

PENS AND TONGUES:
COMMUNITY RESISTANCE TO THE GERMAN-AMERICAN BUND,
1936-1939

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Imagery of the swastika most often brings to mind Nazi Germany. In the 1930s, however, Americans confronted swastika-adorned flags in their own communities. This paper focuses on the German-American Bund, a pro-Nazi organization active in the United States between 1936 and 1941, and the reactions of American citizens to the Bund's activities in their communities. This paper argues that American resistance to the pro-Nazi intrusion started as local and organic movements; that local confrontations increased national publicity of the Bund; and that the increased visibility of the Bund fueled the federal investigations that followed. In 1936, two Bund youth camps- one already established in Yaphank, New York and the other proposed for Southbury, Connecticut- met substantial animosity from their neighboring towns. Examined as case studies, the two communities demonstrate the broader concern of home-grown Nazi organizations throughout the United States in the decade before World War Two. This research will be conducted using several newspaper sources, the town archives of Southbury, CT, Federal Bureau of Investigation files on the German-American Bund, archived newsreel footage, a feature film, and other publicly available documents.

DEDICATION

History is a story about the past, intended to be true.

This paper is dedicated to Robert Babcock,
The best mentor, teacher, friend, and role model
That one could ever ask for.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1937, Chicago journalist William Mueller aimed to expose the activities of the German-American Bund, a pro-Nazi and fascist organization in the United States. Writing in the *Chicago Daily Times*, Mueller opened his article on the Bund's youth camps by saying, "Thousands of childish voices ring out in a crescendo of 'Heil Hitler!' in German-American camps throughout the nation. American boys and girls sing hymns to *Der Führer* and to the *Vaterland* they have never seen. Their youthful feet goose-step in a march of racial and religious hatred."¹ Such inflammatory statements, combined with pictures of American youth marching with swastika-adorned flags and songs proclaiming the purity and strength of Nazi Germany, horrified and frightened much of the American public.² Mueller's article depicted a trend in a growing national focus on the Bund, inspired by the communities rising to resist pro-Nazi ideals.

Resistance to the German-American Bund began as local movements in individual communities fueled by combinations of two distinct factors, social and ideological. Some communities, such as Yaphank, New York, were more resistant to the Bund because of social factors. Yaphank's residents disliked having the Bund in their community because of the Bundists' disruptive actions, not their beliefs. Other communities, such as Southbury, Connecticut, actively resisted the Bund because of

¹ William Mueller, "Children 'Heil!': *Times* Men Reveal More Nazi Secrets", *Daily Times* (Chicago), September 10, 1937. *Der Führer* and *Vaterland* are the German words for "The leader" and "Fatherland," respectively.

² William Mueller, "Picture Primer shows Nazi Racial Prejudice," and "Singing Given a Big Place in Camp Training," *Daily Times* (Chicago), September 10, 1937.

ideological factors. Southbury citizens were primarily concerned with the aims and principles of this pro-Nazi organization. Using Yaphank and Southbury as case studies, this paper seeks to demonstrate that resistance movements to the Bund took two distinct forms, both of which garnered mounting negative publicity toward the Bund on a national scale and highlighted the growing threat of pro-Nazi groups within the United States.

As Adolf Hitler gained popularity in Germany in the early 1920s, he simultaneously gained a following in German communities in the United States. American pro-Nazi organizations and groups of Hitler supporters began meeting as early as 1924. The most notable of these groups was the Friends of New Germany (FONG). Led by a German immigrant, Fritz Gissibl, the Friends struggled with infighting, contested leadership, and low membership.³ When Gissibl left the group to return to Germany in 1936, FONG transitioned to the name “German-American Bund” under the leadership of Fritz Kuhn.⁴ Kuhn, a naturalized citizen who left Germany after serving in World War I, worked as a chemist for the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. It was here that he became involved with the Friends, inducted as a full member in 1934.⁵

³ The Friends of New Germany are often referred to as The Friends, FONG, or FDND, the German acronym for the group. The group also suffered a split in October 1935, when some members left to follow a different leader. However, most came back before the year’s end. Scott Freeland, *They Too Were Americans: The German-American Bund in Words, Photos, and Artifacts*, (R. James Bender Publishing, San Jose, CA, 2011), 36.

⁴ The Friends of New Germany was originally called “Friends of the Hitler Movement,” but that was quickly dubbed too controversial by group members. For a more complete history of the early movements before the Bund, see Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States 1924-1941* (Cornell University Press, London, 1974); Susan Canedy, *America’s Nazis: A History of the German-American Bund* (Markgraf Publications Group, Menlo Park, CA, 1990); and Arnie Bernstein *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund* (St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2013).

⁵ Bernstein, 31.

Reacting to turmoil in the Friend's early leadership, Kuhn quickly consolidated power. Following the same leadership principles as the Nazi Party in Germany, Kuhn restructured the national organization to comprise of the *Bundesführer* (himself), who presided over the National Convention (a legislative body), and the National Executive Committee (an administrative body). Local and regional leaders answered to the National Convention, while officers like the treasurer, youth division leader, and public relations council all answered to the Executive Committee.⁶ However, as Kuhn mimicked aspects of the Nazi Party, he also attempted to rebrand and Americanize the group.

The transition to the name "German-American Bund" (*Amerikadeutscher Volksbund*) was the first step in Kuhn's attempt to Americanize the group. A change from "The Friends of New Germany" would ostensibly help distance the group from the new Reich and promote more American ties. As he outlined the name change in an official booklet, titled *Awake and Act!*, Kuhn noted, "every German by birth or descent...should be a friend of present-day Germany...We shall educate the American people to become friends of the new Germany...The Bund is American in its inception and in its field of endeavor."⁷ Later, the Bund solidified and expanded on their/its goals

⁶ *German-American Bund Charts*. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Secretary's File (PSF), 1933-1945, Safe Files: State Dept., 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum Website; accessed March 25, 2019.

⁷ From *Awake and Act! Aims and Purposes of the German American Bund. An Appeal to all Americans of German Stock man Stock* by Fritz Kuhn. Reprinted in Arnie Bernstein *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 2013), 48-49.

as an “American” organization. A pamphlet titled “Purpose and Aims,” handed out by Bundists to residents of Southbury in 1937, read,

[with] our will, firm conviction, and determination to further the interest of the United States of America, the country of our free choice and adoption, and Germany, the land of our birth and ancestors...we resolve...above all to uphold and defend the constitution and the laws of the United States of America...respect and honor the [American] flag...to promote Good-will, lasting friendship and continued beneficial relations between the United States of America and Germany...we pledge our best efforts to expose and depose Communism, Marxism, Internationalism and Un-American Boycott Rackets within the United States of America.⁸

Clearly, the Bund was trying to promote the image of an American organization with only the most inconsequential of ties to the Nazi Reich. Under Kuhn, the organization attempted to sell itself as purely American, dedicated to defending the laws, ideals, and flag of the United States from the perceived dangers of Marxism, Communism, and Judaism. However, new members still had to pledge, “I am of Aryan origin, free from Jewish or colored blood,” and no one of non-German stock could join.⁹ German symbols, language, and practices remained more prevalent in the organization than American elements.

