Bund’s many ancillary organizations including but not limited to camp directors, the women’s and youth auxiliaries, the leaders of the A.V. Publishing Corporation, the Prospective Citizens League and the German American Business League (DKV). Next came the regional leaders; city and local respectively, followed by rank-and-file members.<sup>6</sup> The organization of the group can be further broken up into ‘Sovereign Jurisdictions’ of the Bund, as shown in the chart below along with the ranking of power mentioned above:<sup>7</sup>

### ‘Sovereign Jurisdictions’ of the Bund:

Bund: National  
Areas: Sections (large nation areas)

### Ranks of Power:

*Bundesführer*  
I. National Administrative Officers

<sup>6</sup> Susan Canedy, *America’s Nazis: A History of the German American Bund*, (Menlo Park California: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990), pg. 89.

<sup>7</sup> “Organizational Structure of the Bund,” pp. 9-10, found in RG 131, Entry 1, Box 9, National Archives, Suitland, Maryland, in Canedy, p. 89.

Regions: Groups of States	II. Leaders of Ancillary Organizations
Circuits: Individual States	III. Regional Leaders
Districts: Groups of Counties	IV. Members
Precincts: Towns	
Squares: Subdivisions of Towns	
Blocks: Neighborhoods	
House Groups: Subdivisions of Blocks	

Like the Friends of the New Germany, the Bund was split up into three separate *Gau*'s, dividing the United States into three distinct partitions, the West, the Midwest, and the Eastern *Gau*.<sup>8</sup> Each *Gau* was led by a single official, and each official reported to and received orders from Kuhn. The most popular of these partitions was the Eastern *Gau*, led by August Klapprot, a man with a "Face scarred by hate."<sup>9</sup> Operating out of the National Headquarters in the Yorkville section of New York the Eastern *Gau* had local branches in twenty-two cities in New York State as well as an estimated twenty chapters scattered throughout New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Maryland.<sup>10</sup> The Midwestern *Gau* was led by George Froboese, a German World War I veteran with a tense disposition who like many Bund members believed in an 'obligation to preserve' the homeland.<sup>11</sup> Froboese and his headquarters were centered in Chicago Illinois and his jurisdiction encompassed eight states and just over twenty cities through Michigan, Ohio and Illinois.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the Western *Gau* was led by Herman 'Max' Schwinn, a German-born bank clerk who became the head of the Western *Gau* during the time of the Friends of New Germany. Schwinn was such a defined leader in Los Angeles's German community that the GOP promised to give him a well-paying patronage job if he could 'deliver the German vote.'<sup>13</sup> Smaller than both the Eastern and Midwestern

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<sup>8</sup> Constitution of the German American Bund - Amerikadetscher Volksbund - New York, 1937, Article III: Organization, 3, (New York, 1937), in House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18, 21-24, 28-29, August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn) p. 3714.

<sup>9</sup> John Roy Carlson, *Undercover*, (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1943), pg. 264.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Scott Freeland, *They Were Too Americans: The German-American Bund in Words, Photos and Artifacts*, (San Jose, CA: R. James Bender Publishing), p. 203.

<sup>12</sup> Canedy, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> Ness, report, July 22 and Aug 15, 1936, CRC, pt. 1, box 7, folder 4, and box 14, folder 3, in Steven Ross, *Hitler In Los Angeles*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017) pg.166.

*Gau*, the Western Gau had its headquarters in Los Angeles and its reach traversed across the three West Coast States and encompassed 13 different cities.<sup>14\*</sup>

Later testifying to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1939, Fritz Kuhn would brag of a Bund chapter in every state within the Union except Louisiana, where the Ku Klux Klan had denied the group entry. While membership was never officially reported (the Bund never kept a roster of members for reasons to be detailed later) Kuhn estimated that the Bund encompassed over 20,000 Americans along with over 500,000 additional ‘sympathizers.’<sup>15</sup> While this number would fluctuate throughout the Bund’s existence, it demonstrates the reality of the Bund’s ultimate goal of achieving one million members by 1941.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the groups immense size, every year of the Bund's existence a National Convention was held in the first week of September with the task of selecting the leader to carry the movement into the coming year. Similar to the conventions of the Democratic and Republican parties, each local Bund chapter was entitled to send one delegate for its first two-hundred members, and one more delegate for each additional two hundred. Aligning with any democratic institution, each delegate represented the



Figure 7: From left to right: August Kapprot, Eastern Gau Leader. Gerhard Welhelm Kunze Public Relations Director, and George Froboese, Midwestern Gau Leader. 1941. (*They too Were Americans*, pg. 202).



Figure 8: Fritz Kuhn (Left) standing with Hermann "Max" Schwinn, Western Gau leader. 1938. (*They too Were Americans*, pg. 170)

<sup>14</sup> Canedy, p. 83.

\*an index of all Bund chapters is included at the end of this thesis

<sup>15</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18, 21-24, 28-29, August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3731.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz Kuhn et. Al. *Free America! Six Speeches by the leaders of the German-American Bund, Madison Square Garden February 20, 1939*, (Osarta Publications: 2019), p. 1.

wills of his chapter, and each chapter received one vote. Once elected, the *Bundesführer* had the power to nominate a cabinet of national officials, including treasurer, secretary, and vice president. All offices served for one year, and elections to either reaffirm or dispose of the leader occurred annually.<sup>17</sup> The one caveat of this system of course was that because Fritz Julius Kuhn often ‘pyramidically’ chose the delegates to attend the convention, deposition was extremely unlikely.<sup>18</sup> Fritz Kuhn was elected the leader of the German American Bund every year from its inception in 1936 until his arrest in 1939. What allowed him to reign over the German American Bund with complete authority and power? The *Führerprinzip*.

A defining principle of the Bund, and one that would eventually lead to its demise, the *Führerprinzip* translates directly to English as the ‘Leadership Principle.’ It allowed Kuhn the power and control necessary to propel the German American Bund to the center stage of American Fascism. Adopted from Hitler’s reign across the Atlantic Ocean in the Third Reich, the *Führer* principle lent considerable strength and ultimate authority to the leader, or *Führer* of an organization.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Fritz Julius Kuhn, exercising the *Führer* principle, had complete and utter authority over all activities and aspects of the German American Bund. Initiated during the Buffalo Conference in 1936, all Bund members were required to pledge their acceptance to the *Führerprinzip*, strengthening Kuhns totalitarian control of the group. Because he had ultimate authority and could control the entire Bund, similar to how Hitler’s control over the NSDAP in Germany, the German American Bund became Fritz Kuhn, and as the leader grew, so did the organization.

## 5. The Movement Matures

Through Kuhn’s efforts to ‘Americanize’ the Bund, one of its main appeals was the German American community it presented. Many of the casual rank and file members – those who did not regularly

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<sup>17</sup> Constitution of the German American Bund - Amerikadetscher Volksbund - New York, 1937, Article III: Organization, 6, in House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol VI. 16-18, 21-24, 28-29, August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn) pg. 3715.

<sup>18</sup> Canedy, pg. 76.

<sup>19</sup> Canedy, pg. 76.



attend its rallies and meetings – did not see the German American Bund as the great political movement that Fritz Kuhn looked to build, but as a community fit with camping retreats, picnics, and holiday banquets. While the leaders at the top, as well as many dedicated members, had very dangerous antisemitic leanings and loyalties to Nazi Germany, as the Bund grew, it began to attract a plethora of members solely because of the German American community it offered. This was the other German American Bund, the one that Kuhn would attest to while denying the existence of the violently pro-Nazi group it actually was. It was the veil that Kuhn hid the true Bund behind. This veil did exist, and, as to be shown throughout this chapter, the Bund did offer a German American community for its members. Ironically, it was also Kuhn who peeled back this veil through his repeated actions which reflected his need for attention and recognition. This paradoxical relationship is demonstrated by an analysis of the community aspects that attracted members to the Bund, while closing with Kuhn's trip to Germany which ostracized those same casual members.

## A Diverse Membership

As mentioned in the introduction, much of the information in this section was found in the 2011 book *They Too Were Americans* by Scott Freeland, as well as testimony by Fritz Julius Kuhn. I mention this because Freeland's work on the Bund was created to defend the German American Bund from the attacks it received, and thus, purposely omits certain controversial elements while embellishing aspects that portray this group and its members as one-hundred percent American. Similarly, the testimony of Fritz Kuhn omits key activities of the Bund because he was testifying in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and wanted to avoid investigation and prosecution.

To supplant this bias, I look to Susan Cannedy's critical description of the Bund in her work *American Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* as well as the testimony of Helen Vooros, an 18-year-old ex-member of the Bund's youth movement who later testified to the same HUAC panel as Kuhn in August 1939. A condemnation of the organization, Vooros's testimony attests to a more sober characterization of

the Bund's social activities, catering towards the common narrative of the time, that the Bund was a group of Nazi sympathizers pledged to antisemitism and the ideals of Hitler.

This leaves us at a crossroads of how to properly characterize this organization. Was it a group of dedicated Nazi sympathizers aimed at initiating a political movement, or was it simply a German American organization that was saluting the Swastika because it was the current flag of their native country? The reality of this dichotomous relationship is that the Bund most likely contained characteristics from both extremes of the spectrum. It had both the rabid armed Nazi loyalist who attended every Bund meeting, rally and event, as well as the German American mother, interested in finding a new community to share and trade recipes with. In the same sense that not every member of Democratic Party is a socialist, nor every Republican a gun touting conservative, not every member of the Bund was a Hitler idolizing Nazi. What I mean to say is there was a clear ideological separation between the common rank and file members and the devout card carrying Bundists.

The German American Bund was complex, and at the intersection of these divergent depictions, it is important to remember that this organization was made up of members with different motives, perspectives, and loyalties. While I found myself in stark disagreement with Freeland's defense of the Bund, I must admit that through his work, I began to see the members of this organization who weren't ardent Nazis nor Hitler loyalists. It is easy to paint this organization as a group fully composed of enthusiastic Nazis, but this would be a mistake and miscalculation of reality. Above its politics, and despite Fritz Kuhn's efforts, the Bund was a social group, enticing many members through community and friendship.

Despite these crossroads, the Bund was incredibly dangerous. As mentioned above, it didn't matter that many members weren't following the ideology, as long as they paid their membership dues, they were supporting a Nazi organization that propagated violence, antisemitism and racism. In no way am I defending the actions and ideology of the Bund (in fact I neither condone nor excuse the harm and hatred they endorsed and spread), I am merely bringing to light the complicated motives that caused many of the group's members to join and stay within the Bund. It is with this in mind that I refer to the activities of the Bund to demonstrate the community that this organization provided, and the attraction that drew many to its ranks.

## “Buy Gentile”

The German American Bund built upon the *Frauenschaft* and the organization of the *Jugendschaft* and the *Mädchenschaft* (the ladies auxiliary, and boys and girls youth organizations respectively), and initiated the creation of numerous subsidiary organizations within the organization. Within these, the Bund rebranded DAWA, which had initiated the growth of the FoNG, and replaced it with the DKV (*Deutsche Konsum Verband*, or “German American Business League”). It became a separate corporation operating out of the State of New York in which Kuhn served as President. Restricted to Christian store owners only, members of the DKV paid a membership fee of three dollars a year and



Figure 9: Pamphlet advertising the counter boycott sponsored by the DKV 1938. (The Atlantic)

receive a sign that notified customers they were members of the business league.<sup>1</sup> The DKV operated very similarly to the FNoGS's DAWA, in that it gave out stamp booklets and discounts, but it took the next step and organized events such as the Easter and Christmas markets at Bund-sponsored locations across the United States. This allowed the merchant membership of this organization to grow to more than 800 stores in New York alone.<sup>2</sup> All DKV activities were openly antisemitic and naturally, pro-Bund. The largest of these events was the 1938 Christmas Exposition held in New York City. Complete with a Santa Claus and a Christmas Village, the exposition had a fair share of propaganda posters advocating patrons to “Buy German for Christmas,” and “Patronize Gentile Stores Only.”<sup>3</sup> A brand new Ford Sedan was given away

<sup>1</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3753.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg. 3753.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Canedy, *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* (Menlo Park, CA: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990), pg. 124.

as the grand drawing prize, and other prizes included radios, food, and free weekends at any of the Bund's summer camps.<sup>4</sup> Lasting over a week, this exposition illustrates the popularity and sheer size and capability of the Bund. To many, this exposition appeared to be nothing more than a German American community event, fit with youth sales tables, German American Bund themed porcelain, and displays of handmade greetings cards. Illustrating the clear



Figure 10: A Christmas pageant held in Los Angeles and sponsored by the DKV. Notice the Santa Clause on the right of the stage. 1938. (*They too Were Americans*, pg. 67)

distinction in the appearance of the Bund compared to the Friends of New Germany, representatives of the German consulate in New York and Bund officials would herald the event as helpful in binding together Germans, Germany, and the United States, a goal that Kuhn had been set on achieving since the organization's inception.<sup>5</sup>

Along with the DKV, the DAB (*Deutsch Amerikanische Berufsgemeinschaft*, or "German American Vocational League") a Bund ancillary organization, provided unemployed members with vocational support to aid in job placement and training to upgrade or revamp existing skills. According to Scott Freeland, no other organization in the 1930s, including the services operated through the New Deal by the Federal Government came anywhere close to such a comprehensive employment of the Bund. He goes on to cite that through the DAB, the Bund were 'pioneers' in employee health and unemployment

<sup>4</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol, VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3848.

<sup>5</sup> Papers on the Christmas Exhibition found in RG 131, Entry 6, Box 1, National Archives, Suitland Maryland, Found in Canedy, pg. 124.

insurance benefits.<sup>6</sup> This sounds rather bit far from the truth, taken at face value, but nonetheless demonstrates the reach and appeal of the Bund. The DKV and DAB illustrate the financial appeal that undoubtedly drew members into its ranks. These programs reached an audience of Americans still suffering from the 1929 Depression, and through the advertising discount booklets and programs aimed at job placement and training, the Bund was able reach a nationwide community. While the DKV and DAB were entities separate from the Bund, they were still headed by Fritz Kuhn, and the moneys they obtained went to the general funds of the Bund.<sup>7</sup> They expanded the reach of the organization, and once a prospective member had submitted to the allure of the economic glamor of the economic based auxiliary organizations, it was usually pretty easy to entice them into agreeing to a German American Bund membership.

Along with economic incentive, the Bund offered the Prospective Citizens League which prepared new immigrants and German nationals for United States citizenship. Under the direction of the Bund, the Prospective Citizens League would help individuals gain U.S. citizenship by offering English language courses and classes on American history.<sup>8</sup> Falling into the guise of the Fritz Kuhn's will to establish a political coalition, it was only after citizenship was obtained, that a prospective member could be admitted into the ranks of the German American Bund. The efforts to help immigrants achieve citizenship was a ploy to grant voting rights to individuals who would be indebted to the Bund, expanding the political power of the Bund. Once incorporated into the Bund, these members were prohibited from holding leadership positions, despite being granted full membership. As the president of these organizations, Kuhn made a self-reported \$300 dollars every month, equivalent to nearly \$6,000 dollars today.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Scott Freeland *The Too were Americans: The German-American Bund in Words, Photos and Artifacts*, (San Jose CA: R. James Bender Publishing, 2011) pg. 69.

<sup>7</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Julius Kuhn), pg. 3755.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg. 3757.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg. 3708.

## “Do you wish to have a pal?”

One of the most controversial aspects of the German American Bund were the notorious camps and retreats scattered across the outskirts of cities across the United States. These retreats were not only advertised as offering a pleasant place to picnic and celebrate holidays, but also represented a summer camp for the children of Bund members to be indoctrinated to German ideals. Scott Freeman describes the relationship between the Bund and these camps as one similar to a modern parent corporation that controls the various enterprises of the subsidiaries under it.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the Bund organized multiple auxiliary corporations, such as the German American Settlement League, the German American Bund Auxiliary inc., and, among others, the German American-Alliance, to own and operate these properties. Totalling twenty-four different camps, each was its own ‘piece of German soil in America,’ and each provided a place ‘which breathes the spirit of New Germany,’ where “our boys and girls shall be educated,” and “where they shall be strengthened and confirmed in National Socialism so they will be conscious of the role which has been assigned to them as the future carrier of the German racial order in America.”<sup>11</sup> Focusing on the most popular of these camps, Camp Nordland, makes clear



Figure 11: Dedication of Camp Nordland in Andover NJ. 1937. (The New York Times, 1937).

why these retreats became so popular in the United States.

Opened on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1937, Camp Nordland was operated out of Andover, New Jersey. It was set up to provide Bund member with facilities and organized events common with the German heritage.<sup>12</sup> Susan

<sup>10</sup> Freeland, pg. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. McMahon, Assistant Attorney General*, (June 9, 1939), FBI file for the German American Bund, part 02 of 11, pg. 46

<sup>12</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Report Number 100-9766*, (November 17, 1941), FBI file for the German American Bund, Part 11 of 11, pg. 26.

Canedy refers to the Camps opening day exercises as a display of the Bund in microcosm, alluding to the fact that “It was proclaimed a huge success by leadership and members alike, and denounced as Nazi activity by nearly everyone else.”<sup>13</sup> Led by August Klapprott, this retreat encompassed just under one hundred total acres and was a popular location of relaxation and escape for East Coast Bundists during the hot summer months. Here Bund members enjoyed social gatherings and looked for any excuse to get together. Many of these excuses came in the form of holiday events, as the Bund catered towards festivities on George Washington’s birthday, Adolf Hitler’s birthday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, German Day, Reich Founders’ Day, Labor Day, Solstice Day, the anniversary of the Munich Putsch, Christmas, Youth Day and Gau Day, to name a few. American holidays were ‘generally unnoticed’ by this organization.<sup>14</sup>

Because of its casual attitude and appeal, these camps attracted Bund and non-Bund members alike. According to one account, Camp Nordland was so popular that in one summer eighteen thousand persons were reported at the retreat in a single afternoon.<sup>15</sup> It seems unlikely that all eighteen thousand were pro-Nazi, bringing attention to the idea that many were attracted to the Bund for reasons other than its ideology. One man would later testify to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1940 that, “a nice time, good eats, and so forth” attracted him to overlook the swastikas littered around the camp, while another individual stated, “You see I go to Camp Nordland like to any other lake or place for the weekend. My wife like it. It was a nice big place, so we went there... Oh, we went boating and then we lay down in the sun and sometimes we were sitting and looking at the people there.”<sup>16</sup> Clearly, many did not characterize these camps as specifically associated with the German American Bund, but saw them as any other campground, as an escape from the noise and stress of the city. Others went to these camps for more specific reasons. Scott Freeman writes of a young man, who when asked why he went to Camp Nordland even though he wasn’t in the Bund answered with; “That’s an easy answer. We were 19 and 21 years-old at the time, and

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<sup>13</sup> Canedy, pg. 124.

<sup>14</sup> D.E. Balch, “Denaturalization Based on Disloyalty and Disbelief in Constitutional Principles,” (University of Minnesota Law School, Minnesota Law Review, 1063, 1945), pg. 432.

<sup>15</sup> Martha Glaser, “The German-American Bund in New Jersey,” (Ann Arbor Michigan: MPublishing, University Library, University of Michigan, 1974), pg. 40

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pg. 38

there were always lots of girls there.”<sup>17</sup> These accounts of Camp Nordland show the competing motives for individuals to take part in the Bund activities and the varying reasons they used their facilities. While these camps flew the Swastika flag next to the American, many overlooked this piece of ideology in order to use the facilities the camps offered.



Figure 12: A member of the Frauenschaft sewing a Swastika flag. 1938. (They too Were Americans, pg. 82).

Nonetheless, these camps provided an environment in which members could partake in community lead activities and reaffirm their German identity. On campgrounds, young Bundists participated in gymnastics, swimming, horseback riding, wrestling, and motorcycling, plus automobile and sailboat races, along with boxing, various ball games (football, baseball soccer and basketball), hiking and camping. Outside of physical activities, the Bund also offered chess, crafts, model building, and folk dancing as well.<sup>18</sup>

It was at these camps where the *Frauenschaft* (Women’s service), of the German American Bund flourished and instilled the community element that attracted many towards the Bund. Adopted

from the Friends of New Germany, the *Frauenschaft* spent hours preparing meals, attending meetings, creating flags and banners, and overall, served as the backbone to the German American Bund. Scott Freeland, through an interview with Hedwig Klapprott, wife of Eastern *Gau* leader August Klapprott, found that the *Frauenschaft* served as an extended family organization, exchanging hand-me-down clothes to members in need, while organizing baskets of food and flowers to be sent to funerals and weddings. The *Frauenschaft* also helped to organize baptisms and christenings, along with other events that would unite Bund members in the German American community<sup>19</sup> The Women’s service was also responsible for

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ms. Klapprott by Scott Freeman, Spring 2004, in Freeman, pg. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Freeland, pg. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Taped interview with Mrs. Hedwig Klapprott, September 1982 (author’s collection), in Freeland, pg. 85.



organizing activities for adult members of the Bund, including singing groups and folk-dance troupes. The motives of these groups, according to Freeland, were to strengthen the bonds of the Germanic culture within the Bund, and within the ‘individual families of the Bund.’<sup>20</sup> The *Frauenschaft* instilled a community, and undoubtedly was an attractive feature for those who were contemplating membership in the Bund. A-political, this organization of women conducted fundraising, prepared potlucks, and overall, strengthened the ties between members, drawing them to their Germanic roots.

Despite these harmless actives, these German American camps were owned and operated by an American group of Nazi sympathizers, and members did more than just play chess and dance. Members sang German Songs which idolized the Nazi Party, including ‘Horst-Wessel-Lied,’ the anthem of the Nazi Party. As the war in Europe would progress, the Bund would also adopt satiric ballads illustrating the sympathies this Nazi organization. An example of these songs is included below, titled “There will always be an England.”<sup>21</sup>

There will always be an England,  
But it won’t be much the same;  
For the Hebes we set adrift  
To the Lands from hence they came

There will always be an England,  
But no Churchill and his gang.  
We will hand him to the Yankees  
Gladly with his whole shebang.

