

From Dreams of the Worker State to Fighting Hitler: The German-Canadian Left from the Depression to the End of World War II

Art Grenke

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Article abstract

German-Canadian labour first organized itself at the national level soon after the outbreak of the Depression, in 1929. Once organized, the movement was integrated into the international communist labour movement, under the direction of the Comintern. After the rise to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany, German-Canadian labour changed its focus from radically altering society to fighting Naziism. The change in focus helped many German-Canadian pro-communists escape internment when war broke out. The war, however, brought an end to their organized activities. These recommenced soon after Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union. Established in 1942, the German Canadian Federation became essentially an advocate of Soviet Russian views and interests. This greatly weakened its appeal in the German Canadian community and contributed to the demise of the German Canadian labour movement soon after the end of World War II.

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From Dreams of the Worker State to Fighting Hitler: The German-Canadian Left from the Depression to the End of World War II

A. Grenke

WHY DID GERMAN¹ CANADIAN LABOUR first organize itself into a national movement in the late 1920s? Why was the movement plagued by discord shortly after it was organized, and why were the communists rather than the socialists eventually able to dominate the movement? With the ascendancy of the communist element, German-Canadian workers were integrated into the international labour movement, then dominated by the Soviet Union. How did this affect the movement? What effect did the rise of National Socialism in Germany have on German-Canadian labour? This paper will seek to examine the influence of these forces on the German-Canadian labour movement from the time it was first organized until its demise in 1949.

Unlike the United States, where the German element played an important role in first organizing labour,² Germans in Canada only gradually became involved in the labour movement. From the mid-1700s to the early 1800s, most German

¹The term "German" is used here to refer to Canadians of German cultural background. Although primarily originating from Germany, Austria or Switzerland, many German Canadians also trace their roots back to areas of Eastern Europe, such as Hungary, Poland, Romania, the former Yugoslavia, and the Ukraine, where smaller German enclaves had established themselves over the centuries.

²See Stanley Nadel, "From the Barricades of Paris to the Sidewalks of New York: German Artisans and the European Roots of American Labor Radicalism," *Labor History*, 30, 1 (1989), 47-75; and Ken Fones-Wolf and Elliot Shore, "The German Press and Working-Class Politics in Gilded-Age Philadelphia," in *The German-American Radical Press: The Shaping of a Left Political Culture, 1850-1940* (Urbana 1992), 63-77. See also Moses Rischin, "Envoi," *Ibid.*, 201-11.

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immigrants who arrived in what today is Canada came from an essentially agricultural society. The massive exodus of Germans to the New World, including many urban workers, who left Germany from the 1850s to the turn of the century, by-passed Canada. The few immigrants from Germany who came, such as the West Prussians who settled in the Ottawa Valley in the 1860s, came from the agricultural areas of eastern Germany. German immigrants to western Canada prior to World War I came primarily from rural areas of Austria-Hungary and Russia. Being largely farmers or the sons of farmers, they didn't see themselves as members of the working class, but rather as farmers. They came to America to own land, and remained in urban centres essentially to earn enough to establish themselves on the land.³

Despite the strong rural orientation of these immigrants, the labour movement gained some support among them. Thus, the Socialist Party of Canada had a German language section which together with the Jewish, Ruthenian and other language sections broke with the party in 1911 to form the Social Democratic Party of Canada.⁴ However, unlike many other language affiliates of the Socialist party, the German language section was small and short-lived. This may be attributed largely to the relatively small exposure of German immigrants to the Socialist tradition in Europe. Finnish and Ukrainian labourers, for example, were fairly broadly exposed to Social Democratic influences already before World War I.⁵ This was less so with Germans who originated from the small, inward looking German enclaves in the Russian or Austro-Hungarian empires, who formed the majority of the German element in western Canada. Furthermore, the lack of land for a growing population, which forced both Finns and Ukrainians to become wage earners and radicalized them, was less of a problem for Germans in Eastern Europe.

There were a number of changes in the 1920s which were to alter the influence of labour among German immigrants. One was a change in the type of immigrant. Of the some 100,000 German immigrants to Canada during the inter-war years, a good proportion came directly from Germany. Furthermore, by the 1920s the number of wage earners had increased substantially in the different smaller German enclaves in Eastern Europe. This meant that the German immigrant during this period was not as strongly oriented towards rural settlement as earlier immigrants. Also, many of those who came in the 1920s, unlike earlier arrivals, had already been exposed to social-democratic or communist influences prior to coming to Canada.

³For evidence of this, see, for example, my, *The German Community in Winnipeg, 1872 to 1919* (New York 1991), 31-4.

⁴Lionel Orlikow, "A Survey of the Reform Movement in Manitoba, 1910 to 1920," unpublished MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1955, 89-91.

⁵For evidence of this, see J. D. Wilson, "Matti Kurikka and A.B. Maekelae: Socialist Thought among Finns in Canada," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 10, 2 (1978), 9-21; John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion: The History of the Ukrainian Pro-Communist Organizations in Canada* (Toronto 1979), 2-4.

Furthermore, by the 1920s most of the good land in western Canada had been taken, making rural settlement more difficult. Also, when the Depression broke out in 1929, its severity had a disastrous effect on both the urban and the rural economies. This meant that escape into the hinterland once one lost one's job was less of an alternative for the urban worker than it had previously been. Organizing themselves to protect their interests was, therefore, the only alternative for German immigrant workers forced to deal with the conditions into which the Depression had placed them. These conditions were to influence not only the types of organizations that German immigrants established but also the life span of these organizations and the membership they attracted.

Ushered in by the Wall Street stock market crash in 1929, the Depression led to tens of thousands of workers losing their jobs. The urban working class in general, and immigrant workers in particular, were especially severely affected. Not only did immigrant workers have to cope with low wages and irregular work that made it difficult to save enough to help themselves over a prolonged period of unemployment, but they were also burdened with the necessity of paying off the costs of their travel from Europe and handicapped by the difficulties of establishing themselves in a new country with different languages and cultures. Their situation was made still worse by the fact that the few jobs that were available tended to be offered to Canadians, especially veterans.⁶ Furthermore, immigrants could not afford to become public charges. Sections 40 and 41 of the Immigration Act made it obligatory for all public and municipal officers to report immigrants who had become dependent on public relief. The deportation of immigrants for this reason rose from 430 in 1928 to 2,106 in 1930, and peaked in 1933 with 4,916 deportations.⁷

To deal with this situation, German-Canadian labour first organized itself in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with the formation of the German Workers Education Society. The initiative for forming the Society came from Jacob Penner, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Canada.⁸ Also in 1929, the Association of

⁶"Generalversammlung der Sektion Edmonton," *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* (hereafter DAZ) (Januar 1931), 2.

⁷*Canada Yearbook 1940*, 161. No data on the German share of these deportations is available.

⁸Canadian Security Intelligence Service (hereafter CSIS) — Access to Information Act Request, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (hereafter RCMP) Report, "The German-Canadian Federation," 1 August 1944, 12-3. Jacob Penner had first come into contact with Marxist and socialist ideology while a student in Russia. It was in part to keep their son out of the hands of Czarist officials that his parents decided to emigrate to Canada. Arriving here in 1904, Penner worked at first as a teacher in rural Manitoba, but was soon back in Winnipeg, where he picked up contact with other socialists, whom he did not find in the Mennonite community. By 1906, Penner belonged to a group of young orthodox Marxists in Winnipeg. In 1906, he was involved in founding a Winnipeg local of the Socialist Party of Canada. After the Socialist Party split in 1908, Penner became involved in founding the Social

German-Speaking Workers was formed in Edmonton. Unlike the Winnipeg Society, which had a strong ideological base, the Edmonton Association stressed practical concerns. It offered legal advice to workers who had been incarcerated while seeking work or while taking part in demonstrations protesting against poor wages and working conditions. It offered to help them find work and gain memberships in unions that would aid them in protecting their jobs. As far as possible, it provided them with sickness insurance and also helped them cope with other day-to-day economic problems.⁹

Soon after the formation of labour organizations in Winnipeg and Edmonton, German-Canadian labour also organized itself in Regina, Calgary, Vancouver and Toronto. In 1930, the executives of these organizations met to establish the Zentralverband deutschsprechender Arbeiter (Central Association of German-Speaking Workers) to co-ordinate the activities of the locals. Differences soon arose, however, regarding the purpose of the organizations. To reconcile the differences, the Winnipeg local sent Jacob Penner to Edmonton to meet with the executive of the Edmonton branch of the Association of German-Speaking Workers.¹⁰ His efforts achieved little success, however, mainly because each group sought to control the Central Association as well as its main mouthpiece, the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*. In part, the problem stemmed from regional rivalry. More important, however, were the ideological differences between the Winnipeg and Edmonton locals. The Edmonton local, led by Walter Widmer, was Social Democratic in orientation, with an emphasis on serving the everyday needs of workers and the unemployed, and it sought to direct German-Canadian labour in that direction. The Winnipeg branch, on the other hand, sought to integrate

Democratic Party of Canada. He remained a member of the party until the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, which convinced him that the Russian people would lead the way to true socialism. In 1921, Penner participated in the founding meeting of the Communist Party of Canada. He became a member of its Central Committee and western organizer for the party. That same year, he ran as a candidate in North Winnipeg during the federal election, representing the newly founded Workers' Party. A leading communist in Winnipeg and western Canada, he never deviated from the ideological line emanating from Moscow. In 1933, the Workers Unity League nominated Penner as its candidate for alderman in Ward Three in North Winnipeg. Elected, he held that seat for many years, representing working-class interests. The devotion he aroused among his supporters was evident in particular during World War II. Interned in June 1940, he was released from internment in August 1942. Three months later, he was elected as alderman, serving his constituency until 1960, when he retired. See "Ald. Jacob Penner's 80th Birthday," *The Marxist Review*, (November-December, 1960), 38; A.B. McKillop, "Citizen and socialist: the ethos of political Winnipeg, 1919-1935," unpublished MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1970, 83-5, 98, 104-20, 183-5; "Jacob Penner's Recollections," *Social History*, 7, 14 (1974), 366-78. Also, discussions with Norman Penner, 15 December 1993.

⁹*Ibid.*, 12. Also, "Ausbau des Verbandes im Osten," *DAZ* (Januar 1931), 4.

¹⁰CSIS, RCMP Report, "The German-Canadian Federation," 1 August 1944, 12.

German-Canadian labour into the larger communist movement in Canada and the world.¹¹

Pressure to radicalize the German-Canadian labour movement came in part from the communist element within the movement itself, in particular from Jacob Penner and Conrad Cesinger, editor of the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*. Similar pressure came from outside the community. RCMP reports on the conflict in the German-Canadian labour organization point in particular to the influence of John Naviziwsky, a leading member of the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association. Naviziwsky had been in the Soviet Union in 1930 and since then had been very active in the Workers Farmers Unity League. RCMP reports suggest that the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association hoped that a larger mutual aid organization, that included a number of ethnic groups, might be a possible refuge and alias for their activities, should they ever be prosecuted or suppressed. For this purpose, the Ukrainian association entered into discussions with the German organization to create a labour organization that would weld together all foreign-born communists and sympathizers who were still isolated from communist control.¹²

In its efforts to radicalize the German-Canadian labour movement, the Winnipeg local had an important advantage: it controlled the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*, which played an important role not only in its own but also in other locals. The Edmonton local sought to counteract this influence by publishing its own *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*. This did little, however, to lessen the influence of the Winnipeg *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* and, after several issues, the attempt made by the Edmonton local to constitute itself the prime mouthpiece of the Association of German-Speaking Workers failed.

The conflict came to a head in November 1930, when Widmer used his influence in the Zentralverband to expel the Winnipeg local from the Association of German-Speaking Workers because of its pro-communist activities and sympathies.¹³ Widmer's extreme measure, however, failed to resolve the conflict with the Winnipeg organization. Having condemned the Winnipeg group for going to extremes, he had himself then acted in an authoritarian fashion to eliminate the radical elements within the Winnipeg local, the largest of all the locals in the Association of German-Speaking Workers, and force it into the Social Democratic mould. In reply, the Winnipeg organization portrayed Widmer as the extremist while it presented itself as moderate, even though it took the more radical position in its overall approach to labour issues. It also criticized Widmer for trying to make

¹¹CSIS, RCMP Intelligence Branch, Toronto, 1 November 1943, "Co-Ordinating Committee for Eastern Canada, German-Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario."

¹²CSIS, Memo by C. Starnes to The Officer Commanding, RCMP, 28 March 1931. Also, CSIS, RCMP Manitoba District, Winnipeg, Man., 13 March 1931, "Report re. *German Workers' News*" (*Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*).

¹³*Ibid.*; DAZ, Edmonton (Januar 1931), 2.

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the German-Canadian labour movement a German-language affiliate of the Canadian Labour Party, which it criticized for being interested in Germans only at election time. By contrast, the Winnipeg local praised the Communist Party for fighting for the cause of workers all over the world and for building, in the Soviet Union, a society that worked in the interest of the workers instead of the capitalists.¹⁴

Central to the dispute between the Edmonton and Winnipeg organizations was the question of whether German-Canadian labour should take a gradualist approach to social change and concern itself essentially with pragmatic matters, or should align itself with the Communist Party and its struggle for the radical alteration of society. The Winnipeg local won, largely because that local's control of the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* put it in a better position to influence the opinions of members in the movement, but also because, in a period when capitalism was in crisis, the Winnipeg local seemed more in tune with the times. Members of the Association of German-Speaking Workers were for the most part recent immigrants.¹⁵ They looked to Europe for guidance, where they had often been involved in the Social Democratic movement. Few of them, however, could draw inspiration from the problems that Social Democrats were having in dealing with the Depression. Workers in the Soviet Union, by contrast, were seen to be creating a new society under the direction of the Communist Party. It was therefore not unnatural that unemployed German-Canadian workers should look to the Communist Party and the Soviet Union as offering them a way out of their own difficulties.

As a result, the Edmonton local found little support in the broader German-Canadian labour movement for its action against the Winnipeg local. It also created dissent within the Edmonton local itself, which resulted in its own demise shortly after its expulsion of the Winnipeg organization. The Winnipeg local, on the other hand, no longer restrained by Edmonton, became even more pro-communist in orientation.¹⁶ It took the lead in re-organizing the German-Canadian labour movement as soon as it gained ascendancy. Even the new name of the organization, German Workers and Farmers Association, reflected the communist influence.