Mimicking the organizations of the Nazi Party, the Bund developed a paramilitary guard, a propaganda wing, and a youth program, all of which Kuhn strengthened and streamlined. The paramilitary wing, commonly known as the OD, (*Ordnungsdienst*) was tasked with providing security for events and acting as

⁸ “Purpose and Aims,” German-American Bund Informational Pamphlet, n.d. Box 1, Folder 14, (87.1), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

⁹ *German American Bund Application for Membership*, n.d. Box 1, Folder 17, (87.1), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

bodyguards.¹⁰ They answered directly to Kuhn. Complete with brownshirt uniforms modeled after SA (*Sturmabteilung*) personnel, OD members looked the part of a Nazi army within the United States. In addition to security, the OD distributed propaganda leaflets, until the creation of the *Deutsche Zeitung*, the newspaper for the Friends and later the Bund.¹¹ Most of the content of the *Deutsche Zeitung* comprised of propaganda brought directly from Germany, along with articles which attempted to combine Nazi anti-Semitic sentiments with American racial prejudices. Flyers decried “The Negro Menace” or called for “[guarding] your women folk from pollution by Jews, Blacks, and Browns.”¹² A large portion of the pro-German material came from a Nazi propaganda mill in Erfurt, Germany, with even more provided by branches of the German propaganda machine specializing in propaganda for the American people.¹³

The editor of *Deutsche Zeitung*, Walter Kappe, liked to remind readers of the threat Jews posed to “the national order of Aryan dominance.”¹⁴ He wanted readers warned and prepared for the coming struggle. The leadership of the Friends and the Bund knew the coming struggle would be long-term, and in this vein, they created activities and offshoots of the organization for children. Their belief was that

¹⁰ Bernstein, 34. The official name, Ordnungsdienst, literally translates as “the organization for the maintenance of public order.”

¹¹ Bernstein, 35.

¹² John Roy Carlson, *Under Cover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underworld of America-The Amazing Revelation of How Axis Agents and Our Enemies Within are Now Plotting to Destroy the United States* (E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc, New York, 1943), 51. This same flyer called Bolshevism the modern term for Judaism and Soviet another term for “Jew-control.”

¹³ Carlson mentions that most of this propaganda is brought over by passenger ships travelling between the United States and Germany, a claim which further is illustrated in a Hollywood film from 1939, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*.

¹⁴ Bernstein, 35.

indoctrinating youth would increase the likelihood of the thousand-year Reich. Similar to other youth camps of the time, pro-Nazi youth camps featured athletic events, marches, drills, and parades complete with swastika banners waving alongside American flags.¹⁵ Even smaller camps, such as Camp Wille und Macht (Will and Might) in Griggstown, New Jersey, possessed the capacity for upward of 200 young campers.¹⁶ Wille und Macht hosted youth from the surrounding cities of New York, Buffalo, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia. At its height, the Bund and its affiliates operated twenty-four youth camps across the United States, with plans to open several more, including at least one in Canada.¹⁷ Pro-Nazi camps aimed at the indoctrination of youth concerned and frightened Americans, especially neighbors of the youth camps. As a result, they resolved to de-Nazify their communities in any way they could.

Community resistance to the German-American Bund started at the local levels. Individuals who took issue with the activities of Bund members took their complaints directly to local officials, who would either deal with the complaint or pass it to officials at higher levels. In some communities, the resistance to the Bundists grew more from irritation at their rudeness and poor social interactions than ideological conflicts.

¹⁵ Bernstein, 35.

¹⁶ "Nazis Open Camp in Jersey for Boys," *The New York Times* (New York), August 9, 1934. It is interesting to note that a reason for this camp to be smaller than others could be due to health concerns associated with the camp, which were addressed by the health authorities of New Jersey in August 1934. This may have limited the number of families visiting the camp each summer, but more research is needed for a complete analysis of the causes.

¹⁷ One map, published by the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, shows no less than 47 camp locations, situated mostly on the East and West Coasts but also including several in Texas, and one each in Colorado, Florida, and Utah. See "What of Tomorrow, America?" *The Anti-Nazi Bulletin*, May 1938, reprinted by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main/nazis-in-america>. Accessed 1/17/2020.

Interactions between Bundists at Camp Siegfried in Long Island, New York, and the citizens of the neighboring town of Yaphank are an example of this.

2. YAPHANK, NEW YORK

The Friends of New Germany established Camp Siegfried in 1935, arguably the most well-known and best attended of all the Bund's youth camps. The opening of the camp in August drew more than 5,000 members and supporters, as did the opening ceremonies for the following summer.¹⁸ In later years, the German-American Bund leadership billed the camp as a haven for German-American children, as well as a place for weekend and holiday retreats for the entire family. Members of the surrounding community objected to the camp from its beginning. Despite apathy on the part of a few residents, pushback against the Bund was significant.¹⁹ Some residents, apathetic at first, grew to despise their unwelcome neighbors. Local Justice of the Peace, Gustav Neuss, commented to a reporter in June of 1937, "I visualized a group of Germans of my father's type, but they've turned out to be just a bunch of Hitlerites."²⁰

Camp Siegfried was popular with Bund members in the summer, when hundreds of children and their families would come to relax and vacation, taking a special train from New York called the Siegfried Special. Bundists, led by OD battalions and members of the boys' youth division, *Jugendenschaft*, would march through town from the train station to their camp, waving swastika-emblazoned flags, playing Germanic music

¹⁸ "5,000 Members of German American Club at Yaphank Festival Sunday," *The Mid-Island Mail* (Medford Station, Yew York), July 22nd, 1936.; "5,000 Take Oath of Nazi Loyalty," *The New York Times*, August 19, 1935.

¹⁹ Marvin D. Miller, *Wunderlich's Salute: The Interrelationship of the German-American Bund, Camp Siegfried, Yaphank, Long Island, and Young Siegfrieds and their relationship with American and Nazi Institutions*, (Malamud-Rose, Publishers, New York, 1983), 23.

²⁰ "Judge Neuss Registers Complaint Against Nazi Crowds at Yaphank," *The Mid-Island Mail* (Medford Station, NY), June 23, 1937, 2.

and singing loudly. These marches to and from the train station became an eyesore and headache to many of the permanent community members of Yaphank. As a result of residents' complaints, local police instituted strict policies on the weekend marches through town, forcing the marchers to walk in single-file and stop playing music whenever they passed a church.²¹ In a newspaper article from September 1937, William Mueller described a typical march to the station. "Boys and girls form into separate ranks and prepare to greet storm troopers and other Bund members...Some of the scouts march behind the German swastika and the American flag...their arms outstretched in a Hitler salute."²²

In addition to noisy parades throughout the week, Bundists caused offense in other ways during the summer of 1937. Townspeople reported Bundists wearing indecent clothing, from ill-fitting tops to shorts which were clearly too short, on both males and females. The local Justice of the Peace, Gustave Neuss, reported watching a man walk through town, wearing only shorts which were rolled down from the waistband as far as they would go, and rolled up from the bottom as far as they could go. He decried the lack of decency, saying, "they parade through the village in the scantiest of attire...I saw a 250 pound woman walking around there in only shorts and a halter a week ago."²³ Belligerent Bund members also trespassed on private property, pillaged

²¹ "Judge Neuss Registers Complaint Against Nazi Crowds at Yaphank," *The Mid-Island Mail* (Medford Station, NY), June 23, 1937, 2.

²² William Mueller, "Children 'Heil!': *Times* Men Reveal More Nazi Secrets. *Daily Times* (Chicago), September 10, 1937.