There will always be an England,  
And no ties with Palestine.  
Let the k----- hang up their washing  
On the ancient Jordan line

There will always be an England  
Raise your right and stretch your hand.  
Hail away the pretty Eden  
And his money-changers band.

There will always be an England  
One without the bloody shame  
Of a foreign Master-Rabbi,  
Franklin Roosevelt by name.

There will always be an England,  
Here’s advice to the U.S.A.  
Keep your pukes across the ocean,  
But from England stay away.

There will always be an England.  
With our Nazi pals and chums  
We will clear the shores of England  
Of the Asiatic bums

There will always be an England  
For the rank and for the file  
In the dawn of coming Europe  
Hail to Hitler and Seig Hile

<sup>20</sup> Freeland, pg. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *File no. 97-27, German American Bund: Voorhis Act—G.* (November 10, 1939), pg 8 FBI file for the German American Bund, part 10 of 11 (1939), pg. 13.

This song illustrates a combination of the community element and the Nazi element, as those who did not partake in the singing of “There will always be an England,” were reportedly ordered to finish their beers.<sup>22</sup>

Besides the community events that retreats like Camp Nordland offered, these locations could quickly be transformed into the biggest of Bund rallies due to their immense size and distance from urban opposition. Focusing upon a specific September 1937 rally at Camp Nordland in New Jersey, the *Democrat and Chronicle* of Rochester New York writes of, “A parade of 1,000 uniformed men, women and children goose-stepping to the “heils” of 20,000 persons.”<sup>23</sup> An example of a typical Bund rally, the *Chronicle* writes of the speeches of the day, with specific detail given to Kuhn’s proclamation of “the determination of the Bund to continue its fight for Americanism until America is controlled by Americans and not by a bunch of Russian-controlled Jews.”<sup>24</sup> A shocking image, descriptions like these challenges the image created by Freeland of a peaceful camp and demonstrate the Bund’s threatening ideology. As with most organized events, the September 27<sup>th</sup> rally ended with the singing of the “Star Spangled Banner,” “Deutschland uber Alles,” and “Horst-Wessel-Lied,” followed by a parade of military uniformed *Ordunungsdienst* against a backdrop of alternating American and Nazi flags.<sup>25</sup>

Possibly, the most appealing aspects of the Bund was the youth group. Adopted from the FoNG, both the *Jugendschaft* and *Mädchenschaft* were incorporated to create the great hope of the Bund, the Youth Movement.<sup>26</sup> Split up into divisions of age and gender, Scott Freeland characterizes the youth movement as structured similarly to the American Boy Scouts, with local units scattered across each of the three *Gau*’s. Declaring the “youth is our great hope, the lifeline of our organization,” Fritz Kuhn went on to state in the Bunds’ 1938 yearbook that:

Every effort in behalf of the German youth is of great importance over there (Germany), since the future of Germandom in America can no longer depend upon new recruits from across the sea.\* It must find its German future in its own land, and construct it out of its own youth. Therefore, the youth groups of the German-American Volksbund represent a truly great achievement for

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pg. 15

<sup>23</sup> “Head of Bund Scores Jews in Camp Talk,” *Democrat and Chronicle*, September 27, 1937, pg. 6

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pg. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pg. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Freeland, pg. 112.

\*This is in reference to the citizenship requirement of the Bund, which was aimed at establishing a coalition of German Americans who could vote in the hopes of forming a political movement.

Germandom. The children's choirs of the glee clubs help perpetuate the German language. Within the next few years, the entire unified strength of Germandom will be necessary in order to check the shrinkage in the German population through the Americanization of its youth.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, the youth movement was more than just a community organ for the Bund. It was the Bund's way of investing in its future to ensure that the movement would continue into the next generation. Led by Youth Division Leader Theodore Dinklacker, children of Bund members would have to pledge their allegiance to not only the Bund's form of National Socialism, but to their 'cultural solidarity' and comradeship as Germans. After this, they were given matching uniforms, and split into two age groups by sex: eight to thirteen and fourteen to eighteen.<sup>28</sup> Like most other aspects of the Bund, the uniform and dress of the youth movement were modeled directly on the Hitler Youth Program in Germany. Complete with swastika belt buckles and the lightning-bolt insignia -- which symbolized the power of the Nordic youth to overcome evil -- the German American Youth movement resembled a 'carbon copy' of Hitler's *Jugend*.<sup>29</sup> Children met weekly to participate in a variety of activities, and during the summer months, children could be sent to one of the twenty-four camps owned and operated by the Bund. Below is a dossier of a typical summer day at Camp Nordland for a member of the Youth Movement:

6:30am	Reveille
6:40	Personal Hygiene
7:15	Tent (or barracks) clean up
7:40	Tent (or barracks) inspection
7:50	Roll Call
8:00	Breakfast
9:00	Work service – chores
11:00	Swimming
12:00pm	Lunch
1:00	Singing practice
2:00	Sport
4:00	Swimming

<sup>27</sup> German American Bund, 1938 Yearbook, in House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3904.

<sup>28</sup> Canedy, pg. 97.

<sup>29</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Helen Vooros), pg. 3924.

6:00	Dinner
7:00	Singing
7:30	Group Gathering
9:00	Call to quarters
9:30	Taps

Outside of these activities, Bund Youth Movement members also participated in typical camp exercises, including hiking, arts-and-crafts, and enjoying the outdoors. Both genders participated equally in these activities, save for shooting practice, which was restricted for male campers, and sowing for female.<sup>30</sup> As demonstrated by the orderly composure of this schedule for youth campers, the Bund prided itself upon the same ideals that the Nazi Party projected, procedure and organization. What is absent from this schedule, which would become grounds of controversy and discontent, is education and culture. When asked during a House Un-American Activities Committee hearing in 1939 about any sort of instruction given, Kuhn, clarified to Senator Starnes that the Bund oversaw nothing but the physical activities of any other summer camp, even going as far as to offer an invitation to Camp Nordland so that the Senator could see for himself.<sup>31</sup> Kuhn also denied that the Bund taught any language other than German, while affirming that these summer camps promoted nothing but American ideals and values. A camp advertisement aligns perfectly with Kuhn's testimony, advertising the organization as nothing other than American:

OUR RANKS ARE CALLING YOU.

DO YOU ENJOY HIKING?

Summer and Winter we leave the cities' dirt and noise behind and hike through forest and field.

DO YOU LIKE SPORTS?

With swimming, soccer, javelin-throwing, track-work, and many other sports and games we make you men who need fear nothing.

DO YOU WISH TO HAVE A PAL?

In our ranks you will meet the pals who will be your friends for life.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN AMERICA'S FUTURE?

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pg. 3921

<sup>31</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3771.

We boys are the front-line fighters of tomorrow's struggle for liberation in America. The Answer is "YES," for no real American boy who has any red blood in his veins can remain asleep and waste his life by becoming a street-corner loiterer while such an opportunity is there for him."<sup>32</sup>

Offering much to deconstruct, this advertisement shows how the Bund attracted members and how it envisioned the purpose of its youth ranks for the maintenance of National Socialism. It advertises the American vail of the German American Bund, under which Kuhn looked to hide the true nature of the group. While not directly mentioned, it is clear with some analysis that "tomorrow's struggle for liberation" carries similar connotations as "Free America," aligning with the Bund's quest to continue their movement. The simple question of "Do you wish to have a pal" speaks to the social element of the Bund, and community it promised to provide. Nowhere in this description is anti-Semitism, Nazism, or Bundist ideology mentioned. As a result, many joined these groups without any knowledge of its Nazi leanings, only to slowly be indoctrinated into the ideology of the Bund, and the movement spurred by Fritz Julius Kuhn.

Helen Vooros, a 19-year-old ex-member of the Youth Bund Movement, would testify to the House Un-American Activities Committee in the days directly after Kuhn and contradict much of the testimony recorded the previous session. Indoctrinated into the organization in May of 1937, Vooros joined the South Brooklyn Division inspired by a recommendation from a friend. Embodying the experience of many members of the youth movement, Vooros was not aware that the organization she was joining was associated with Nazism and had only joined to make new friends.<sup>33</sup> Exposing the German American Bund and the lies of Fritz Kuhn, Vooros detailed the other German American Bund, the one that was sympathetic and possibly connected to Nazi Germany. Asked by Senator Martin Dies about the Americanness of the group attested by Kuhn in previous testimony, Vooros answered that not only were members fined for not speaking German, they also gave the Nazi salute, sang German songs, and learned about the life of Adolf

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<sup>32</sup> Freeland, pg. 135.

<sup>33</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Helen Vooros), pg. 3893.

Hitler and other Nazi leaders.<sup>34</sup> Vooros would testify that many of the pamphlets and material read by campers were in fact printed and distributed by the Nazi government in Germany, a fact the Federal Bureau of Investigation later used to try to connect the Bund to the Nazi government in order to arrest Kuhn under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.\*

With an education on the history of the Nazi Party in Germany, as well as lessons on the ideals of National Socialism, Vooros refuted all testimony of Kuhn that these retreats were nothing more than American Summer camps. This notion became more apparent as she testified that during her time in the Bund, leaders not only ignored American history and ideals, but were openly critical and condemnatory of American institutions.<sup>35</sup> Campers were indoctrinated to the teachings of Nazism and antisemitism, reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Father Coughlin's *Social Justice*, and Silver Shirt's leader William Dudley Pelley's *Liberation*.<sup>36</sup> Through these authors and cultivation, the Bund was slowly able to mold the next generation, and prepare them for battle of 'Tomorrow's struggle for liberation in America' mentioned on the above advertisement. When asked about the 'German culture' that the Bund promoted, Vooros testified an image of the Bund that confirmed what many already suspected:



Figure 13: Helen Vooros demonstrating the Bund salute to the House Un-American Activities Committee, 1939, (*The New York Times*).

They tell us that we are pure Aryans, and that we are not to mingle with any other races, because they say that that would be the most disgusting thing that could happen. They say that it would ruin our race. They say that our race would be ruined. Small children from 8 to 12 years old, are given books published by Julius Streicher.\* They are the kind of books that children would get in kindergarten. They would have pictures of Jews with blood-dripping fingers, and under the picture there would be rhymes. They are given to children from 8 to 12 years old. We were told that later

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pg. 3893.

\* *The Foreign Agents Registration Act, also known as FARA, was passed in 1938 and required all agents representing the interests of foreign powers in a "political or quasi-political capacity" to disclose this relationship with the United States government or face imprisonment and fine. To be discussed later, this was one of the methods used by the FBI stop the Bund.*

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pg. 3898.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pg. 3905.

\* *Julius Streicher was a member of the Nazi Party in Germany and the founder of Der Stürmer, an antisemitic newspaper which was a central element to the Nazi propaganda machine*

we would have children, and that our children were to be in favor of this same government, because it was the only way to get along.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 14: Youth Movement members marching. Notice the Swastika next to the American flag, as well as the lightning bolt flag, the official insignia of the Youth Movement. 1939. (The Atlantic).

This testimony lines up with Kuhn's ambition to create a Nazi movement that would transcend generations. It also wipes away the façade that the Kuhn had been so intent at hiding the Bund's true ambitions behind. The most publicized part of Vooros testimony was that Bund camps were rife with immorality, as she stated that counselors did nothing to condemn these acts, even advocating for

campers to "follow their instincts." Vooros testified that she left the Bund Youth Movement because in part because this immorality, stating it appalled and disgusted her.<sup>38</sup> The preliminary reason that she was left was the death of her friend Tillie Koch, a teenaged leader of Vooros's unit.

In early August 1937, Koch volunteered to stand guard outside the sleeping quarters of her 'sister campers,' and guard the girls from the 'immorality' that Vooros would later attest to. This devotion would prove her undoing, as Koch developed a cold after standing overnight guarding her unit.<sup>39</sup> Her infection turned into pleurisy and by August 12 Koch was in dire need of medical attention. Theodore Dinkerlacker, Bund's National Youth Leader, refused her any attention, announcing the belief that no German child would turn into a soft 'Americanized sissy' under his watch. Tillie Koch died on August 17, 1937.

Both Kuhn and Dinkerlacker went into damage control mode, writing lavish obituaries in *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*, the Bund's official news organ, praising Koch for her devotion and courage. Much of these columns were filled with alternative reasons for Koch's death, only to finally be brought to light in 1939 with the testimony of Vooros. On August 20<sup>th</sup> a grand funeral was held, as under

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pg. 3904.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pg. 3904.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, pg. 3902.

the shadow of the swastika banner, members of the German American Bund laid a member of the Youth movement to rest. Koch's father, a janitor of 'modest means' paid for everything.<sup>40</sup> Because the efforts of Kuhn and Dinkerlacker, the death of Koch went largely unnoticed.

These 'immoralities' which Vooros would attest to, and which Koch ultimately died trying to prevent were a product of the German Baby Policy, a program which encouraged German Teenagers in the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls to reproduce, and often. As to seen later, sexual intrigue within the Bund Youth Movement wasn't limited to just between teenage peers.

Looking past ideology of the group, the Bund was a community. It enticed members with the appeal of potlucks, joint holidays, a youth organization, and economic incentives. While many joined for its antisemitic ideology, more joined to ensure that their kids could find friends in a safe German community, or as an effort to find a vacation spot outside the noise of the cities. To some, the antisemitic rhetoric and pro-Hitler attitudes was overlooked by the excellent facilities and opportunities that the Bund offered its members. A Jewish man attests to this sentiment, as when asked why he had attempted to join the Bund despite their antisemitic attitudes, he simply responded that "They had the best gym in New York City."<sup>41</sup> What this shows is that members joined and stayed in this organization for various reasons. Many got swallowed up in the community and were agreeable to the Nazi ideals solely because disagreement would mean expulsion from the Bund. Others joined the Bund and found that the ideology within the community actually aligned and supported their own beliefs. It didn't matter. Once initiated into the Bund, it was difficult to get out, and through the monthly dues, every paying member of the German American Bund supported the antisemitic, pro-Nazi views of the organization, and implicitly endorsed Kuhn's movement to initiate an American Nazi Party. These regular rank and file members would participate in an all-out exodus from the Bund once the "Trouble Years" would begin in 1938.

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<sup>40</sup> Bernstein, pg. 83.

<sup>41</sup> Freeland, pg. 55.



## Mr. Kuhn Goes to Germany

In June of 1936, with the German American Bund still in its first year of existence, Fritz Kuhn journeyed to Germany. This venture was fueled by Kuhns dream for recognition from the Fatherland, and with the Bunds' recent rise in militaristic and political power, Kuhn felt positive that such recognition was not only deserved, but likely.<sup>42</sup> This trip would introduce many of the American members of the Bund to Germany, and would also coincide with the Berlin Olympic Games, providing an excellent opportunity for the Bund to receive media attention in Europe and the United States. Joining the American *Führer*, Eastern *Gau* leader August Klapprott and his wife Hedwig, Eastern *Gau* leader George Froeboese Youth Division leader Theodore Dinklerlacker, and *Ordnungsdienst* leader Josef "Sepp" Schuster accompanied the group of Bundists to Germany.<sup>43</sup> Joining their ranks was an armed wing of OD men, and a select group of thirty members of the Bund Youth Movement, including Helen Vooros, who's testimony was mentioned earlier. In Germany, the group met up with previous Bund members who had gone earlier, bringing the total number within the entourage to more than 500.<sup>44</sup> Along the voyage to Germany, Theodore Dinkelacker was caught in bed with a 17-year-old youth leader from the Bronx. Helen Klapprott called a meeting and told the youth unit not to mention a word about the encounter and instructed the girls to "keep [their] mouths shut about it."<sup>45</sup> Vooros challenged Klapprot, stating that as the Youth Movement leader Dinkelacker was supposed to be a role model, to which Kapprot repeated her orders to keep quiet.<sup>46</sup>

Arriving in Germany on April 11<sup>th</sup>, the group toured Hamburg, Berlin, Wiesbaden, Stuttgart and Munich. In Stuttgart, the group of Bundists were met by both the mayor of the city and former FoNG leader Fritz Gissibl, who had fled to Germany earlier that year. The trip to Germany was wrought with parades, speeches, and dinners. Susan Canedy goes so far as to state that Kuhn and his entourage of Bund members

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<sup>42</sup> Canedy, pg. 113.

<sup>43</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Helen Vooros), pg. 3912.

<sup>44</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Memorandum on Fritz Julius Kuhn: The Olympic Trip of the Bund," (May 5, 1939), FBI file for Fritz Julius Kuhn, (1942) part 02 of 10, pg. 59.

<sup>45</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Helen Vooros), pg. 3922.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pg. 3922.

were ‘wined and dined’ across Germany, experiencing firsthand the “ostentation and magnetism of the Third Reich.”<sup>47</sup>

The high point of the trip was the May 1<sup>st</sup> meeting at the Olympic stadium in Berlin, in which the group was introduced to the top echelon of Nazi officials, as well as the Führer himself. As representatives of the American Nazi movement, even if not officially endorsed by the NSDAP, Bund members were given a special tour of the grounds, as well as a front seat for the rally that day. Gazing up at the stage, members of the German American Bund saw first-hand the source of the propaganda they had been reading the past year and allowed themselves to be further indoctrinated into the hate and prejudice that was the Nazi Party. They heard speeches by Adolf Hitler, Josef Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, then the leader of the S.S., and Robert Ley, who led the German Labor Front, and joined tens of thousands of other Nazi loyalists in applause and shouts of encouragement. Not all were swept up in the hate of the NSDAP. Helen Vooros would later describe the rally as nothing more than ‘a half an hour of yelling.’<sup>48</sup> After the rally at Olympic stadium the group was escorted by S.S. bodyguards to Josef Goebbels’s own propaganda office, where they would have a personal audience with the propaganda minister along with the leader of the Third Reich.

Vooros, who was seventeen at the time, would later describe this moment in her testimony to the HUAC, specifically focusing upon her interaction with Josef Goebbels stating:

“And when he [Goebbels] gave the salute, why we saluted back; and Goebbels looked down and smiled; and it so happened that it was meant for me; I looked different from the other[s] [of the] group, and he looked at me, because I did not have blonde hair like the other Germans, I guess, and Dr. Goebbels was staring at me; and I looked around to see if he were [sic] looking at me, but he was looking at me, and he smiled in that direction, and it was for me.”<sup>49</sup>

The meeting lasted for about two hours during which Hitler spoke to the group and expressed his interest, particularly with the youth movement. It was at this meeting where Kuhn would take the infamous photo with Adolf Hitler, forever suggesting the connection between the Bund and the *Führer*. It was also during this meeting when Kuhn presented Hitler with “*Das Goldene Buch*” (The Golden Book), which outlined

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<sup>47</sup> Canedy, pg. 113.

<sup>48</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Helen Vooros), pg. 3929.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pg. 3930

the history of the American Nazi movement while listing the names and donations given by members to the Nazi Winter Relief Program (some donations tallied up to \$3,000).<sup>50</sup> Upon receiving the leatherbound-bound pictorial history, Hitler was overheard to have told Kuhn to “Go over there and continue the fight,” and gave him a signed photo of himself to take back to the United States.”<sup>51</sup> This conversation, reportedly, left Bund members at the meeting “starstruck.”<sup>52</sup>



*Figure 15: Kuhn (Left) with Adolf Hitler (Right). Midwestern Gau leader George Froboese, (far left) and Eastern Gau leader August Klapprott (second from right). 1936. (The Atlantic).*

Many have concluded that the fifteen-minute meeting between Kuhn and Hitler resembled nothing more than one of a long procession of meetings by the German head of state. Some have even gone as far as to propose that Hitler had no idea of the identity of the man who had just presented him a leatherbound book, and simply chose “continue the fight,”

from a bank of one-liners, each as without meaning as the last. Others have seen this conversation, and the audience with Adolf Hitler as a clear indication of the Bund’s connection with Nazi Germany. Either way, Kuhn interpreted this comment, and the audience with Hitler, as indicative of the *Führer’s* interest in, and intimate knowledge of the Bund.<sup>53</sup> What Kuhn perceived as a declaration of support would be worn as a badge of honor at Bund rallies and carry the official endorsement of the Naz government. While much of this was an exaggeration of the actual encounter, it nonetheless rallied up Bund supporters in the United States and provided a valuable base to build the movement upon. After the trip, many believed that Hitler had officially endorsed the movement, which undoubtedly raised membership in the United States. Kuhn

<sup>50</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3820

<sup>51</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Memorandum on Fritz Julius Kuhn: The Olympic Trip of the Bund,” (May 5, 1939), FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 02 of 10, pg. 61.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pg. 61.

<sup>53</sup> Canedy, pg. 113

made sure to play his part, enhancing the events of the summer of 1936 to breathe life in the Bund, declaring at a rally later that year:

Today, I know better than ever before the direction in which our Bund must go. I know that it is not only important to continue our work, I understand that the American-German Bund is called to the political leadership of the German element in the United States.<sup>54</sup>

Kuhn still envisioned the Bund taking the role of a Nazi centered political party. Under his guise, the Bund became infatuated with *Der Führer*, developing into, what John Roy Carlson describes as an organization similar to a ‘Cult of Hitler,’ and because its hierarchical system of the *Führerprinzip*, Carlson’s characterization is convincing.<sup>55</sup> Kuhn pledged his loyalty and support to Hitler, and Bundists pledged their support to Kuhn. Not only was Kuhn an expert at manipulating the representation of his organization to the United States Government and media, but he was also extremely skilled at presenting himself as a larger than life individual, as the only man fit to lead this movement. Administering a thick German accent joined by erratic hand gestures and passionate body language, Kuhn embodied a charismatic leadership ability that not only attracted people towards the Bund but convinced them to stay. To many within the organization, he was truly the American embodiment of Adolf Hitler, but to the public outside, he was portrayed as nothing more than an ‘illiterate thug and general malcontent’ as an FBI put it in 1942.<sup>56</sup> Either way, a combination of his larger-than-life personality, and the controversy of the movement he led, Fritz Kuhn found himself at the center of the rising celebrity culture of the 1930’s, and the adoption of this status would become as important to him as his image as the American *Führer*. His photo was shown throughout newspapers, and his romantic life would later become a source of contention. By 1939, Kuhn was an American celebrity.