¹⁴“Ein Jahr, Verband deutschsprechender Arbeiter,” *DAZ* (November-Dezember), 1-2.

¹⁵Interview with Horst Doehler, 26 October 1988. Horst Doehler became active in the German radical labour movement shortly after his arrival from Germany in 1930. Although not a member of any movement in Germany, he was made aware of the mistreatment of workers in his homeland during the 1920s. He first came into contact with German-Canadian labour organizations when he received a copy of the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*. Soon after, he joined the movement. A linotypist by trade, he started to work in the printing shop of the newspaper. He worked not only as a printer, but also helped in the lay-out and the editorial work for the *Deutsch-Kanadische Volkszeitung*, when it was founded in 1937. He participated in the founding of both the German-Canadian League and the German-Canadian Federation, serving as editor of the latter organization's newspaper, the *Volksstimme*.

¹⁶CSIS, RCMP Manitoba District, Winnipeg, 13 March 1931, “Report re German Workers' News” (*Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*).

Although it was recognized that poorer Canadian farmers were also suffering from the Depression, members of the German working class had tended to see farmers as petty bourgeois. Lenin, however, had succeeded in bringing about the revolution in Russia by uniting both urban workers and rural peasantry under the Bolshevik banner. By uniting both farmers and workers in their organization, German-Canadian labour was acknowledging the relevance of the Bolshevik precedent: if the labour movement was ever to bring a Communist worker-controlled government to power in Canada, it would have to seek support among farmers as well as workers.

The statutes of the German Workers and Farmers Association spelled out the overall goals of the organization. They set up guidelines on how new members were to be obtained and under what conditions existing members were to be expelled. Moreover, they established the operative relationships between different levels of the organization. The German Workers and Farmers Association was divided into a western Canadian district and an eastern Canadian district. Meeting annually, each district would work out strategies to meet group objectives at the district level. National meetings, which ultimately decided the Association's overall policy, were to be held every two years. The statutes concluded, however, that the German Workers and Farmers Association was always to remain a part of the progressive workers movement. It would never come under the control of individuals who were negatively disposed towards the interests of the proletariat. This condition could never be altered, either at a general meeting of the German Workers and Farmers Association, or through the action of its executive.¹⁷ This served essentially to assure communist control of the organization.

A main goal of the German Workers and Farmers Association was to educate German Canadians as to their true interests. The Association sought to explain to them, chiefly through the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*, that the Depression was capitalism's death agony, with the workers being forced to bear the brunt of suffering, caused by the system's painful demise. The established order was using arrests and the jailing of members in the labour movement in a vain attempt to sustain a moribund structure.¹⁸ Criticism of the Soviet Union was used by those in power to distract people from their misery, which was caused by economic exploitation. At the same time, capitalist countries were arming, both to keep the capitalist system in operation (for the system would only survive through militarism) and also to threaten the Soviet Union, the true fatherland of the working class. It was up to the working-class movement in capitalist countries to defend the Soviet Union by supporting the Friends of the Soviet Union; by laying bare the class nature

¹⁷"Statuten des Deutschen Arbeiter und Farmer Verbandes," *DAZ* (1 September 1932), 4-6.

¹⁸"Eine Lehre aus dem Hungermarsch," *DAZ* (15 März 1932), 1.

of the attacks made upon the Soviet Union; and by keeping the attention of workers on the class struggle.¹⁹

The Association declared itself a member of the united front of the international proletariat. In practical terms, this involved implementing policies and programs as they had been spelled out by the Communist International. This meant essentially carrying out policies as they had been formulated by Stalin and thereafter imposed upon the Communist International during the Sixth Congress, in 1928, and upon communist parties in Europe and North America.²⁰ As viewed by Stalin, capitalist countries were increasingly approaching the proletarian revolution. In order to forward this process, communists had to intensify their efforts to win the working class away from socialist groupings and organize them in truly revolutionary organizations dominated by the communists. One way of doing this was by organizing workers in trade unions dominated by the communists. Another was to intensify communist propaganda against the established order and, in particular, intensify their attack upon the socialists who were seen to be compromising with the capitalist system and thereby perpetuating the life of this moribund structure.

In order to further these objectives, the German Workers and Farmers Association sought to encourage Germans to join communist-dominated trade unions. It criticized the craft unions for being interested only in protecting the jobs of their existing members by excluding skilled foreign tradesmen from their unions. Strikes of these organizations were seen primarily as serving the narrow selfish interests of these groups rather than the larger interests of the working-class movement as a whole. The trade unions with which the German Workers and Farmers Association felt most comfortable were what it called the communist labour unions, in particular the Workers' Unity League (WUL).²¹ Established after the Communist Party's move to the left, following the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928, the WUL made a special effort to recruit foreign workers in both the skilled and unskilled trades. In January 1930, the WUL replaced the rather ineffectual Trade Union Educational League as the "Canadian Section of the Red International of Labour Unions," and within a year it had claimed a membership of twelve

¹⁹See, for example, "Resolution des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (18 Juli 1932), 1; "Nur in Russland statt Arbeitslosigkeit, Arbeitermangel," *DAZ* (Maerz 1931), 1; "Rueckblick und Aussicht," *DAZ* (November 1931), 4; "Unsere beste Verteidigungswaffe ist der Angriff," *DAZ* (Januar 1931), 1; "Warnung vor Sowjet-Spitzeln," *DAZ* (15 Februar 1932), 3; "Genosse Kuusinen zum internationalen Solidaeritaetstag," *DAZ* (1 Juni 1932), 1; and "Delegation nach der Sowjetunion," *DAZ* (1 Maerz 1932), 8.

²⁰For a discussion of Soviet influence on Comintern, see Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform*, vol. 1. (New York 1975), 103-66.

²¹CSIS, RCMP Manitoba District, 22 July 1932, "Report re D.A.Z. (*Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*).

thousand.²² The *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*, representing the views of the German Workers and Farmers Association, argued that more than any other trade union the WUL represented worker interests and fought for both the employed and the unemployed, and that it should therefore be supported by all German workers.²³ German farmers in turn were encouraged to join the Farmers Unity League (FUL), which had been founded at the same time as the WUL.²⁴ Working together, urban labourers and rural farmers would turn any attack upon them and their interests into a victory against the bourgeoisie.²⁵

Another communist-led organization behind which the German Workers and Farmers Association threw its support was the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL), formed by the Communist Party of Canada in 1925. The CLDL had since the onset of the Depression sought to represent the interests of labourers who had been incarcerated for participating in strikes. It had also sought to defend foreign workers who were threatened with deportation after losing their jobs. German-Canadian workers were advised to support the CLDL because it could be expected to help them stand up for their rights when dealing either with their employers or the police (who were regarded as agents of the possessing class), and would also throw its support behind German workers threatened with deportation.²⁶

The German Workers and Farmers Association sought to involve German workers in labour holidays, in particular the annual May Day festivities. It supported organizations of the unemployed sponsored by the Communist Party, such as the National Unemployed Workers' Association (NUWA) or the Relief Camp Workers' Union, the activities of which culminated in 1935 in the On-to-Ottawa-Trek that marked the "climax of the struggle by the Communists on behalf of the unemployed."²⁷ The Association also sought to involve Germans in local labour protests and to encourage them to throw their moral and material support behind

²²Donald Avery, "Ethnic Loyalties and the Proletarian Revolution: A Case Study of Communist Political Activity in Winnipeg, 1923-1936," *Ethnicity: Power and Politics in Canada* (Toronto 1981), 71-2.

²³"Ein Jahr Verband deutschsprechender Arbeiter," *DAZ* (November-Dezember 1930), 1; "Der Deutsche Arbeiter und Farmer Verband und die Worker Unity League," *DAZ* (15 Maerz 1934), 4.

²⁴Resolution des D.A. u. F.V., " *DAZ*, (18 Juli 1932), 6; "Vereinigt Euch," *DAZ* (November 1931), 4; "Gruendung einer Sektion in Pindale, Alta.," *DAZ* (15 Dezember 1932), 2. See also Avery, "Ethnic Loyalties," 71-2; and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto 1975), 83.

²⁵"Unsere beste Verteidigungswaffe ist der Angriff," *DAZ* (Januar 1932), 1.

²⁶Resolution des D.A. u. F.V., " *DAZ* (18 Juli 1932), 6; "Genossen," *DAZ* (15 Februar 1932), 1; "C.L.D.L. Berichte," *DAZ* (1 Juni 1932), 1; and "Kitchener, Ont.," *DAZ* (15 September 1932), 3. Also Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988), 119.

²⁷Resolution des D.A. u. F.V., " *DAZ* (18 Juli 1932), 6. Also, Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 109.

strikers, such as those at Estevan in 1931, who were described as forwarding the goals not only of their unions but of the entire labour movement.²⁸ In addition, the Association threw its support behind labour organizations such as the Workers International Relief (WIR), which supported strikers both by financial aid and other means.²⁹

The German Canadian workers movement saw the Conservatives and Liberals as bourgeois political parties, whose work in the German-Canadian community served only the interests of the capitalists.³⁰ At the same time, the German Workers and Farmers Association did not consider it to be in the interest of German Canadians to support the Independent Labour Party, or the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) when it was formed; it argued that these organizations, like the Social Democrats in Germany, were essentially the tools of the capitalists, and would do little to change the economic structure if they came to power. One reason for the ineffectiveness of the CCF was considered to be its belief that it could introduce a worker state through the electoral process, when in fact the capitalists would never give up power without an armed struggle.³¹ In Canada the "spokesmen of capitalism" ranged from the Conservative Prime Minister Bennett down to the CCF.³² Of course, these views echoed those of the Comintern which, following the Sixth Congress, had branded the Social Democrats as the stooges of the capitalists.³³

²⁸"Gedenkt der Martyrer von Estevan," *DAZ* (15 Oktober 1934), 2. Also, National Archives of Canada (hereafter NA), Michael Bader Papers, MG 31, H 122, "The Memoirs of Michael Bader," part II, 12-3; and Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 106. Michael Bader had already been involved in the labour movement when he came to Canada from a small German settlement in Yugoslavia, in 1929. In Canada, he became involved in the labour movement shortly after the outbreak of the Depression, when he was asked to address a worker rally. Soon thereafter, he made the decision to join the Communist Party. He also became involved in organizing the Regina local of the German Workers and Farmers Association. During the first convention of the association, in Winnipeg, he was elected national organizer. In this capacity, he travelled to eastern Canada, going to centres such as Toronto, Kitchener, Guelph, Windsor, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls, where he either visited branches of the organization to encourage them in their work or helped organize branches of the organization.

²⁹"W.I.R.," *DAZ* (18 Juli 1932), 7.

³⁰"Rueckblick und Aussicht," *DAZ* (November 1931), 2.

³¹"Nachrichten aus Regina," *DAZ* (3 Januar 1935), 4.

³²CSIS, RCMP Manitoba District, 27 February 1933, "Report re. D.A.Z. — (*Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*) *German Workers News*"; "Die Deutsche Republik in Gefahr," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1932), 2; "Zur Discussion am Programm der C.C.F.," *DAZ* (1 September 1933), 3; "Die C.C.F. unterstuetzt die Kriegspolitik der kanadischen Kapitalisten," *DAZ* (15 Februar 1934), 2.

³³For a discussion of Comintern's influence on western European and American communist parties following the Sixth Congress, see Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (New York 1960), 283-90. Also, Avakumovic, *Communist Party*, 54-5.

The political party with which the German Workers and Farmers Association felt most comfortable was the Communist Party. It was seen to be fighting for the interests, not of a particular group of workers only, but of all workers. It was on the cutting edge of the labour movement all over the world and, in the Soviet Union, was creating a new society. The transformation in the Soviet Union, with its full employment, was often compared favourably with the situation in which workers found themselves in capitalist countries. The German Workers and Farmers Association lauded the work of Canadian Communist Party leaders and condemned their incarceration in 1931 and 1932. It also condemned the expulsion from Canada of foreign-born members of the Communist Party, including a leading member of its own organization, Conrad Cesinger, who served as editor of the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* and secretary of the Association.³⁴ If the Canadian government had hoped to cripple the radical labour movement by this action, it was mistaken. In the case of the German Workers and Farmers Association, it was stimulated to greater activity, calling on workers to stand together and be more assiduous in forwarding the cause, since the government's action was a sign not of strength but of weakness.³⁵

Although cynical about the bourgeois democratic process, which it saw as being essentially a means of maintaining the control of the possessing class over the workers,³⁶ the German Workers and Farmers Association supported Communist Party representatives when they ran for political office. For example, it supported Jacob Penner, a founder of the German Workers and Farmers Association, when he ran for alderman in Winnipeg.³⁷ Action such as this was not,

³⁴Conrad Cesinger came to Canada in 1927. Here he worked as a farm labourer and also as a lumberman. He became a leading member in the German labour movement, serving as editor of the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*. Together with Jacob Penner, he was one of the leading advocates for the leftward swing of the German workers movement in 1929. Cesinger denied being a member of the Communist Party of Canada. However, the government had in its possession correspondence addressed to Cesinger in his capacity as Secretary of the National Party Fraction Bureau. He was expelled because the government felt that it was impossible for anyone to be a member of the National Party Fraction Bureau without being a member of the Communist Party of Canada. See NA, Records of the Department of Immigration, RG 76, vol. 738, file 513057, R.N. Munro, Assistant Commissioner, Dept. of Immigration, Ottawa, to A.L. Joliffe, Commissioner of Immigration, Ottawa, 11 May 1932. See also, "Vernichtet die Attacke der Polizei," *DAZ* (16 Mai 1932), 3; "Die Deportation der revolutionaeren Arbeiter aus Canada," *DAZ* (Mai-Juni 1931), 1.

³⁵See, for example, "Wacht auf!," *DAZ* (16 Mai 1932), 2; "Zwei Jahre Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1932), 1; "Die Deportation revolutionaerer Arbeiter aus Canada," *DAZ* (Mai-Juni 1931), 1. The effect seems to have been the same on other radical groups; see John Herd Thompson *et al.*, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto 1985), 226-9.

³⁶"Demokratie oder Diktatur," *DAZ* (1 Maerz 1932), 2.