²³ "Nazi Camp is Held Stirring a Revolt," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1937.

townspeople's orchards, and trampled flowerbeds without apology.²⁴ On one occasion, a Yaphank resident confronted a Bundist about stealing, and the Bundist refused to leave until he was shown the deed proving the man owned the property.²⁵

Residents reacted strongly to Bund members who wore or carried swastika insignias outside the camp boundaries. A retired U.S. Army Major living in Yaphank seized a pocketknife from one youth camper as he walked through the town. The knife was emblazoned with a swastika, and the unnamed Major angrily told the boy, "That should be an American flag there!"²⁶ The Major refused to give the knife back to the camper or one of the Bund officials at the camp, and camp officials took the case immediately before a judge to arbitrate a ruling. Judge Donald Shaw ruled the Major did not have any right to seize the knife, and returned the knife to the young camper.²⁷

As the number of complaints against the Nazis at Yaphank continued to rise, Justice Neuss grew increasingly incensed about the Nazis in his town, as did many other residents. Neuss received dozens of complaints of trespassing from residents, and several local children came to complain that leaders of the Bund youth division kicked them off the public beach.²⁸ Residents complained about the juxtaposition between the American and swastika flags flying over the camp and paraded by campers marching

²⁴ "Judge Neuss Registers Complaint Against Nazi Crowds at Yaphank," *The Mid-Island Mail* (Medford Station, NY), June 23, 1937; Miller, 33.

²⁵ "Town Board Says Ask U.S. Attorney About Nazi Camp," *The Mid-Island Mail* (Medford, NY), June 30, 1937.

²⁶ "Swastika-marked Knife is Seized," *The Mid-Island Mail* (Medford Station, NY), August 4, 1937.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Town Board Says Ask U.S. Attorney About Nazi Camp," *The Mid-Island Mail* (Medford Station, NY), June 30, 1937, and Miller, 33.

through town. Citizens, including Neuss, complained of clearly anti-American behavior, noting the presence of more Nazi flags than American flags. On one occasion it was reported that the local sheriff raised the height of the American flag at the camp so it flew higher than the swastika.²⁹ Residents brought these claims before Neuss because he served as an authority figure in the town, and Neuss decided to bring these complaints before the town board so the town could do something more than simply complain. Neuss, enraged about the events happening in town, declared before the assembled town board that Yaphank was on the verge of revolt.³⁰ By the end of summer 1937, the town board agreed. They temporarily denied building permits to the camp until camp officials submitted plans of the property showing where proposed structures would be built. The board members also suggested to Neuss that any perceived un-American activities by campers should be reported to the United States Attorney in Brooklyn.

For residents of Yaphank, this was not enough. Frustrated and angry, they contacted the Justice Department, reporting that the Bund held weapons training and night-time rifle practices at the camp. Citizen reports led to the opening of an FBI investigation of all Bund camps, which looked to prove charges of arms shipments, incitement of rebellion, sedition, recruitment of a foreign army, and desecration of the flag, among others.³¹ During the investigations, Neuss and other residents provided the FBI with evidence against the Bund, including motion picture film of parades through

²⁹ Miller, 39.

³⁰ "Judge Neuss Registers Complaint Against Nazi Crowds at Yaphank," *Mid-Island Mail* (Medford Station, NY), June 23, 1937.

³¹ Miller, 34.

town. While some residents were willing to show patience and let the Justice Department do its work, others did not exhibit the same restraint. One evening, Yaphank resident Howard Shannon, who lived on the border with Camp Siegfried, became extremely intoxicated. He began firing his rifle into the air and screamed, "I'm going to kill all the Nazis!"³² Other residents calmed him and no one, Nazi or otherwise, was hurt. This event, however, illustrated divided opinion, even within the town. Some residents wanted more than a superficial Department of Justice investigation. They wanted action.

Leaders listened to the townspeople and acted a few months later. When the liquor license for Camp Siegfried came up for renewal in October 1937, Judge Neuss, along with other town residents, petitioned the Suffolk Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, asking that the license not be renewed. They claimed intoxication by camp members often led to inflammatory remarks, intoxicated minors, and poor behavior by Bundists—behaviors which were causing property values in Yaphank to fall. The ABC board denied the renewal, and estimates put Camp Siegfried's loss at roughly \$500 per day at the height of its season.³³ In modern terms, that equates to nearly \$9,000 per

³² Miller, 39.

³³ "Hotel at Nazi Camp Loses Liquor License," *New York Times*, October 9, 1938. "A New Wine-Beer License Refused Camp Siegfried?" *The Mid-Island Mail* (Medford Station, NY), December 7, 1938.

day.³⁴ In spite of such opposition and the massive revenue loss, the camp remained active until the Bund's demise in 1941.³⁵

The events in Yaphank between Bundists and townspeople illustrated a campaign to limit the influence and popularity of the Bund. Citizens irritated with the rude behavior of their neighbors complained to local elected officials, who in turn brought the cases before a larger local judicial body with slightly more power. The town board made recommendations for limiting the infiltration of the town by Bundists and suggested going up another level to the United States Attorney to report un-American activities if necessary. For Yaphank's inhabitants, this solution was not effective enough. They seized the opportunity to limit the Bund's revenue by removing the camp's liquor license. The attempts by Yaphank's residents were only moderately successful for two reasons. First, the townspeople were not united in their resistance to the Bund. Some wanted more action, others were satisfied with the potential FBI investigation, and still others were not involved at all. Second, the movement against the Bund did not completely limit the Bund's influence in town. Although damaged financially, Camp Siegfried's campers were still active, and the marches from the train station to the camp continued. A few months after Yaphank's citizens attempted to resist the Bund in their community, residents of another town less than sixty miles north were more successful in completely throwing out the Bund, although with markedly different motivations.

³⁴Inflation calculations were made based on the U.S. Department of Labor's CPI inflation calculator, using October 1938 and February 2019.

³⁵ Miller, 277. The camp did change hands for a short time in 1940. It was controlled by an insurgent group for a short time after a default of the mortgage, before an agreement was reached with the national leadership to continue running the camp. See FBI File Set #11 on the German-American Bund, 30.

3. SOUTHBURY, CONNECTICUT

Unlike Yaphank's socially motivated reasons, some communities opposed the Bund more for ideological reasons. Southbury, a small town roughly 60 miles due north of Long Island, boasted approximately 1,200 inhabitants in the 1930s.³⁶ It was by all accounts a small, quiet farming community. This all changed when the German-American Bund, using an outside realtor, picked Southbury as the perfect location for a new youth camp and purchased 178 acres of former logging property. The Bund sought a strategic location for a camp, located close to railroad tracks for easy transportation and in a small enough town it would be away from public scrutiny. Southbury fit the Bund criteria perfectly, with railroad tracks running directly past the proposed camp's location.³⁷ Speaking later of their memories of the events, Southbury residents expressed the belief and fear that the Bund wanted close access to train tracks as part of a larger military strategy for when the Germans would eventually invade the United States, and the Bund would be poised to help the invasion.³⁸ Southbury residents were concerned with the Bundists as a fascist and pro-Nazi "fifth column" in the United States, poised to help Hitler take the country if the Germans decided to invade.

A group of more than 100 Bund members traveled to Southbury from New York and New Jersey on Sunday, November 7, 1937, to begin clearing land for their new camp. They began by opening an access road to the property, but first asked locals for

³⁶ George W. Bragdon, "Southbury Gives Nazi Camp 'Heel,' Not 'Heil,' as Voters Score Move," *Hartford Times*, Hartford, CT, November 24, 1937.

³⁷ "Blue Laws, Zoning Drive Off Nazis," *Republican American* (Waterbury, CT), June 18, 2012.