This trip to Germany confirmed the suspicion of many regarding the Bund’s connection with Germany. Newspapers across the country covered it, and the photo of the *Bundesführer* and *Der Führer*

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<sup>54</sup> Bund Command 1, 28 October 1936. Found in RG 131, Entry 1, Box 5, National Archives, Suitland, Maryland, in Canedy, pg. 118.

<sup>55</sup> John Roy Carlson, *Under Cover*, (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1943), pg. 116.

<sup>56</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, File 97-27 *Synopsis of Facts: German American Bund*, (December 22, 1942), pg. 4.

became infamous as the Bund became more controversial. This trip also represented something a bit more sinister as well, as testified by Helen Vooros. Standing before members of the HUAC, Vooros closed her testimony stating that during her trip to Germany, she was instructed to make room in her trunk to fit ‘fifty copies’ of Nazi propaganda, as well as a book on how to run Nazi meetings.<sup>57</sup> Once returned to the United States, she quit the Bund because of the “immoralities,” and death of Koch, and never distributed the books, keeping them in her possession. This garnered her an audience with Fritz Kuhn who scolded her, threatening that she better be quiet about bringing the books from Germany, and that it would “not be pleasant” for her if she went to the authorities.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, Vooros asserted that the Bund in the United States was in ‘constant contact’ with Nazi officials, and that it sent a report to Germany.<sup>59</sup> When incorporating this testimony into the account of the Bund’s trip to Germany, the meeting with Adolf Hitler appears to be more sinister. Was this a formal meeting between the new leader of the Nazi movement in the United States and *Der Führer*? Because there is no physical evidence, it is hard to say one way or the other. It comes down to the truthfulness of the testimony of the nineteen-year-old Vooros. This is why I advocate that it isn’t a question regarding whether or not the Bund was related to Nazi Germany, but rather, to what extent.

## 6. Journalists, Mobsters, and Hollywood Stars

As the German American Bund grew in membership, sparking Fritz Julius Kuhn’s slow rise through the ranks of American popular culture, more and more people began to respond to the fifth column threat represented by this organization. The Bund’s trip to Germany made many question the legitimacy of this organization, as Kuhn’s outward loyalty to Hitler began to peel back the facade that the Bund had been attempting to hide behind since its inception. The media began to attack the Bund, notifying many of the

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<sup>57</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Helen Vooros), pg. 3951.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, pg. 3954.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pg. 3918.

rising controversy the organization was provoking. Protesters at rallies not only became louder, but more intense, barring many devout Bundists from entrance. The federal government began to probe the Bund regarding its legality, searching for a viable reason for the prohibition and arrest of its leaders. The Dickstein McCormack committee which had investigated the Friends of the New Germany only ramped up their efforts for prosecution transforming into the Dies committee. As all this was happening, Kuhn continued to bask in the spotlight of celebrity, no longer relying upon his best judgement but upon his ego to make the decisions of the Bund.

## A Dedicated Adversary

“Fritz Kuhn, who poses as a chemist for a motor magnate in Detroit, is Hitler’s Number One secret agent in the United States... secret until now that is.”

“By the way, Fritz Kuhn, and all your bungling Bundist buddies, your oh-so-clumsy attempt to blackmail me was a miserable failure, as you must know by now. Nuts to you, Nazi...”<sup>1</sup>

-Walter Winchell, 1939.

Walter Winchell was one of the first American writers to understand the dark implications of Adolf Hitler’s rise in Germany. A politically minded journalist, Winchell attacked the German dictator with such persistence and wit that many began to think of him as the defender of the Jews in America. A Jewish man himself, Winchell’s hate for Hitler and Nazism were translated into his *Daily Mirror* columns with off-color assessments of Hitler, many aimed at his sexuality. While deplorable today as nothing more than extremely inappropriate ‘gutter humor’, Winchell earned the title “the most rabid anti-Hitlerite in America,” gaining fame and fortune through his unrelenting satirical columns.<sup>2</sup> The rise of the German American Bund provided Winchell a new target, and he would find his true nemesis in Fritz Julius Kuhn.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes from a broadcast of Walter Winchell from “The End of the Slow Music” *Daily News Magazine*, May, 20, 1990, pg. 260

<sup>2</sup> Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2013), pg. 73.

While much of Winchell's work was nothing more than embellished lies and half-truths, his columns and, their popularity, demonstrate the pushback against the German American Bund. As Kuhn's power and influence grew, so did Winchell's riffs and insults. Like a mosquito, Winchell covered every step of Kuhn, using a scalpel to dissect and criticize every discussion and action the Bund leader made. Some of the pleasantries offered towards Kuhn were razor sharp, others were nothing more than "happy buffoonery," and a couple were just downright puzzling, enigmatic insults that perhaps only Winchell understood. No matter the levity or truth of the quip, Winchell was the most famous of Kuhn's many critics, and through his wide arrange of nicknames, insults and wisecracks, became what the Democrat and Chronicle referred to as "Kuhn's pet hate."<sup>3</sup> Among others, below is a list of Winchell's select stylings of the *Bundesführer*:

- Phffftz Kuhn
- Kuhnazi
- The Shamerican
- Fat Fritz Kuhn
- Fritz Kuhn, local anesthetic
- Life's Little Ironist
- Fritz Kuhnfcus
- Son-of-a-Fritz
- Beef Bundit
- Chief of the Ratzis<sup>4</sup>

While many of these are quite petty and comedic, they caught the attention of the target party as Kuhn would respond to Winchell with a nickname of his own, "dot Choo Vinchell," while proclaiming that he hid his Jewishness under a pseudonym, the same way many in the Bund believed Franklin Delano Roosevelt did. Kuhn insisted that Walter Winchell's real last name was "Lipschitz," to which Winchell replied with a razor-sharp affirmation, imitating the Bundist leader's thick accent with "*Ja, me und* President Rosenfeldt!"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Walter Winchell, the New York Scene," *Democrat and Chronicle*, November 12, 1939, pg. 15

<sup>4</sup> Bernstein, pg. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Herman Klurfeld, *Winchell: His Life and Times* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976), pg. 67, found in Bernstein, pg. 75.

Upset with the insults and constant bombardment of retort, Kuhn was quoted by a news wire service threatening to “blacken Walter Winchell’s eyes,” which ultimately came to fruition one cold December night in 1935. Jumped and beaten by a gang of Bundists, Winchell’s campaign against Kuhn ended abruptly as Kuhn’s exercise of violence silenced the reporter’s criticism and banter for a brief period.<sup>6</sup>

Winchell’s reports undoubtedly opened the eyes of many to the threat of the German American Bund, and while many of his columns weren’t exactly true, they inspired many to revolt against this Nazi organization. As the Bund grew, so did the negative response they elicited from the American public. By 1937, the Bund had caused such controversy and were so notorious that seemingly every Bund rally was incomplete without protesters. Headlines from the period reflect this as “Veterans and Public Protest Bund’s Organization Meeting,” “San Francisco Groups Protest Bund Convention,” and “Anti-Nazis Protest Bund,” began to flood the media.<sup>7</sup> Walter Winchell brought attention to the German American Bund, and through his satirical articles, inspired many to join the fight against the fifth column threat. Most protested outside the rallies of the German American Bund, but some, like Jacob Rubenstein, choose more violent means of retaliation.

## The Atonement of the Mob.

Jacob Rubenstein ran the mob business of Chicago’s rough ghettos during the early 1930s. Working under mob boss Al Capone, Rubenstein carried sealed envelopes from place to place, and like many Jewish boys of his generation, took up boxing to pass the time. Rubenstein quickly rose through the Capone Outfit, carrying with him a pride in his Jewish heritage. With this pride came a deep hatred toward any antisemitic taunts which often initiating fights with “random Jew haters” on the street. Well connected to the mob culture of Chicago, Rubenstein found himself within a loosely knit gang of Jews on Chicago’s West Side, running operations for Al Capone.

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Canedy, *American Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* (Menlo Park, CA: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990), pg. 75.

<sup>7</sup> “Veterans and Public Protest Bund’s Organization Meetings,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, March 19, 1938, pg. 9, “San Francisco Groups Protest Bund Convention,” *Tulare Advance-Register* [Visalia CA], March 28, 1938 pg. 3, “Anti-Nazis Protest Bund” *The North Adams Transcript* [North Adams MA], December 13, 1937, pg. 6.



During this time in Chicago, the Bund's presence was extensive. Fritz Kuhn declared in 1938 that the Bund had between four and six thousand members in Illinois, with the majority centered in the Windy City.<sup>8</sup> Feeling a personal duty bound as Jews to take action, Rubenstein enjoyed fighting mob wars against the German American Bund, as his crew made a point of "cracking a few heads," when disrupting antisemitic rallies and meetings. Rubenstein would eventually serve in World War Two as a private in the Air Force. Returning to civilian life, Rubenstein moved to Dallas Texas where he bought a string of strip-clubs and burlesque houses, eventually changing his name to a more Gentile-sounding "Jack Ruby."<sup>9</sup>

Chicago mobsters weren't alone in their quest to disrupt German American Bundsters. In New York City Meyer Lansky, who worked closely with Charlie "Lucky" Luciano, worked to form a Brooklyn Jewish squad known as "Murder, Inc," quickly rising to prominence as a premier New York mobster. Running organized crime in Brooklyn, Lanksy became the figure you called when you needed extralegal help. This led to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise approaching the notorious Lanksy with a unique request in 1938.

Wise, working alongside another large figure in the Jewish community Judge Nathan Perlman, crossed into extralegal terrain in their request to Lansky.

"We Jews should be more militant... We want you to take action against these Nazi sympathizers. We'll put money and legal assistance at your disposal, whatever you need. Can you organize the militant part for us?" Lanksy was inspired by the request and agreed without hesitation to fight the Bund, even declining the support they offered stating, "I'll fight these Nazis with my own resources, I don't need your cash." His only condition was that he didn't to damage his name in the Jewish community, telling Wise and Perlman that, "After we go into action, you'll try to make sure the Jewish press doesn't criticize me."<sup>10</sup>

Meyer Lansky recruited a whole 'attack squad,' and with the help of fellow mobster Bugsy Siegel, began to hold training sessions specifically tailored for 'Bundist bashing.' This Lansky led roaming gang responded to the antisemitism of the German American Bund with a campaign of violence and intimidation.

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<sup>8</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3825.

<sup>9</sup> Bernstein, pg. 152.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 152.

When asked about the dirty, sometimes dangerous work, Lanksy replied, “I must say, I enjoy beating up those Nazis.”<sup>11</sup> This was a personal matter for Lanksy. When an Italian organization offered to lend their help with the attack on Bundsters, Lanksy politely declined, “[A]s a matter of pride I wouldn’t except,” he later said. This was a strictly Jewish operation. “[T]he main point was to teach [the Bundists] that Jews couldn’t be kicked around.”<sup>12</sup>

Gaining a tip from journalist Walter Winchell, Lanksy obtained a direct address for a meeting in which Fritz Kuhn would deliver fiery speech, full of antisemitism and pro-Hitler rhetoric. Showing up to the meeting with just a squad of fifteen men, Lanksy was considerably outnumbered by the several hundred Bundists already inside. Undeterred, Lanksy gave the signal initiating an all-out brawl as his



Figure 16: A Member of the OD in a brawl at a restaurant at Camp Norland. In his right hand is his Sam Browne Belt, used as a weapon. 1938. (*The Atlantic*).

fifteen devout volunteers began to use what they had learned in their training sessions. Fists flew, swastika banners were torn down from walls and OD men were thrown through windows. Some Bundists fled, while others took off their Sam Browne belts to use as a weapon. After the dust settled and the blood had been mopped up, Lanksy called Winchell stating that the operation had been a success.<sup>13</sup>

When asked about his actions against the Bund, Lanksy justified that: “Yes, it was violence. We wanted to teach them a lesson. We wanted to show them that the Jews would not always sit back and accept insults.”<sup>14</sup> Meyer Lanksy certainly proved this, and while this point was often proven with a baseball bat or

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, pg. 128

<sup>12</sup> Dennis Eisenberg, Uri Dan, and Eli Landau. *Meyer Lansky: Mogul of the Mob* (New York & London: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1972), pg. 26, cited by Bernstein, 128,

<sup>13</sup> Bernstein, pg. 129

<sup>14</sup> Eisenberg et al, 185, found in Bernstein, pg. 130.

brass knuckles, Lansky and many other gangsters proved that the openly antisemitic attitudes of the Bund weren't going to be accepted.

Violent responses were not isolated to the East Coast. Los Angeles Jewish racketeer Mickey Cohen joined in as a defender of his people. Born to immigrants in 1914, Cohen was raised in the Jewish community of Boyle Heights Los Angeles. Growing up fighting antisemitic slurs and insults, Cohen fell back on a fighting spirit to survive. Eventually taking up boxing, Cohen later garnered the nickname "Gangster Mickey Cohen," while, like many Jewish boxers of the time, he proudly wore a Star of David on his boxing shorts.<sup>15</sup> Cohen would be indoctrinated into the gangster lifestyle during his time working with Al Capone in Chicago. With a hearty Jewish name and pride in his heritage, Cohen took to fighting antisemites he saw in the streets with the strategies he had learned in the boxing ring. Returning to Los Angeles during the late 1930's, Cohen was offered a bountiful channel to vent his Jewish pride. With a strong presence in California the German American Bund had its headquarters of the Western *Gau* in Los Angeles. While running operations back in his hometown, Cohen began to garner a reputation as the terrorizer of the Bund. Speaking of a specific rally he and a couple of his associates had stormed, Cohen later said "[We] grabbed everything in sight, all of their bullshit signs... and smacked the shit out of them as best we could. Nobody could pay me for this work. It was my patriotic duty. There ain't no amount of money to buy them kind of things."<sup>16</sup>

The Bund found a worthy opponent with the American mob. With its significant Jewish presence, individuals like Lansky, Rubenstein and Cohen were just three of countless other American mobsters who answered the Bund's hate with violence. Arnie Bernstein references this need to defend their Jewish heritage as a way to seek their own brand of atonement; seeking forgiveness from a Higher Authority by defending their fellow Jews and annihilating the "Jew-vanquished Swastika Nation dreams" of the German

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<sup>15</sup> FBI memo, June 7, 1950, 1-5, found in Bernstein, pg. 143,

<sup>16</sup> Robert Rockaway, *But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (New York & Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2000), 32, found in Bernstein, pg. 148.

American Bund.<sup>17</sup> Whatever the reason, the actions of the Bund, while condoned by many, were actively rejected and protested by individuals across the nation.

Despite the antisemitic attitudes prevalent within the United States during this period, for some, the German American Bund went a step too far with its hateful rhetoric, resulting in violence and retaliation, as shown above, but also protest and opposition. These efforts were led by Jewish advocacy groups like the B'nai B'rith and Jewish Congress, but also non-Jewish groups like the German American Alliance and the Steuben Society which were embarrassed by the Bund's representation of Germany. The many opponents of the Bund only further played into the victim mentality that drew many into its ranks. Only emphasized by the eventual Federal Investigation, the German American Bund began to draw similarities between their efforts to free United States from Jewish influence and George Washington's efforts to rid a colonial United States from British dominance. Despite being a bit of a stretch, this comparison caught on within the Bund, leading members to promote the idea that George Washington would have been friends with Adolf Hitler, and that those who opposed the Bund opposed the same ideals that Washington stood for in his fight against Britain.

## The Bund vs. the Movie Industry

One of the largest groups that fought the Bund was the Hollywood anti-Nazi League (HANL). Joining the Jewish Congress in the 1933 German boycott, the Hollywood anti-Nazi League was created by Samuel Untermyer that same year with the goals to "keep the public informed about the true nature of the Nazi regime in Germany," to "fight Nazism and Nazi agents in this country," and to "maintain a constant fight for justice to political prisoners in Germany."<sup>18</sup> With a membership of over 4,000, the HANL's ranks included such names as Melvyn Douglass, Eddie Cantor, Dick Powell and Sylvia Sidney. The HANL also sponsored many well-publicized events, featuring such individuals as Viennese-born director Fritz Lang, African American activist W.E.B. Du Bois, and actors Ray Boldger, Fanny Brice, Bing Crosby, and Joan

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<sup>17</sup> Bernstein, pg. 153.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), pg. 192.

Crawford.<sup>19</sup> Founded to “defend our democracy against Hitlerism,” the league did exactly that, boycotting German goods, distributing anti-Nazi pamphlets, and sending money and supplies to the homeless and refugees of Spain, Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia.<sup>20</sup> The organization was ‘acknowledged to be so successful’ by the local German American Bund chapter that, ‘[their] offices were rifled by them’ as the Bund obviously saw them and the industry they represented as a threat to their movement and organization.<sup>21</sup>

The German American Bund, especially the Western *Gau*, was constantly at war with Hollywood. A combination of the assumption that Hollywood was full of Jews as well as the displeasure with the portrayal of Germany in such films as *Little Man, What Now?* (1934), *Three Comrades* (1938), and *The Mortal Storm* (1940), the German American Bund radiated a distrustful and combative attitude towards the movie industry as well as those involved.<sup>22</sup> Feelings of distrust between the Bund and Hollywood were strained by *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, released in 1939 by Warner Bros in which many of the scenes from the movie seemed eerily similar to scenes from Bund summer camps. So similar, that in May of 1939 Fritz Kuhn filed a \$5,000,000 libel suit against Warner Brothers, naming the film company as well director John Wexley, script writer Milton Krimes, and technical adviser, Leon G. Turrou, as defendants.<sup>23</sup> The case was ultimately dismissed after Judge Vincent L. Leibell viewed the film and found that many of Kuhn’s claims were “exaggerated.”<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, it was reported that during the filming of the *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* there were multiple acts to sabotage the production, including a suspected assassination attempt upon the film’s director Anatole Litvak by Bund members.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, was the first Hollywood movie to include the term ‘Nazi’ in its title, and the first to outwardly portray Nazi Germany as the threat it was. Before, movie industries

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pg. 194.

<sup>20</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, File 100-6633*, (February 2, 1941), FBI file for the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, (1941), pg. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pg. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Doherty, “When Hollywood Fought Nazis,” (Tablet Magazine, May 13, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> “Kuhn Sues Film Company,” *Daily News* [New York], May 13, 1939, pg. 4.

<sup>24</sup> “Judge Sees Film in Kuhn Suit,” *Daily News* [New York], June 14, 1939, pg. 118.

<sup>25</sup> Bernstein, pg. 215.

had been tentative to target Germany because of its large market for Hollywood films. Jack Warner ended his film with a warning that seemed to clearly target the Bund as one of the films main characters closes with “the nerve of those Nazis ... trying to stir up the kind of trouble here their making in Europe,” to which another responds that unless Germany’s behavior changes, “We’ll fight and how we’ll fight.”<sup>26</sup> The rift between the German American Bund and Warner Brothers Studios would continue as Jack Warner, a Jewish man and head executive of one of the largest movie industries, would consistently accuse the Bund and its members of being “active militant propagandists of Nazi ideology’ who intend to destroy the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and ultimately to bring the United States under the ‘will and domination of Nazi Germany’”<sup>27</sup>

## A Hollywood Hit List and Other Subversive Plots

On September 12, 1937, a crowd of 10,000 men, women and children journeyed to Hindenburg Park on the outskirts of northern Los Angeles for the annual celebration of German Day initiated by the German



Figure 17: The Hindenburg Park Rally. 1937. (The Los Angeles Times).

American Bund. Hindenburg Park was chosen as the venue because one of its trees had been imported from Germany the year prior and held specific value.<sup>28</sup> Bands played popular German songs, booths sold Nazi books and German merchandise while a crowd gathered around a large stage decorated with both swastika and American flags.<sup>29</sup> The main speaker of the event was Baron Manfred von Killinger, the German consul general of San Francisco. A former death squad leader and ‘one of Hitler’s best friends,’ Killinger, spoke

<sup>26</sup> Final Script, “Confessions of a Nazi Spy,” Jan. 27, 1939, found in Fancis Macdonnel, *Insidious Foes*, (Oxford University Press, 1995), pg. 66.

<sup>27</sup> “Bund Held Menace by Movie Company,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 6, 1939, pg. 22

<sup>28</sup> “German-Americans to Hold Celebration,” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 1937, pg. 50.

<sup>29</sup> “Swastika Flies Side by Side with Stars and Stripes,” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1937, pg. 20.

of unity to the Fatherland as a barrage of leaflets fell from the sky, dropped from a plane sponsored by the Hollywood anti-Nazi league thousands of feet above. For good measure, the pilot turned around and dropped a second round of leaflets among the crowd of unsuspecting Germans.<sup>30</sup> This barrage was an act of revenge for the earlier trashing and burglarizing of their offices. As the leaflets floated upon the gathering, many expressed their indignation at the “Jew Communist” movie people who had disrupted their festivities. Killinger, unfazed by the bombardment, simply smiled and began his speech.<sup>31</sup>

Later that month, Western *Gau* leader Hermann Schwinn was approached by Los Angeles Bundists Henry Allen and Leopold McLagan with a plot that would garner “worldwide publicity,” for both the German American Bund, and the U.S. Nazi movement. Originally conceived by McLagan, a man who carried a hatred of Jews everywhere he went, the plan was to initiate a “wholesale slaughter” of the most influential Jewish individuals in the United States.<sup>32</sup> This meant targeting the leaders of the “Jew-infested” movie industry, as well as members of the Hollywood anti-Nazi League. One of the most outwardly violent conspiracies of the German American Bund that has been uncovered, Schwinn approved the plot, even going so far as to discuss potential targets with San Francisco consul Von Killinger. Schwinn even implied a possible endorsement by Bund, informing McLagan that his allies “were particularly interested in eliminating” the key leaders of the Hollywood anti-Nazi League.<sup>33</sup> Combining efforts with the White Russians and Silver Shirts, McLagan and Schwinn worked to come up with twenty-four names, including some of the most famous people in the world: Jack Benny, Herbert Biberman, James Cagey, Eddie Cantor, Charles Chaplin, Emanuel Cohen, Sam Goldwyn, Henry Herzbrun, Al Jolson, Leon Lewis, Fredric March, Louis B. Mayer, Paul Muni, Joseph Schenck, B.P. Schulberg, Mendel Silberger, Franchon Simon, Donald Ogden Stewart, Gloria Stuart, Sylvia Sydney, Ernst Toller, Walter Winchell, Marco Wolff, and William Wyler.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Plane in L.A. Drops Leaflets Scoring Hitler,” *Sacramento Bee*, September 13, 1937, pg. 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 19

<sup>32</sup> Slocombe, report, September 30, 1937, CRC, pt. 1, box 10, folder 1, found in Ross, pg. 205.