³⁷"Jakob Penner United Front Kandidat mit 4000 Arbeiterstimmen fuer Wpg'er Stadtrat gewaehlt," *DAZ* (1 Dezember 1933), 1.

however, perceived as a means whereby the workers could attain power, since democracy was considered to be impossible under the capitalist system. The political process was used merely as a means of revealing the suppressive nature of the existing political and social structures.³⁸

The Communist Party appealed to the German Workers and Farmers Association for several reasons. All main-line Canadian political parties, including the Social Democratic parties, were considered to be dominated by the Anglo-Canadian sponsor group. Social Democratic parties were also criticized for being closely tied to the craft unions, which pursued their own narrow interests rather than the broader ones of the working-class movement as a whole. The Communist Party, on the other hand, was perceived as being, of all Canadian political parties, the one most open to foreigners. Furthermore, it was seen as being more than a Canadian political party. It represented the progressive element in the labour movement all over the world. In Canada, progressive labour (represented by such organizations as the German Workers and Farmers Association, the Ukrainian Workers and Farmers Organization, the Russian Maxim Gorky Club and the Finnish Worker Organization) was working in the interest of workers and farmers towards the ultimate goal of freeing all labourers from the yoke of capitalism.³⁹ The Communist Party, with its roots deep in Marxist ideology, was the political expression of a goal, an ideal, a dream, with which workers originating from Central Europe, raised in the Marxist tradition, were familiar. In a sense, the Communist Party and members of the German Workers and Farmers Association spoke a common language and used a common terminology that made the ethnic group feel comfortable with the larger organization.⁴⁰

Although the German Workers and Farmers Association was not formally integrated into the Communist Party of Canada, it adhered to its ideology and accepted its guidance on tactics. This was because its leadership consisted largely of communists and communist sympathisers, whose control of the organization essentially assured that the German labour organization adhered to communist party directives.⁴¹ The German Workers and Farmers Association saw itself as the only organization in the German community representing worker interests, just as the Communist Party was the only one representing the interests of all Canadian workers, no matter what their ethnic background. The goal of both organizations was to make workers aware of their true interests and involve them in the struggle

³⁸"Resolution des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (18 Juli 1932), 6. In this way they were no different from other Communist groups, see Thompson, *Decades*, 229-30.

³⁹"Resolution des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (18 Juli 1932), 6.

⁴⁰Avery also comments on this. See Avery, "Ethnic Loyalties," 68.

⁴¹For a discussion of the Party's policy regarding language branches, see Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 268-83. Methods used to control German language groups were similar to those used to control other language affiliates of the Communist Party, as, for example, the Ukrainian. See Kolasky, *Shattered Illusion*, 146-7.

for the worker state. The Association saw all German Canadians, with few exceptions, as belonging to the working class. They were convinced, therefore, that any German Canadians who were not allied with their working-class party had to have been blinded to their true interests by capitalist propaganda. It regarded German language papers such as the *Courier* or *Der Nordwesten* as merely German language mouth-pieces of the main Liberal and Conservative bourgeois parties that were seeking to forward their interests among the German minority. The same parties also pursued their own ends through the German clubs. Liberals and Conservatives, and their supporters in the German-Canadian community, were exploiting German ethnic feelings to advance the interests of the existing capitalist power structure.⁴² The goal of the German Workers and Farmers Association, on the other hand, was to make it clear to German Canadians that their ethnic interests corresponded to their class interests, and that only by eradicating the class problems of capitalism could the problems of the German ethnic minority in Canadian society be eventually resolved.⁴³

The German Workers and Farmers Association stressed that only 'by an unambiguous stand on class issues would it be possible to demonstrate to German Canadians that it alone represented their true interests, rather than the organizations that had traditionally purported to represent them. Rather than a mass organization, it saw itself as an organization that, imbued with the correct ideology, would win German Canadians for the working-class movement, more specifically for the communist working-class movement. In this, however, it faced a number of difficulties. Although many German Canadians were unemployed, the majority were not recently-arrived immigrants and did not, therefore, find themselves in the dire economic position of many of the Association's members. Also, the Association's strong advocacy of the Soviet Union did little to endear it to many of the *Volksdeutsche* who originated from Russia, in particular those who had fled the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik seizure of power. Again, the sometimes anti-religious stance of the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*,⁴⁴ the organ of the Workers Association, could not but offend many German Canadians who for the most part had strong ties to their churches. These factors made it certain that the German Workers and Farmers Association would not become a popular movement but would remain merely an association of labour radicals.

Besides involving its members in the labour struggle, the German Workers and Farmers Association also sought to help its members meet their everyday needs. To meet the health insurance needs of its members, for example, the German Workers and Farmers Association, when first organized, held discussions with the

⁴²"Was will der Deutsche Bund?," *DAZ* (15 April 1932), 1 and 4.

⁴³CSIS, RCMP, file no. 175/6897, 27 July 1934, "German Workers Assoc.;" "Die Aufgaben der D.A.Z.," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1932), 3.

⁴⁴For examples of this, see "Die Aufgaben der D.A.Z.," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1932), 3. Also, "Kapitalisten, Hitleristen und Pfarrer in einer Front," *DAZ* (15 Mai 1934), 4.

Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association, with the object of becoming a German section of the latter's Sickness Benefit Society.⁴⁵ When these plans failed, the German Workers and Farmers Association sought to join the German-Canadian Sickness Benefit Association. It was refused membership, however, because of its radical political orientation.⁴⁶ At its convention in Kitchener in 1933, therefore, the German Workers and Farmers Association decided to join the Independent Mutual Benefit Federation (IMBF) to obtain health insurance for its members.⁴⁷ The Federation had been established in the fall of 1927, but was chartered by the Department of Insurance in the Province of Ontario only in January 1928, under the name of the Canadian Hungarian Mutual Benefit Society. It was renamed in 1934 when it expanded its membership to include other language groups, such as Slovaks, Germans, and later, Poles, Carpatho-Russians and others. The IMBF, as such, served essentially as a mutual benefit society for pro-communist groups in Canada that were not in a position to support such societies on their own. It provided a small weekly stipend to members if they became ill and also offered death benefits, which helped members or their families to cover funeral expenses.⁴⁸

Each local of the German Workers and Farmers Association also offered a meeting place for club members and their families. As far as possible, the worker clubs had theatre and song groups, as well as bands. These permitted members both to develop their own talents and to offer entertainment to the German community at large. Almost every local had its library of Marxist literature, and some had schools that offered German language instruction to the children of both members and non-members. There were, of course, differences in the ability of the different locals to provide these services. Larger locals might be like the Winnipeg local which, with a membership in the hundreds, was able to run its own club-house, a mandolin orchestra, a school offering German language instruction on Saturday mornings, a theatre group, and a library holding Marxist literature that had been received free from Switzerland and Germany.⁴⁹ Smaller groups tended to be much more dependent on help from the outside. The Regina local, for example, did not have its own club-house, but met in the hall of the local Ukrainian Labour Farmer

⁴⁵"Ein Jahr Verband deutschsprechender Arbeiter," *DAZ* (November-Dezember 1930), 1.

⁴⁶"Soll es so bleiben?," *DAZ* (Januar 1932), 2; "Aus dem Deutsch-Kanadischen Krankenunterstützungsverein," *DAZ* (Maerz 1932), 8.

⁴⁷CSIS, RCMP Headquarters, file 175/897, 11 June 1941, "Re: German Canadian People's Society, Toronto, Ont."

⁴⁸"I.M.B.F. 50th Anniversary, 1928-1978," *Uttoro* (October 1978), 3. Also, N.F. Dreisziger, *et al.*, *Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto 1982), 158-9; interview, 6 July 1993, with André Durovecz, a leading member of the IMBF and its Hungarian branch; and NA, Kossuth Benefit Association Records, MG 28, V 163 — the records of the IMBF in this *fonds*, which still (in 1994) have to be arranged, show what services the Federation performed for the different groups associated with it.

⁴⁹Advertisements for different events or services appeared repeatedly in the *DAZ*. Also, interview with Horst Doehler, 26 October 1988.

Temple Association. It did, however, have its own choir and theatrical group (which received song sheets and plays from Europe) and, in imitation of the Ukrainians, began to give its children instruction in their mother tongue and history. With the help of the Ukrainians, the group also started its own children's mandolin orchestra, which in 1935 received a contract to play at the annual agricultural exhibition in Regina's "Glass" Pavilion.⁵⁰

Of course, members of all language associations, be they Ukrainian, German



German Workers and Farmers Association taking part in May Day parade, Vancouver, 1935. National Archives of Canada, PA-148491

or other, co-operated in all labor associations dominated by the communist party. They worked together during strikes or in common celebrations such as the May Day parades. Generally, however, each language group concentrated on winning its own language group for the radical workers movement, competing with bourgeois community organizations for the allegiance of workers. Whereas most German clubs emphasized cultural and recreational events, locals of the German Workers and Farmers Association stressed social action to win adherents among German Canadians. Songs or theatrical pieces presented by the Association or its members were of a political nature, intended to make the audience aware of its class origins and motivate them to realize class goals. The same was true of the frequent public addresses that were popular in most locals of the Association. The

⁵⁰NA, M. Bader-Papers, MG 31, H 122, "Memoirs," part II, 11-2.

activist orientation of these organizations also found expression in the emphasis placed by them on supporting the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* (the newspaper of the Central Organization) in its attempts both to disseminate information on the working-class movement and to involve German Canadians in the class struggle.

The drive by the German Workers and Farmers Association to forward its goals and win adherents to its cause among German Canadians was to be radically affected by the rise to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany. Prior to his achievement of power, Hitler had been viewed by the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* with a certain degree of condescension and derision. Of course, this view tended to be shared by German communists and by the communist leadership in the Soviet Union. Attitudes changed radically, however, once Hitler took power. He was considered to have seized power with the help of the big capitalists and, as their agent, to be using terror to interfere with the capitalist system's logical evolution toward the worker state. Surprise and anger greeted the Nazis' rapid consolidation of their hold on Germany, together with outrage over their use of terror to suppress the German working-class movement.⁵¹ The German Workers and Farmers Association encouraged its members to participate in mass demonstrations directed against what was happening in Germany⁵² and also appealed to German-Canadian workers to support the German proletariat through financial help and other means.⁵³

Hitler's rise to power and the ascendancy of fascism in Germany sensitized the German Workers and Farmers Association to what it saw as the fascist threat in Canada. It saw signs of fascist terror in the treatment of labour during strikes⁵⁴ and regarded Canadian governments from coast to coast as steering towards fascism in the various measures that they took to deal with radical labour.⁵⁵ In particular, it saw evidence of Hitlerism in the policies of the Bennett Conservatives. Both Hitler and the Bennett Conservatives were seen as the tools of big business, using similar tactics of incarceration, police brutality and murder.⁵⁶ The Conservatives were also perceived as exhibiting a certain type of silk-glove British

⁵¹"Der Terror in Hitler Deutschland," *DAZ* (1 April 1934), 1; "Faschismus fuehrt Deutschland in den Abgrund — Kommunismus — der Einzige Ausweg!," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1934), 7; "Wir Foerdern die Freiheit fuer Thaelmann," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1934), 1.

⁵²"Protestiert! Demonstriert!," *DAZ* (1 August 1934), 1.

⁵³"Helft den Opfern des deutschen Faschismus," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1933), 1; "Rote Hilfe Deutschlands Appeliert an Kanadisches Proletariat," *DAZ* (1 Mai 1934), 1; "Unsere Klassenbrueder erwarten von uns Hilfe," *DAZ* (24 Januar 1932), 2.

⁵⁴"Faschistischer Terror gegen Western Packing Co. Streik in Winnipeg," *DAZ* (1 April 1934), 1.

⁵⁵"Werkzeug nieder! — Auf die Strasse am 1. Mai," *DAZ* (1 Mai 1934), 1.

⁵⁶"Die deutschen Faschisten berufen sich auf kanadische Gefaengnismethoden," *DAZ* (1 April 1934), 1; "Der Terror in 'Iron Heel' Kanada," *DAZ* (15 Mai 1934), 1.

fascism. Instead of Nazi terror, they used legal means and a fake democracy to maintain the control of the possessing classes over the workers.⁵⁷

The contradictions in the capitalist system were seen as having led both to the excesses of the Nazi-fascists in Germany and to the excesses of the Bennett government in Canada, as seen in the strike breaking it encouraged, in the meagre relief it offered to the unemployed, and in its jailing of the communist leaders. Only the united action of the working class, both urban and rural, the German Workers and Farmers Association argued, could successfully counteract these reactionary forces of fascism.⁵⁸ At the same time, the paper criticized the gradualist reform program of the CCF as serving only the capitalists, and condemned the party as a tool of the capitalists that, like the German Social Democrats in Germany, would prepare for a fascist seizure of power.⁵⁹ The Communist Party was seen to be the only antidote to fascism and the only means of introducing true democracy to Canada.⁶⁰

At the same time, the German Workers and Farmers Association began to watch for the dissemination of Nazi propaganda in Canada. It criticized speakers sent out by the New Germany, claiming that they were nothing but representatives of the hooligans who were using terror to further the interest of German capitalists. Associations such as the Friends of the New Germany were criticized as doing nothing more than spreading falsehoods about the true situation in Germany; German consuls, such as Consul Seelheim of Winnipeg, were criticized for misusing their position to disseminate Nazi propaganda in Canada.⁶¹ In addition, the Association attacked any views expressed in the German community itself that were in any way favourable to Hitler or Hitlerism⁶² and also, on the positive side, argued vehemently for its own social ideal, stating that the objective of the radical workers movement was to bring an end to conflict, an end to the suppression of one social class by another, and the commencement of the proletarian revolution that would usher in a new society, a new sense of community based on social justice, and a new co-operation in place of conflict and suppression.

⁵⁷"An den Pranger mit dem Betrug der 'Volksgemeinschaft,'" *DAZ* (1 Oktober 1934), 2. For a general view of the state, see "Ueber den Staat," *DAZ* (1 Juni 1934), 2.

⁵⁸"Vorwaerts zur Einheitsfront," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1934), 5.