³⁸ *Home of the Brave: When Southbury Said No to the Nazis*, Directed by Scott Sniffen, Scott Sniffen Pictures, 2013. DVD. Southbury Historical Society, 2014.

directions to the land. Several members went into town to ask the owner of a general store about purchasing bulk supplies for the camp. The store's owner, suspicious, followed the men back to the camp, and then reported his findings to the town's First Selectman, Ed Coer.³⁹ The next day, Coer conferred with the town clerk about the sale, and quickly discovered the land was to be the location of a new youth camp for the German-American Bund, Camp General von Stuben.⁴⁰ Coer immediately began meeting with other town leaders to discuss the Bund and the camp. On November 14, another group of Bund members came again from New York to clear more land. Reporters for the local paper, the *Waterbury Republican*, interviewed the workers and took their pictures. Subsequently, the paper published an article titled, "Nation's Largest Pro-Nazi Camp Started in Southbury by German-American Bund."⁴¹

Southbury's residents reacted angrily to the news that the Bund planned to move in. The town selectmen posted notices calling for a special town meeting just ten days after the first group of Bund members were seen clearing the land.⁴² Two days later, a group identified only as "The Kettleowners" named for a specific area of Southbury, distributed a letter attached to a magazine article to all the local residents.⁴³ The article, "An American Führer Organizes an Army," was a reprint from *The*

³⁹ Melinda Elliot, "Timeline of the German-American Bund in Southbury," Southbury Historical Society, 2018, 1.

⁴⁰ "Nazi Camp Fought in Connecticut," by Paul Gallico, Dec. 8, 1937, *Newspaper Articles*, Box 1, File 7, (81.79), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

⁴¹ Elliot, 3.

⁴² Original Signed Notice of Special Town Meeting, November 17, 1937, Box 2, Folder 17 (2012.023), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

⁴³ Kettleown was the name of the area of Southbury where the proposed Bund camp was being built.

American magazine, warning of the dangers of these American Nazis. The attached letter encouraged the Southbury residents to read the article and decide, “whether or not you want the swastika and goose-step thrust upon you,” and to attend the town meeting if in agreement that the Bund posed a danger to the community.⁴⁴ Fritz Kuhn, hearing rumors that Southbury was not receptive to a Bund camp in the town, sent a letter to Reverend Lindsay, one of the town pastors, who spoke out often against the Bund. In his letter, Kuhn claimed the Bund needed the Southbury camp so they could teach the philosophies of Hitler, loyalty to the American Flag, reverence to the swastika, and instill in their children a mistrust of communism. He attempted to sell the camp to Southbury as a pro-American group, not a distinctly Nazi organization. However, Kuhn also appealed to the Reverend’s “Aryan sensibilities,” which did not go over well with Lindsay. Kuhn closed the letter by writing that the Bund was not a private militia, and the camp would not be a place for military training, but rather a boon to Southbury’s economy.⁴⁵ By this time, the residents of Southbury had formed their own opinion of what the Bund stood for, having seen articles in the local news as well as the information provided by the Kettletowners. Collectively, the residents decided they did not want a Bund camp in their town, especially as parents voiced concern about their children’s exposure to Nazi ideals.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ “Every Citizen and Resident of Southbury, Attention!”: Broadside, signed “The Kettletowners,” and attached to a reprint of “An American Führer Organizes an Army,” from *The American* magazine, November 1937, M.E.N. Lindsay papers (2015.33.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

⁴⁵ *Home of the Brave*.

⁴⁶ *Home of the Brave*.

The town selectmen held a special meeting November 23, 1937, solely to reconsider the zoning laws within Southbury's borders. By rezoning the area where the Bund proposed to build their camp, Southbury could limit which buildings could be constructed and what activities could take place on the land. The Sunday before the town hall meeting, November 21, both churches in town were packed full. Both Reverend Lindsay of South Britain Congressional Church, and Reverend Felix Manley, pastor of Southbury Federated Church, delivered passionate sermons on the dangers of the Nazi menace in the midst of Southbury.⁴⁷ Reverend Lindsay titled his sermon, "Nazism—An Anti-Christian Menace." In it, he denounced the Nazi Movement as an "Anti-Christ", and sought to prove the Bund was an established Nazi group even when they claimed they were an American movement. Lindsay ended by proposing two ways to fight this Anti-Christ in Southbury's midst: fighting for the deportation of alien citizens connected with the Bund, and devising legislation as needed to cope with such movements.

The next day, more than 200 residents showed up to the town meeting. A quick vote established a new zoning committee to oversee all future property building in Southbury. At this meeting, town leaders forbade discussion of the Bund, but residents knew the proposed committee was created to shut down any attempt to build a new camp. While the majority supported new zoning, some dissent persisted. Many Southbury residents were opposed to government interference, believing land was

⁴⁷ "Nazism-An Anti-Christian Menace," Sermon by Rev. M.E.N. Lindsay, November 1937, M.E.N. Lindsay papers (2015.33.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC; Bernstein, 89.

private to use as one wished, up to and including building a pro-Nazi youth camp. They viewed a stronger zoning board as a hard pill to swallow. Others, mainly farmers, knew little of zoning regulations and were worried about how they would be affected. A local attorney helped explain why they would not be adversely impacted.⁴⁸ A few also had financial interests at stake, as the Bund had already approached several local men to help build the camp. Ultimately, those opposed were outvoted, but the vote was fairly close: 142 in favor, 91 opposed.⁴⁹

Immediately after the town board meeting adjourned, the townspeople held a second, impromptu meeting to discuss the threat of Bund in greater detail. This meeting served as an outlet for the townspeople to vent their anger and strengthen determination to remove the Bund from their town. During this meeting, townsfolk offered two resolutions. Mrs. Jennie Hinman, supposedly the oldest taxpaying resident of Southbury, offered a resolution forbidding the flying of flags of foreign nations on American soil or the wearing of uniforms or emblems supporting a foreign power. Residents quickly amended the resolution to allow foreign flags to fly on Armistice Day, when flags of Allied nations flew alongside the Stars and Stripes.⁵⁰ The second resolution, brought forward by WWI veteran George Holmes, condemned the very idea of the Bund camps, declaring Southbury was no place for Nazis. Both resolutions passed with resounding

⁴⁸ Bragdon, "Southbury Gives Nazi Camp 'Heel,' Not 'Heil,' as Voters Score Move," *Hartford Times*, Hartford, CT, November 24, 1937.

⁴⁹ Copy of Minutes of Special Town Meeting, Box 2, Folder 17 (2012.023), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society, Southbury, CT, 1-4.; Bernstein, 90.

⁵⁰ Chris Gardener, "Elderly Woman Helped Rid Southbury of Nazis in 1937," *Republican-American* (Southbury, CT), November 11, 2012.

enthusiasm.⁵¹ The town council also drafted a resolution calling on the American President, the Senate, Representatives in Congress, and the Governor of Connecticut to, “dispel and destroy this [Nazi] menace to our constituted government.” It was signed by all the citizens in attendance.⁵² Reverend Lindsay received supportive letters from across the country after the town hall meeting, praising the action the people of Southbury were taking. Many of the letters came from Germans who had already fled Hitler’s regime, and several of the letters detailed the horrors taking place in Germany under the Nazis. Reverend Lindsay burned dozens of letters and destroyed the names on others in an effort to protect the authors from possible persecution in Germany.⁵³

Word of the town meeting and its results quickly reached the Bund’s leadership. On November 28, the Bund’s national publicity director, Wilhelm Kunze, visited Southbury to plead the Bund’s case. Still hoping to gain approval for the camp, he met with several town leaders including Reverend Lindsay, but they were not swayed.⁵⁴ The Bund decided to build the camp regardless of the town’s resistance. On Sunday, December 5, two Southbury residents neighboring the Bund land saw a group of Bundists clearing brush on the land. Alerted by Southbury citizens, a group of policemen stormed the property and arrested the two men on the charge of, “did with force and arms do manual labor, the day being Sunday, in violation of Statute Chap 330 Sec.