<sup>33</sup> Slocombe report, September 30, 1937, found in Ross, pg. 206.

<sup>34</sup> Ross, pg. 205.

McLagen was a radical fascist, combining pro-Nazi and antisemitic fervor with international fame as a lethal jiu-jitsu expert and authority on espionage and military explosives. Originally born in London, he had moved to Los Angeles in search of a career in Hollywood and quickly befriended Henry Allen, a dedicated Bundist who along with Herman Schwinn, was considered one of the most dangerous men in Los Angeles. Quickly initiated into both German American Bund and Silver Shirt meetings, McLagan was introduced to a community in which many shared his rabid, antisemitic right-wing views. It was in this community that McLagan found a group of people who endorsed and supported his sabotage plot and radical scheme. It was also here where he met his co-conspirators as well as ‘millionaire socialite’ Philip M. Chancellor, who agreed to finance his violent plots against the “Communist Jews.”<sup>35</sup>

Forming an alliance with Henry Allen, California Silver Shirt leader Kenneth Alexander, and Bund official Charles Slocombe, McLagen planned to use millionaire Chancellor’s money to hire “Nazi boys and White Russians” to assassinate their Hollywood targets. Planning to use dynamite bombs to blow up the homes of these Hollywood luminaries, McLagen added a further twist to his murder scheme. He told Slocombe that “In Germany when the lid was blown off, the Jews took steamers, trains and automobiles to get out of the country. Naturally they will want to do that here, too” McLagen planned to respond to this escape attempt with planted bombs on yachts around Los Angeles harbor, as well as contracting a fleet of trucks ‘to catch anyone who escaped.’<sup>36</sup>

With everything but a date for the attack figured out, the plot would have been attempted if not for the fact that Charles Slocombe was an undercover agent working for Leon Lewis of the Los Angeles Jewish Community Committee, who on October 7, 1937 worked to inform the Los Angeles district attorney Buron Fitts about McLagan’s plot. Lewis helped Slocombe’s efforts by sending a lengthy memo outlining a “terrorist plot,” while suggesting lines of inquiry the District Attorney’s office should pursue.<sup>37</sup> The sheriff’s office was ultimately able to trap McLagan, arresting and charging him for bribing a witness, soliciting the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pg. 205

<sup>36</sup> Slocombe, report, October 1, 1937, CRC, pt. 1, box 17, folder 1, found in Ross, pg. 207.

<sup>37</sup> Ross, pg. 209.



commission of perjury, attempted extortion and preparing false evidence. To maintain the confidentiality of both Slocombe and Lewis, neither's role was mentioned in ruining the murder plot, and the arrest of McLaglan on what he described as a 'Frameup,' helped to maintain Slocombe's position undercover within the Bund.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the DA's office succeeded in keeping the assassination plot out of the press until November 15<sup>th</sup> when the *Los Angeles Herald-Express* broke the conspiracy announcing, "Plot to Massacre Rich L.A. Jews Probed." Describing a "so-called plot for the wholesale massacre of a list of wealthy and prominent Jews, including Louis B. Mayer, Eddie Cantor, and others," the *Herald-Express* reported, "was revealed today to be under investigation by the district attorney and the sheriff's office." The newspaper went on, reasoning that no arrests were made because the "conspiracy never got beyond the conversational stage."<sup>39</sup>

McLaglan ultimately pled guilty to attempted extortion and was sentenced to five years in prison but was granted probation on the condition that he take the first ship back to England and not set foot on American soil during that time. His \$5,000 bail was paid by his brother Victor McLaglan, ironically a famous actor in his own right, who sent his brother Leopold on a one-way ticket to Liverpool.<sup>40</sup> This event only capitulated the violent potential of the German American Bund, and its vehement antisemitism and violence, but yet, it wasn't the only violent plot foiled by outside civilians.

Arthur Derourian, who went by the pseudonym John Roy Carlson, was an undercover agent within the Bund gathering information to later publish in his bestselling book *Under Cover*. Derourian gives a fantastic account of the ideology, membership and strategies of not only the Bund, but also other fascist groups in the United States, such as the Silver Shirts, Christian Front, and the Crusaders. He tells the plots of these groups, and the destruction they had planned to administer across the United States. One such account is an attempted sabotage in New York City. Illustrating the characteristics and ideology of the most devout of Bundists, Derourian writes of a plan to unite loyal members of the German American Bund with

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<sup>38</sup> "McLaglan Declares Arrest Frameup, *The San Francisco Examiner*, October 29, 1937, pg. 1.

<sup>39</sup> "Plot to Massacre Rich L.A. Jews Probed," *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, November 15, 1937, pg. 1

<sup>40</sup> "Capt. Leopold McLaglan Freed on \$5,000 Bonds" *The Herald-Press*, October 30, 1937, pg. 3.

members of the Christian Front, the Iron Guard and the Christian Mobilizers under a new group, the American Phalanx, in an effort to start a 'revolution' against communism.<sup>41</sup> Through the American Phalanx, Derourian demonstrates that membership of the most ardent loyalists was often split between groups, as a devout members of the German American Bund was likely a member of the Christian Mobilizers or Silver Shirts, or numerous other fascist underground organizations. These members weren't interested in the community aspects of the Bund, but the radical antisemitism and network of connections it provided. They were the most extreme members of the Bund and joined for cause not community. They believed wholeheartedly in Kuhn's movement and would maintain membership through the groups 'Trouble Years.'

Members weren't the only to cross into adjoining groups. Derourian writes of a 1939 meeting of the Crusaders for America in which Fritz Kuhn, Wilhelm Kunze and James Wheeler-Hill all spoke to a mixed crowd of Bundists, Crusaders, Silver Shirt members and members of the American Nationalist Party.<sup>42</sup> Kuhn was also prone to inviting speakers from such groups as the Silver Shirts, America First Committee and Christian Front to speak at Bund rallies and meetings. As the largest of these groups the Bund led the movement, setting the tone and making sure its ideology was heard. It was within this complex web of connections that individuals like McLaglen were able to easily find an audience to preach their radical plots and encourage and endorse their destructive ideology. Derourian characterizes the Bund as the spearhead of the "anti-Democratic crusade," accrediting them with setting the pattern for countless other fascist organizations.<sup>43</sup>

Splitting the group into cells across twenty-one districts in New York, Derourian was assigned to become familiar with his district, and to obtain floor plans of suspected Communist headquarters to aid movement in a suspected bombing.<sup>44</sup> Working closely with other Bund members, Derourian found seven recruits to work below him, employing them as lieutenants in the sabotage mission.

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<sup>41</sup> John Roy Carlson, *Undercover*, (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1943), pg. 100.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pg. 47.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pg. 112.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pg. 98.

The leader of the attack, James Banahan saw this not as sabotage but as a movement that would liberate the American people, the same way he thought that Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch had unchained Germany. He emphasized the importance of preparation, telling loyalists to the "train yourselves in smashing up stores – Jewish stores – and beating the brains out of Jews that put up a fight. You men will put the fear of God in the Jew."<sup>45</sup> He also instructed his men in target practice in the basement of a nearby bar known as Cassidy's Sports Club, sound-proofing the walls with monk's cloth and using sandbags for targets. Engaging in obvious fifth column activity, Banahan led his team of saboteurs in armed combat and military drills. Derourian writes that some of the members were in fact veterans of World War One, expertly drilling the men for the American *der tag*.<sup>\*</sup> He also led the group in making bombs, telling them that they were "fighting to preserve a Christian America and Hitler and Musolini are fighting with you."<sup>46</sup> The movement was only stopped when Derourian presented himself at the office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and turned over the information he had gathered. This led to an FBI raid at Cassidy's in January of 1940, with seventeen arrests. The organization was disbanded immediately after.

Through this account Derourian offers an especially chilling characterization of the German American Bund. In *Under Cover*, he speaks of an entire effort of "German Lebensraum<sup>\*</sup>," a movement to initiate a political revolution across the American Midwest in which Bund members would establish their own autonomous laws, press, and political representatives in the hopes to one day establish an independent German America. Unfortunately, as Derourian writes, those partaking in this revolution were all too eager to use violence means to gain this goal.<sup>47</sup> His whole goal in writing *Under Cover* was to expose these organizations, and through his characterization of his time in this organization, he did exactly that.

These two sabotage plots are just the two of the numerous schemes which the Bund partook in. From disrupting Hollywood film sets to spying on US marine ships to possibly bombing industrial plants,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, pg. 101.

<sup>\*</sup> "*Der Tag*" translates as "*The Day*" and is usually interpreted as a toast given before the German Navy would attack the British Royal Navy.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pg. 103.

<sup>\*</sup> *Lebensraum* is a territory that a state or nation believes is needed for its development, especially associated with Nazi Germany.

<sup>47</sup> Carlson, pg. 116

the Bund was dangerous, and while not all of its membership participated in these actions, it gave a place in which those who did have subversive attitudes could find likeminded others. These accounts also illustrate the Bund's leadership in the American fascist movement. Outside of the German American community the Bund attracted very radical individuals with violent tendencies looking for a safe place to propagate these harmful ideologies. It was the premier leader of the movement and worked to extend its reach into other organizations. It did this through infiltration, sending members to attend the meetings of other fascist groups, eventually incorporating the organization into the German American Bund.<sup>48</sup> Through these efforts the Bund became the face of American fascism, and the representation of the NSDAP in the United States. It didn't take long before this caught the attention of United States authorities, specifically Congressman Martin J. Dies.

## 7. The “Troubled Years”

With widespread public opposition, the Bund began to attract the attention of the Federal Government. Still proclaiming an outward allegiance to America and denying any association with Germany, the Bund looked to stand up against the investigation of Congress and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This connection would be picked apart by these agencies, but due to Kuhn's mastery of public image and the lessons he had learned from the FoNG, this relationship would remain speculative due to lack of records kept. The failure of the investigation would give the Bund a bravado of invincibility, as through this false confidence, the reality of the organization began to show.

### “Patriotic Law Abiding Organization”

The response of the United States Government towards the fifth column threat started well before the creation of the German American Bund through Samuel Dickstein and his dedication to remove all

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<sup>48</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *File 97-27 Synopsis of Facts: German American Bund*, (December 22, 1942), pg. 8.

traces of Nazism from the United States in the early 1930s.<sup>1</sup> A Lithuanian-born Jew, Dickstein had traveled to Berlin in early 1933 and witnessed the dangers of Hitler's Brownshirts and horrific ideology firsthand. Realizing the threat this posed, Dickstein launched his own one-man investigation into Nazi cells within the United States during his time as a representative in Congress, representing New York's lower eastside. Taking his fight to the press and the airwaves, Dickstein spent nearly \$6,000 of his own money to fight and expose Nazi threats.<sup>2</sup> While many of his reports were of the more sensational variety, for example, he once claimed that all German seamen were secret Nazi agents running guns into the United States, he was able to effectively whip up publicity and garner attention towards the fifth column threat.<sup>3</sup>

In October 1933, Dickstein, then the chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, requested the deportation of Hans Spanknöbel, leader of the Friends of the New Germany, on the grounds that he had failed to register with the State Department as an agent of a foreign government.<sup>4</sup> This garnered interest from the New York Grand Jury who launched an investigation into the FoNG, motivating Dickstein to begin work on a resolution that would authorize a Congressional examination. Passing Congress with a vote of 168-31 in January of 1934, the Dickstein-McCormack Congressional Investigatory Committee, headed by John William McCormack (D-Mass) and Samuel Dickstein, held public and private hearings and collected testimony filling 4,300 pages.<sup>5</sup> With a mandate to "get information on how foreign subversive propaganda entered the U.S. and the organizations that were spreading it," the Committee initiated its official investigation into the Friends of New Germany in April 1934.<sup>6</sup> Dickstein and his committee were so effective in their prosecution of the FoNG, that Martha Griebel, wife of Hans Griebel, a ranking member within the organization and friend of Hans Spanknöbel, wrote to President Roosevelt pleading that, "Congressman Dickstein, as a Jew, cannot under existing conditions, be tolerant

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<sup>1</sup> Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), pg. 37.

<sup>2</sup> "Reminiscences of Samuel Dickstein: Oral History, 1950," 28, Oral History Collection, Special Collections, Columbia University, found in Steven Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), pg. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Bernstein, 37

<sup>4</sup> Susan Canedy, *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* (Menlo Park, CA: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990), pg. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 55

<sup>6</sup> Canedy, pg. 62

and just in his conclusion,” asking that he be replaced as chair by “a neutral congressman, preferably an American Gentle.”<sup>7</sup>

As the FoNG morphed into the German American Bund in 1936, the Dickstein-McCormack Committee, against the wishes of Dickstein, slowly turned its attention towards communism and away from the internal Nazi threat.<sup>8</sup> Undeterred, the opening of Camp Nordland in July 1937 provided Dickstein an opportunity to renew his attacks upon the Nazi threat and to demonstrate that the American Nazi movement hadn’t ended with the dissolution of the FoNG. Dickstein attacked the Bund, gaining both him supporters sympathetic to his cause, and an enemy in Fritz Kuhn. His bombardment of assaults against the organization were so exhausting that they prompted Kuhn to send a letter to Speaker of the House John H. Bankhead (D-AL), inviting an investigation in an effort to stem adverse publicity and validate his organization and its cause:

It is with a feeling of profound indignation that I am compelled to submit to the false and malicious statements which Representative Samuel Dickstein is reading in the Congressional Record, and thence supplying into newspapers throughout the country. I have repeatedly asked for an investigation in order to convince the American people that the German American Bund is a patriotic, law-abiding American organization, fighting communism and Marxism as un-American ideals.<sup>9</sup>

Another notion of Kuhn’s veil of ‘Americanness’ of the Bund, as well an example of his arrogance and blind confidence, his invitation was accepted a couple days later. Upon investigation, led by U.S. Attorney General Homer S. Cummings, the committee found that the Bund posed no threat to the American people. This was in part due to the efforts of Kuhn who had directed members to be cautious in their public presentations and representation of the organization, as well as the lack of available records offered by the Bund.<sup>10</sup> Because Cummings found no wrongdoings within the Bund, many, including Kuhn, perceived the pronouncement as a final closing of the books on attempts to dislodge the organization, instigating an attitude of invincibility and arrogance that would eventually doom the organization.

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<sup>7</sup> “U.S. Nazi Witness,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 4, 1933, pg. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ross, pg. 102.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, 11 August 1937, found in Canedy, pg. 137.

<sup>10</sup> Canedy, pg. 141.

Despite the failure of the investigation to uncover any subversive threats, Dickstein, determined to find the link between the Bund and Germany continued to pursue the American Nazi group, labeling them a conspiracy, a hate group, and a subversive organization. He was largely unsuccessful. Except for minor civil rights violations on the local level, it was difficult to obtain an indictment against the Bund. Summer camps and locals had their tax records examined, if they could be found, their liquor licenses were suspended, and meetings surveilled by police, but to no avail.<sup>11</sup> The Bund continued to exist upon the margins of the law, and the efforts of federal officers to prosecute them only gave credence to Kuhn's claims of a Jewish conspiracy controlling the American government.

## The Edge of Legality

While the Bund was able to shift the prosecution of Dickstein in their favor, the Foreign Agents Registration Act, signed into law by President Roosevelt in June 1938, presented an investigation that would shadow the rest of the Bund's existence. Popularly known as FARA, the purpose of this 1938 act was to keep an eye on people and groups that might present themselves as a threat to the American people.<sup>12</sup> Kuhn, and his cabinet of leaders, recognized the implications of this act, but stood strong to their denial of German connections, fully committed to the veil of Americanness that had been initiated during the Bunds' founding in 1936. Nonetheless, the implications of FARA were tremendous for the Bund. Symbolizing the beginning of the "Troubled Years," membership fell dramatically in response to the increase in federal probes and questioning.<sup>13</sup>

This was part of a response to the initiation of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), established in May earlier that year to replace the McCormack-Dickstein Committee. Chaired by Martin Dies Jr (D-Tex), the committee began to symbolize his desire for social justice, often achieved through xenophobic nationalism. Unlike the previous committee, which charged the Bund as a key outlet

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<sup>11</sup> Diamond, pg. 307

<sup>12</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum on the German American Bund*, (March 29, 1939), FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), part 01 of 11, pg. 138.

<sup>13</sup> Canedy, pg. 183.

for Nazi propaganda – constituting them as a subversive organization – Martin Dies, as leader of the HUAC, cried treason, stating that “The United States was no exception to this diabolical scheme, for Hitler has already planted in our midst many of his trusted agents who were carrying on their treasonable work unmolested.”<sup>14</sup> The committee increased its efforts to prosecute the Bund along FARA, calling the state and justice department to help with their efforts.<sup>15</sup> Dies even went to enlarge his definition of ‘un-American,’ writing of his concept of Americanism and un-Americanism:

Americanism is a philosophy of government based upon the belief in God as the Supreme Ruler of the Universe; nazi-ism, fascism, and communism are pagan philosophies of government which either deny, as in the case of the communist, or ignore as in the cases of the fascist and nazi, the existence and divine authority of God. Since nazi-ism, facism, and communism are materialistic and pagan, hatred is encouraged. Since Americanism is religious, tolerance is the very essence of its being.<sup>16</sup>

The investigation intensified the efforts of city governments to indict their local Bund chapters. The first major case against the German American Bund was the ‘Riverhead Case’ of July 1938 brought up by the city of New York. Officials of the German American Settlement League, a Bund auxiliary group, were under suspicion of representing an oath-bound organization. This was in violation of a New York State statute that required all oath-bound organizations to submit a membership roster to the New York Secretary of State, something that the Settlement League had failed to do.

The defense consisted of twenty-five Bundists, including James Wheeler-Hill, the National Secretary, and all testified



Figure 18: Kuhn (front, in white) walking to watch the trial of the 'Riverhead cases.' 1938. (*The Atlantic*.)

<sup>14</sup> *Hearings* Part VII, pg. 1, found in Sander, Diamond Sander, *The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924-1941*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1974) pg. 308.

<sup>15</sup> “Dies calls for Action: Demands Prosecution of Communist Party and German-American Bund,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1939, pg. 4.

<sup>16</sup> “What are Un-American Activities?” Section A, “Americanism Defined,” *UA*, pg. 10-11, found in Sander, pg. 309.



that an oath was not required for membership. While the prosecution was substantially weak -- it rested its entire case upon the testimony of just one witness – the Bundists were found guilty in just fifteen minutes of jury deliberation, largely because their “abrasive behavior and virulently antisemitic attitude so shocked the jury”<sup>17</sup> It was the existence of the German American Bund, rather than the lesser issue of registration procedures that was on trial.

Responding to the ruling, Kuhn created a “fighting fund” to solicit money from membership to pay legal costs.<sup>18</sup> The cost of litigation had drained the Bund’s resources, and while collecting a steady stream of membership fees, the Bund was not financially equipped to cover extensive legal expenses. An example of an advertisement to garner raise for the fund is included below, illustrating how the Bund continued to adhere to its ‘Americanness,’ while implying corruption and conspiracy:

HELP! HELP! This is vital to you. Money is needed to carry the Riverhead case to the higher courts. Show that you stand for the purity of American court proceedings and American justice by contributing to the Defense Fund.... Every dollar contributed will be used to vindicate the principles of common justice, to which the humblest citizen is entitled.<sup>19</sup>

Not only did this case hurt the Bund financially, it also cost the Bund prestige and membership. As Susan Canedy writes, its vulnerabilities were on public display, strengthening the opposition while weakening the movement.<sup>20</sup> Kuhn warned his organization of a hostile public as he admonished them to welcome every fight, but neither he nor his organization was prepared for the onslaught directed against them led by Martin J. Dies.

In August of 1938, the HUAC assembled its first official hearing, calling upon low level members of fascist organizations to testify before its members. Among others, the committee heard testimony from Peter Gissibl, the brother of Fritz Gissibl, Henry Allen, who undenounced to the Committee participated in the 1937 conspiracy to kill Jewish Hollywood celebrities, and the star of the hearing, John C. Metcalfe.

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<sup>17</sup> Canedy, pg. 182.

<sup>18</sup> Canedy, pg. 182.

<sup>19</sup> “Kuhn Used Bund Cash for ‘Love and Kisses’ Telegrams to Woman,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 14, 1939, pg. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Canedy, pg. 182.

## “Not Really German Americans, but American Germans.”

Metcalf, who was a German-born reporter for the *Chicago Daily Times*, had infiltrated the German American Bund under the false name of Hellmut Oberwinder, spending six months as a member of the Chicago branch in 1937.<sup>21</sup> During his testimony before

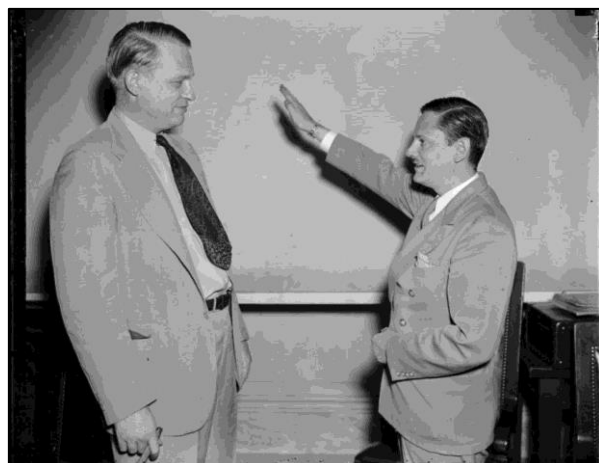


Figure 19: John C. Metcalfe (Right) demonstrating the Bund Salute to Congressman Dies (Left). 1939. (*The Atlantic*).

the committee, he painted a vivid picture of the German American Bund, telling of an army of twenty-five thousand members joined by five-hundred thousand sympathizers who were ready and willing to initiate an ‘American revolution.’<sup>22</sup> Metcalfe testified that the Bund collaborated ‘easily’ with such other fascist organizations as the Italian Black Shirts and Silver Shirts due to their shared antisemitic policies and attacks upon religion. All this was done in an effort to “set up a dictatorship in this country” as, “although they claim to be thoroughly American, they are opposed to a great many government institutions.”<sup>23</sup> Metcalfe went on to detail that over ninety percent of Germans in the United States were actually opposed to the Bund, alluding to such groups as the German American Alliance and Steuben Society, both mentioned earlier. Effectively exposing the Nazi Bund for the threat it was, Metcalfe closed his testimony with a warning for the Committee

The German American Bund claims that they are purely a social movement, and that it has no other purpose than preserving the identity of the German American; but we have discovered that the real aims and purposes of the Nazi Germans in the United States are threefold: First, the establishment of a vast spy net; second, a powerful sabotage machine; and third, a German minority with the present group as a nucleus and to encompass as many German-Americans as possible.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), Vol. 1. August 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22 and 23, Washington DC, (testimony of John C. Metcalfe), pg. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pg. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pg. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pg. 25.