⁵⁹"Erfolgreicher westlicher Distrikts-Verbandstag des D.A. und F.V.," *DAZ* (15 Juni 1933), 1; "Die C.C.F. als dritte kapitalistische Partei," *DAZ* (1 August 1933), 4; "Die politische Lage der deutschen Arbeiter in Regina," *DAZ* (15 August 1933), 3. This was essentially a repetition of criticisms made of the CCF by Stewart Smith of the Communist Party of Canada, writing under the pseudonym G. Pierce. Norman Penner examines Pierce's views in some detail. See Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Toronto 1977), 149-56.

⁶⁰"Aufruf der K.P. Kanadas," *DAZ* (4 November 1934), 4.

⁶¹"Die faschistische Natter zeigt ihre Giftzaehne in Kanada," *DAZ* (1 November 1933), 3; "Der gleichgeschaltete Seelheim in Wpg.," *DAZ* (15 Mai 1934), 4.

⁶²"Nazi-Kultur in Kanada," *DAZ* (1 Juni 1933), 2; "Nazi-Propaganda in Winnipeg, Man.," *DAZ* (1 Mai 1934), 3; "An den Deutschsprechenden in Edmonton," *DAZ* (1 Mai 1934), 1.

The National Socialists challenged this goal with their offer of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which envisaged co-operation rather than conflict as the basis of social relationships, at least within the Volk. Casting derision on the term, the German Workers and Farmers Association argued that the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* was nothing but a ruse by which the Nazis were trying to deceive the German people. What sort of *Volksgemeinschaft* have the National Socialists created in Germany, asked the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*, where they were using force and bloodshed to impose their will on the people? Furthermore, how could one speak of a *Volksgemeinschaft* between a Krupp and an unemployed or underpaid worker? The term was nothing but a sham that the big capitalists and their agents, the National Socialists, were using to delude Germans into believing that they had created a harmonious community when, in fact, the only thing that existed in Germany was brute force directed against the people, with the National Socialists using demagoguery and mythology to disguise the truth.⁶³

In its effort to fight the dissemination of National Socialist views and attitudes in the German-Canadian community, the German Workers and Farmers Association sought particularly to counteract the propaganda of the *Deutscher Bund Canada*. Bund leaders like Karl Gerhard, Franz Straubinger or Bernhard Bott were described as Nazi agents seeking to indoctrinate German Canadians with National Socialist ideology.⁶⁴ The worker's association challenged the Bund to stop its pretence of being non-political and interested merely in carrying on cultural work, when it was really a political organization spreading Nazi propaganda and seeking to give the Nazis a foothold in Canada.⁶⁵ The Bund was seen to be using the *Deutsche Tage* (days on which Germans in the different provinces got together to celebrate their common heritage) for this purpose. That was why organizers of these celebrations were actively trying to keep members of the German-Canadian left from participating in the events. At the same time, they were using the *Deutsche Tage* to spread Nazi propaganda.⁶⁶ Such propaganda was described as consisting,

⁶³"An den Pranger mit dem Betrug der 'Voksgemeinschaft,'" *DAZ* (1 Oktober 1934), 2. Also, "Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksbetrug," *DAZ* (27 Januar 1937), 2.

⁶⁴"Probe zum Deutschen Tag in Ont.," *DAZ* (15 August 1934), 1; "Ein Professor der nicht die Wahrheit sagt," *DAZ* (1 September 1934), 3; "Die deutschen Vereine in Winnipeg sollen fuer den Faschismus gewonnen werden," *DAZ* (15 September 1934), 3; "Die Maske im Fallen," *DAZ* (25 April 1935), 2; "Ein deutscher Arbeiter erhebt Anklage gegen die Nazi-Agenten in Toronto," *DAZ* (2 Mai 1935), 3; "Ein Besuch beim Deutschen Bund in Kitchener," *DAZ* (28 Maerz 1935), 4.

⁶⁵"Deutscher Tag in Toronto und der D.A. & F.V.," *DAZ* (1 September 1934), 4. See also Jonathan F. Wagner, *Brothers Beyond the Sea: National Socialism in Canada* (Waterloo 1981), 120.

⁶⁶"Probe zum Deutschen Tag in Ont.," *DAZ* (15 August 1934), 1; "Nichtgehaltene Rede des D.A. & F.V. am Deutschen Tag von Ontario," *DAZ* (25 September 1935), 2; "Verweigern Deutschen den Zutritt zum Deutschen Tag in Kitchener," *DAZ* (25 September 1935), 6.

in essence, of two elements: encouraging hatred of the Jews, and preaching national chauvinism.⁶⁷

The German Workers and Farmers Association also took direct action to counter Nazi propaganda. During the Deutsche Tage, members of the Association passed out handbills condemning the Nazi influence in the Tage; at films staged by pro-Nazis, they demonstrated with placards urging non-attendance; at public speeches delivered by pro-Nazis, they sought to disrupt the proceedings. Furthermore, they questioned the accounts by these speakers on Nazi Germany and called for the liberation of communist workers in German jails.⁶⁸

To counter pro-Nazi influences, the German Workers and Farmers Association sought to intensify its propaganda activity in the German Canadian community, on the one hand, to win more members for the organization in its struggle against fascism and, on the other, to explain to German Canadians the falsehoods that the National Socialists were disseminating.⁶⁹ In this connection, they criticized not only the idea of the Volksgemeinschaft, but also Nazi anti-semitism. Nazi criticisms of the Jews were seen as being indirect attacks on the radical proletariat.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the Association criticized the Nazi view that the Jews were controlling international capital.⁷¹ It maintained that the Nazis were blaming the Jews for what were essentially the evils of the capitalist system.⁷²

The German Workers and Farmers Association called on German Canadians not to let themselves be influenced by Nazi propaganda.⁷³ It argued that Nazism, if permitted its natural evolution, would lead to war. Nazism was the naked terrorist dictatorship of finance capital and as such was the bastion of counter-revolution.⁷⁴ One way in which this counter-revolution was expressing itself was by terrorizing the proletariat. Another was by war.⁷⁵ The German Workers and Farmers Association warned that Nazi Germany was arming for war.⁷⁶

⁶⁷"Die Maske im Fallen," *DAZ* (25 April 1935), 2.

⁶⁸Wagner, *Brothers*, 120-1. Also, "Antifaschisten zeigen ihre Losungen zum Deutschen Tag von Ontario," *DAZ* (11 September 1935), 1, and "Zum dritten Verbandstag des D.A. & F.V.," *DAZ* (9 Oktober 1935), 2.

⁶⁹"Zu den Aufgaben des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (15 September 1934), 4. Also, "An den Pranger mit dem Betrug der 'Volksgemeinschaft,'" *DAZ* (1 Oktober 1934), 2. Also, in "Resolution zum 3. Verbandstag des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (9 Oktober 1935), 2, the writer recommends more participation by locals in order to win German Canadians for the worker and anti-fascist movement.

⁷⁰"Die Maske im Fallen," *DAZ* (25 April 1935), 2.

⁷¹"Kommunismus der einzige Ausweg," *DAZ* (25 April 1935), 4.

⁷²"Die Programhetze gegen die Juden," *DAZ* (28 Maerz 1935), 2.

⁷³"Die Nazimachinationen in Ontario," *DAZ* (18 Dezember 1935), 2; "Die braune Pest in Winnipeg," *DAZ* (18 Dezember 1935), 4.

⁷⁴"Zum dritten Verbandstag des D.A. & F.V.," *DAZ* (25 September 1935), 2.

⁷⁵"Wer will den Krieg!," *DAZ* (9 Mai 1935), 4.

⁷⁶"Hitler Ruestet Gegen die Sowjetunion und Gegen das Deutsche Volk," *DAZ* (18 September 1935), 1.

To counter the spread of Nazifascism both in Canada and abroad, locals of the German Workers and Farmers Association (for example the Windsor branch in 1934) became involved in the League Against War and Fascism. The League grew out of the World Congress Against Imperialist War that met in Amsterdam in August 1932. Although many of the delegates were not communists, the Congress was closely supervised by Comintern officials to ensure that the resolutions adopted were those that the Comintern wanted adopted. Discussions at meetings centred on one theme — namely, that the capitalist powers were preparing to launch a war on the Soviet Union, and that the League of Nations and pacifism were attempts by the capitalist powers and their social-democratic allies to paralyze the anti-war struggles of the masses.⁷⁷

With the rise to power of Adolf Hitler, the danger of an imperialist war was increasingly seen by communists as emanating, not from some vague capitalist threat, but from the fascism that was taking root in Germany. At first, communists had believed that Hitler's hold on power would be brief. It was thought that once Nazi-fascism proved itself incapable of dealing with the problem of the Depression, it would be overthrown and its fall would usher in the proletarian revolution. Instead of this, the National Socialists were putting Germany back to work. At the same time, through their use of force, they were bringing labour peace to the country and by their example were inspiring similar reactionary forces outside of Germany.

Late in 1933 these conditions (which were observed by the standing committee that the World Congress Against Imperialist War had set up to monitor developments that might lead to a war against the Soviet Union) caused the movement to change its name to World League Against War and Fascism. The League was to serve as a basis for communist endeavours to broaden their struggle against fascism. To forward these goals, communists in many countries established national affiliates, taking care that the united-front character of the movement was preserved.⁷⁸

Largely under the direction of Canadian communists, the United Front against Fascism held its first meeting in Canada in October 1934. Tim Buck, leader of the Communist Party of Canada, supported the Front's call for a united stand against fascism soon after his release from jail towards the end of 1934.⁷⁹ At this time, the call for the united front meant essentially a call for co-operation with socialist parties and with other groups left of centre. When the Communist Party's offer of a united front was rejected by the CCF, the German Workers and Farmers Association, like the Communist Party of Canada itself, blamed the CCF leadership for the rejection. It called on what they saw as the left wing of the CCF to work closely

⁷⁷ Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 133-4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 115-7. For German Canadian support of this policy, see "C.P.C. richtet an die C.C.F. Einheitsfrontangebot zu den kommenden Federalwahlen," *DAZ* (18 April 1935) 1. Also, "Die Einheit bricht sich Bahn!," *DAZ* (1 August 1934), 2; "United Front Kandidaten fuer Winnipeg," *DAZ* (1 November 1933), 4.

together with the communists to defeat the bourgeois parties at the local, provincial and national levels.⁸⁰

These efforts were to receive further encouragement following the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, which took place in Moscow in July and August 1935. The Congress admitted that the move to the left made by the Sixth Congress in 1928 had been wrong, and that the emphasis by German communists on fighting the Social Democrats had merely helped to pave the way to power for Adolf Hitler.⁸¹ Furthermore, a continuation of this policy following Hitler's rise to power had not succeeded in preventing him from consolidating his position but, on the contrary, was actually aiding the fascists. The French Communists in particular saw an alliance with the Socialists as a way of keeping French fascists out of power. Georgi Dimitrov's speech to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 expressed this change in orientation when he stressed that the new enemies of the international labour movement were not the capitalist democracies but the fascists, and that the communists must unite with all forces opposed to fascism to fight this danger to the people's movement.⁸²

In keeping with this new program, the German Workers and Farmers Association supported the CCF in the federal election campaign of 1935.⁸³ This did not, however, prevent it from criticizing the party for rejecting the Communist Party's offer of a united front.⁸⁴ At the same time, the Association fervently supported any communist candidates that were running, such as Tim Buck in North Winnipeg and Matthew Popovich in Vegreville.⁸⁵

The policy of the German Workers and Farmers Association regarding union activity was influenced by initiatives from Moscow. In 1935, in order to encourage the movement towards a united front, the communist leadership in Europe demanded that the Workers Unity League be disbanded. On instructions from Moscow, the Communist Party in Canada ordered the dissolution of the League and unions affiliated with the WUL were instructed to join ranks with other unions to lay the foundation of a united-front movement against fascism and against

⁸⁰"C.C.F. lehnt die Einheitsfront zu den Wahlen ab," *DAZ* (25 April 1935), 1; "CCF — Fuehrer gegen die Einheitsfront in Hamilton," *DAZ* (9 Mai 1935) 4.

⁸¹This is discussed in some detail by Claudin, *Comintern*, 160-6.

⁸²Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 131-5. The change is discussed in greater detail by Claudin, *Comintern*, 127-30. Also interview, 11 July 1989, with Horst Doehler, and "Dimitrow ruft zur Aktionseinheit gegen den Faschismus," *DAZ* (21 August 1935), 2.

⁸³"Die Reichen Muessen Zahlen," *DAZ* (15 September 1935), 2.

⁸⁴For example, "Einheitsfront zum 1. Mai in Hamilton hergestellt," *DAZ* (18 April 1935), 2; "Die Einheitsfront in Hamilton, Ont.," *DAZ* (25 April 1935), 1. A good analysis of its position is also given in "Zum dritten Verbandstag des D.A. & F.V.," *DAZ* (25 September 1935), 2.

⁸⁵"An die Deutsche Waehlerschaft Kanadas," *DAZ* (18 September 1935), 2; "Deutsche Waehler in Nordwinnipeg Stimmt fuer Tim Buck," *DAZ* (9 Oktober 1935), 1; "Waehlt im Wahlkreis Vegreville Matthew Popovich," *DAZ* (25 September 1935), 3.

another imperialist war.⁸⁶ The German Workers and Farmers Association followed this lead, supporting the idea of conservative and radical labour unions co-operating to attain both work-related and broader social objectives.⁸⁷

Efforts to bring about a united front of working-class parties were seen as necessary, for the time being, in order to pave the way for the eventual triumph of the proletarian revolution.⁸⁸ As part of this endeavour, the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* rid itself of its cynicism regarding bourgeois democracy, and its criticism of the bourgeois political parties lessened. Rather than drawing a close parallel between the European fascists and Canadian bourgeois parties such as the Conservatives and Liberals, the German Workers and Farmers Association now endeavoured to differentiate between German fascism and Canadian political parties.⁸⁹ It identified the National Socialists not with any particular Canadian political party but rather with Canadian capitalists, who were seen as being behind the forces of reaction in this country.⁹⁰ Any criticisms of the political parties now tended to be of a practical nature rather than being cast in the traditional Marxist ideological framework.⁹¹ This altered stance was encouraged when the King Liberals replaced the Bennett Conservatives in 1935 and, in 1936, struck from the criminal code Section 98 that the hated Bennett government had used to incarcerate communist leaders.