⁵¹ Copy of Southbury Anti-Bund Resolution, 1937, Box 2 Folder 29, *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society, Southbury CT; Elliot, 5; *Home of the Brave*.

⁵² Copy of Southbury Anti-Bund Resolution, November 23, 1937, Box 2, Folder 29, *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

⁵³ *Home of the Brave*. The story of the destroyed letters is told by Rev. Lindsay’s daughter in the documentary and is corroborated by supporting evidence in the Southbury Archives.

⁵⁴ Bernstein, 90.

1705e of 1931.”⁵⁵ This law, one of the “Blue Laws” still on the books in Connecticut, related to doing work on Sunday or otherwise violating the Sabbath.

Dating back to colonial times, this law was rarely, if ever, enforced in the 1930’s. In fact, several Southbury residents recollected stopping work in their yards or garages as the police marched the Bund members to the judge’s house, in case anyone complained the town treated the Bund members unfairly. Two other residents recalled spending most of the day building a barn as the police marched the Bund members past.⁵⁶ Even the judge who charged the Bund members violated the very same laws. The police interrupted him to hear the case while fixing cars in his garage. It is of note, however, that in Reverend Lindsay’s sermon a few weeks before, he told his congregation, “Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the plan as stated [by the Bund members], is to use Sundays to clear the ground for the camp---a splendid Christian gesture.”⁵⁷ Perhaps Reverend Lindsay spurred the residents of Southbury to watch for Bund members working on a Sunday to catch them in the act of violating these Blue Laws.

⁵⁵ Warrants Against Gustav Korn and Richard Koehler, December 5, 1937, Box 1, Folder 21, (87.1), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT. The town judge signed 30 John Doe warrants to give the policemen storming the camp, and it is unclear why only two men ended up being arrested. Melinda Elliot, “A Timeline of the German-American Bund in Southbury”, Southbury Historical Society, 2018, 6.

⁵⁶ *Home of the Brave*.

⁵⁷ “Nazism-An Anti-Christian Menace,” Sermon by Rev. M.E.N. Lindsay, November 1937, M.E.N. Lindsay papers (2015.33.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Ultimately, the two Bund members, Gustav Korn and Richard Koehler, were charged and then released on a \$75-dollar bond.⁵⁸ On December 14, Southbury approved a new zoning code, which rezoned the Bund's property as, "a purely farming and residential district which cannot be used for recreational camping or drilling purposes."⁵⁹ Violations were subject to a fine of \$250. The charges against the two Bund members were eventually dropped, demonstrating that Southbury was willing to find legal loopholes to prevent the Bund from building their camp or being active around the town, even if they knew charges would not hold up in court. Defeated and unable to build their proposed camp, the Bund leadership later sold the land to a former Bund member for a fraction of its worth.⁶⁰

All across the country, newsreels and newspapers praised the residents of Southbury. One resident, Bernice Hubbell, wrote in a letter, "This is just a sleepy little country town...but it seems we know when to wake up."⁶¹ One former resident, interviewed in 2013, proudly stated, "Nobody else did [what we did]."⁶² In this instance, the residents of Southbury were alone in their resistance. They took the initiative, fighting and doing what they could as citizens to keep the Nazis out of their town. The incident in Southbury showed Americans there were ways for communities to stand up to the Bund, and it served as a reminder that citizens were the driving force in keeping

⁵⁸ Warrants Against Gustav Korn and Richard Koehler, December 5, 1937, Box 1, Folder 21, (87.1), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

⁵⁹ "Southbury's Zoning Code Bars Use of Bund Camp for Recreation or Drills," *The Waterbury Republican*, December 14, 1937, reprinted in Bernstein, 93.

⁶⁰ Bernstein, 93.

⁶¹ Bernice Hubbell, Letter to G. Kenyon Moore, April 7, 1938, found in Bernstein, 94.

⁶² *Home of the Brave*.

the Bund out of their communities. The publicity Southbury garnered after it took a stand had national repercussions for the Bund.

4. ACROSS THE COUNTRY

In the aftermath of the zoning law changes, town hall meetings, and court hearings for the arrested Bundists, Americans across the country wrote to town leaders in Southbury. The writers praised the actions of the town, condemned the rising tide of Nazism in America, and requested help combatting the Bund in their own communities. Jennie Hinman, a New York socialite in addition to being Southbury's oldest resident, received letters from nearby communities, such as Brooklyn, New York City, and Hartford, but also from cities as far away as Tampa, Florida and Oakland, California.⁶³ One man, a Great War veteran living in Memphis, wrote, "While in New York this summer...I was astounded at the flood of Nazi newspapers sold on street corners, and alarmed at the number of young people reading them...Let's hope your community is successful in ousting those scoundrels."⁶⁴ A lawyer in Nanuet, New York wrote the town council in March of 1939 requesting a copy of the zoning ordinance which had been enacted. He told the council, "We, in Richland County, N.Y. are confronted with a situation similar to your own...we perhaps could follow in your footsteps if you can furnish us with some direction and precedent."⁶⁵ The town council responded promptly with a copy of the zoning laws.

⁶³ *Post Cards to Jennie Hinman*, n.d., Box 1, Folder 4, (81.79), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

⁶⁴ Letter from L.W. Kibler to Mrs. Jennie Hinman, Dec. 9, 1937, *Correspondence to Jennie Hinman*, Box 1, File 6, (81.79), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

⁶⁵ Letter from Samuel L. Gunn to Southbury Town Council, Mar. 16, 1939, *Gladys Bartlett Clippings and Papers*, Box 1, Folder 25, (87.1), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

As this correspondence between the residents of Southbury and the rest of the country shows, the incidents in Southbury made headlines nationally. Americans across the country saw articles in their local papers, even as far away as the West Coast. Nearly a dozen of the letters open with phrases along the lines of, “In an article of this morning’s daily paper,” or “I have read with indignation, clipping sent [to] me.”⁶⁶ Several referenced or included copies of an article by Paul Gallico, a reporter for the *New York Daily News*, whose article was reprinted by papers from New York to Oakland.⁶⁷ Resistance to the Bund in Southbury gained national attention in a way that no other movement had. A World War I veteran from Tennessee may have put it best when he wrote to Reverend Lindsay, “We must fight to preserve peace. Fight with our laws...fight with our pens and our tongues; our eyes and all our faculties ever watchful to detect and crush the foreign and unamerican scisms.”⁶⁸

Americans did fight with their pens and their tongues. Growing concern with the Bund and the greater Nazi movement in the United States led to an increase in news coverage of the Bund, both written and spoken. “Religion in the News,” a weekly National Broadcasting Corporation radio program hosted by Walter Van Kirk, covered

⁶⁶ Letter from L.W. Kibler to Mrs. Jennie Hinman, Dec. 9, 1937; Letter from Geo. C. Chase to Rev. E.N. Lindsay, Dec. 10, 1937.

⁶⁷ Letter from Henry Hinman to Jennie Hinman, Dec. 11, 1937, *Correspondence to Jennie Hinman*, Box 1, File 6, (81.79), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT; “Nazi Camp Fought in Connecticut,” by Paul Gallico, Dec. 8, 1937.