A chilling image of sabotage and ‘fifth column’ suspicions, Metcalfe convinced Martin Dies of the un-Americanness of this organization, intensifying the investigation upon the German American Bund. In the fall of 1938, Dies broadened the scope of his probe to include an investigation of espionage and requested the Federal Bureau of Investigation to take a look at the activities of the German American Bund. Led by J. Edgar Hoover, who had taken over as the director in 1924, the FBI assembled files on both Fritz Julius Kuhn and the Bund, and compiled thousands of memos, newspaper clippings, letters and reports. Initially, the plan for the FBI was to prosecute the American Communist Party, Silver Shirts, and the American League of Peace and Democracy, along with the German American Bund, adhering to the orders of the Dies Committee to sniff out all ‘materialistic and pagan’ organizations.

Kuhn, realizing the gravity of the investigation, continued to stand by the groups Americanness, initiating a new eight-point “American” program designed to ensure the continued existence of the organization. At its annual September Convention, the Bund proclaimed itself in favor of:<sup>25</sup>

- I. A socially just, white, Gentile-ruled United States
- II. Gentile-controlled labor unions free from Jewish, Moscow-directed domination
- III. Gentiles in all positions of importance in government, national defense, and educational institutions
- IV. Severance of diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia, outlawing of the Communist Party in the United States
- V. Immediate cessation of the dumping of all political refugees on the shores of the United States
- VI. Thorough cleansing of the Hollywood film industries of all alien, subversive doctrines
- VII. Cessation of all abuse of the freedom of the pulpit, press, radio and stage
- VIII. A return of our Government to the policies of George Washington. Aloofness from foreign entanglements. Severance of all connections with the League of Nations

These policies were not only aimed at reaffirming the Bund’s commitment to Americanness but targeted to gain the support from isolationists scattered across the United States who opposed possible involvement in Europe. This new attitude was joined by a push to recruit Americans into the movement through the use of English at rallies and in publications, heightened use of the term “white man,” and alliances with right-wing

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<sup>25</sup> *Minutes of the 1938 National Convention of the German American Bund*, in Canedy, pg. 192.

societies.<sup>26</sup> Staying true to its origins, the Bund attempted to camouflage its form of National Socialism in what it perceived to be Americanisms.

The effort failed. The Bund's message continued to be, as Susan Canedy appropriately describes as 'so repugnantly pro-New Germany' that the efforts to Americanize the group went unnoticed.<sup>27</sup> It was clear that the Bund wasn't the American organization that it wished to be perceived as, and the discrepancy between how the Bund thought of itself compared to how it actually presented itself was only made more obvious by the organization's own actions. Less than a month after declaring its commitment to America, the Bund organized a rally on October 2<sup>nd</sup> in celebration of Hitler's acquisition of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia after the Munich Conference.<sup>28</sup> In an advertisement recovered by *the New York Times*, the Bund boasts of a "Universal Holiday" on Sunday October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1938 in honor of the liberation of the Sudetens, calling all German patriots to join them at a rally at the New York City Turnhall. Staying true to their commitment, the handbill assured readers that speeches would be in both German and English.<sup>29</sup> Their elation was not shared by most Americans as many viewed the Bund's reaction as further proof of its ties with Germany. The October 2<sup>nd</sup> rally would ultimately be canceled as Bundists were met by five thousand protesters, who broke into the rally hall where Kuhn was scheduled to speak and initiated an all-out brawl with the American Nazis.

The Bund's facade was only hurt more by Metcalfe's continued testimony and investigation. On September 28<sup>th</sup> Metcalfe testified again to the Dies Committee that the German American Bund was a Nazi organization intent at laying the groundwork for a "sabotage machine and spy net to be put in operation in the event that the United States should go to war with Germany." While the legitimacy of this claim may have been questionable, Metcalfe continued his assertion stating that:

It should be made distinctly clear that the Nazi ranks in the United States are not really German Americans but rather American Germans. In other words, they consider themselves identical type of minorities as the Polish German minorities in Poland, the Austrian German minorities who

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<sup>26</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum on the German American Bund*, (March 25, 1941), FBI for the German American Bund, (1939), part 08 of 11, pg. 77

<sup>27</sup> Canedy, pg. 192.

<sup>28</sup> "Nazi Hold U.S. Warship Plans, Says Dies Agent," *The St. Louis Star and Tribune*, Sep 28, 1938, pg. 10

<sup>29</sup> "Hitler Rules Bund, Says Dies Witness," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1938, pg. 5.

recently brought about the annexation of Austria, or for instance, the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia.<sup>30</sup>

Statements like these illustrate the threat that the Bund now appeared to pose towards the United States government. As the testimony of Metcalfe continued to indoctrinate the Bund as the organization that Kuhn had been so intent at hiding, regular rank and file members, who had not already left because the investigation, began to realize what the Bund truly stood for and leave its ranks. This exaggerated the drop in membership, leaving only the more radical members who were convinced that the American prosecution upon of the Bund was nothing more than a continuation of the “Jewish Conspiracy” that had led them towards Kuhn in the first place. The community that had defined the Bund since 1936 no longer sufficed to reason why members joined. Following the investigation of the Dies Committee, what remained of the German American Bund was composed of members fully committed to establishing an American Nazi Party, endorsing and supporting Fritz Julius Kuhn as their American Führer.

Metcalfe was unrelenting in his efforts to dismantle the Bund. In late 1938 he testified that the Bund was slipping into U.S. Navy yards and obtaining secret plans for the construction of American battleships, while instructing members in military drill training and subjecting “dictatorial ideals of Nazi Germany into tiny German-American children.”<sup>31</sup> He consistently argued against Kuhn’s assertion that the Bund was not connected to the Nazi Government in Germany. As an undercover agent, he had heard Kuhn speak of a “secret arrangement directly with Adolf Hitler,” while bragging about having delegative control over who was to be chosen for Germany’s ambassadorship to the United States.<sup>32</sup> Obviously connecting the Bund to Nazi Germany, there was still no physical evidence to certify this statement. Furthermore, Dies remained hesitant to call members of the Bund before the Committee, stating that he would not allow Bund leaders to use the hearings as a “sounding-board,” through which they could receive publicity for their movement.<sup>33</sup> Metcalfe’s testimony before the HUAC received attention from newspapers across the United States,

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<sup>30</sup> “Link German-American Bund with Nazis” *Spokane Chronicle*, September 29, 1938, pg. 29.

<sup>31</sup> “Hitler Rules Bund Dies Probers Told,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 29, 1938, pg. 6.

<sup>32</sup> “The Bund Tie-Up with Hitler Aired at Dies Hearing” *Los Angeles Times* September 30, 1938, pg. 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 10.

convincing Americans of a definite connection between Nazi Germany and the Bund, while warnings of an imminent threat of Bund dictatorship which undoubtedly shocked many. Fritz Kuhn reportedly flew into a state of rage when he read of Metcalfe's testimony, previously unaware that the man whom he had personally hired for a speaking tour across the country had been a spy the entire time.<sup>34</sup>

But yet, the Dies committee was unable to take down the Bund. They had testimony from two ex-members who reported of a clear relationship with Germany, but the committee remained unable to stop the German American Bund. The Dies Committee was underfunded, distracted, and rife with internal bickering. One of the biggest critics of the Committee was actually Samuel Dickstein, who believed that the committee's chairman, Martin Dies, was guiding the group to investigate communism rather than the implicit Nazi threat, just as was done earlier with the Dickstein-McCormack Committee.<sup>35</sup> The Committee was at odds with the rest of Congress regarding funding, and it was even reported that President Roosevelt joined Adolf Hitler in his hatred of the Dies Committee.<sup>36</sup> Many saw this committee as sucking up funds that could be used elsewhere.

Even though the investigation was weak, it became clear to everyone outside of the Bund's ranks that the organization wasn't invincible to exogenous shocks. Metcalfe, along with the Dies Committee, had launched a joint offensive against the organization. Casual members left in flocks. Their public support, while already low, plummeted even further. Cities began to snoop around their local Bund chapters, becoming more critical of the Nazi organization, asking questions of legality and right. Because the Bund's own actions, the public image of the organization as a 100% American group was shown to obviously be a façade. But yet, for many within the ranks the investigation from the United States government and the attacks from the media were nothing more than a 'Jewish ploy' to stem a movement that was destined to succeed. Persecution only reaffirmed their movement, as many likened the political environment of the United States in the late 1930's to the environment in Germany in the 1920's, which saw the rise of Adolf

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<sup>34</sup> "Nazi Activity in U.S. Told," *Oakland Tribune*, August 12, 1938, pg. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph P. Kamp, "The Fifth Column vs. the Dies Committee," (New Haven Connecticut: Constitutional Education League, 1941), pg. 23

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 18

Hitler, despite an arrest and prosecution against the Nazi party. The Bund was unrelenting in its quest to bring Nazism to the United States and overwhelmed by an outward representation of arrogance and a belief in the inherent rightness of their movement.

## Scarcity of Evidence

Guided by Congress, the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched an attack on the German American Bund at the orders from Martin Dies in Fall of 1938. Looking for a way to pin the Bund on a violation of the Foreign Agent Registration Act, the FBI searched the records of the Bund to find definitive proof of this group's connection to Germany. Before going forward, it is necessary to dive deeper into FARA to ascertain why the FBI was unable to establish this connection.

Section 2 of the act stated that "Every person who is now an agent of a foreign principal shall, within thirty days after this Act takes effect... file with the Secretary a registration statement, under oath."<sup>37</sup> In regard to the Act, the term 'foreign principal' referred to a government of a foreign country, a political party of a foreign country, or a foreign political organization." 'Agent' referred to any person who 'acts or engages or agrees to act' as a 'public agent,' 'servant' or 'representative' of a foreign principal.<sup>38</sup>

What 'Agent' did not pertain to was a group. Therefore, the Bund, as a group, was not considered as a 'Agent' under this act, making the prosecution for the FBI under FARA much harder.<sup>39</sup> Because this complication, Judge George Jones of the Criminal Division, who was later appointed to the United States Court of Appeals, believed that attempting to prosecute the Bund as a group "would [not] stand up under the legal definition" of the term "Agent" as it applied to the act.<sup>40</sup> He suggested that the FBI focus upon specific persons 'prominent' within the Bund, because these individuals would be easier classified as

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<sup>37</sup> 75<sup>th</sup> Congress, Third Session, *Act of June 8, 1939*, Section 2, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum on the German American Bund*, (March 29, 1939), pg. 1, FBI file for the German American Bund (1939), part 01 of 11, pg. 142.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pg. 142.

<sup>39</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation *Memorandum for Mr. McMahon, Assistant Attorney General Regarding the German American Bund; Communist Party of the U.S.A.; The American League for Peace and Democracy*, 'Proof of Agency.' (June 9, 1939), pg. 13, FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), 02 of 11, pg. 52.

<sup>40</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. E.A. Tamm, from K.R. McIntire*, (May 5, 1939), FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 2.

‘Agents,’ raising the likelihood in prosecution. In response, the FBI turned their efforts away from the Bund as a group and began to focus upon two individuals, Fritz Kuhn and public relations advisor Wilhelm Kunze.<sup>41</sup> It was further suggested that surveillance of both would be worthwhile because it was suspected that either could possibly flee the country at any point, similar to as Hans Spanknöbel had done earlier.<sup>42</sup>

Led by the direction of Judge Jones, the Bureau was determined to find a ‘tremendous reservoir’ of information that would prove that Kuhn had instructed members of the Bund to participate in ‘espionage and subversive activities which not only endite the Bund along FARA but also under conspiracy to commit espionage.’<sup>43</sup> This source of information was believed to be hidden in the Bunds many auxiliary businesses scattered across the Midwest whose sole purpose of existence was to provide a “place for concealing the records” of the Bund.<sup>44</sup> If found, this would provide a definitive link, something that was absent from the testimony of Metcalfe who had testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Because of Metcalfe’s lack of physical evidence, many within the FBI believed that his testimony was of the ‘fanatical,’ variety.<sup>45</sup> While his testimony implicated the Bund, statements like these show the difficulty of prosecuting the Bund as the accusations were often doubted in their legitimacy. Ultimately, the FBI failed to find this reservoir of information, as according to Edward Allen Tamm deputy director of the FBI, it was ‘impossible’ to obtain adequate material to prove that the Bund was of foreign principle. “What is considered material today might be immaterial tomorrow and what is considered of no materiality today

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<sup>41</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. John Edgar Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, regarding Investigation of German American Bund*, (July 13, 1939), FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939) part 02 of 11, pg. 107.

<sup>42</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation *Memorandum for Mr. McMahon, Assistant Attorney General Regarding the German American Bund; Communist Party of the U.S.A.; The American League for Peace and Democracy, ‘Proof of Agency.’* (June 9, 1939), pg. 13, FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 52.

<sup>43</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. E.A. Tamm, regarding ---- from K.R. McIntire* (June 22, 1939), FBI file for the German American Bund (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 81.

<sup>44</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memo to J. Edgar Hoover regarding Nazi Activities in the United States (Bureau File 61-7560), from Dwight Brantley, Special Agent in Charge*, (June 8, 1939), FBI File for the German American Bund (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 36

<sup>45</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. E.A. Tamm, regarding ---- from K.R. McIntire* (June 22, 1939), FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 82



would be of extreme importance tomorrow.”<sup>46</sup> But yet, despite the frustration, the FBI was convinced of this connection, stating that the Bund were clear representatives of foreign organizations within the “meaning of [the Foreign Agents Registration Act].” All that was needed was official records declaring this information.<sup>47</sup>

This motion to find these records can be seen through the countless investigations the FBI executed, each ending in disappointment and frustration. At one point, the Bureau spent countless weeks mulling over an article of “Click” magazine which featured a photograph of Kuhn sitting in an office chair while using the American flag as a rug.<sup>48</sup> At another, the Bureau investigated the claims of a concerned citizen who submitted 15 bound files containing what he referred to as “Factual Findings” and “Legal Reasons” that supported his contentions that Kuhn citizenship should be evoked. Attached to these files were twenty-eight reasons why Kuhn had violated the rules of his citizenship, all accusing Kuhn of plotting to overthrow the United States Government, while remaining loyal to Adolf Hitler.<sup>49</sup> Neither of these investigations found any physical evidence that could help the Bureau, and both resulted in disappointment.

One of the largest investigations into the Bund was the indictment of Kuhn under FARA through the writings of the Bund’s official organ ‘Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter.’ Roughly translated into “The German Awakener and Observer” and published by the A.V. Publishing Organization, this was the primary newspaper of the German American Bund and distributed to members across the nation. It was originally fully in German, but as mentioned above, it eventually became half German, half English through the Bunds attempts to Ameicanize.<sup>50</sup> Violently anti-British and pro-Nazi, subscriptions were carried at \$1.50 for half a year, and \$3.00 for a full, culminating in an estimated \$2,437 a month towards the Bund.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pg. 82.

<sup>47</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, from Welly K. Hopkins, Acting Assistant Attorney General*, (June 9, 1939), FBI File for the German American Bund, (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 39.

<sup>48</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for the Acting Assistant to the Attorney General Mr. Mathew F. Deguire*, (5/16/1939), FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), part 02 of 11, pg 85.

<sup>49</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, ---- *Attempted Denaturalization of Fritz Kuhn*, (August 1937), FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 02 of 10, pg. 135.

<sup>50</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *FBI Report #100-9766*, (November 17, 1941), FBI for the German American Bund (1939), part 11 of 11, pg. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 25.

It was also reported the paper “continuously and consistently” reprinted in its paper articles by leading Nazi authorities, which had originally appeared in Germany. Kuhn, as the president of A.V. Publishing and the official editor of the *Beobachter*, could be potentially held responsible for the political articles that could’ve possibly had origin with the NSDAP in Germany.<sup>52</sup> This culminated in intensive scrutiny over the Bund’s weekly newsletter in an effort to link the Bund explicitly with Germany.

This attempt to link the Bund to Germany under propaganda was worthless. Under Josef Goebbels, the propaganda wing of the Nazi Party in Germany distributed letters and leaflets around the world to any organization interested in the spreading of National Socialism. Goebbels’s personal mission was to penetrate the Western Hemisphere, initiating a well-organized, but ‘camouflaged’ propaganda campaign directed at thousands of Germans abroad, with a specific focus on the United States. Just because the Bund may have used Nazi propaganda in their newspapers did not necessarily implicate them as an agent of a foreign principal.<sup>53</sup> This was the general problem that the FBI found when attempting to implicate the Bund under FARA. It also impeded the HUAC from prosecuting after the testimony of Helen Vooros, who had certified that much of the literature read and instructed upon at Bund Youth Camps were from Germany.

The German American Bund outwardly proclaimed allegiance America and insisted its commitment to the legalities of American ideals. Kuhn had taken a photo with the leader of the Nazi government, but this by itself constituted no prosecutorial connection. They used media and text printed by the Nazi Party while citizens of the United states. Their leaders spread the ideals of Nazism and violent antisemitism across the country. None of this mattered. As long as the FBI couldn’t establish any physical connections linking the Bund to the NSDAP, such as funding, orders, or requests from the party in Germany, there was nothing they could do to prove that the Bund was in fact an agent acting under a foreign principle. This is largely why authors disregard mention of the Bund’s connection to Germany. While the

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<sup>52</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. E.A. Tamm regarding the German-American Bund; Registration – Agents of Foreign Principals, from K.R. McIntire*, (June 28, 1939), FBI file on the German American Bund, (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 76

<sup>53</sup> Sander, Diamond, *The Nazi Party in the United States, 1924-1941*, (New York, Cornell University Press, 1974), pg. 139.

testimony of those involved is extremely compelling, without physical evidence, this testimony appears as nothing more than speculation.

Because of this difficulty, the FBI opted for a different way to cut the head off the movement, this time through the revocation of Kuhn's citizenship. It was learned through a tip from a member of the Hollywood anti-Nazi League that it was possible that Kuhn had lied on his immigration forms when he had filed for citizenship in 1928.<sup>54</sup> More specifically, Kuhn had purposefully omitted the arrest he had received during his time at the University of Munich, where he had been caught for stealing coats and lab equipment. Unlike previous cases in which citizenship had been revoked for pro-German, anti-American rhetoric, such as *Glaser v. United States*, *United States v. Kremer*, and *United States v. Herberger*, the United States was not at war, and wouldn't be until December 1941. In a statement to J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, E.A. Tamm admitted that taking away citizenship from Kuhn during a time of peace was "unequivocal[ly] and absolutely inconsistent with the bona fide attachment to the principles of the Constitution of the United States."<sup>55</sup> If the Bureau could verify this report, they could deport Kuhn for valid, legal reasons, without controversy or dispute.

Verification came from Kuhn's past employer Reinhold Spitz, a Jewish War veteran who had immigrated from Germany to the United States in December 1936.<sup>56</sup> Spitz had filed a complaint to the

TRIPPLICATE  
To be given to the person making the Declaration

Form 2202-1  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
Naturalization Service  
No. 89047  
1928

6 92102  
1585  
19456

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

~~DECLARATION OF INTENTION~~  
Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof

Southern District of Michigan, ) ss:  
Southern Division

In the District Court of the United States.

I, Fritz Kuhn, aged 31 years,  
occupation chemist, do declare on oath that my personal  
description is: Color white, complexion fair, height 6 feet 0 inches,  
weight 175 pounds, color of hair brown, color of eyes gray  
other visible distinctive marks none  
I was born in Munich, Germany  
on the 15 day of May, anno Domini 1896; I now reside  
at 1145 Lakeshore Avenue, Detroit, Michigan  
(Give number, street, and city or town)  
I emigrated to the United States of America from Laredo, Mexico  
on the vessel International Bridge  
(If the alien arrived otherwise than by vessel, the character of  
conveyance or name of transportation company should be given)  
foreign residence was Mexico; I am married; the name of my (wife) is Elsa, (she) was born at Germany  
and now resides at with me  
It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign  
prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to The German Reich  
of whom I am now a subject; I arrived at the port of Laredo  
in the State of Texas, on or about the 18 day  
of May, anno Domini 1928; I am not an anarchist; I am not a  
polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith  
to become a citizen of the United States of America, and to permanently reside therein  
SO HELP ME GOD.

Fritz Kuhn  
(Original signature of declarant)

Subscribed and sworn to before me in the office of the Clerk of  
said court at Detroit, Mich., this 6 day of December  
anno Domini 1928

(Seal) Elbert Lane  
Deputy Clerk of the District Court of the United States.

Figure 20: A copy of Kuhns immigration papers. 1935.  
(FBI File for Fritz Kuhn)

<sup>54</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Mr. E.A. Tamm*, (September 26, 1939), pg. 2, FBI file for the German American Bund, (1939), part. 03 of 11, pg. 49.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pg. 58.

<sup>56</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *File no. 74-130, Fritz Kuhn; Perjury, Immigration, Naturalization*, (June 9, 1939), pg. 2, FBI file on Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 05 of 10, pg. 44.