In pursuit of the united front, the German Workers and Farmers Association recommended its locals to rid themselves of their sectarian approach to the class conflict and strive to co-operate with as broad a spectrum of German clubs as possible. Possible areas of co-operation included cultural work and the attainment of economic objectives important to the community.⁹² Since most German clubs did not belong to a national or even regional umbrella organization, the initiative for co-operation was left to locals of the German Workers and Farmers Association. Some of these, such as the Kitchener local, did make an effort to co-operate with other clubs in their areas, but they had little success.⁹³ In Regina, the local of the German Workers and Farmers Association sought to gain membership in the German Central Committee of Regina, an umbrella organization of the local

⁸⁶I.M. Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1956* (Toronto 1973), 3, 25.

⁸⁷"Zum dritten Verbandstag des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (25 September 1935), 2. Also, "Zum dritten Verbandstag des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (9 Oktober 1935), 3; "Am W.U.L. — Kongress wurde Gewerkschaftseinheit gefordert," *DAZ* (20 November 1935), 1; "Erhaltet die Gewerkschaftseinheit," *DAZ* (24 März 1937), 2.

⁸⁸"Die Bedingung des Sieges der Weltrevolution," *DAZ* (2 September 1935), 2.

⁸⁹See, for example, "Die Hitlervertreter in Kanada," *DAZ* (18 Dezember 1935), 2.

⁹⁰"Reaktion und Nazi in Kanada," *DAZ* (8 Januar 1936), 2.

⁹¹See, for example, "Liberale Versprechung und Prosperität," *DAZ* (6 Mai 1936), 4.

⁹²"Zum dritten Verbandstag des Deutschen Arbeiter und Farmer Verbands," *DAZ* (25 September 1935), 2; "Volkskultur gegen Nazi-Kriegskult," *DAZ* (15 Mai 1935), 2.

⁹³"Die Einheitsfront in Kitchener," *DAZ* (1 April 1936), 4.

German clubs. Its application for membership in the organization was rejected, however, with the excuse that it was a political association and therefore ineligible for membership.⁹⁴

The German Workers and Farmers Association also encouraged its locals to sponsor cultural evenings and to involve other associations in staging these.⁹⁵ There is little evidence, however, to show that any locals were at all successful in taking up this challenge or, in fact, to indicate that they made any significant attempts in this direction.

At the same time, the German Workers and Farmers Association fought the spread of Nazism in the German-Canadian community. It sought particularly to counteract the influence of the Bund and warned local German clubs that since the Bund was having difficulty in spreading its Nazi propaganda openly in the essentially unsympathetic German-Canadian community, it was attempting to do so surreptitiously under the guise of carrying out cultural work.⁹⁶ It also declared that the Arbeitsgemeinschaften that organized the Deutsche Tage were not neutral but had become the tools of the pro-Nazi elements in the community. It claimed that all too frequently the speakers who appeared at these rallies not only misled the German-Canadian community itself by lying about the true situation in Germany, but also aroused the enmity of non-German groups towards the German minority in Canada.⁹⁷

The German Workers and Farmers Association also continued its efforts at clarifying Nazi ideology, not only for German Canadians but also for the wider Canadian community. For example, it explained the role that anti-semitism served in a reactionary ideology such as fascism, and advised German Canadians not to let themselves be confused about who the real enemy was.⁹⁸ It continued its criticism of the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft,⁹⁹ and sought to explain to Canadians that the Nazis did not represent Germany as a whole, where the broad mass of German people, unlike the Nazis, did not want war but wished to live in peaceful co-exist-

⁹⁴ "Protestieren gegen Schoenberg-Brief in Regina," *DAZ* (2 August 1936), 1; "Nationalismus ohne Maske," *DAZ* (2 August 1936), 2.

⁹⁵ "Distriktstag im Osten," *DAZ* (27 Mai 1936), 2; "Einigkeit ist Noetig," *DAZ* (3 April 1936), 2; "Erfolgreiche Distriktstagung des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (8 Juli 1936), 1; "Resolutionen des zweiten oestlichen Distrikttages des D.A. u. F.V.," *DAZ* (15 Juli 1936), 3.

⁹⁶ "Die Nazimachinationen in Ontario," *DAZ* (18 Dezember 1934), 2; "Entlaervt die NSDAP in Kanada," *DAZ* (22 Januar 1936), 2.

⁹⁷ See, for example, "Entlaerft die N.S.D.A.P. in Kanada," *DAZ* (22 Januar 1936), 2; "Nationalitaetenhass," *DAZ* (29 Juli 1936), 2; "Bilanz der Deutschen Tage," *DAZ* (23 September 1936) 2; "Nazirummel statt Deutsche Tage in Ontario," *DAZ* (16 September 1936), 1; "Was bringt uns die Hitlerpropaganda in Kanada," *DAZ* (29 Juli 1936), 2.

⁹⁸ "Antisemitismus in Kanada," *DAZ* (20 Mai 1936), 2; "Der Antisemitismus," *DAZ* (29 Juli 1936), 4.

⁹⁹ "Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksfront," *DAZ* (27 Januar 1937), 2.

ence with other peoples.¹⁰⁰ It continued explaining the difference between Hitler-fascism, which was reactionary and led to war, and German culture, a culture of progress based on service to all mankind,¹⁰¹ and it repeatedly warned that Hitlerism meant war,¹⁰² and advised German Canadians not to support it if they wished to avoid the antagonism of other groups.

Evidence of the antagonism it warned about was seen in the objections made by Mayor J.A. Clarke of Edmonton to having propaganda literature distributed and having the Swastika flag prominently displayed during the German Day celebrations in that city in 1936.¹⁰³ Equally antagonistic attitudes were seen in criticisms expressed by dailies such as the *Daily Mail* or the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which were reacting to attempts made by German-Canadian supporters of Hitler to justify his policies.¹⁰⁴ The German Workers and Farmers Association warned fellow German Canadians that Nazi activities in Canada, including their use of the *Deutsche Tage* for propaganda purposes, aroused hatred towards them by other nationalities,¹⁰⁵ which could only be exacerbated by the growing distrust provoked by Nazi Germany's aggressive moves on the international scene.

Nazi Germany's aggressive character was clearly demonstrated in 1936, when it sent troops into the demilitarized zones in the Rhineland. Again, the civil war had no sooner broken out in Spain than it sent its forces to take part on the rebel side. The Soviet Union supported the Loyalist side in Spain and sought to involve the international labour movement in that cause. The Canadian Communist Party responded by recruiting soldiers to fight on the Loyalist side. It also channelled aid to Spain through the League Against War and Fascism, which in turn set up the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy that raised funds for the Canadian blood transfusion unit under Dr. Norman Bethune.¹⁰⁶ Some members of the German Workers and Farmers Association went to Spain to fight against the fascists,¹⁰⁷ and

¹⁰⁰“Ueber Zweck und die Ziele des D.A. u. F.V.,” *DAZ* (5 Februar 1934), 6.

¹⁰¹“Die Distrikstage des D.A. u. F.V.,” *DAZ* (5 August 1936), 2.

¹⁰²“Verteidigt den Weltfrieden durch Kampf gegen Hitler,” *DAZ* (18 Maerz 1936), 1; “Hitler treibt zum Krieg,” *DAZ* (18 Maerz 1936), 2; “Der Faschismus Fuehrt Deutschland zum Krieg,” *DAZ* (6 Mai 1936), 2.

¹⁰³NA, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, MG 26, J 1, vol. 214, 185214-6, reel C-3686, J.A. Clarke, Edmonton, to Department of Justice, Ottawa, 30 July 1936. Also, “Hakenkreuzverbot zum Deutschen Tag in Edmonton,” *DAZ* (22 Juli 1936), 1.

¹⁰⁴“Nationaltaetenhass,” *DAZ* (29 Juli 1936), 2; “Provokationen gegen das Deutschum,” *DAZ* (29 Juli 1936), 2.

¹⁰⁵“Was bringt uns die Hitlerpropaganda in Kanada,” *DAZ* (29 Juli 1936), 1; “Bilanz der Deutschen Tage,” *DAZ* (23 September 1936), 2.

¹⁰⁶Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 135-7.

¹⁰⁷Interview, 22 July 1980, with Hans Ibing, who had served in Spain. Also, CSIS, RCMP Intelligence Branch Toronto, 27 June 1944, report “Re: German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario,” which comments on the party leader of the St. Catharines branch having gone to Spain, where he had died.

branches of the organization (for example, the Montréal and Hamilton locals) collected money to support the Canadian Medical Mission under Dr. Bethune.¹⁰⁸ The *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* argued that in Spain international fascism was combining with the Franco forces to crush not just the Spanish workers but also Spanish democracy.¹⁰⁹ The war in Spain was reaching a critical point when in 1937 the rebel forces, supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, took Bilbao and threatened Madrid. In 1937 also, the popular front Blum government went down to defeat in France, and it appeared to many that Europe was in danger of being taken over by fascism.¹¹⁰

Reacting to these conditions, the German Workers and Farmers Association became increasingly convinced that, if fascism was to be stopped, efforts had to be intensified to strengthen the alliance of all groups opposed to fascism.¹¹¹ In this, it reiterated the views of the Communist Party both in Canada and the Soviet Union,¹¹² which were also stressed by exiles from Nazi Germany,¹¹³ and German-American anti-fascists.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the German Workers and Farmers Association was losing members because of its close association with the communists.¹¹⁵ In order to appeal to as large a segment of the population as possible, the Association dissolved itself and, in November 1937, re-emerged as the *Deutschkanadische Volksbund* (German-Canadian League). As part of this change, the name of the organization's newspaper, the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung*,

¹⁰⁸"Sektion Montreal Unterstuetzt den Freiheitskampf des Spanischen Volkes," *DAZ* (28 April 1937), 1, and "Unterstuetzt den Kampf des Spanischen Volkes," *DAZ* (3 Maerz 1937), 1.

¹⁰⁹"Steigert die Hilfe fuer Spanien," *DAZ* (7 April 1937), 2. Also, "Sieben Jahre fuer die Deutsche Kultur," *DAZ* (23 Juni 1937), 2; "Sieben Jahre D.A.Z.," *DAZ* (23 Juni 1937), 3.

¹¹⁰"Die Faschisten bedrohen Europa," *DAZ* (30 Juni 1930), 1; "Arbeiterbewegung am Kreuzweg," *DAZ* (14 Juli 1937), 1 and 3. Also, "Blum dankt Ab," *DAZ* (23 Juni 1937), 1, and "Dimitroff schlaegt praktische Aktion fuer Spanien vor," *DAZ* (7 Juli 1937), 1.

¹¹¹"Bildet die deutsche Volksfront," *DAZ* (27 Januar 1937), 1; and "Volksfront oder Volksgemeinschaft," *DAZ* (27 Januar 1937), 2; "Deutsch sein heisst Demokratisch sein," *DAZ* (17 Maerz 1937), 2.

¹¹²Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 151. Also, "Dimitroff schlaegt praktische Aktion fuer Spanien vor," *DAZ* (7 Juli 1937), 1; "Einheitsfront: Schluss mit der Nichteinmischung," *DAZ* (14 Juli 1937), 1; and interview, 26 August 1988, with Horst Doehler.

¹¹³"Zusammenschluss der deutschen Friedensfreunde," *DAZ* (30 September 1936), 3; "Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann und die deutsche Volksfront," *DAZ* (9 Juni 1937), 5.

¹¹⁴See "Dr. Erich von Schroether sprach in Toronto, Ontario," *DAZ* (8 April 1936), 1. Unlike Canada, which received few exiles from Nazi Germany, in the United States there was often an overlap between the German exile and the American labour radical, with the exile often occupying a leading role in German American socialist and communist organizations. See Joachim Radkau, *Die deutsche Emigration in den USA: Ihr Einfluss auf die Amerikanische Europapolitik 1933-1945* (Duesseldorf 1971), 169-73.

¹¹⁵Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives, Departmental records of H.M. Caiserman, CJC General Secretary, File DA 1/ Box 2/ File 1, Confidential, German-Canadian Peoples Society, September 14, 1938.

was also changed, to the *Deutsch-Kanadische Volkszeitung*.¹¹⁶ Justifying these changes, the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* argued that the example of Spain showed that all nations were threatened by the imperialist-fascist authoritarian rule. Furthermore, the Nazi activities in Spain had harmed Germans abroad who sought to live in co-operation with other peoples. Nazism also had to be opposed to protect German character formation, culture and to prevent a war. As such, the Volksbund would serve as a refuge for all Germans who espoused these goals.¹¹⁷

Although other language groups affiliated with the Communist Party, such as the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association and the Finnish Organization of Canada, became involved in the anti-fascist struggle,¹¹⁸ there is little evidence that either the Finnish or the Ukrainian anti-fascists changed the names of their organizations to strengthen their appeal among anti-fascists. German-Canadian radical labour radicals felt, however, that as the threat against communism was concentrated in Germany, it was especially up to them to oppose Hitlerism and fascism.¹¹⁹ They had in fact adopted this position immediately after Hitler's rise to power. The change in name merely was a tactical move intended to help the workers movement attract other members of the German-Canadian community to a policy it had pursued since 1933.

After the central organization had changed its name to enhance its appeal among German Canadians, it directed its locals to conform to the new strategy. Generally it succeeded in this, in large part because the organization was centrally organized. Central direction was assured in several ways. The statutes of the association ensured that the League's basic ideology was and always would be Marxist, and that its locals did not hesitate to expel deviant members. In addition, the leadership at the national level was made up of communists or communist sympathizers who enforced conformity to party ideology not only from afar but also by travelling from community to community to bring locals into line.¹²⁰ Furthermore, as may be seen in the case of the Montréal and Toronto locals, leaders in the locals also tended to be pro-communists, who frequently imposed their views on the rest of the membership in an authoritarian fashion.¹²¹ The result was that both the national body and the locals of the German Workers and Farmers

¹¹⁶“Die D.A.Z. siedelt nach Toronto ueber,” *DAZ* (14 Juli 1937), 2.

¹¹⁷“Zum Aufbau des D.A. und F.V. zu einem Deutsch-kanadischen Volksbund,” *DAZ* (7 Juli 1937), 4.

¹¹⁸For examples of this, see William Eklund, *Builders of Canada: History of the Finnish Organization of Canada 1911-1971* (Toronto 1987), 219-26, and Kolasky, *Shattered Illusion*, 19, 22.