⁶⁸ Letter from Geo. C. Chase to Rev. E.N. Lindsay, Dec. 10, 1937, *Correspondence to Jennie Hinman*, Box 1, File 6, (81.79), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

the events in Southbury on November 27, 1937. Van Kirk concluded, “It looks as though the Nazis will have tough sledding this winter in Southbury, Connecticut.”⁶⁹

Between January 1, 1936, and January 1, 1937, the *New York Times* published fewer than a dozen articles relating to the German-American Bund. Only two related to Camp Siegfried in Yaphank. Between 1937 and 1938, the number increased to 129, a third of which related directly to Yaphank or Southbury. By January of 1940, the *New York Times* published more than 550 articles relating to the German-American Bund and its activities.⁷⁰ This massive increase in the national news coverage on the Bund was due, in large part, to local resistance movements by individual communities to fight the influence of the Bund. The publicity of events in Yaphank and Southbury were a catalyst for Americans across the country to draw more attention to the Bund in their own communities.

The best friend and worst enemy of the German-American Bund was publicity. Publicity increased sales of pro-Hitler pamphlets, encouraged the support of German businesses allied with the Bund, and increased Bund membership, especially in its early stages. Publicity, however, also damaged the Bund’s wider reputation, especially as communities began to openly counter the Bund’s activities in their towns. Negative

⁶⁹ “Religion in the News” by Walter W. Van Kirk, Vol. VII, No. 4, WEAK and Red Network, Presented by NBC, 1937. Transcript, *Gladys Bartlett Clippings and Papers*, Box 1, Folder 22, (87.1), *The Bund Collection*, Southbury Historical Society Archives, Southbury, CT.

⁷⁰ A search of the *New York Times* online archives for the search “German-American Bund,” “Southbury,” “Yaphank,” “Camp Siegfried,” and “Friends of New Germany,” returned 11 relevant search results from January 1, 1936 to 1937, 129 between 1937 and 1938, 204 between 1938 and 1939, and 357 by January 1, 1940. A search for the same term between January 1, 1936 and January 1, 1943 returns over 1,200 results. See timesmachine.nytimes.com, accessed 11/30/2018.

publicity of the Bund was widespread across the United States, but, due to the larger volume of activities taking place on the East Coast and Midwest, more sources can be found relevant to issues in those areas of the country. Bund activities in western cities such as Los Angeles were written about, but they did not draw the same level of publicity nationally as events in the East.⁷¹

A major figure in spreading negative publicity about the Bund was John C. Metcalfe, a journalist who moved to the United States from Germany with his brother in 1914. While dates on John Metcalfe's naturalization are unavailable, his brother James became an American citizen in 1930. Both Metcalfe brothers worked as Chicago newspaper reporters.⁷² In 1936, they went undercover to infiltrate the Bund and other fascist organizations in New York. They aimed to write about their experiences and expose the activities of the Nazis to the general public.⁷³ Writing around the same time as the events in Southbury and Yaphank, the brothers published their findings in a series of thirteen newspaper exposés in the *Daily Times* in 1937, under titles such as "Nazi Secrets in U.S. Told by Times Men" and "U.S. Children 'Heil' Hitler."⁷⁴ Their articles, combined with pictures showing Bund members, marches, and other activities, drew

⁷¹ For more information on Nazis on the West Coast, see Steven J. Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*, (Bloomsbury, New York, 2017); Laura B. Rosenzweig, *Hollywood's Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles*, (New York University Press, New York, 2017); and Bradley W. Hart, *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in the United States*, (Thomas Dunne Books, New York, 2018).

⁷² James Ruffin, "Memorandum on the Bund, Silver Shirts, and other Anti-Communitic and Anti-Semitic Organizations," dated November 27, 1939, from FBI files on the German-American Bund, File set #3, pg 125, 149.

⁷³ Ibid, 125; "Nazis Secrets in U.S. Told by Times Men," *Daily Times* (Chicago), September 9, 1937;

⁷⁴ "Nazis Secrets in U.S. Told by Times Men," *Daily Times* (Chicago), September 9, 1937; "U.S. Children 'Heil' Hitler," *Daily Times* (Chicago), September 10, 1937.

connections between German Nazis and their counterparts in the United States. The Metcalfe's articles frightened the American public as they continued to be exposed to the activities of the Bund.

John Metcalfe detailed the secret ceremony of his induction and his experiences as a member of the OD. He infiltrated the Bund using the assumed name Hellmut Oberwinder, pretending to be a German citizen instead of an American. As a new recruit, Metcalfe was ordered to express his loyalty to the Nazi flag as well as give a Hitler salute. Hermann Schwartzman, the leader of Metcalfe's Bund unit in Astoria, New York, told the recruits, "You new members are about to express your fealty to this [the swastika] flag, for all that it stands for and to stand side by side fighting with your comrades, come what may."⁷⁵ Metcalfe noted the Nazi flag flew at least six inches higher than the American flag during the ceremony, a clear demonstration that the Bund gave more reverence to the swastika than the Stars and Stripes.⁷⁶ This directly ignored the United States flag code, published in 1924, which stated, "No other flag or pennant should be placed above ... the flag of the United States ... No person shall display the flag of...any other national or international flag equal, above, or in a position of superior prominence or honor to...the flag of the United States at any place within the United States."⁷⁷ Flying the swastika-adorned flag higher than the American flag was a common occurrence at Bund meetings and rallies, as evidenced in Yaphank.

⁷⁵John C. Metcalfe, "I am a U.S. Nazi Storm Trooper," *Daily Times* (Chicago), September 9, 1937.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ United States Code, Title 36, Chapter 10, §175 (c).

After the induction ceremony, Metcalf joined older OD members for drinks and an impromptu meeting, where members sang a number of anti-Jewish songs like “The Devil is the Father of the Jew,” taken from a Nazi primer sold at meetings and camps across the country. One song, republished in the *Daily Times* and translated by Metcalf, included the lines:

And so the Jews first came to have
Hunch backs and crooked noses;
Disgusting creatures in their looks,
Their manners and their poses.
Then to the Devil did they turn
Their wretched horrid faces.
He sneaked them into Germany
To take the Germans places.⁷⁸

Such lyrics, similar to others sung at Bund camps and meetings, further alienated the Bund from the majority of American people. There were Americans with anti-Semitic sentiments who appreciated the Bund’s position, but many more were upset and alarmed by the Bund’s rhetoric.⁷⁹ Such fear and anger were translated and channeled by communities into resistance against the Bund, which only grew as time passed. Americans’ resistance took the form of growing negative publicity in newspaper exposés, film, and complaints directly to the United States government.

As public opinion of the Bund became increasingly negative, reports flooded into the FBI and other governmental offices warning them about the threatening and un-American activities of the Bund. One letter came from one Andrew Bryz, a New York

⁷⁸ “Nazi Primer (\$5 or 75c) Shows Hatred of Jews,” *Daily Times* (Chicago), September 9, 1937.