Office of United States Attorney John T. Cahill in which he attested to Kuhns arrest, stating that because the families were so close, he had worked to keep Kuhn's arrest out of the local paper, and had even visited Fritz during his imprisonment in Stadelheim Prison. Oddly enough, Spitz attested that Kuhn was not antisemitic at that time, telling investigators that "he was of "weak character," and "for whatever he could get paid for."<sup>57</sup> Spitz who was "of the highest type of pre-war German," "scholarly," and who had authored a book on World antisemitism, also attested that he could find individuals in Munich who could support his statement, resulting in Tamm writing that "there is no doubt in my mind as to his utter sincerity and trustworthiness."<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately for the Bureau, they were unable to obtain any records from the Nazi Government in Munich. Edward Allen Tamm suspected that in part because Munich was the "birthplace of Nazism," it was quite possible that the records had been destroyed or were closely watched and made unavailable to the United States Government.<sup>59</sup> It was also suspected that Kuhn's records hadn't been transported because a connection between Germany and the Bund or because Kuhn Brother was a member of the Supreme Court in Munich, but neither of these have been verified.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, the Bund would fall not because of the investigations from either the House Un-American Activities Committee or the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but from the Special Tax Emergency Investigation team of New York City.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pg. 45.

<sup>58</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for the Director J. Edgar Hoover; Fritz Julius Kuhn; II. Allegation of Fritz Kuhn's Criminals Record* (May 14, 1939), pg. 85, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part. 02 of 10, pg. 120.

<sup>59</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for the Director, J. Edgar Hoover*, (May 12, 1939), pg. 1, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942) part. 02 of 10, pg. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, pg. 8

## 8. Pro-America Rally and George Washington Birthday Exercise\*

The 1939 Pro-America Rally and George Washington Exercise not only encapsulated the chaos and controversy of the German American Bund, but also detailed the hatred, antisemitism and bigotry that this group projected. It symbolized the Bund's last appearance on the national stage, showcasing their horrible ideology through an extreme manifestation of arrogance, perceived invincibility and obliviousness of opposition which shocked Americans across the country. The epitome of the German American Bund's existence, the following section details the preparation for the rally, speeches from leaders, as well as reactions from across the nation. I include summaries and portions of the speeches because they show the true ideology of the Bund, the ideology that Kuhn had attempted to hide behind the community and Americanness of the organization since its inception. Every speaker that night exhibited an attitude of victimization, either unwilling to realize, or unaware, that they were in fact the cause of all their problems. Drunk on arrogance and perceived invincibility, this rally saw the Bund pull back its mask of Americanness and show the world the true hate hidden behind Kuhn's façade. This was the Bund which Vooros and Metcalfe attested to, the violent, dangerous, and un-democratic entity that had haunted the edges underworld of American society. The 1939 Pro-America Rally was the German American Bund in its true form. Members denounced America's leaders, pledged allegiance to Hitler, and



Figure 21: An advertisement for the Pro-America Rally, 1939. (*The Atlantic*).

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\* A portion of the research of this rally was done in the winter of 2020 for Prof. Herald Marcuse's History 133D, a course on the Holocaust and other genocides.

rewrote American history with themes of Nazism and antisemitism. It epitomized what the Bund truly stood for, and would fittingly lead to the groups demise.

## A Night at the Garden

Planned by Fritz Kuhn, the rally was held in celebration of an overturning of an unfavorable decision against the German-America settlement League as well as in honor of the birthday of founding father, George Washington.<sup>1</sup> Selling thousands of tickets (\$1.10 for a seat on the main floor, 40¢ for one on the balcony), the rally took center stage at Madison Square Garden in the heart of New York City.<sup>2</sup> Following an agreement with New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, an ardent opponent of Kuhn, the American Führer promised not to display any antiemetic sentiment, nor exhibit any antisemitic speeches in order to gain the city's blessing for the rally.<sup>3</sup> Leading up to the event, it has been reported that Kuhn actually wanted authorities to cancel the rally, as the Bund, low on money because of dwindling membership and the "fighting fund" for the riverhead cases, believed that a deprivation of free speech would increase their popularity as "victims of Jewish conspiracy."<sup>4</sup> Despite Kuhn's wishes, the rally continued as planned, even garnering support from the American Jewish Committee, exemplifying their endorsement in an open letter, later published by the New York Times,

The German American Bund is, in our opinion, completely anti-American and anti-democratic. It is a foreign-inspired organization endeavoring to arouse in the United States the same hatreds which in Germany have brought the condemnation of the entire civilized world. Nevertheless, because we believe that the basic rights of free speech and free assembly must never be tampered with in the United States, we are opposed to any action to prevent the Bund from airing its views. It is natural today, when our American system is being attacked from many sides, that people should seek to suppress their enemies. We are confident, however, that citizens of the United States will reject all un-American propaganda without resorting to any such violation of the liberties guaranteed to all by the Bill of Rights.

*Singed by Edward S. Greenbaum, Chairman of the Survey*

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<sup>1</sup> Diamond Sander A, *"The Nazi Movement in the United State, 1924-1941"* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1974), pg. 325.

<sup>2</sup> "22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes" *The New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>3</sup> "22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes" *The New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Diamond, pg. 325.

*Committee of the American Jewish Committee.*<sup>5</sup>

## STOP THE FASCISTS!

Mayor LaGuardia realized the dangers posed by this rally and dispatched the most police to a single event in the city's history.<sup>6</sup> 1,700 uniformed police officers patrolled outside the venue as well as 600 undercover detectives and non-uniformed officers scattered throughout the hall, and even 35 firefighters, armed with a heavy-duty fire hose in preparation of a riot. Bomb squads also combed the arena in response to a threat received a week earlier, boasting a series of time activated devices to explode during the event.<sup>7</sup> Anticipating protest, LaGuardia reasoned "I held that if we are for free speech we have to be for free speech for everybody, and that includes the Nazis."<sup>8</sup> New York was ready for the influx of Nazi sympathizers, and was prepared to protect their guaranteed rights for no other reason except the law. Chief Inspector Louis F. Costuma illustrated this commitment to safety, telling the press, 'We had enough police here to stop a revolution' in an interview in preparation for the rally.<sup>9</sup>

While Madison Square Garden had prepared itself for the Bund, many around New York City didn't consider the Nazi organization so welcome in their city. An advertisement advocating the protest of the rally was published in the Daily News that day, advocating the protest of this fascist threat stating:<sup>10</sup>

### **WORKERS OF NEW YORK!**

#### **STOP THE FASCISTS!**

#### **PICKET MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, Mon., Feb. 20, 6 P.M.!**

The fascists are mobilizing at Madison Square Garden Monday Night.

Hitler's German-American Bund gangsters, Pelley's Silver Shirt scum and Coughlin's mob of labor-haters have hurled a brazen challenge at the workers of New York

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from the American Jewish Committee, found in "22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes" *New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>6</sup> "22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes" *The New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Bund Rally Bomb Rumor Fails to Worry Mayor," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 2.

<sup>8</sup> "Bund Rally Bomb Rumor Fails to Worry Mayor," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation, Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, (New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2013), pg. 180

<sup>10</sup> "Stop the Fascists!" *Daily News* [New York], February 20, 1939, pg. 3.

Wrapping themselves in the cloak of patriotism and “Americanism”, the fascists prepare to spew their anti-labor and anti-Jewish poison throughout New York City.

These Gangs have already gone to far. They must be stopped.

What are you going to do to stop this murderous crew?

We must not let this filthy, creeping slime get a foothold in New York.

Gather in front of Madison Square Garden Monday by the thousands!

Be There at 6:00 P.M. sharp!

Let the fascists feel the anger and the might of the working class – Get out and picket!

Don’t wait for the concentration camps – Act now!

**On to Madison Square Garden Monday Night!**

Bolstering a 30ft picture of George Washington surrounded by American flags and Swastika-emblazoned banners of the Bund, the atmosphere of the rally drew obvious commonalities to scenes in Berlin.<sup>11</sup> Surrounded by posters voicing such messages as “Wake Up America - Smash Jewish Communism,” “Stop Jewish Domination of Christian America” and “1,000,000 Bund members by 1940”, Fritz Kuhn immediately broke his promise to Mayor LaGuardia, as the Bund foreshadowed the rest of the night with its clear antisemitic theme.<sup>12</sup> Described as ‘orderly enough,’ three thousand *Ordunungdienst* members acted as ushers to the nearly 20,000 Bund members who poured into the arena.<sup>13</sup> Many were dressed in uniforms and adorned the Nazi salute upon entering as the environment quickly began to resemble a microcosm of Nazism within the United States. The stage was clad with members of the Bund Youth Movement from across the nation and an orchestra played as members marched through the aisles and calmly took their seats. Copies of *Mein Kampf* and Father Coughlin’s *Social Justice* were sold in the hallways normally used by hockey or fight fans to buy beer and hotdogs.<sup>14</sup> Nazi posters lined the upper balcony and the Reichsadler

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<sup>11</sup> Bernstein, pg. 185.

<sup>12</sup> “22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes,” *The New York Times*, (February 21, 1939), pg. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pg. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg.1.

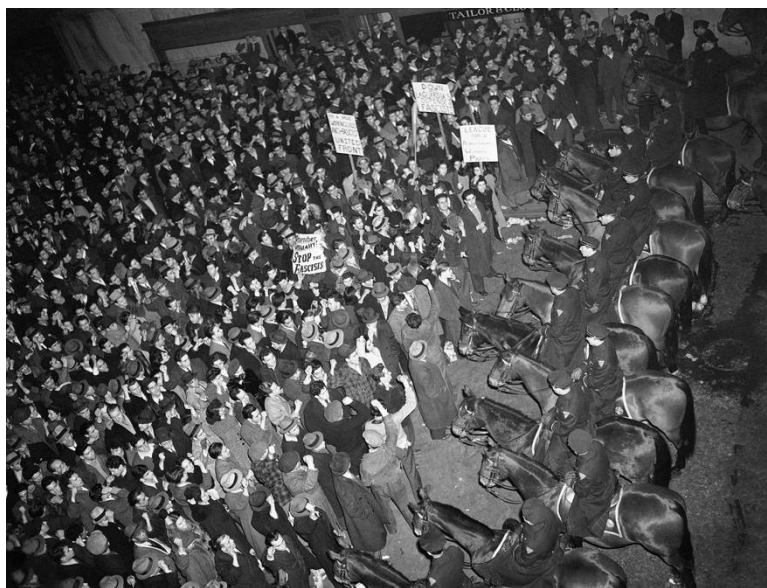


hung above founding father George Washington's head. All this created an image of American Nazism, deemed unimaginable within the United States. Leading up to the night, both Father Charles Coughlin and William Dudley Pelley were invited to speak at the rally, but ultimately neither showed up.<sup>15</sup>

### “Fellow Christian Americans!”

Fooling nobody except themselves, the Bund remained

committed to its Americanness, starting the night with a rendition of the “Star Spangled Banner” led by Margarete Rittershaush.<sup>16</sup> James Wheeler-Hill, the Bunds’ national secretary, opened the night, welcoming the crowd to the “impressive patriotic mass demonstration.”<sup>17</sup> Delivering the opening address, Wheeler-Hill compared the Bund movement with the American revolution. Quoting the Americas first president throughout the speech, Wheeler-Hill doubled down on his assertion, going as far as to preach that “If [George] Washington were alive today, he would be a friend of Adolf Hitler, just as he was of Frederick the Great ” to roaring applause.<sup>18</sup> Calling upon his “fellow Christian Americans,” Wheeler-Hill preached a challenge to restore America to ‘True Americans’ while condemning the press and President Roosevelts Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, for attacking Nazi officials.<sup>19</sup> Wheeler-Hill closed his



*Figure 22: A crowd of anti-Nazi protesters blocked from entry to Madison Square Garden by police on horseback. 1939. (The Atlantic).*

<sup>15</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, VI, 16-18, 21-24, 28-29 August 1939, (Testimony of Fritz Julius Kuhn), pg. 3767.

<sup>16</sup> “Free America! The German American Bund at Madison Square Garden, February 20, 1939. Speeches by J. Wheeler-Hill, Rudolf Markman, George Froboese, Hermann Schwinn, G. William Kunze and the Bund Fuehrer: Fritz Kuhn,” Opening Address, James Wheeler-Hill, (February 20, 1939), 2.

<sup>17</sup> “Free America!” Opening Address by J. Wheeler-Hill, pg. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pg. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pg. 1.

speech unequivocally proclaiming that the “WE STAND BEFORE YOU – loyal and law-abiding, to be here dedicated together with you, to the great task of national and social reconstruction... to restore America to the true Americans and to the ideals and principles given expression in the great farewell address of George Washington. FREE AMERICA!”<sup>20</sup>

Rudolf Markmann, standing in for Eastern *Gau* leader August Klapprot who was unavailable that night, followed Wheeler-Hill, addressing the audience as “Mein Bundesführer, American Compatriots, Bund-Members and Friends.”<sup>21</sup> Summarizing the Bund’s history as a protest against the “Jewish hate campaign,” Markmann argued that the Bund was the only organization capable of completing the task of attaining “proper representation in the fields of American political, economic and social life” for German Americans.<sup>22</sup> Cries of “Free America!” were heard throughout the Garden as George Froboese, leader of the Midwestern *Gau* lectured the audience on labor, economics, and finance. Pushing themes of “Jewish world domination,” and the ideals of the ‘group before the self,’ Froboese denounced labor unions as a Jewish ploy to avoid a “honest day’s hard manual work.” He went on to blame the “oriental cunning of the Jew Karl Marx-Mordecais” for the class warfare felt across the country.<sup>23</sup> Labeling the Jewish anti-Nazi boycott as “detrimental to the welfare of a hundred and fifteen million White and Colored American Citizens,” Froboese argued that the boycott had caused the United States to lose exports to the value of “many billions of dollars,” while “retarding our economic recovery and hindering reemployment.”<sup>24</sup> With obvious undertones that admired Hitler and the policies of the NSDAP in Germany, Froboese ended his speech calling upon all Bund members to join in the “battle for a socially-just, economically really stabilized, financially independent, Jew-free America!”

West Coast leader, Hermann Schwinn, who had been taken part in the plot to kill a who’s who of Hollywood less than three years earlier, chose to denounce the Jewish control of Hollywood and news

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pg. 2.

<sup>21</sup> “Free America!” Reasons for the Bund’s Existence, by Rudolf Markmann, pg. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pg. 3.

<sup>23</sup> “Free America!” Labor, Economics, Finance, by George Froboese, pg. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pg. 5.

industries, following a common theme of the night with a fantastically antisemitic run-on sentence, “Everything inimical to those Nations which have freed themselves of alien domination is ‘News’ to be played up and twisted to fan the flames of hate in the hearts of Americans, whereas the Menace of Anti-National, Gold-Hating Jewish-Bolshevism, is deliberately minimized.”<sup>25</sup> Schwinn closed his speech on religion and culture emphasizing the importance voting in the task to free America.<sup>26</sup>



*Figure 23: Bundists salute as the Color Guard of the Bund march through the aisles. 1939 (The Atlantic)*

National Public Relations Director G. Wilhelm Kunze spoke of “Race and Youth,” exemplifying the true horridness of the Bund’s ideology. Ironically, the man in charge of public relations gave one of the most harmful, most utterly racist speeches of the evening. Justifying his racism under the ‘racial laws of the Almighty,” Kunze spoke of the need to distinguish the White Gentile Races from the “Asiatic, African and other non-Aryan Races,” calling the efforts to achieve racial equality “madness and blasphemy.”<sup>27</sup> Speaking of the superiority of the Bund, Kunze argued that all great cultures and civilizations abided by racial laws and that in order to maintain the greatness of the United States it was necessary to instill the leadership of the “Children of Aryan Europeans” as only they possessed the “necessary degree of Blood-Relationship” which provided a “code of Ethics and Morals” enabling them to subscribe to a “common system of laws.”<sup>28</sup>

As Kunze’s speech continued, his racism began to mix with antisemitism, crafting a confusing justification for the Bund’s ideology and campaign of hate. Arguing that the German American Bund did not preach “Race Hatred” but rather “Race-Recognition,” Kunze spoke that only countries that have not

<sup>25</sup> “Free America!” Religion, Culture, Speech by Herman Schwinn, pg. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pg. 10.

<sup>27</sup> “Free America!” Race, Youth, Speech by Wilhelm Kunze, pg. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pg. 11.

undergone “racial spoiling” can realize their true ‘natural culture’ and work out their ‘destiny’ according to their own characteristics. Falling back on historical notions of antisemitism, Kunze argued that the Jew were the spoiler of races, and as a race “at home to a degree everywhere and truly at home nowhere,” were truly alien to all culture.<sup>29</sup> This showing of disgusting antisemitism was heard to applause and roars of encouragement by the crowd of twenty thousand. Asking that the Jew be treated with similar strict policies enforced by the “Asiatic Exclusion Act” and “Jim Crow Laws,” Kunze called upon United States legislators to “adequately develop [the] countries Race Legislation,” in order to protect America from “Jewish influence” which was ‘a thousand times more dangerous’ than any other race.<sup>30</sup> If not, Kunze threatened, the Bund would initiate the political movement that had been brewing since Kuhn spoke at the Buffalo convention three years earlier, bragging that the Bund had the potential to build a united political front.<sup>31</sup>

Addressing the youth movement, Kunze acknowledged the claims of political indoctrination but denied all alleged accusations of propagation. Rather, the Youth Movement was an alternative to the public education system which had “fed lies and rottenness” to students, aimed at “mak[ing] them ashamed of their ancestry and of every White Man’s Virtue.”<sup>32</sup> Through the Youth Movement, Kunze claimed that children would no longer confused “Liberty with License,” enabling them to realize the responsibility to continue the future of the Germanic heritage. Ending his speech with the ever present “Free America!” Kunze walked off the stage delighted at the uproar from the crowd as 20,000 uniformed American Nazis cheered. As Fritz Kuhn readied himself to appear before audience of Bund members, the situation outside the Garden began to intensify. A total of three attempts were made to break the arm-linking lines of police. First, a group of World War One veterans, wrapped in Stars and Stripes, were held off by police on mounted horseback as they marched down Fifty-second street. Next came a group of men led by ‘burly man carrying an American flag,’ who ‘was quickly deprived of his standards’ and hustled off down the street. Finally, a Trotskyites group known as the Socialist Workers Party attempted to break the lines, but like those before

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pg. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pg. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pg. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pg. 13.

them, had their efforts to fight Nazism halted by armed police.<sup>33</sup> Many saw the police as complicit with the Bund, as one man, labeled as an artist by The New York Times, reportedly shouted at a policeman “You ought to be proud of yourself.” Others simply chanted “Keep the Nazis out of New York,” or “What for is Democracy,” but it was clear that the situation was



*Figure 24: A police officer fights with a protester over an American Flag. 1939. (The Atlantic)*

escalating. In an effort to ease the crowd, an orchestra from a nearby theater played “I Must Love Someone,” while a male chorus sang “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Chief Inspector Costuma’s Police Force also uncovered a “mystifying disturbance” coming from the second floor of a rooming house at the southeast corner of the Garden, which upon investigation was learned to be a record attachment set to a clock that was repeating “Be American, Stay at Home.”<sup>34</sup>

Full of dramatics, the night’s main act saw Joseph Goldstien, a former New York magistrate, exit a taxicab in front of the Garden holding a summons for the arrest of Fritz Julius Kuhn in relation to a criminal libel suit filed which he had filed earlier that month in Bay Ridge Court, Brooklyn. Like all other opposing efforts to gain admittance to the Garden, Goldseint was stopped by police, held up by Inspector Costuma himself, who denied the former magistrate entry based on the failure to present a ticket.<sup>35</sup>

Inside, Kuhn began his keynote address. “Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow-Americans, American Patriots: I am sure I do not come before you as a complete stranger. You will have heard of me through the Jewish-controlled press as a creature with horns, a cloven hoof and a long tail.”<sup>36</sup> Denouncing Rabbi

<sup>33</sup> “22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes” *New York Times*, (February 21, 1939), pg. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 1.

<sup>35</sup> “Record Detail of 1,700 Cuts off the Area to Protesters - Thousands in Vicinity” *New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 1

<sup>36</sup> “Free America!” Address, Speech by Fritz Kuhn, pg. 15.

Stephen Wise, a hallmark figure in the New York Jewish Community, Samuel Untermyer, who had helped initiate the anti-Nazi Boycott, and Samuel Dickstein, the ever-determined investigator of the Bund, Kuhn preached that all three of them had shown great ability to make “white appear black,” referring to the negative perception of the Bund throughout the United States. Ironically, it wasn’t these three figures that garnered the Bund a poor reputation, but their intense antisemitism and allegiance to Nazi Germany, as exemplified by the events of the evening. Ignorant of the irony, Kuhn began to speak about the perceived mistreatment of the German race in the United States, stating that German Americans were being persecuted in every field of endeavor for no reason other than their German name. The German American Bund would fight this perceived marginalization, uniting the German element to create a “silent majority” of “co-racial in the cultural, economic and political field.”<sup>37</sup> All this would be done despite the “unprecedented campaign of hate and defamation set under Jewish leaders” who had total control of the “so-called Free Press, radio and cinema.” Making the connection clear between antisemitism and communism, Kuhn asserted that the “Jewry [was] the driving force of communism,” referencing a plethora of historic antisemitic examples that do not need repeating.

Kuhn went on to applaud the work of the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War who “paid back terror [with] terror,” against the Jewish carpetbaggers who swept through the postwar south. He labeled World War I the “price of Palestine,” as the United States sent “thousands of American boys to fight on the bloody fields of France and die for a Jewish cause under the slogan making the world safe for ‘Democracy.’” He answered the accusations of being an “outpost of the Nazi Government” by referencing that every Jewish organization “[was] an outpost for world rulership.” As the antisemitic crescendo poured over the audience, one man seethed at the rhetoric of the *Bundesführer*. Isadore Greenbaum, a 26-year-old Jewish plumbing

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pg. 17.

assistant, broke through the line of OD men surrounding the stage and charged at Kuhn.