¹¹⁹Interview with Horst Doehler, 26 August 1988.

¹²⁰H.W. Merker complains of this in a letter to the Minister of National Defence. See NA, W.L.M. King Papers, MG 26, J 1, vol. 272, 230340-230343, microfilm reel C-3745, H.W. Merker to Ian Mackenzie, 9 May 1939.

¹²¹CSIS, RCMP Sub-Division: Detachment Toronto HQ, 9 February 1940, “Re. German Canadian People's League, Eastern District Convention, 1938 — Toronto, Ontario.”

Association tended to conform to strategy as it had been worked out by the communist leadership at different levels of the organization. Thus, soon after the German Workers and Farmers Association became the German-Canadian League, locals changed their names accordingly and became members of the new organization.

This conformity did not always occur without internal strife. At the national level, for example, there was disagreement regarding the extent to which the League should follow the communist line, and dissention regarding the degree of support to be given to the Jewish community.¹²² At the local level, too, there were cases of vigorous opposition: in the case of Montréal, for example, the change nearly led to the self-destruction of the organization. Some members left altogether, while others became apathetic and virtually abandoned the work of the organization to the pro-communist element within it.¹²³ This disaffection weakened the Montréal local, even though its anti-fascist stand enabled it to attract new members, mainly from the German Jewish community.

Loss of membership also affected the financial well-being of the whole organization, resulting in fewer members on whom to draw for support. To some extent, this was offset by donations from the Jewish community, but these were not sufficient to allow the League to keep its newspaper.¹²⁴ In December 1937, therefore, the *Deutsch-Kanadische Volkszeitung* was absorbed by the *Deutsche Volksecho* of New York.¹²⁵ Founded by Communist refugees from Nazi Germany, the *Deutsche Volksecho* agreed to have part of its space reserved for German-Canadian readers. Also, attempts were made to have both a Canadian and an American

¹²²CSIS, N.A. Robertson, Department of External Affairs, to Commissioner S.T. Wood, RCMP, Ottawa, 11 February 1942; and CSIS, file 175/6935, S.T. Wood to Norman A. Robertson, Under-Secretary of State, Dept. of External Affairs, Ottawa, 6 February 1942.

¹²³CSIS, file 175/6897. M. Black, RCMP Sub-Division, Detachment Toronto H.Q., 9-2-40. Re: German Canadian People's League, Eastern District Convention, 1938 — Toronto, Ontario.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 1. See also Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives, Departmental records of H.M. Caiserman, CJC General Secretary. DA 1/ Box 2/ File 1. H.M. Caiserman, General Secretary, C.J.C., to M. Haltrecht, Chairman, German Canadian League, Montreal, 25 October 1938; and M. Haltrecht, German Canadian League, to H.M. Caiserman, c/o Canadian Jewish Congress, Montreal, 19 October 1938. It seems that while the Canadian Jewish Congress encouraged the League's activities, and cooperated with it in areas of mutual interest, it was not comfortable enough with the League to give it more than minimum financial support.

¹²⁵"Vereinigung unserer Zeitung mit dem 'Deutschen Volksecho', in New York," *Deutsch-Kanadische Volkszeitung* (hereafter *D-K V*) (25 Dezember 1937), 1 and 12; "Auf dem Weg zur Einheit der Deutschen in Amerika," *D-K V* (25 Dezember 1937), 1. For problems connected with sustaining the *Deutsch-Kanadisch Volkszeitung*, see also CSIS, RCMP Intelligence Branch, Toronto, 1 November 1943, "Co-ordinating Committee for Eastern Canada, German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario," 2.

editor for the paper and thereby make this a truly Canadian-American endeavour. However, problems of having a newspaper published jointly in two countries were insurmountable and the attempt was dropped.¹²⁶

Several times between 1937 and 1939 the League tried to start its own paper again, to counter the influence of the Nazis in the German-Canadian community, but did not have the financial resources to carry out the undertaking.¹²⁷ Making the best of a difficult situation, the League argued that not having to struggle to maintain its press would give it more time to carry on its propaganda work. After all, it was the responsibility especially of Germans to oppose the Nazis and to show to other nations that there was another side to the German tradition than that seeking to replace German culture with the glorification of power.¹²⁸

When the League gave up its own paper, it also began to place less emphasis on winning adherents from the German-Canadian community and concentrated on making Canadian society in general aware of Nazi-fascism and the dangers it posed. To forward its anti-Nazi work, the organization invited to Canada refugees from Nazi Germany, such as Ludwig Renn, Tony Sender, Paul Tillich and Joseph Ostermann, to give public addresses to English-speaking as well as German-speaking audiences. One of the largest of the anti-Nazi rallies sponsored by the League attracted some five thousand people to the Montreal Forum.¹²⁹ A meeting organized by the League in Toronto to protest against Nazi persecution of the Jews attracted some two thousand people.¹³⁰ The League also held memorial services to commemorate the victims of Nazism, such as Ernst Thaelmann and a German Nobel prize winner, Carl von Ossietzky.¹³¹ Its publicity denounced the persecution of the Jews in Germany,¹³² and in both Kitchener and Calgary it sponsored mass

¹²⁶Interview with Horst Doehler, 24 January 1994. For more information on the *Deutsche Volksecho*, which ceased publication soon after the outbreak of war, see Radkau, *Deutsche Emigration*, 169-73.

¹²⁷See, for example, CSIS, F.E. Jolliffe, Chief Postal Censor, to The Commissioner, RCMP, Ottawa, Ontario, 4 October 1939, together with letters attached dated 19, 23, and 26 August 1939.

¹²⁸"Fuer die Einheit am 1 Mai," *DAZ* (28 April 1937), 2; Sieben Jahre fuer die deutsche Kultur," *DAZ* (23 Juni 1937), 2; "Aufgabe der Deutschen in Kanada," *DAZ* (23 Juni 1937), 1.

¹²⁹"Truth is Unlikely in Spanish Fight," *Montreal Daily Star* (4 December 1937), 3 and 4; "Hundreds Hear Hitler Policy Denounced," *Montreal Daily Star* (24 April 1939), 5. Also, "Nazism Denounced by Unanimous Vote," *Montreal Gazette* (24 April 1939), 13; and NA, W.L.M. King Papers, MG 26, J 1, vol. 279, 236977-9, reel C-3750, O.D. Skelton to King, 15 April 1939.

¹³⁰"2000 Deutsch-Kanadier bei Protest Meeting gegen Nazis," *Deutsche Volksecho* (11 Dezember 1938), 7.

¹³¹See, for example, "Ossietzky Honored at Gathering Here," *Montreal Gazette* (30 May 1938), 11.

¹³²"Thousands here Protest Nazi Attacks on Jews," *Montreal Daily Star* (21 November 1938), 1.

meetings to protest against such persecution.¹³³ In addition, it cooperated with the Canadian Jewish Congress to investigate pro-Nazi activities in Canada.¹³⁴ The League also made representations to the Canadian government requesting that Jewish refugees be permitted to enter Canada, and condemned the deportation of refugees who had arrived.¹³⁵ It also sought to persuade the Canadian government to conduct an official inquiry into Nazi activities in Canada, in order to put an end to the often repeated rumour that German Canadians were pro-Nazi.¹³⁶ At the same time, the League deplored signs of discrimination against German Canadians as a result of Nazi excesses.¹³⁷ Although it never failed to stress that Nazi agitators were active in the German-Canadian community, the League's publicity reassured the Canadian government and the Canadian people that the vast majority of Canada's half million German Canadians supported the democratic system and were loyal to Canada.¹³⁸

When war broke out in September 1939, the League supported Canada's declaration of war against Germany and called on other German Canadians to do the same.¹³⁹ Some cooperated with the officials to arrest members of the Bund.¹⁴⁰ Despite this, the League's executive buried its records immediately after the outbreak of war for fear that they would be seized by the Canadian government, which would use them to incarcerate pro-communists in the League.¹⁴¹ A major problem for the League was the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact that served to divide Eastern Europe between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. As a corollary of the pact, the Soviet Union denounced the war, which it branded as an imperialist war

¹³³"Deutsch-Kanadischer Volksbund protestiert gegen Hitler-Terror," *Deutsche Volksecho* (26 November 1938), 3.

¹³⁴This is shown in documentation from the Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives, Departmental records of H.M. Caiserman, CJC General Secretary. File DA 1/ Box 2/ File 1. Arnold Haltrecht, Secretary, German Canadian League, to Ben Robinson, President, Canadian Jewish Congress, Eastern Division, July 6, 1938; H.M. Caiserman, General Secretary, C.J.C., to A. Haltrecht, German Canadian League, Montreal, 8 May 1939.

¹³⁵"Three Refugees Face Deportation," *Montreal Gazette* (18 November 1938), 5. Also, "Drei deutsche Fluechlinge von der Deportation gerettet," *Deutsche Volksecho* (10 Dezember 1938), 7.

¹³⁶"German Canadians Seek Nazi Inquiry," *Montreal Gazette* (15 May 1939), 25.

"Hilfe gegen die Nazi-Agenten," *Deutsche Volksecho* (20 Mai 1939), 7.

¹³⁷"Nazis denounced by Germans Here," *Montreal Daily Star* (21 November 1938), 1.

¹³⁸"German Canadian Majority Declared to be Non-Nazi," *Montreal Standard* (10 June 1939), 4. Also, "Where Do the German People Stand?," *Daily Clarion* (12 September 1938), 2.

¹³⁹"German-Canadians Back Allied Cause," *Montreal Gazette* (4 December 1939), 3.

¹⁴⁰NA, Records of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, RG 25, G 1, vol. 1964, file 855-E, part 1, Norman A. Robertson to Superintendent E.W. Bavin, Intelligence Section, RCMP, Ottawa, 22 September 1939. Also, CSIS, Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, 22 May 1940, Norman Robertson to Supt. E.W. Bavin, Intelligence Section, RCMP.

¹⁴¹Interview, 27 May 1987, with Otto Kerbs.

that communists should oppose. This was too much for some of the League's members. When Otto Kerbs, a leading member of the Montréal branch of the League, was invited by Fred Rose of the Communist Party to condemn the war publicly, he refused to do so.¹⁴² The outbreak of war and Soviet neutrality also subjected members of the League to the threat of internment. Soon after war broke out, the Canadian government began interning not only pro-fascists but also communists, including members of foreign language organizations under the control of the communist party.¹⁴³ Members of the German-Canadian League did not find themselves in quite the same position as the other language groups, essentially because it had attracted considerable middle-class support since it was founded. This becomes evident in discussions involving security officials debating whether or not League members should be interned. The RCMP, who considered the League to be a communist organization, recommended that members thereof be interned. This was opposed by Norman Robertson who, essentially on the basis of his contact with middle-class Jewish members of the organization, disputed the RCMP view, stating that the League was essentially an anti-Nazi organization which fervently supported the war effort and therefore should be left alone. Robertson's support overrode the RCMP recommendation.¹⁴⁴ This did not, however, prevent some German members of the League from being interned, as for example, Jacob Penner, a declared communist in Winnipeg, or German miners in Nova Scotia who were members of the IMBF.¹⁴⁵

Of course, once the war broke out, League members who had joined strictly because of its anti-Nazi activities became directly involved in the war effort. This left some four hundred communist and pro-communist members of the League in awkward suspension until the attack of Nazi Germany on Soviet Russia resolved their difficulties. Other League members sought to promote the active involvement of the organization in the war effort. The Montréal local, for example, approached Norman Robertson of the Department of External Affairs to obtain his support for propaganda among German Canadians and their recruitment for the war effort.¹⁴⁶ It also approached the Canadian Legion and asked its support for the League's efforts to address German Canadians on the subject of their duties as Canadian

¹⁴²Interview, 26 October 1988, with Horst Doehler.

¹⁴³For steps taken to intern, for example, Finnish or Ukrainian pro-communists, see Kolasky, *Shattered Illusions*, 27-31; Eklund, *Builders*, 229-33.

¹⁴⁴NA, W.L.M. King Papers, MG 26, J 1, vol. 273, 231077-89, microfilm reel C-3746. Memorandum: For the Prime Minister's Office. Re: Internal Security Measures Taken on Outbreak of War, 2 December, 1939.

¹⁴⁵Bader mentions the internment of the miners. NA, M. Bader Papers, MG 31, H 122, *Memoirs*, part 1, 24.

¹⁴⁶CSIS, Norman A. Robertson to Commissioner S.T. Wood, 27 January 1942; also, CSIS, RCMP, German Canadian League, "Copy of communication between N.A. Robertson, Department of External Affairs and individual mentioned herein ...," no date provided.

citizens and on the desirability of obliterating Nazi influences from among them.¹⁴⁷

The RCMP, however, recommended against these proposals, giving as its reasons the "strong feeling running through the country at the present time which amounts almost to hysteria and [the fact that] this force is running in various directions on alarms of all kinds, the majority of them being without foundation."¹⁴⁸ Failing to gain government support for its endeavours, the League dissolved itself. In 1942, S.T. Wood of the RCMP wrote that the last report received on the German-Canadian League had related to its participation in a convention of the Canadian Civil Liberties Union held in Montréal on 18 and 19 May of the previous year.¹⁴⁹

Many of those who had joined the League after 1937, primarily because of its anti-Nazi stance, became involved in the war effort. At the same time, many among the communists, who had always formed the backbone of the League, ceased their activities, largely because of their difficulty in reconciling their conviction that a war against Nazi Germany was necessary with the Soviet Union's call for communists not to participate in what it had branded an imperialist war. In July 1941, however, when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, communist hesitancy to become involved in the war effort ceased. Shortly thereafter, the left-leaning section of the League began organizing itself again and, largely through its efforts, the German-Canadian Federation was founded in 1942 and the Co-ordination Committee, German-Canadian Federation was set up in June 1943. Unlike the League, however, which had had support all across Canada, the Federation was centered in eastern Canada. German Canadians in general were suspicious of it because they considered it to be dominated by communists, and the groups that did support it — essentially the German-Canadian communists and pro-communists — were by 1939 concentrated in eastern Canada because of the better work opportunities there. At its founding meeting,¹⁵⁰ the Federation declared that it regarded combatting the activities of the Nazis and their followers in Canada as its sacred duty. Members of the Federation declared their absolute loyalty to Canada. They supported the just war that the allies were waging against the Axis, both financially and by taking up arms. At the same time, they undertook to strive with all Canadians for the aims of the Atlantic Charter as the foundation for world peace.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷"Legion's Aid Asked to Curb Naziism," *Montreal Daily Star* (19 September 1939), 6.