⁷⁹ Carlson, 30.

resident and naturalized citizen originally from Poland.⁸⁰ In July of 1939, Bryz sent a letter to United States Attorney General Frank Murphy. Bryz first referenced letters he previously sent to the Justice Department concerning the German American Bund, starting in 1935. He wrote the Justice Department that a “German fellow” shared with him information on the Bund, including that the Nazi government in Germany sent money to the United States for propaganda purposes.⁸¹ Bryz claimed the Bund suddenly changed their public attitudes about Nazism because they were “trying to get more power and [sympathy] of the American people,” through what Bryz referred to as “hypocritical work.”⁸² He concluded the only solution was to wipe out the Bund, as it remained a nuisance and danger to the United States government and the American people. He included a newspaper clipping from an unidentified paper about a secret meeting the Bund held in New York, noting that not even the police knew about the meeting until it ended. The FBI, in a directive passed on to the Special Agent in Charge in New York, noted the allegation of the Bund receiving money from the Nazi government and concluded it warranted further investigation. They sent agents to talk more in depth with Bryz at a later date.⁸³

⁸⁰ The 1940 New York Census has Bryz listed as a resident, (although it mistakenly identifies him as Andrew Bryx), and he is noted as living at the same address for at least 5 years. *1940 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012, Ancestry.com accessed October 15, 2018.

⁸¹ Letter from Andrew Bryz to the Hon. Frank Murphy, U.S. Attorney General, dated July 10, 1939, in FBI File Set #2 on the German-American Bund, 97.

⁸² *Ibid*, 97.

⁸³ Directive from J. Edgar Hoover to Special Agent in Charge, New York, New York, dated July 18, 1939, in FBI File Set #2 on the German-American Bund, 92. It is unclear if the agents gained anything from later conversations.

Other citizens' letters to the FBI between 1937 and 1939 echoed Bryz's claims. Many lacked concrete evidence and were simply accusations of subversive or suspicious activities towards neighbors, coworkers, or other community members.⁸⁴ Others, however, backed up allegations with information the FBI could investigate, either photographic evidence or detailed claims with enough specific information for agents to follow-up. One photograph which garnered the attention of the public, and subsequently the government, was that of a Bund camp office. Ohio Senator Robert Taft sent the photograph, originally published in *Click* magazine, to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in May 1939 on behalf of his constituents. The photo reportedly showed Fritz Kuhn's office in an unidentified Bund camp, complete with swastika flag and a framed photograph of Hitler on the wall.⁸⁵ The singular item most problematic for Senator Taft's constituents, however, was the American flag used as a carpet under Kuhn's desk.⁸⁶ The FBI received numerous complaints from politicians and citizens who demanded an investigation into the authenticity of the photographs and immediately arrest the party responsible.

⁸⁴ German-American Bund Sympathizers List, FBI File Set #4 on the German-American Bund, 54-75.

⁸⁵ *Click: The National Picture Monthly*, (Vol 2, No. 5, June 1939), inside cover.

⁸⁶ Memo from Robert A. Taft to J. Edgar Hoover, May 29, 1939, in FBI File Set #2 on the German-American Bund, 26. The FBI files include the photographs and the article in later pages.

5. CONFESSIONS OF A NAZI SPY

Another half-dozen reports made to the FBI dealt with the Bundists' association with airfields. Americans reported suspected Bund members or sympathizers were employed with aircraft corporations such as Lockheed, which were in the process of making military prototype aircraft. Such actions led many Americans to worry about sabotage and espionage.⁸⁷ The FBI fielded dozens of accusations in Los Angeles from various sources that German-Americans, formerly associated with the Bund, were contacting German ships in the San Francisco Harbor, often with the aim of collecting propaganda from Germany.⁸⁸ The FBI files reflected concern that Bund members working in the Naval Yards were in a position to sabotage ships in the harbor.⁸⁹

These reports, which the FBI addressed in late 1939, may have been the result of a movie released in May of the same year. The movie, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, dealt specifically with Nazi subversive activities in the United States. In 1938, the FBI broke up a German spy ring in the United States, which had been under investigation for some time. Known as the Rumrich Nazi Spy Case, it was equal parts success and failure. Three spies were tried and convicted, but four times as many escaped the United States after interrogations by FBI agent Leon Turrou, including the ringleaders.⁹⁰ The FBI was criticized for their handling of the case, but the convictions were nevertheless a

⁸⁷ German-American Bund Sympathizers List, FBI File Set #4 on the German-American Bund, 54-75.

⁸⁸ The initial investigation in 1937 found no evidence to back these claims, but subsequent investigations would see dozens of current and former Bund members arrested for various offences surrounding the distribution of foreign propaganda. See Carson, *Undercover* and Bernstein, *Swastika Nation*.

⁸⁹ German-American Bund Sympathizers List, FBI File Set #4 on the German-American Bund, 56.

⁹⁰ "Rumrich Nazi Spy Case", Famous Cases and Criminals, Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/rumrich-nazi-spy-case>, accessed 11/30/2019.

significant blow to the isolationist movement and demonstrated the dangers of German interference in the United States. Agent Turrou even wrote a series of newspaper articles and later a book about the case.⁹¹ In a sensationalized semi-documentary/spy thriller, director Anatole Litvak seized upon the events of the Rumrich spy case to take a strong stand against American neutrality, the first Hollywood director to do so, and in doing so highlighted the problems of Nazis at home and abroad.

The plot of the film revolved around a Nazi spy ring operating in the United States, broken up by fictional FBI Agent Ed Renard. The movie, the first anti-Nazi Hollywood film, was based on former FBI Agent Leon Turrou's accounts of investigating Nazi spies in the pre-war years.⁹² *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* connects the German-American Bund to the larger international picture of German espionage and subversion. Litvak capitalized on the Bund's reputation and the questions of its loyalty to the United States to portray it as little more than a puppet of the Reich government. Dr. Kassel, the fictional *Bundesfuhrer*, is shown to be an agent of the Reich Propaganda Ministry, going as far as travelling back to Germany to take orders directly from a German official. Dr. Kassel's character is a mix of Fritz Kuhn and an earlier leader of the Friends of New Germany, Dr. Fritz Gissibl. Litvak skillfully weaves elements of truth in with the fictionalized accounts of both the Bund leaders and the German spies. Like Dr. Kassel, the real *Bundesfuhrer*, Fritz Kuhn, was caught in part because of his

⁹¹ Leon G. Turrou, *Nazi Spies in America* (Random House, New York, 1939).

⁹² Edward G. Robinson, Francis Lederer, George Sanders, Paul Lukas, Henry O'Neill, Anatole Litvak, Milton Krims, John Wexley, and Leon G. Turrou. *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.; a First National Picture. 2009. Archive Collection. Warner Home Video.

affairs, which became public knowledge during his trial in 1939 for various changes including embezzlement.⁹³ Kuhn also traveled to Germany, and while the real trip did not go as Dr. Kassel's did, Kuhn did meet with a Reich bureaucrat. However, instead of being given instructions, Kuhn was chastised for damaging the reputation of the Reich in America. Upon his return he said little of the meeting in Berlin, but continued acting as if he had the backing of the Reich.⁹⁴

Exaggerating the Bund's role in the espionage case even further, Litvak used several claims made by American people at the time as subversive acts by characters in the film. Countless reports to the FBI, police, and even Congressmen detailed claims of sabotage at military installations, Navy shipyards, factories, and other government buildings. An FBI document from 1939 notes allegations of OD members working as aviation mechanics for Boeing, which was producing bomber aircraft for the Army at the time.⁹⁵ In the film, one of the Bund members gives blueprints of the landing gear for a bomber to the Germans, and another is working on weapons prototypes like anti-aircraft guns. Several Bund members and spies in the film, including Dr. Kassel, Werner Renz, and Kurt Schneider are either current military members, former military members, or National Guard or Army Reserve members with easy access to military bases. Most of the espionage and sabotage claims were never substantiated in any FBI investigations, but the acts highlighted in the film were common concerns at the time.