Quickly swarmed by the armed guard, Greenbaum was subdued in an “effective routine of punches and stomps,” exemplifying an “uncanny replication of ‘Nazi thuggery’ [as] a pack of uniformed men blas[t]ed away with fists and boots on a lone Jewish



Figure 25: Close up of Fritz Kuhn, 1939. (*The Atlantic*).

victim.”<sup>38</sup> Pulled away by a team of police, Greenbaum was saved from serious injury only to be escorted to jail later that evening. Attempting to control the riled-up crowd, Kuhn delivered his rousing finish, advocating for an America ruled by White Gentiles, free from a Jewish controlled Hollywood and Press. Kuhn closed the evening, restating the eight-point “American program” which had been published the previous year, finishing his speech with a proposal:

That is our program. Take it or leave it. If you approve and wish to make your influence felt – for alone you are powerless – the Bund is open to you, provided you are sincere, of good character, of Aryan (White Gentile) Stock and an American Citizen imbued with patriotic zeal! Therefore: Join! Free America!<sup>39</sup>

At 11:15 pm, members of the Bund buttoned up their overcoats, conveniently hiding their uniforms, and were escorted through police lines along Fifty-Second street, amid a crowd of protesters who had been waiting outside. They were greeted with a roar of catcalls, jeers, and even a few punches, but by midnight, all was quiet, on the streets outside the Garden. Inside, workman managed to scrape away what remained of the microcosm of Nazism in America. The outright arrogance and perceived invincibility of speakers

<sup>38</sup> Maloney Russel, “Heil Washington!” *The New Yorker*, April 4, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>39</sup> “Free America!” Address, Speech by Fritz Kuhn, pg. 17.

that evening demonstrate a lapse in judgement by those within the Bund. Drunk on celebrity and the perceived invincibility due to failed federal investigations, leaders of the Bund openly proclaimed their allegiance to Nazi Germany as the group initiated into a period of misguided arrogance and hubris. Effectively burning the veil of Americanness, the 1939 Pro-America Rally ripped the mask off of the German American Bund and exposed its proud destructive Nazi allegiances.

Isadore Greenbaum never intended to charge the stage. A former deck engineer and chief petty officer, Greenbaum had snuck into the rally, but overcome by anger, could no longer stand the hatred produced by Kuhn. Facing the judge, Greenbaum carried an aura of defiance and confidence, justifying his actions with: "I went down to the Garden without any intention of interrupting but being that they talked so much against my religion and there was so much persecution I lost my head and I felt it was my duty to talk." The Judge, taking the side of the Bund answered back "Don't you realize that innocent people might have been killed?" To which Greenbaum snapped back "Do you realize that plenty of Jewish people might be killed with their persecution up there?"<sup>40</sup>

Fifty years later in an interview with the Washington Post, Greenbaum continued to justify his actions. When asked what caused him to charge at Kuhn, despite him being surrounded by an armed guard and stadium full of Nazis, Greenbaum retorted that "Gee, what you have done if you were in my place listening to that S.O.B. hollering against the government and publicly kissing [Adolf] Hitler's behind – while thousands cheered? Well, I did."<sup>41</sup> For his actions in disturbing the largest Nazi rally within the United States, Greenbaum was sentenced to ten days in jail, but instead paid the \$25 fine.

During the rally, Dorothy Thompson, a newspaper columnist, had narrowly escaped ejection from the halls because of her repeated shouting of "nonsense" and hysterical laughter after every pause in speech. Thompson, who had been the first American journalist to be expelled from Nazi Germany in 1934, had been escorted out of the rally by OD men who the press labeled as "Storm Troopers." A statement was

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<sup>40</sup> "Bund Foes Protest Policing of Rally," *The New York Times*, February 22, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Philip Bum, "When Nazis Rallied in Manhattan, one Working-Class Jewish Man from Brooklyn took them on" *The Washington Post*, February 20, 2019, pg. 1.



made by her husband the next day, stating that he was “extremely proud” of his wife for taking a stand against Nazism, stating that: “This is the second time Dorothy has been thrown out of Germany by Hitler. I hope the third time of her ejection from swastika-crowned German territory will not be from the capitol at Washington.” The statement was signed by her husband, Sinclair Lewis.<sup>42</sup>

In total, 13 people were arrested for their part in protesting the rally. All for minor infractions, a list of their names, charges and sentences (if available) are included below:<sup>43</sup>

- Isadore Greenbaum (26) - disorderly conduct (rushing the stage) - \$25 fine
- John Doe (Fred Ryde) - disorderly conduct - \$2 fine
- Lawrence Paladri - disorderly conduct - \$2 fine
- Peter Saunders(34) - disorderly conduct and cruelty to animals (lunged on a mounted officer)
- George Mason(19) - yelled keep the Nazi's out of New York - \$10 fine
- Stephen Carmalt(20) - disorderly conduct - suspended sentence
- Robert Lee (39) - disorderly conduct - \$10 fine
- J Walter Flynn(32) - \$10 fine
- Michael Naradich(26) - disorderly conduct
- Peter Shopes (22) - disorderly conduct
- Lionel Sheppard (26) - disorderly conduct
- Abe Dollinger (27) - disorderly conduct
- Enfrim Lidew (50) - disorderly conduct

The perpetrators were hauled off to a night court, where their guilty verdicts, as shown by the charges above, received fairly negligible punishments. At the nights end, only four policemen and four protestors reported minor injuries, while a fifth policeman, who was knocked to the ground by a horse, refused treatment.<sup>44</sup>

## National Denouncement

Before the February 20<sup>th</sup> rally, the German American Bund was surrounded by controversy. Afterwards, much of the controversy had been affirmed by the speeches and actions of Bundists that

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<sup>42</sup> “Sinclair Lewis Praises Wife’s Defiance of Bund,” *Oakland Tribune*, February 21, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>43</sup> “22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes” *The New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>44</sup> “22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes” *The New York Times*, Tuesday, February 21, 1939.

evening. While the ideology and rhetoric had been a constant pillar of the Bund since its inception, the rally at the Garden, and the publicity that was garnered from it, introduced many to the Nazi threat presented by this group. On February 21<sup>st</sup>, newspapers across the country were blazon with headlines denouncing the rally as particular stress was put both upon the record number of 1,300 policemen who were assigned to control the protest outside and the speeches of leaders that evening.



Figure 26: Police officers blocking protesters from the rally. 1939. (*The Atlantic*).

In response to the actions of the evening, Mayor LaGuardia announced a new policy that would prevent “the use of brown-shirted Storm Troop guards” as seen during the Madison Square Garden Rally. Labeled an “Ingenious new formula” by the *New York Times*, this act made it mandatory for hall owners to hire their own ushers, while placing responsibility of ‘arenas and rental halls’ to ensure safety for their occupants.<sup>45</sup> This was followed by “New York’s Answer” to the Pro-America Rally on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Over 3,500 people cheered and applauded at Carnegie Hall where Protestant, Catholic and Jewish speakers denounced the Bund for their “un-American nature and utterances” exemplified during the rally.<sup>46</sup> The keynote speech was left to the mayor who called the audience the “respectable, law-abiding, loyal Americans,” while remarking that the meeting was one in which “the city need not call the reserves to protect.”<sup>47</sup> Walter White, the secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) asserted that he spoke against Nazism on behalf of the 12 million African Americans within the United States stating, “We denounce the brazen attempt of Fritz Kuhn and his cohorts because we do not

<sup>45</sup> “LaGuardia Order Bans Bund Guards; Hall Owners Must Hire Their Own Ushers,” *The New York Times*, February 28, 1939, pg. 8.

<sup>46</sup> “Public Officials and Clergy Rally to Denounce Bund” *The New York Times*, March 4, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 1.

want to see other minorities suffer as we have suffered.”<sup>48</sup> Kuhn, who had been invited was not in attendance. Instead, he lashed out against the meeting, stating that “Those people are nine-tenths Jews, and the others are Communists. They won’t allow me to talk anyway. We don’t consider them worthwhile. They don’t represent New York and they want us there to make a laugh, that’s all.”<sup>49</sup>

District Attorney Thomas E. Dewey spoke of his disgust towards the Bund, calling them disciples of bigotry who had “libeled the memory of George Washington” by trying to depict him as “an eighteenth-century Nazi.” He went on to say that the attempt had failed because the “made in Germany” stamp showed better. Dewey called the meeting that night the “light of truth on this foreign import,” and asserted that the Bund had its days in the sun numbered. Similar messages were read from Senator Robert Wagner, Lieutenant Governor Charles Poletti and Dr. Stephen S. Wise, president of the American Jewish Congress. Representative Bruce Barton drew comparisons between the Bund and the Ku Klux Klan while James Marshall, chairman of the Board of Education asserted that any kind of dictatorship was antagonistic to the American system of education and culture upon which democracy depended.<sup>50</sup>

The night closed with a ‘rising vote’ in which the audience adopted a resolution urging the prohibition by law of the use of uniforms by political groups like the Bund. *The New York Times* made sure to mention that only 30 policemen were needed at the meeting, and that no uniformed storm troopers acted as private guards. The meeting ended without disorder or disturbance.<sup>51</sup>

In Congress, Representative John A. Martin (D-CO) called Hitler “the greatest enemy in the world,” and charged that the German American Bund was composed of “aliens of the blood and fealty of the hired Hessians of the revolution” to applause from the House of Representatives.<sup>52</sup> Charles Hawks, (R-WI) one-upped Martin’s sentiment, demanding that Congress appropriate a further \$5,000,000 dollars to the fight communists and fascists across the United States. Undeterred, Martin responded that every American who sympathized with the Bund was “a traitor to his country” and that the February 20<sup>th</sup> rally symbolized “a

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pg. 13

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pg. 13

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pg. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pg. 13.

<sup>52</sup> Hitler Called Greatest Foe of U.S. Ideals,” *The San Francisco Examiner*, February 23, 1939, pg. 9.

mass demonstrations of aliens, many of them wearing the uniform of a foreign dictator, the greatest enemy in the world of everything that America typifies.” Martin closed his attack declaring that “God save America from the Nazi Christian Americanism,” winning wild applause and crowing him as the most dedicated to American ideals.<sup>53</sup>

The Bund was also dissected by the American press, the same press that had jumped on the testimony of John C. Metcalfe the previous September of 1938. Dr. Clyde R. Miller, secretary of the Institute of Propaganda Analysis, which existed between 1937 to 1942 broke down the “Americanism” of the German American Bund to the New York Times. Nothing more than a ploy, Miller went on to state that:

“‘Americanism,’ as used by the Nazis, actually means concrete manifestations of German fascism. That is, it means the fomenting of hatred, based on racial and religious differences. It means violation of the specific freedoms of speech, press and assembly set forth in our Constitution. In the actual American term, as set forth in the basic law of our land, ‘Americanism’ really means democracy, the democracy which Hitler has again and again reviled in terms of contempt and vituperation.”<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Miller continued, stating that the Bund was a Nazi attempt to “promote suspicion, distrust and hatred among racial and religious groups in other countries.”<sup>55</sup> This perspective lined up with the testimony of John C. Metcalfe who, mentioned earlier, argued that Kuhn in fact had a “secret arrangement directly with Adolf Hitler.”<sup>56</sup>

Coverage of the rally was not confined to the American press. Across the Atlantic Ocean, French and British papers carried details of the event, including editorials that pointed towards Kuhn as the American Führer. The NSDAP, who had repeatedly stated that it had no connections with the Bund, was forever attached to the group because of the obvious allegiance to the Nazi party. Germany, who was trying to maintain a positive relationship with the United States to ensure neutrality had repeatedly denounced the actions of the German American Bund and dispelled their representation of National Socialism. In 1936,

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<sup>53</sup> “Ibid, pg. 9.

<sup>54</sup> “Miller Assails Bund on ‘Americanism,’” *The New York Times*, February 21, 1939, pg. 13.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pg. 13.

<sup>56</sup> “Bund Tie-Up with Hitler Aired at Dies Hearing” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1938, pg. 10.

when Kuhn asked the German Government who the Bund should endorse for president, the party responded that it had absolutely no interest in how people voted in the United States.<sup>57</sup> In March of 1938 Hitler ordered that all German Nationals in the United States quit the Bund and “all such groups,” at the risk of losing German citizenship. This command reaffirmed the position taken in 1935 when a previous German order had led to the dissolution of the Friends of New Germany.<sup>58</sup> When Kuhn met with a representative of the Nazi Party in late 1938, he was informed that Germany had no interest whatsoever in the German American Bund, and that Kuhn’s reputation as an “agonizing loudmouth” wasn’t winning him any respect in Germany.<sup>59</sup> Through these encounters it is clear that the German Government consistently sought to establish a distance between the Bund and themselves. This was similarly the case after the rally as on February 26<sup>th</sup>, the National Socialist Government and party in Berlin officially and explicitly disclaimed any “connection” with the German American Bund. In a letter published in the *New York Times*, a representative of the party wrote that “Any such connection... would constitute ‘interference in the internal affairs of another nation.’ As such it would be contrary to the policy of the Third Reich and the of proclaimed dictum that ‘National Socialism is no export commodity.’”<sup>60</sup> Although denying any connection with the Bund, the representative expressed “natural sympathy” for its aims.<sup>61</sup> But yet, it must be asked, was this a true denouncement of the Bund, or an effort to cover up Germany’s tracks to avoid a tense relationship with the United States?

The walls around the German American Bund were closing in. No longer could they speed blindly ahead blaming all persecution and investigation on conspiracy. Two days after the rally in the Garden, Los Angeles Bund members were pelted with “eggs and overripe vegetables,” at a rally led by Western *Gau* leader Hermann Schwinn.<sup>62</sup> The night ended with an all-out brawl between Bundists and protesters in what the *Los Angeles Times* would characterize the next day as a ‘Riot.’<sup>63</sup> The Bund had achieved the attention

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<sup>57</sup> Bernstein, pg. 67

<sup>58</sup> “Hitler Again Orders Nazis Here to Quit Bund and All Such Groups,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 1938. pg. 1

<sup>59</sup> Bernstein, pg. 163.

<sup>60</sup> “Reich Denies Link to American Bund,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 1939, pg. 68.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 68.

<sup>62</sup> “Eggs Hurlled at Bundsmen by Nazi Foes,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 2.

that Fritz Kuhn had been set to achieve. His name and movement were headline news across the United States. With this attention came increased investigation and scrutiny. LaGuardia, who had been embarrassed at the Bund's association with New York due to the rally venue, launched an inquiry to investigate the Bund's financial activities in March of 1939.

## 9. The Fall of *Der Bundesführer*

After the February 20<sup>th</sup> rally, the Bund quickly fell into a state of disarray. Its vehement allegiance to Nazism combined with its outward proclamation of antisemitic hate earned the Bund a reputation as a fifth column threat. Mayor Furillo LaGuardia looked to get rid of this organization at all costs, picking apart their records for any illegal activity that could subdue the hate it produced. This would ultimately suffice in tax fraud, a charge that would lead to Kuhn's arrest, but leave many questions open regarding the groups connection to Germany.

### “Hey Fritz, *wei matcht* der Hitler?”

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1939, an inquiry was initiated by William B. Herlands, Commissioner of Investigation under the emergency relief taxation law. Fritz Kuhn, who had been subpoenaed earlier that week, was brought in for questioning regarding the issue of the Bund's files in order to obtain information that would prove that the Bund hidden money.<sup>1</sup> Organized by Mayor LaGuardia and District Attorney Thomas E. Dewey, and led by Herlands, the Special Tax Emergency Investigation questioned Bund members in order to find any sort of record of the organization. Kuhn, and five other members were questioned by the lead investigator, but to no avail. Kuhn remained his defiant and undeterred self, even participating in Bund rallies in between questioning sessions.<sup>2</sup> As it became clear that investigators

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<sup>1</sup> “City Sifting Bund,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 1939, pg. 8

<sup>2</sup> Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn, and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013) pg. 201.

wouldn't find any financial statement or official record through questioning, Herlands initiated a raid on the Bund headquarters in New York on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1939. Demanding membership rolls, subscription lists, bank accounts and statements and canceled checks, the Bund was effectively being checked for tax violations. Instructed to look for materials that would dictate "certain alleged grand larcenies in substantial amounts," investigators found that the Bund had failed to pay the 2% sales tax required on the memorabilia sold at the Madison Square Garden Rally. The Bund paper denounced the investigation as an "illegal raid and looting," and called the investigation a conspiracy to "destroy the Bund by means of burdening it with unbearable costs."<sup>3</sup>

Two days after the raid, Peter E. Lockwood, an assistant to Thomas Dewey, received a phone call from Fritz Kuhn who was furious by what he thought was an unauthorized search. Kuhn also accused the investigators of raiding his desk and stealing \$1,380 that had been found in one of the drawers.<sup>4</sup> Kuhn attested to being in California during the time of the raid. This was found to be a lie, as a photograph of the American *Führer* and his mistress Florence Camp at the New York World's Fair proved that Kuhn's story held no weight. Concerned that Kuhn would leave the country because the investigation, Mayor LaGuardia blocked the renewal of Kuhns passport, along with the passports of Gerhard Kunze, the publicity director, and Fritz Schwiering, head of the publicity division.<sup>5</sup> On May 17<sup>th</sup> Herland provided Mayor LaGuardia a forty-two-page report on potential tax violations, accusing Kuhn of over forty charges each garnering a minor misdemeanor, punishable by three to six months in prison. Furthermore, it had been found that the Bund failed to keep any records or books, as investigators found that membership rolls and other files were kept on 'scraps of paper and paper bags' which were easily destroyed by the Bund.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, (June 15, 1939), in Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Memorandum for Assistant Attorney General Hodge from J. Edgar Hoover*, (7/1/1939), FBI file for German American Bund, (1939), part 02 of 11, pg. 78.

<sup>4</sup> "How About it, Herr Kuhn?" *New York Daily News*, May 11, 1939, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 04 of 10, pg. 22.

<sup>5</sup> "Mayor Blocks Kuhn Move to Leave U.S.," *New York Daily News*, May 13, 1939, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 03 of 10, pg. 67.

<sup>6</sup> "Dewey Studying 40 Bund Charges on Mayor's Plea," *New York Post*, May 18, 1939, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 01 of 10, pg. 70.

The case as handed over to the District Attorney, Thomas Dewey who denounced Kuhn as nothing more than “Just a common thief.”<sup>7</sup> The state also filed charges against Max Rapp, the Treasurer of the Bund, William Leudtke, the secretary and general manager of the Business league, James Wheeler-Hill, secretary of the Bund and the A.V. Publishing Corp, Max Buchete, owner of a shop that sold Bund uniforms, Karl Kienzier, president of a company that imported swastika emblems, and Fred Hackl, president of Hackl press, the organization that controlled the printing of the Bund’s newspaper.<sup>8</sup> Dewey asserted that the tax fraud was nothing more than “small potatoes” and summoned Kuhn before a grand jury to testify concerning ‘alleged substantial felonies.’ Kuhn adhered to this request, remaining his bold self, stating “I’m not running away from the Jew Herlands and the little Red LaGuardia.”<sup>9</sup>

Martin Dies, chairman of the Dies Committee, launched a congruent investigation on the Bund but found nothing due to the scarcity of records and book. Kuhn had effectively obliterated any possible trail, as it was found that Kuhn had sent letters to all Bund members to ‘destroy at once’ all evidence or correspondences which could’ve linked the Bund with the Nazi government.<sup>10</sup> Unable to find anything, the investigation was ultimately dropped by the Congressional Committee.

Kuhn, who consistently stated that he had nothing to hide, refused to be subpoenaed, stating that he would testify before a grand jury on his own will. He refused to sign the waiver of immunity, and actually accused Dewey of breaking the law for stealing the \$1,380 from his desk during the May 2<sup>nd</sup> raid. Despite agreeing to testify, Kuhn had a change of heart and reportedly ‘left in a huff’ from the New York City court building<sup>11</sup> Later that day, the New York County Grand Jury released an official indictment for the arrest of Fritz Julius Kuhn, charging him with twelve counts of grand larceny and forgery for embezzling \$14,548.59 from the German American Bund bank account.

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<sup>7</sup> “Bund Head Seized as Thief,” *Washington Post*, May 26, 1939, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 03, of 10, pg. 35.

<sup>8</sup> “Kuhn, Truculent, Awaits Arrest in Office,” *New York Evening Journal*, May 1939, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 01 of 10, pg. 22.

<sup>9</sup> “Mayor and Dewey Vie for Kuhn Scalp,” *New York Daily Mail*, May 19, 1939, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 03 of 10, pg. 76.

<sup>10</sup> “Why So Secret,” *New York World-Press*, May 19, 1939, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 03 of 10, pg. 78.

<sup>11</sup> “Kuhn Stalks out on Failure to Get Immunity” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 25, 1939, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942) part 04 of 10, pg. 26.



Kuhn, who had effectively ‘vanished’ from New York City, had fled after he had left the Grand Jury, packing three trunks and heading west with three other men. Unbeknownst by Kuhn, three detectives were closely following and observing his actions. Kuhn’s entourage stopped in Krumsville Pennsylvania to get gas, where James Cashman, the lead detective learned that charges had been filed against Kuhn. Cashman approached Kuhn at Schenker’s restaurant off route 22 and notified him of the charges and the intent to arrest. Kuhn, projecting his arrogance, asked the investigator if he knew what state he was in. When Cashman answered Pennsylvania, Kuhn laughed, responding that he had no jurisdiction to arrest him. Cashman attested that they would figure that out later, cuffing Kuhn and escorting him back to New York.<sup>12</sup> Dewey believed that Kuhn had been fleeing the arrest, as neither Kuhn nor his accomplices knew that they were being followed. It was also believed that the party had chosen to drive to Krumsville Pennsylvania because it was a district in which Nazism was strong, and many believed that Kuhn had friends in this area that would help him.<sup>13</sup> He remained jovial during this whole encounter, even asking the detective for a safety pin to seal a hole in his pants. This attitude quickly subsided in New York when, as Kuhn was being escorted out of the police car, a member the crowd which had gathered to see the American Führer yelled out “Hey Fritz, *wei matcht der Hitler?*” (How’s Hitler Doing?) Kuhn’s smile was quickly replaced with a glare.<sup>14</sup>

Kuhn, who pled not guilty, sat in Tombs prison in the heart of New York City until late that evening when a ‘mystery woman’ appeared, asking how much Kuhn’s bail was. When she learned that it was \$5,000, she left the police station. Half an hour later, Kuhn’s attorney, Vahan H. Kalendarian and Gustave Elmer, a Bund organizer, appeared and produced bail, all in five- and ten-dollar bills. When the police officer on duty asked how Elmer got the money, Elmer responded that “Someone was kind enough...” before getting cut off by the attorney who told him to keep silent.<sup>15</sup> While out on bail Kuhn continued to

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<sup>12</sup> “Kuhn on Bail on Theft Charge,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1939, pg. 1.