¹⁴⁸CSIS, RCMP, file 175/6935, E.W. Bavin to Norman A. Robertson, 27 May 1940.

¹⁴⁹CSIS, S.T. Wood to Norman A. Robertson, 6 February 1942. Also, CSIS, RCMP Sub-District Toronto H.Q., file 175/6897, 14 December 1939.

¹⁵⁰A report on the organization states that it came into being early in February 1942 — CSIS, "Extract R.C.M.P., German Canadian Federation. Re: Secret Letter to the Chief Postal Censor, from (E.H. Perlson) Inspector, Assistant Intelligence Officer," 19 August 1942.

¹⁵¹CSIS, enclosure in letter from George B. McClellan to Commissioner, RCMP, Ottawa, 27 July 1943, 7. Also, CSIS, RCMP, Toronto Intelligence Branch, 2 July 1943, "Conference of the German Canadian Federation Eastern Section, June 19th and 20th, 1943, Toronto, Ontario."

In many respects, the Federation was taking a position similar to that of other German anti-fascists active outside Germany. Thus, the Federation's declaration of absolute loyalty to the country where they worked and its support of the Atlantic Charter were positions strongly recommended by Ludwig Renn, a German anti-fascist and a leader of the Free Germany Movement in Mexico.¹⁵² The RCMP, however, also saw other influences at work in the Federation's determination to co-operate with the Canadian government in its "momentary" aims regarding the war effort. Commenting on this, translators M.A.S. Hett and E.W. Elfvingren noted that the Federation's support for the Canadian government in its war effort against Nazi Germany was "in line with the present-day communist platform."¹⁵³

To forward its goals in the German-Canadian community, the Federation sponsored meetings in which anti-fascist films were shown or in which Allied goals in the war were explained. It stressed that it would give German Canadians a working-class view of events as they unfolded in Europe, because the "middle class press provides only one-sided information."¹⁵⁴ It also criticized people, such as Emil Ludwig, who advocated the imposition of draconian peace terms on Germany.¹⁵⁵ The ideological orientation of the group becomes particularly evident in such instances as, for example, its drive to collect clothes and other items for the Soviet Union and for Tito's partisans, causes which were also espoused by Ukrainian Canadian communists.¹⁵⁶ In its reports on the war's progress, too, it tended to emphasize Soviet successes rather than Western advances.¹⁵⁷

In pursuit of its objectives, the Federation co-operated with the Free Germany Movement (consisting essentially of groups of refugees from Nazi Germany who were working for the liberation of their homeland), which had been involved in the founding of the Federation.¹⁵⁸ In particular, it cooperated — for example in Mexico — with the communist element in the Movement.¹⁵⁹ The Federation had reports

¹⁵² CSIS, RCMP, report of F.W. Schulz, Toronto Intelligence Branch, 8 July 1943.

¹⁵³ CSIS, M.A.S. Hett, Translator and E.W. Elfvingren Translator, 30 June 1943, "Re. German Canadian Federation."

¹⁵⁴ CSIS, Department of National War Services Canada, Directorate of Censorship, 28 October 1943, "Second Bulletin of German Canadian Federation," 1.

¹⁵⁵ CSIS, RCMP, Toronto, Ontario, 8 November 1943, attachment to letter of George B. McClellan, for O.C., "O" Division, to the Commissioner, RCMP, Ottawa, "Re. German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario," 3.

¹⁵⁶ See *Mitteilungen der Deutsch-Kanadischen Foederation* (1 September 1943), 4; also, "Nachrichten aus der Deutsch-Kanadischen Foederation," *Volksstimme* (November 1944), 12. Also, Kolasky, *Shattered Illusions*, 44-5, 61.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, CSIS, Department of National War Services Canada, Directorate of Censorship, 28 October 1943, "Second Bulletin of Canadian Federation."

¹⁵⁸ CSIS, RCMP Sub-Division Toronto Intelligence Branch, 8 July 1943, "Re: German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario." Also, CSIS, RCMP report, 1 August 1944.

¹⁵⁹ Commenting on this, J. Leopold of the RCMP Intelligence Service observes: "In their activities in connection with the Free Germany Movement the German Canadian Federation

on its activities printed in the publications of the Movement, and it also received propaganda material from various segments of the Free Germany Movement — for example, from Mexico (*El Libro Libre*); London; the United States (*The German American*); and Moscow (The Publishing House for Foreign Language Literature); and it regularly received copies of *Freies Deutschland*.¹⁶⁰ In addition, it donated money to the activities of the Free Germany Movement.¹⁶¹ The Federation, as such, left little doubt that its goals were the goals of the Free Germany Movement dominated by the communists.¹⁶²

In spite of its propaganda work, the Federation had little success in recruiting German Canadians as members and little influence among Germans in Canada. It failed to bring religious or cultural groups into the Federation, and even German Canadians opposed to Hitler — apart from those with a communist political affiliation — were wary of it.¹⁶³ Among refugees from Nazi Germany, it found only Sudeten Germans amicably disposed to it and willing to become active in the organization.¹⁶⁴

will follow the Communist line” — CSIS, J. Leopold, S/Inspector, Assistant Intelligence Officer, to The Director, Prisoners of War, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 17 July 1944. Evidence of close co-operation between Canada and Mexico may also be seen in CSIS, Department of National War Services Canada, Directorate of Censorship, letter from Co-Ordination Committee of the German Canadian Federation, Toronto, to *Freies Deutschland*, Apartado, Mexico, February 1944; CSIS, “Extract RCMP, Re: German Canadian Federation” (memorandum from J.E.M. Hanna to Inspector Leopold), 19 June 1945; CSIS, memorandum from A.W. Parsons, S/Inspector, for Intelligence Officer, to Inspector Leopold, “Re: *Volksstimme*,” 14 May 1945; and CSIS, “Extract RCMP, Re: German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario,” 12 December 1945.

¹⁶⁰See, for example, CSIS, Department of National War Services Canada, Directorate of Censorship, letter from Secretary, Latin American Committee of Free Germans, Apartado, Mexico, to Horst Doehler, German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Canada, 14 November 1943. Also, CSIS, German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario, to *Freies Deutschland*, Apartado, Mexico, 24 November 1943; and CSIS, RCMP, report on “The German Canadian Federation,” 1 August 1944; as well as CSIS, F.W. Schutz, Supt., Commanding “O” Div., to The Commissioner, RCMP, Ottawa, 25 February 1944, “Re: Co-ordination Committee, German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ont.”

¹⁶¹CSIS, J. Leopold, S/Inspector, Asst. Intelligence Officer, to the O.C. “O” Div., RCMP, Toronto, Ont., 14 January 1944, “Re. German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario.”

¹⁶²See, for example, CSIS, F.W. Schutz, Supt., Commanding “O” Division, to The Commissioner, RCMP, Ottawa, 22 November 1943, “Re. German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario,” 2 of enclosure. Also, *Mitteilungen der Deutsch-Kanadischen Foederation* (1 September 1943), 5.

¹⁶³CSIS, RCMP Detachment Toronto C.I.B., 2 March 1945, “Co-ordinating Committee, German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario.”

¹⁶⁴CSIS, Department of National War Services Canada, Directorate of Censorship, letter from Horst Doehler, German-Canadian Federation, Toronto, to _____, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 17 October 1943.

Although the *raison d'être* of the Federation had been to involve German Canadians in the war effort against Nazi Germany, it did not dissolve itself immediately after the cessation of hostilities. It also continued its strong advocacy of the Soviet Union. Although the Communist International had been dissolved in 1943, largely as a result of pressure by Britain and the United States on the Soviet Union, communist parties and their supporters in the West, inspired by the prestige gained by the Soviet Union from its war effort against Nazi Germany, continued to follow Soviet guidance regarding policy.¹⁶⁵ This continued even after the creation of Cominform by the Soviet Union in 1947, which had been brought into existence essentially to contain American power rather than spread the revolution.¹⁶⁶

After the cessation of hostilities, the Federation argued that its presence was necessary to counteract the pro-Nazi views that still infected the German-Canadian community. Evidence of these were found in German language publications such as *Der Nordwesten*.¹⁶⁷ Examples included complaints by German Canadians that they were not being treated justly in this country, and German-Canadian criticism of the Soviet Union and its treatment of German civilians after the war. In order to counteract pro-Nazi views, the Federation sought to re-educate German Canadians through speeches, cultural events, films, or any other means that would inform them of the true situation in Germany and Europe regarding such matters as the Potsdam Agreement or the Soviet policy in Germany.¹⁶⁸ The Federation defended the Potsdam Agreement, which resulted in a large area of eastern Germany being taken over by Poland, and sought to expose Germans to positive views on the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁹

The Federation blamed the Western Powers for the division of Germany, claiming that this was done to make western Germany a puppet of American capitalism. It considered that neither America, Britain, nor France was heeding the will of the German people, but rather that they were building in western Germany a bastion of German imperialism by putting the bankers and Junkers back in power.¹⁷⁰ It denounced in particular the Marshall Plan, which it described as an attempt by the Americans to divide Germany and subject German industry to American control and permanently reduce Germany to the status of a primarily

¹⁶⁵Discussed by Claudin, vol. 1, 15, 24-7, and 39. Also, Claudin, *Comintern*, vol. 2, 312-4.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, vol. 2, 461-73.

¹⁶⁷"*Der Nordwesten fuer Rettung des deutschen Imperialismus*," *Volksstimme* (Januar 1946), 3. Also, "Eindruecke aus Manitoba — Deutschkanadier Wohin?," *Volksstimme* (Januar 1945), 8.

¹⁶⁸"Aufgaben der deutschen Antifaschisten in Kanada," *Volksstimme* (Januar 1946), 14-5.

¹⁶⁹See, for example, "Die Potsdamer Beschluesse," *Volksstimme* (Oktober 1945), 3-5. Also, "Nicht verleumden — sondern lernen," *Volksstimme* (Januar 1949), 2.

¹⁷⁰"Die Einheit Deutschlands und die Stellung der Deutschkanadier," *Volksstimme* (Juli 1948), 1, and "Eine neue Etappe der Zerstueckelung Deutschlands," *Volksstimme* (September 1948), 1.

agricultural nation.¹⁷¹ The Federation also blamed the western allies for disagreements over Berlin in 1948 and 1949,¹⁷² and saw behind the American position the drive of American capital and industry to win new markets.¹⁷³ The Federation condemned Canadian support of American policy and, because of his criticism of the Soviet Union and its policies in Europe, called the Acting Prime Minister, Louis St. Laurent, an arch enemy of the working class and of the USSR, and a loyal servant of Wall Street.¹⁷⁴

In contrast to the Western Powers, the Soviet Union was described as wanting to keep Germany united.¹⁷⁵ It was perceived as seeking to do so through the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), created by a union of Social Democrats and Communists, and as constructing in eastern Germany a system that represented the interests of the people. It was also rebuilding cities that had been destroyed by the war, not only in Germany but also in Poland and other areas of eastern Europe.¹⁷⁶ The *Volksstimme*, the mouthpiece of the Federation, declared that while Canada supported the American and British policy in Germany, the German Canadian Federation supported the policy of the Socialist Unity Party,¹⁷⁷ which represented Soviet plans for a united Germany.

The German Canadian Federation condoned the Soviet Union's expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe, arguing that this was justified by Nazi excesses and also served as a guarantee against future German imperialism.¹⁷⁸ Reports on crimes committed against Germans during the expulsions were ascribed to falsehoods spread by reactionary forces that were still making themselves heard in the German community.¹⁷⁹ These attitudes of the Federation were largely responsible for its decline in the German Canadian community. Horst Doehler, former editor of the *Volksstimme*, attributed this loss of favour in the community especially to the Federation's support of the Potsdam Agreement and its attempts to justify Soviet

¹⁷¹"Kolonialstatus fuer Westdeutschland," *Volksstimme* (Juli 1948), 1. Also, "Wiederaufbau oder Stillegung?," *Volksstimme* (November 1948), 8.

¹⁷²See, for example, "Die Wahrheit ueber Berlin," *Volksstimme* (Dezember 1948), 1.

¹⁷³"Wie Wallstreet Krise und Krieg exportiert," *Volksstimme* (Januar 1949), 1.

¹⁷⁴CSIS, RCMP Toronto Special Section, 8 November 1948, "Re German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario." See also report in *Volksstimme*, 5, 7 (November 1948), 1.

¹⁷⁵CSIS, RCMP Toronto Special Section, 16 March 1949, Reports "Re: *Volksstimme*, 1949; *Volksstimme*, 5, 6 (September 1948); and *Volksstimme*, 5, 8 (Dezember 1948)."

¹⁷⁶"Wiederaufbau oder Stillegung?," *Volksstimme* (8 November 1948), 8. Also, "Leipziger Messe — die deutsche Messe," *Volksstimme* (November 1948), 8.

¹⁷⁷CSIS, RCMP Toronto Special Section, 3 June 1948, "Re: German Canadian Federation — Toronto — Ontario"; and report on a speech by Joseph Oberle on the occasion of the national festival of the German-Canadian Federation, *Volksstimme*, 4, 7 (August 1947), 4.

¹⁷⁸"Die Verschiebung der Deutschen in Europa," *Volksstimme* (Februar 1946), 9.

¹⁷⁹"Aufgabe der deutschen Antifaschisten in Kanada," *Volksstimme* (Januar 1946), 14-5.

policy in Europe.¹⁸⁰ Another reason given for the loss of members was the community's reception of critical reports from family members living in Soviet-occupied areas of Europe.¹⁸¹ Yet another factor was that many of the inter-war immigrants had acquired a knowledge of English and were turning to the larger society for services formerly provided by organizations such as the Federation.¹⁸² The result of the decline was the eventual demise of the German-Canadian Federation in 1949, despite the fact that membership in the Federation was made mandatory for German Canadians wishing to visit the German Democratic Republic (GDR).¹⁸³ This brought to an end the organized activities of these German-Canadian labour radicals in the German-Canadian community. Although some became active in the Friends of the GDR, which was organized shortly after the establishment of the republic, their role was to influence Canadian government policy towards the GDR rather than to influence and win adherents in the German-Canadian community.