⁹³ Bernstein, 169-173.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 163-165.

⁹⁵ Memorandum by Messrs. William and Ruffin, Re: Mr. Ruffin's notes on testimony of witness before the Dies Committee on the Bund, Silver Shirts, and other allegedly Anti-Communist and Anti-Semitic organizations, Enclosure No. 337473, FBI Files set #3, 1939, 107.

Another scene which draws significant comparisons between the Reich and the Bund is the scene in which several members of the American Legion interrupt a Bund meeting. Litvak made use of this series of scenes to portray the Bund as exceptionally un-American. Immediately before this scene, film of Nazi rallies, swastikas, and documentary footage is shown that appears to be taken directly from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*.⁹⁶ This footage fades into the Bund meeting in the shape of a swastika, making a clear connection between the two events. The scene opens with Dr. Kassel speaking at a rally, calling for the elimination of the Constitution and Bill of Rights and devotion to Hitler and the Fatherland. He is interrupted by members of the American Legion, and a brawl quickly ensues. The scene was based on a real event, a brawl on April 20, 1938. Approximately 60 American Legion members interrupted a Bund speech in Manhattan, New York, and the 2,000 Bund members and supporters began a brawl that left several hospitalized.⁹⁷ While several Bund members were acquitted after facing charges of assault, and many blamed the veterans for starting the brawl, popular sympathy remained with the veterans. The use of such scenes helped Litvak blur the line between fiction and reality, adding a layer of complexity for the audience.

Further blurring the lines between fiction and reality, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* portrays members of the German-American Bund's youth divisions and a youth camp,

⁹⁶ Sandeen, Eric J. "Anti-nazi Sentiment in Film: Confessions of a Nazi Spy and the German-american Bund." *American Studies* 20, no. 2 (1979): 70. www.jstor.org/stable/40641461.

⁹⁷ "U.S. Veterans Lose Battle with Germans in Manhattan," *Life Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 18, May 2, 1938, 18-19. Accessed via Google Books, 12/1/2019.

Camp Horst Wessel. The youth camps and the youth division pictured in the film were both major aspects of the Bund's base in the United States, and indeed were a subject of much contention by 1939. The Bund owned and operated approximately 20 youth and summer camps throughout the country, from New York and Wisconsin to Los Angeles. None of the camps were called "Horst Wessel," a reference to a Nazi anthem and martyr, but all were named after significant Germans or symbols, including Camp Hindenburg and Camp Wille und Macht.⁹⁸ The Bund's youth division was modeled after the Hitler Youth of Nazi Germany, and was exactly as depicted in the film. Youth members marched, wore specific uniforms, were expected to adhere to the Bund's core principles (the same as those of the Reich), and otherwise support the aims of the German-American Bund.

In the film, Dr. Kassel asks several members of both the boy's and girl's divisions questions about their loyalty before watching them march and otherwise showing them off to the visiting Gestapo agents, depicted blatantly wearing full SS uniforms. The youth members then play a rendition of the Hitler Youth anthem as they march away. When one of the Nazi officials remarks to a Bund leader that all that remains is to train the youth militarily, the Bund leader replies that the youth are already trained as such. Military-style training was a major concern for Americans worried about the fifth-column activities of the Bund, and more than one investigation into the

⁹⁸ Bernstein, 35.

Bund camps was started because of such accusations.⁹⁹ Real life concerns and accusations against the Bund were only exacerbated by the film.

Confessions of a Nazi Spy is part spy thriller, part gangster film, and part pseudo-documentary, but it is a wholly propagandistic film. Aside from the clear anti-Nazi storyline, the music, dialogue, and film style leave little question as to what viewers should take away. Music choices including *America the Beautiful* and *Yankee Doodle* are a simultaneous call to action and a patriotic anthem, used by Litvak to leave Americans with the thought that in order to keep American beautiful and pure, they must stand up to the Nazi fifth column activities currently taking place. The dialogue and narration expose the Bund members and German agents as gangsters and common criminals, portrayed as smug, cunning, and brutal, and “dishonest, disgruntled, and disloyal.”¹⁰⁰ The Bund members are also represented as dupes, little more than puppets for the Germans, who pay them little and respect them less. The German’s spies are either depicted as fanatical to the German cause, as ethnic Germans, or as being forced into treason by grievous threats of violence. These character traits stand in contrast to the intelligent FBI agents and the American prosecutor, who are eloquent, calm, and meticulous characters. They represent the pinnacle of American defense, catching and charging the dastardly traitors and spies. The United States justice system is thorough, patient, and democratic- a symbol of a civilized society contrasted against the ruthless and lawless Reich.

⁹⁹ Miller, 34.

¹⁰⁰ *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*.

Confessions of a Nazi Spy ends with a message that echoes the sentiments of Southbury residents, Yaphank townsfolk, Andrew Bryz, and the anonymous FBI sources reporting the Bund's suspicious activities. The final monologue is aimed not at the film's jury, but instead directly at the American people watching in theatres. The prosecutor calls on the American people to be watchful for spies in their midst, and to remember how fortunate one is to live in a democratic nation. The end of the film also makes clear that although this seems like a fantastical, absurd, and unreal series of events, it was, in fact, genuine. As the prosecutor duly notes, "there are some who will say that there is nothing to fear, that we are immune, that we are separated by vast oceans from the bacteria of aggressive dictatorships and totalitarian states. But we *know*, and have seen the mirror of history in Europe's last year."¹⁰¹ This quotation, added in a 1940 edition of the film, directly attacks the isolationist stance of many Americans. Coupled with the addition of newspaper headlines detailing the defeat of Norway, Finland, and other countries at the hands of subversive actors, the film's message is clear: Take a stand, or end up subjugated by Nazi Germany.

¹⁰¹ Sandeen, 80.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Resistance to the German-American Bund began as local, organic movements in individual communities like Yaphank, New York and Southbury, Connecticut. In the case of Yaphank, Camp Siegfried operated in the area for only a short time before its activities, namely loud marches through town, belligerent Bundists, and an abundance of swastikas became too much for its neighbors. In the small town of Southbury, Connecticut, residents reacted to the pro-Nazi intrusion almost immediately after being invaded. Citizens, led by elected officials and religious leaders, banded together to pass legislation prohibiting the Bund from operating in their community. In this case, the simple changing of zoning regulations proved enough to prevent the Bund from establishing a foothold. In both cases, the actions of town residents made local, state, and national headlines. Southbury citizens reenacted and recorded the town meetings for a *March of Time* newsreel, played on a national scale in January, 1938, in movie theatres as part of a larger documentary on Nazi activities.¹⁰² The next year, the first Hollywood film to directly attack the Nazi regime also ridiculed and villainized the German-American Bund.

As communities demonstrated an unwillingness to accept the Bund's influence in their communities, negative publicity toward the Bund grew. This culminated in citizens writing the federal government for intervention. Federal investigations gained ground by 1939, and *Bundesfuhrer* Fritz Kuhn was jailed in December of 1939 for forgery and

¹⁰² *Inside Nazi Germany*, March of Time documentary, Vol. 4 Ep. 6, directed by Jack Glenn, released January 21, 1938.

larceny.¹⁰³ Plunged into chaos with the downfall of its leader, the Bund officially disbanded on December 16, 1941, just days after the United States entered World War II. The fall of the Bund began with local communities standing up against their swastika-toting neighbors and culminated in national press denouncing the Bund and its actions, and it was this national publicity that ultimately brought down the German-American Bund and its leaders.

¹⁰³ Bernstein, 262.

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