<sup>13</sup> “Kuhn is Arrested in theft of \$14,548 of Bunds Funds,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1939, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 04 of 10, pg. 29.

<sup>14</sup> “Kuhn Freed on Bail After Woman’s Visit” *Washington Post*, May 27, 1939, pg. 1

<sup>15</sup> “Kuhn in Seclusion, Prepares Defense,” *New York Evening News*, May 28, 1939, in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 04 of 10, pg. 39.

speak at Bund rallies and events. His final speech was at a May 27<sup>th</sup> rally before the Milwaukee Bund, in which he slipped in unnoticed, surprising Bund members as he denounced Thomas Dewey and Roosevelt as “Enemies of the Bund.” Kuhn asked followers to “hold on to the camps and fight against any attempt to have them taken from you.” He closed the night assuring Bundists that “Our enemies cannot kill the spirit of the Bund.”<sup>16</sup>

Before Kuhn’s arrest, he was elected to four more years as leader of the Bund. He claimed that the Bund was working with 125 other American organizations aimed at targeting communism and the Jewish menace. On August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1939, while awaiting trial, Kuhn was finally called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. His testimony was largely worthless. Questioned for two days, Kuhn and the members of the Committee engaged in a shouting match



*Figure 27: Kuhn (second from right), escorted by police officers to sentencing. 1939. (The Atlantic).*

in which Kuhn dodged questions, giving the Committee nothing of interest. Kuhn even seemed to enjoy the banter between Martin Dies and himself playing with the Congressmen and their questions. The issue of a connection between the Bund and Germany, while a source of interest for the congressmen, quickly proved fruitless, as Kuhn’s arrogance and wit were on full show during the hearing, as shown by an especially irascible exchange below.

Congressman Starnes: “What is the Connection with the German Government?”

Mr. Kuhn: “It has not any connection at all”

Congressman Starnes: Is not Mr. Hitler against the Communists?

Mr. Kuhn: “Yes. Aren’t you against the Communists?”

Congressman Starnes: “Is not Mr. Hitler anti-Semitic?”

<sup>16</sup> “Kuhn Attacks F.D. and Dewey,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 29, 1939, Federal Bureau of Investigation FBI file for Fritz Kuhn, (1942), part 04 of 10, pg. 43.

Mr. Kuhn: Aren't you anti-Semitic?"

Congressman Starnes: I am asking you the question. Is not Mr. Hitler anti-Semitic?

Mr. Kuhn: I suppose so, from what I have heard

Congressman Starnes: Has he not driven hundreds of thousands of those unfortunate people out of his country?

Mr. Kuhn: Have not the Communists driven hundreds of thousands out of Russia?

Congressman Starnes: I am asking you the question with reference to the treatment of the Jews in Germany.

Mr. Kuhn: That is up to Mr. Hitler, not me. What do I have to do with Mr. Hitler? Subpoena Mr. Hitler here.<sup>17</sup>

Because of Kuhn's refusal to answer any question, the investigation learned very little about the Bund's true relation to Germany. Finally, on June 4th, 1939, Fritz Julius Kuhn was arrested after eight and a half hours of deliberation. Guilty of larceny in the first degree and guilty of larceny in the second degree, it had been found that Kuhn had used the fourteen thousands of unpaid tax dollars to transport the furniture of his mistress Florence Camp from Cleveland to New York. Convicted of five counts, Kuhn was sentenced up to thirty years in prison.<sup>18</sup> After sentencing, while waiting in Grand Central Station to be departed to Sing Sing prison, Fritz Kuhn's former employer Henry Ford found time to leave the freight office in Detroit and walked up to the window of Kuhn's train compartment. No words were exchanged between the two, but it is reported that the pair locked eye contact for a few eternal moments. Because the Bund left no paper trail of their financial record, it is impossible to know whether or not Ford had been involved in financing the group. Perhaps, this was a chance encounter between the two, or maybe, Ford was looking to give the American Führer a final send off.<sup>19</sup>

## The "Lucky Rat"

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<sup>17</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. 1, August 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, and 23, (testimony of Fritz Kuhn), pg. 3774.

<sup>18</sup> "Kuhn's Arrest Climax of Bund's Hectic Life," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1939.

<sup>19</sup> Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), pg. 265.

After Kuhn's arrest the German American Bund quickly fell into a state of disarray. Attempting to keep a strong support system on the outside, the Bund united in support for Kuhn, arguing that he was a political prisoner and a victim of Jewish persecution. Wilhelm Kunze, who had taken over for Kuhn as leader of the Bund, argued that following the Führerprinzip, Kuhn, as leader, could do whatever he wanted with the Bund's finances, even sponsor the cross-country movement of furniture. No one outside of the Bund bought this argument, as Fritz Kuhn, now Convict Number 9736, would remain in prison until the end of World War Two.

On September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1940, the Hercules Powder Plant, a New Jersey Factory which manufactured gunpowder was ripped apart by an enormous blast. Killing twenty-seven workers and injuring over two hundred, the Bund was immediately suspected of sabotage due to the close proximity between the plant and Camp Nordland.<sup>20</sup> While it has never been confirmed that Bundists were involved in the explosion, one year earlier in 1939 a Bund member named Neil Howard Ness testified to the FBI that the Bund had discussed such sabotage plots as bombing decks and warehouses along the waterfront of major US cities, as well as the Hercules Powder plant.<sup>21</sup> Because of this earlier testimony, the Bund was suspected of blowing up the plant, resulting in a raid of camp Nordland later that month in which FBI agents seized literature as well as



Figure 28: Guns found during the raid on Camp Nordland, 1940. (*The Atlantic*).

rounds of ammunition. Kunze, who would eventually be found guilty of race hatred in January of the next year, left the country, eventually fleeing to Mexico to avoid prosecution.<sup>22</sup> It has also been verified that

<sup>20</sup> "Bund List Checked in Hercules Blast," *The New York Times*, September 14, 1940, pg. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Memorandum on the Bund, Silver Shirts, and other anti-communist and anti-semitic organizations," (11/27/1939), pg. 1, in FBI report on the German American Bund, (1939), part 03 of 11, pg. 89

<sup>22</sup> "Mexico Expels Kunze to U.S." *The Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1942, pg. 11.

while on the run, Kunze did some work as a spy for Nazi Germany, looking for potential flaws in the American home defense plans.<sup>23</sup> With Kunze on the run, George Froboese, the Midwestern *Gau* leader took over as *Bundesführer*, assuring members to continue the fight, despite widespread defection.

By the summer of 1941, the Bund was ordered by the United States government to cease holding public meetings. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, an executive committee within the United States Government unanimously adopted a resolution to disband the Bund, and three days later, the Treasury Department raided their National Headquarters, resulting in mass arrest. The Bund finally came to a definite end on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1941 as top officials gathered for one last meeting. A vote was taken. The result was unanimous. The men agreed not to provide government investigators with any keys to their desk or file cabinet, and the German American Bund was officially dissolved.<sup>24</sup>

Kuhn was paroled in June 1943. He was released from Clinton Correctional Facility, where he had been previously transferred to from Sing Sing. Earlier that year, he had been indicted under the Nationality Act of 1940, and charged with remaining loyal to Nazi Germany, even though he was an American Citizen. Upon release he was sent to Texas, ultimately winding up in Camp Kennedy, where he taught mathematics to other prisoners. These classes inevitably turned into ‘diatribes of Nazi ideology.’ In September of 1945, Kuhn was finally deported back to Germany. Walter Winchell summarized the Führer’s demise perfectly.

Kuhn was denaturalized and deported – but there is no invention to delouse him. He sailed on the S.S. *Winchester Victory* – the only boat with a name close enough to that of the columnist who first exposed his activities here in 1933... he was arrested for practically spitting on the sidewalk when he should have been shot for treason... The lucky rat! He is *ON* the *Winchester* - instead of having one *AIMED* at him.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Five Accused of Espionage,” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 5,

<sup>24</sup> Ladd, D.M. FBI Memo, December 17, 1941, found in Bernstein, pg. 279.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Winchell, “Walter Winchell in New York” *New York Daily Mirror*, (September 18, 1945), found in Bernstein, pg. 281.

Kuhn reportedly responded to Winchell's final remark with a threat that the journalist enjoyed passing along to his readers, "Fritz said, 'Tell Herr Vinchell, I vill liff to piss on his grafe.'"<sup>26</sup> Kuhn later died on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1951. He was fifty-five. Before he died, he had been tried and convicted by a German court for being a major Nazi offender, but his ten-year sentence was never enforced.<sup>27</sup> News



Figure 29: Kuhn in Jail in Neudeck, Bavaria near Munich. 1947 (*The Atlantic*)

of the *Bundesfuhrer's* death was mentioned on page eleven of the New York Times two years later.<sup>28</sup>

## 10. Espionage

Through this narrative of the German American Bund, I have described the organization as a multi-faceted pseudo-Nazi threat, with two distinct followings, one of German-Americans interested in a shared German community, the other, of Nazi ideologues who joined the Bund the combat the invisible enemy presented by the 'Jewish Conspiracy.' As the Bund traversed into the "Troubled Years" of its existence, many of the aspects of the German American community began to diminish as members who didn't necessarily join the Bund for its political element began to leave. The group became to resemble the truly radical organization that Kuhn had tried so hard to hide, and by February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1939, its extreme rhetoric and hate were on full display. But where does this leave us regarding the German American Bund and its connection to Germany. It is clear that this group is a threat, but was this threat enhanced by being a Nazi satellite organization? As stated earlier, most authors are reluctant to weigh in on this argument.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pg. 281.

<sup>27</sup> "Fritz Kuhn Death in 1951 Revealed." *New York Times*, February 2, 1953, pg. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pg. 11.

Neither Bernstein, Canedy nor Sander state the affirmative nor the negative regarding the existence of the relationship. Scott Freeland openly denies this association, but his history of the Bund is openly skewed in its defense of the organization.

In this thesis, I focused upon the 1939 Pro-America Rally because it peeled back the façade of the German American Bund. Drunk on arrogance and perceived invincibility, the rally showed the true nature of the Bund, as a dangerously pro-Nazi organization that would stop at nothing to instigate a political revolution against the “Jewish Conspiracy.” It became the Bund which both John C. Metcalfe and Helen Vooros attested to, the group which Arthur Derourian warned people of, and the organization which instigated the actions of Leopold McLagan and James Banahan in their subversive plots.



Figure 30: New York Times political cartoon in reference to the German American Bund 1939. (The New York Times)

Fritz Kuhn had learned from his time in the Friends of the New Germany to hide these aspects of the group from public eye, but drunk on arrogance, he ignored his intuition and presented the Bund in its totality in the most publicized city in America. The group that Metcalfe and Vooros attested to was shown, and this is the same group that was loyal to Nazi Germany. No evidence of this connection exists not because there was none, but because throughout the Bund's entire existence it failed to keep any official record of membership, finances, or communications. This may be a combination of the Bund's

lack of records, as well as an underwhelming exit from the public spotlight. Kuhn was arrested for tax fraud, a charge which did not entail an all-out investigation into the Bund as a satellite, did stop the movement in its tracks. A combination of Dies resisting to call in Bund leaders to testify, besides Kuhn in 1939, and the restrictiveness of prosecuting along the language of FARA, the Bund's true connection to Germany was never exposed. This is why most writers neglect to mention it, because there is no definite conclusion to make. Kuhn's order to destroy all Bund documents during the 1939 investigation only adds to the suspicion of this lack of connection. What we are left pondering is whether or not this connection existed at a period in time? Throughout this thesis, I have laid out the German American Bund in its totality. I have illustrated why members joined, and why they stayed. I've measured the two competing narratives of the Bund, up until the final days in which one narrative swallowed the other. I have found that despite the lack of physical evidence, there is enough linking these two parties to not only be suspicious of this connection, but to speculate upon the levity of it.

To draw away from this speculation, I refer to one final aspect of the Bund to prove this connection. While I do build on testimony to certify the existence of this link, the testimony I rely upon speaks of the existence of individuals, not of the existence of linkage. This will become clear as I continue. In Helen Vooros's testimony to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1939 she attested to a man named Hugo Haas, who had met the Bundists in Germany during the 1936 trip to Berlin. Haas's involvement had been consistent with the American Nazi movement, as Fritz Kuhn attested that Haas had had a leadership position within the Friends of the New Germany's youth movement. Furthermore, both attested that when Haas had met the Bund entourage in 1936, he had been the leader of the Association for German Culture Relations Abroad (*Verein für Deutsche Kulturbeziehungen im Ausland*, of VDA). While much of Vooros's and Kuhn's testimonies contradicted each other, the testimony of the involvement of this man did not. Because so, we can tentatively conclude that Haas had been involved in the German American Bund to some extent. According to Francis MacDonne in *insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column*, after the war the VDA was exposed to be engaging in spying



across the entire world through German minorities living in other countries.<sup>1</sup> The German American Bund represented an organization composed almost entirely of German minorities living abroad. This connection links not only Haas to the Bund but the VDA as well. Helen Vooros attested to the Congressional Committee that when she had been in Germany Haas had given instructions to Theodore Dinkelacker, the leader of the Bund Youth Movement to be given to Kuhn. While no physical communication between these two parties exists, the mere connection existent between them provides enough to conclude a relationship.

Furthermore, following my theme of the existence of individuals, in their 1939 testimony to the House Un-American Activities Committee, both Kuhn and Vooros attest to a Dr. Ignatz Griebel. Mentioned briefly, Griebel was the official doctor of the Bund and had been a close friend of the leader of the FoNG, Hans Spanknöbel, even allowing the American born *Führer* to stay at his house to avoid authorities during the 1933 congressional investigation.<sup>2</sup> As a member of the Bund, Griebel avoided titles, presenting himself as a ‘background advisor’ to Fritz Kuhn.<sup>3</sup> Kuhn himself confirmed this relationship, as well as the relationship between Griebel and Spanknöbel, and even a relationship between Griebel and Fritz Gissibl, the leader of the National Socialist Teutonia Association.

Besides being a doctor and confidant of Nazi leaders in America, Dr. Ignatz Griebel was the leader of a Nazi spy ring in New York City. Working closely with Guenther Gustav Rumrich, a spy under the orders of Nazi spy leader Dr. Erich Pfeiffer, Griebel carried the codename “Ilberg” and had volunteered his services as an espionage agent through a letter to Joseph Goebbels.<sup>4</sup> Griebel had involved himself in the FoNG through which he acquired contacts at American defense installations and manufacturing plants.<sup>5</sup> As seen by the testimony of Kuhn and Vooros, Griebel would remain involved in the American Nazi movement, joining the Bund in 1936. He joined these groups to recruit “suitable individuals” to help him

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<sup>1</sup> Francis MacDonne, *Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column*, (Oxford University Press, 1995), pg. 108

<sup>2</sup> Leon Torrou, *Nazi Spies in America*, (American Book-Stratford Press, inc., New York, 1939), pg. 43

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg. 101.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Irene Miller, “Spies in America: German espionage in the United States, 1935-1945,” (1984), *Dissertations and Theses*, Paper 3579, pg. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 24.

spy on American activities. We know this because one man, Leon G. Turrou, an FBI agent who would expose the Rumrich spy ring in 1938 and publish a best-selling book about it the next year, adequately titled *Nazi Spies in America*. Turrou's investigation of Griebel was referred to by the *New York Times* as the "Government's greatest spy hunt in peace time," and would capture national interest. While being investigated, Griebel fled to Germany where he would remain until his death.

Because of Griebel's connection with the American Nazi movement, specifically his position of 'background advisor' to Kuhn, it is possible to speculate that Griebel served as a possible liaison between the Bund and Germany. Frustratingly, just as with Hugo Haas, there is no physical evidence of relationship, and Griebel was on a boat back to Germany before any questions could be asked regarding his connection to Kuhn. Griebel and Haas were not the lone spies working within the Bund. As mentioned earlier, Wilhelm Kunze worked as a spy after he left the Bund, and furthermore, Walter Kappe, founder of the Teutonia Association, was an officer of Abwehr II, the sabotage division of Nazi espionage.<sup>6</sup> On top of this, two Bund Youth Members, Hans Pagel and Frederick Schlosser, observed ships and cargoes at the New York City waterfront as a part of Griebel's espionage ring, reporting their findings to Griebel, who reported them to Germany.<sup>7</sup> Along with these individuals, both Paul Ochojski and Herbert Mai, two Harvard students who had been involved in the Youth Movement, had been in contact with Hugo Haas, who as mentioned earlier led the VDA.<sup>8</sup>

The Bund had many connections to espionage within its ranks. Select members participated in espionage rings while leaders were advised by proven Nazi spies. While this doesn't officially connect the Bund as being sponsored by the German government, it does indicate the likelihood of a connection between the two parties. But again, because investigators never found any physical evidence connecting the Bund to Germany, this relationship has never been verified.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg. 83.

<sup>7</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities (Dies Committee), 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, Vol. 1, August 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, and 23, (testimony of Helen Vooros), pg. 3911

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg. 3911.

## Epilogue

Again, we are left with more speculation regarding the German American Bund. It seems only fitting that a group that such existed in controversy shall have a legacy as convoluted and contentious as the Bund is today. But yet, through my research I have realized that this group's connection with Germany shouldn't matter. This little-known organization captured the spotlight of pre-World War II America. Its leader Fritz Kuhn embraced a celebrity-like status. Mobsters joined Hollywood actors to protest against the organization. The Bund demonstrated the underworld of interwar America as a group that thrived on hatred and found an audience towards which it could project its antisemitic sentiment towards. Whether it was connected to Germany or not, this group was able to exist for a window in time and even thrive during this period. It demonstrated the worst of American history, and possibly, because of its existence in the underworld, today we know little about the German American Bund. This has been easy due to its underwhelming exit from popular culture on the eve of World War II.

Going forth, it is important to realize that a Nazi movement was able to exist during a brief window of time. This becomes especially relevant today with our current political atmosphere. There are obvious parallels between Fritz Kuhn's "Free America" and Donald Trump's all too famous "Make America Great Again." This underworld of American politics still exists, and while the German American Bund is no longer an active participant, other organizations have taken the reins the same way Kuhn filled in for Father Coughlin who had replaced Henry Ford. The German American Bund has demonstrated what can happen when movements go unchecked. The incredible protest against the Madison Square Garden Rally in 1939 was what led to the group's downfall, not the HUAC investigation nor the FBI probes. The hundred thousand anti-Nazi protesters standing outside the Garden that evening influenced Mayor LaGuardia to investigate the Bund's tax records, as he wanted to show that while he had allowed the organization into his city, he hadn't been complicit in their antisemitic, racist, pro-Nazi rhetoric. In closing, I chose to talk

about the responses to this movement to highlight those who pushed back against the hatred this group propagated. 20,000 Nazis may have rallied in Madison Square Garden, but 100,000 protested outside. While the Bund's legacy has been controversial and convoluted, the legacy of the protesters has not been. With the rise of the alt-right today it has never been more important to be conscious of these organizations and to oppose the hatred they project. While it is alarming that 500,000 people sympathized with this movement, it should be noted that 74 million people voted for a platform similarly nationalistic and hateful in November 2020. What this paper brings to light is that these movements still exist, and whether a 1939 rally at Madison Square Garden, or an insurrection attempt on the Capitol, these movements are incredibly dangerous. These examples of hatred and violence are just the tip of an iceberg, and through protest, investigation and the publicization of these groups, we can work to expose such movements before they become deadly.

# Chapters of the German American Bund

(\*) Gau Headquarters

There were certainly more chapters, but because of the Bund's lack of records, these are the only confirmed chapters by the FBI as of 11/17/1941. Fritz Kuhn claimed to have a chapter in every state except Louisiana.

## **Eastern *Gau*:**

Albany, NY	Huntington, NY	Poughkeepsie, NY
Astoria, NY	Jamaica, NY	Providence, RI
Baltimore, MD	Lindenhurst, NY	Schenectady, NY
Bergen County NJ.	Miami, FL	South Brooklyn, NY
Bridgeport, CT	Nassau County, NJ	Stanton Island, NY
Brooklyn, NY	Newark, NJ	Syracuse, NY
Buffalo, NY	New Haven, CT	Trenton, PA
Danbury, CT	New York City, NY*	Troy, NY
Elizabeth, NJ	Passaic County, NJ	Reading NY,
Glendale, NY	Philadelphia, PA	Union City, NJ
Hudson County, NY	Pittsburgh, PA	Washington, DC

## **Midwestern *Gau***

Austin, TX	Gary, IN	Sheboygan, WI
Cheyenne, WY	Hamilton, IN	South Bend, IN
Chicago, IL*	Hammond, IN	St. Louis, MO
Cincinnati, OH	Kansas City, MI	Taylor, TX
Dayton, OH	Kenosha, WI	Toledo, OH

Detroit, MI

Omaha NE

Wheeling, WA

Flint, MI

Pittsburgh, PA

Fort Wayne, IN

San Antonio, TX

## **Western *Gau***

Albuquerque, NM

Petaluma, CA

San Gabriel, CA

Carson City, NV

Portland, OR

San Pablo Valley, CA

Concord, CA

Salt Lake City, UT

Santa Barbara, CA

Los Angeles, CA\*

San Bernadino, CA

Santa Monica, CA

Oakland, CA

San Diego, CA

Seattle, WA

Phoenix, AZ

San Francisco, CA

Spokane, WA

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