In summary, several observations may be made regarding the activities of German-Canadian labour radicals and the organizations they established during the period under consideration. As the members of other language affiliates of the Communist Party, the membership of radical German labour organizations consisted largely of immigrants. Members of the German organizations were largely unemployed workers who had originated partly in Germany but primarily in Hungary and Yugoslavia. Having come to the New World in the hope of making a better livelihood, they were thrown out of work by circumstances outside their control. The communist ideology offered them an explanation for their predicament and at the same time presented them with the challenge of reshaping society so that their needs would be met. This offered new purpose and meaning to lives disrupted by the loss of employment. Working together to build a new society also created a sense of community for the group. Being able to see themselves as part of the new order, marshalling in the new society, helped them to overcome the loss of self confidence that so often accompanies the loss of a job.

¹⁸⁰Interview with Horst Doehler, 11 July 1989. Police reports comment on financial problems of the organization, its inactivity and losses in membership — CSIS, RCMP Detachment Toronto, Special Section, 16 December 1949, "Re: German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario"; CSIS, RCMP Toronto Special Section, 16 August 1949, "Re: German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario"; CSIS, RCMP Toronto Special Section, 16 March 1949, "Re: *Volksstimme*, 1949."

¹⁸¹CSIS, RCMP Detachment Windsor, Ontario, 17 August 1949, "Re: The German Canadian Democratic Club, Windsor, Ontario."

¹⁸²Evidence of this may be seen in a police report on the loss of readership by the *Volksstimme* — CSIS, RCMP, Toronto, Special Section, 16 March 1949, "Re: *Volksstimme* (People's Voice), 1949."

¹⁸³CSIS, "Extract RCMP, Re. German Canadian Federation," Memorandum from J.E.M. Hanna, A/Sgt., to Inspector MacNeil, 5 February 1949.

Although small branches existed for brief periods in rural areas such as Pindale, Alberta, the organizations drew their membership primarily from major urban centres where Germans were concentrated. The main branches were in Vancouver, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Kitchener, Hamilton, St. Catharines and Windsor. The centre of operations for these organizations gradually shifted from western to eastern Canada as the immigrant workers moved east to find employment. The initiative for organizing locals usually came from one or two individuals, such as Penner and Cesinger in Winnipeg, Widmer in Edmonton, and Bader in Regina. In other cases, such as that of Toronto and other locals in eastern Canada, locals were organized by members sent out from centres where the movement had already established itself.¹⁸⁴

Although spread out across the country and made up of people originating in different countries, the organizations proved themselves remarkably capable of acting in unison and quickly altering their strategies, goals, and names, as changing circumstances required. This was made possible by the relative passivity of the rank-and-file members of the organizations. These tended to look upon the clubs mainly as places to relax and get together with friends. Rather than being actively caught up in the wider goals of reorganizing society or fighting fascism that the group leadership espoused, they tended to be concerned more narrowly with finding solutions to their own life problems.¹⁸⁵ This permitted some four hundred activists,¹⁸⁶ who were usually sympathizers or members of the Communist Party, to run these organizations more or less as they chose. They established statutes that tied German Canadian labour firmly to the communist-oriented labour organizations and permitted the leadership to expel any individuals or locals that deviated from its policy. They controlled the policies of locals scattered across the country, either managing operations directly at the local level, or by providing itinerant leaders who travelled frequently from city to city to supervise and co-ordinate strategy.

The influence of the movement in the larger German-Canadian community appears to have been minimal. Although the different locals were always undertaking drives to gain new members and win Germans away from their bourgeois organizations, they were never able to bring organizational membership significantly above two thousand. Their pro-communist orientation automatically made them suspect in the German-Canadian community and prevented them from increasing their membership. This was further encouraged by the strong centralization of the labour organizations, which interfered with their keeping attuned to

¹⁸⁴NA, M. Bader Papers, MG 31, H 122, "Memoirs," part II, 13-4. Also, CSIS, RCMP report, "Re. German Canadian Federation," 1 August 1944.

¹⁸⁵Interview, 26 October 1988, with Horst Doehler. Also CSIS, RCMP Sub-Division Detachment Toronto H.Q., 9 February 1940, "Re. German Canadian People's League, Eastern District Convention, 1938 — Toronto, Ontario."

¹⁸⁶"Aufgaben der deutschen Antifaschisten in Kanada," *Volksstimme* (Januar 1946), 14-5.

the views and attitudes of German Canadians.¹⁸⁷ Of course, German Canadians were not any more likely to join the pro-Nazi Bund, which had an approximate membership of two thousand at its height.¹⁸⁸ It appears that German Canadians were for the most part attached neither to the right nor to the left in the socio-political spectrum but were satisfied to fulfill their aspirations through organizations that were at neither political extreme.

Reaching a high-point in membership in the early 1930s, the organizations under examination suffered a gradual decline thereafter. Although no statistics giving the membership of the German Workers and Farmers Association are available, a RCMP report estimates that at one time the subscribers to the *Deutsche Arbeiter Zeitung* numbered 2,200.¹⁸⁹ This would suggest that at that time membership in the German Workers and Farmers Association was at a similar level. According to Horst Doehler, membership in the German Workers and Farmers Association declined gradually after the rise to power of National Socialist Germany.¹⁹⁰ Some left the Association because they feared that family members in Germany might be endangered if it became known that their relatives were participating in an anti-fascist organization. Others left because of what they perceived as the anti-German stance of the German Workers and Farmers Association and of the League. Still others left because of the authoritarian pro-communist attitudes of leaders in the local organizations. These losses appear to have been temporarily offset by the recruitment of new members, largely middle class members from the German-Jewish community, who were attracted by the anti-Nazi orientation of the League. Informed estimates put the membership of the German Canadian League in 1939 at about 1,800.¹⁹¹

Since the movement's numbers were always small and the strong pro-communist stance of its leaders ensured that it would attract few adherents beyond its core group, the question becomes: what was the importance of the German Workers and Farmers Association and its successor organizations? For example, what was the significance of these organizations in the Canadian communist movement or the Canadian labour movement? Commenting on communist involvement in the labour movement, Abella states: "In organizing industrial workers in Canada, no group played a more important role than the communists."¹⁹² The language organizations that took direction from the communist party played an important

¹⁸⁷This is pointed out in an RCMP report. See CSIS, RCMP Detachment, Toronto C.I.B., 2 March 1945, "Co-ordinating Committee, German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario."

¹⁸⁸Wagner, *Brothers*, 68.

¹⁸⁹CSIS, RCMP Intelligence Branch, Toronto, 1 November 1943, "Co-ordinating Committee for Eastern Canada, German Canadian Federation, Toronto, Ontario," 1.

¹⁹⁰Interview, 11 July 1989, with Doehler.

¹⁹¹CSIS, RCMP, "German Canadian League," 7 September 1939. Also, "German Canadian Majority Declared to be Non-Nazi," *Montreal Standard* (10 June 1939), 4.

¹⁹²Irving Abella, *The Canadian Labour Movement, 1902-1960* (Ottawa 1975), 23.

role, of course, in organizing radical labour unions. Ukrainian Canadians, for example, were heavily involved in the unskilled trades and played a significant role in organizing unskilled workers in most industries. Finns, who were heavily involved in the lumber and pulp industry, played a leading role in organizing communist unions in these areas.¹⁹³ Jewish workers, again, dominated the garment industry, and Jewish labour leaders drew heavily on this support to build their career in the radical labour movement.¹⁹⁴ German labour was not concentrated enough for them to play a leading role in organizing workers in any industry or to serve as a basis from where their leaders might move out to play a leading role among labour. However, German worker organizations helped to unionize members of their own community and integrated them into the larger labour movement.

German-Canadian labour radicals formed only a small segment of the membership in the Communist Party. Commenting on Communist party membership, Avakumovic states that Finns, Jews and Ukrainians made up about 90 per cent of the Communist party membership during most of the 1920s. In 1929, the percentage of East Europeans rose to 95 percent.¹⁹⁵ In comparison, few Germans were actual members of the Communist Party. Of these, only one, namely Jacob Penner, played a significant role in the Communist Party, and he owed his prominence, not so much to his position in German Canadian labour organizations, but to his work among English Canadians.

Nor does the size or complexity of German labour organizations compare to that of organizations established by groups such as the Finns or the Ukrainians, who in many ways served as the bulkward of the communist movement in Canada. In comparison to the Germans, for example, Ukrainian-Canadian radical labour was already well organized before World War I. By the early 1930s, the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA), the Workers Benevolent Association, and the Association to Aid the Liberation Movement in Western Ukraine, with a membership in the thousands, were organized both in rural and urban centres where Ukrainians were concentrated. ULFTA itself had a total membership of 5,483 in 1929. By 1939, ULFTA had 113 temples, 201 branches and about 10,000 members, offering a whole variety of social and cultural programs for its members. In addition, Ukrainian communists also launched a variety of co-operative programs (some in partnership with the Finns), be these coal and wood yards, grocery stores and bakeries.¹⁹⁶ A significant portion of the Finnish community as a whole identified with radical labour and during the 1920s about half the membership of

¹⁹³Kolasky, *Shattered Illusions*, 18.

¹⁹⁴Irving Abella, *A Coat of Many Colours: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada* (Toronto 1990), 169. Erna Paris, *Jews: An Account of their experiences in Canada* (Toronto 1980), 157-66.

¹⁹⁵Avakumovic, *Communist Party*, 35.

¹⁹⁶Kolasky, *Shattered Illusions*, 2-8, 17 and 125-39.

the Communist Party of Canada was made up of Finns.¹⁹⁷ In the Finnish community, the Finnish Organization of Canada at its height had some 70 locals and was deeply involved in all aspects of Finnish Canadian cultural life.¹⁹⁸

Of course, both Ukrainian and Finnish labour organizations had a longer history in Canada than their German counterparts. In both communities, the communist or radical labour element was more strongly represented than it was in the German-Canadian community. This gave them a more solid basis on which to build. Furthermore, German-Canadian labour radicals had only begun to organize when their efforts to establish a strong organizational base were disrupted by the rise of National Socialism. Energies which might have been directed towards organizing their movement became vested in fighting the spread of Nazism. In a sense, it was in this area that German radical labour made its most profound contribution, not only to the labour movement, but to Canadian society. Of course, other groups, such as Jewish Canadians, also took a strong position against Nazism.¹⁹⁹ There was, however, an important difference between the Jewish and the German opposition to Hitlerism. Hitler had made anti-Semitism an integral part of his program. It was, therefore, natural for Canadian Jewry to oppose him. For German-Canadian labour radicals, however, opposition to Hitler meant taking a stand at variance with that of a good portion of their own community. This included not only the pro-fascists, but all those elements in the German Canadian community that, while not supporting Hitler, at least tolerated him. Of course, in taking a largely wait-and-see attitude towards Nazism, in particular during its early years, most German Canadians differed little from Canadians in general. Taking an anti-Nazi stand took courage for people who were immigrants, for family members of anti-Nazi activists who were still in Europe often found themselves persecuted by the regime. It also demanded a clarity of vision as to what constituted the German identity. It meant divesting oneself of traditional, parochial nationalism. German labour radicals not only divested themselves of parochial nationalism, they also fought it in the cause for a greater humanity, as they perceived it.

In their own community, organizations such as the German Workers and Farmers Association offered nurture and direction to a significant minority of suffering people at a time when their lives were being thrown into disarray by the Depression. These associations helped to explain their situation to them and offered them a vision of a way out of their distress. As time progressed, however, the conditions in which the German-Canadian members of these organizations found themselves grew less and less relevant in determining the views and aspirations of the organizations that purported to represent them. Under the influence of Moscow

¹⁹⁷ Avakumovic, *Communist Party*, 35. Also see E. W. Laine, "Finnish Canadian Radicalism and Canadian Politics: The First Forty Years, 1900-1940," *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada*, 101, 110.

¹⁹⁸ These are described by Eklund, *Builders*, 251-369.

¹⁹⁹ Paris, *Jews*, gives an indication of this, 49-96.

and the international labour movement, these became essentially representatives of the views and interests of the USSR. This was most evident after the war, when the German-Canadian Federation became little more than an advocate of the Soviet Union and its policies. Unable, in consequence, to attract members in sufficient numbers to continue its activities, the organization finally ceased to exist.

While the views of the different organizations were primarily outgrowths of a certain ideological orientation, the war and revelations following its end proved that many of the criticisms which German radical labour made of the National Socialists were well-founded. In retrospect, one finds oneself wishing that the observations of these organizations and the goals they pursued had won greater acceptance from their contemporaries, both in Europe and North America.

They did not win greater acceptance for several reasons. One was that the Canadian government lacked the expertise to make it aware of the National Socialist threat.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the Canadian government, in particular its law enforcement arm, the RCMP, tended to view radical labour as a threat during the entire inter-war period.²⁰¹ This made suspect any views offered by radical labour, be this on domestic matters or international affairs. German radical labour itself contributed to its lack of credibility. Although it clearly saw the evils inherent in National Socialism, it tended to be blind to the evils perpetrated by Stalinism. This limitation stemmed in large part from a confrontational ideological orientation that encouraged German radical labour to view reality in terms of opposing extremes, with capitalism in continuous conflict with communism. Furthermore, convinced that their Marxist ideology was correct, German Canadian Marxists and pro-Marxists were inclined to discount all criticism of the Soviet Union as stemming from bourgeois or capitalist antagonism to the worker state.

Any criticism leveled by German-Canadian radical labour either against capitalism or against fascism was, of course, vitiated by the fact that their criticisms had their origin within a system that had produced Stalinist Russia. One must add, however, that the views and attitudes of German labour radicals were very much shaped by the personal economic problems that confronted them. They saw the promise of the worker state, which the Soviet Union offered them, as an answer to these problems. It was this promise, coloured by the trauma of the Depression, that may help to explain the tunnel vision of German radical labour, as it worked to improve its own lot and the lives of working people in general.

²⁰⁰ See Robert H. Keyserlingk, "The Canadian Government's Attitude Toward Germans and German Canadians in World War II," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 16, (1984), 17.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 17. Also see John Sawatsky, *Men in the Shadows* (Toronto 1980), 71, 92.

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