Origins of the Bund

An explosion of revolutionary hopes followed the fall of the Wilhelmine monarchy in November 1918. No one embodied the radical aspirations of the moment better than Artur Jacobs, a charismatic thirty-eight-year-old with boundless optimism and self-confidence. Born in 1880 into modest circumstances in Elberfeld, a small town in the Wupper Valley, Artur went on to attend higher secondary school (in German, “Gymnasium”) and university, and eventually found his vocation as a high school teacher. Artur was inspired by socialism’s promise of social justice and by the verve and independence of the burgeoning German youth movement. In the spirit of the latter, he aimed to do away with the obligation of formal respect traditionally accorded the teacher, hoping instead to inspire his students with his magnetism and mentorship. Personality, not credentials, would affirm his claim to lead. Impatient, impassioned, careless about propriety (he once, for example, took a group of girls on a hiking trip during which teacher and pupils all slept in the same barn), compelling to those who accepted his leadership and dismissive of those who did not, Artur was a controversial figure among staff, pupils, and parents alike.¹

In the turmoil after World War I, Artur’s hope for an educational revolution that would lead to societal transformation was widely shared in
Germany. The radical mood briefly permeated even the Prussian educational administration (in Germany, education remained the responsibility of the individual states). In November 1918, Gustav Wyneken, an influential educator and the spiritual father of the Entschiedene Jugend (“Youth of Conviction”), Germany’s “first revolutionary pupil and student movement,” was given an official appointment by the new socialist education minister and charged with transforming the school curriculum for the new republic.

In Essen, Artur was a tireless advocate of educational change, mobilizing pupils in his school to force through the revolutionary idea of a “school council,” which gave pupils a say in running the school. However, despite Artur’s protestations, just a few months later the teaching staff voted by a large majority to end the experiment. Undaunted, Artur briefly pursued the grander project of a citywide pupil-teacher council. In August 1919, Essen became the center of the Entschiedene Jugend movement and Artur one of its most influential activists. After he helped organize a major conference of students from across the city, the local Catholic press incited a backlash among conservative pupils, teachers, and parents. In the ensuing battle over school politics, Artur, though still relatively young, was placed on extended sick leave and eventually forced to take early retirement, albeit with a generous pension. It was at this low point, with his hopes for revolutionary pedagogy crushed and his career brought to an untimely end, that Artur discovered the possibilities of adult education and called the Bund into being.

In a wave of enthusiasm for widening mass access to higher education, 1919 saw the founding of Volkshochschulen (adult education institutes) across Germany. In Essen, Artur played a significant role in creating the new institute, which, unusually, offered courses in four separate religious and political divisions: Protestant, Catholic, “free” (i.e., nondenominational and, in fact, socialist), and “scientific-neutral” (i.e., liberal). Artur became the coordinator of the “free” division. Just as earlier in the Gymnasium, Artur sought to create a close bond between inspirational teacher and motivated students that would extend beyond the classroom. Here, in this new world of adult education full of idealistic teachers and students, his ideas fell on fertile ground.

In March 1924, Artur and eight other teachers and pupils from the school, aged between twenty-five and forty-five and most of them women,
Standing By

Between 1933 and 1938, the Bund’s energies were focused largely on keeping its little vessel afloat. Its top priorities were to offer an alternative to the Nazi vision and to provide its members with a safe space. In small ways, it is true, Bund members did confront the regime, sometimes separately, sometimes together. Several in the group felt called upon to take more substantial risks—most notably in offering temporary hiding places to left-wingers on the run. But on the whole, the Bund was engaged in only cautious outreach. From an outsider’s perspective, its subversive activity was mostly invisible.

As Germany grew more prosperous and powerful during these years, the Nazis intensified their assault on the Jews. The escalation of anti-Jewish policy was not, however, continuous. In the early weeks of the regime, the war against the Jews took second place to the war on the left, though Jewish left-wingers were singled out for particularly brutal treatment. In 1933 and 1934, Jews were ejected from the civil service, law, medicine, and journalism. The protection for former veterans, on which President Paul von Hindenburg had insisted, allowed a significant number of Jewish civil servants and professionals to remain in their posts, but younger Jews were soon barred from any kind of higher education or professional advancement. In
1935, the Nuremberg Laws reduced Jews from citizens to subjects and made intermarriage—and sexual relations—between Jews and gentiles illegal. Subsequent regulations also introduced the concept of the mixed-race Jew, a category that would now face a confusing mix of prohibitions and exemptions. In economic terms, anti-Jewish measures were introduced very unevenly, varying from one trade to another and from place to place. Some regions quickly became off-limits, with shops even unwilling to sell to Jewish customers, let alone buy from Jewish merchants or employ Jewish labor. In some towns and trades, however, Jewish entrepreneurs were able to operate relatively unhindered. After 1936, the pressure on Jews to close or sell out intensified. Non-Jewish firms also found themselves nudged more and more aggressively to remove their Jewish employees. By 1938, even highly valued senior executives like Wasja Enoch’s husband, Otto, or Tove’s Christian but “racially” half-Jewish husband, Gerhard, were being edged out. Everywhere Jews were shunned, their interactions with non-Jews reduced to commercial or official transactions. Despite the fits and starts, the extent to which Jews were excluded from German society in a mere five years was astonishing.

Throughout these years, the Bund remained largely on the sidelines, though it provided moral support and sometimes a place of refuge for Jewish members seeking to leave the country. The Dutch town of Roermond, where Erna Michels now lived, was within easy reach of the Ruhr, and one Bund friend after another traveled there to enjoy a few days of freedom. Liesel Speer, for example, visited Erna repeatedly between 1934 and 1938; Ernst apparently spent five days there in 1937, and Sonja followed him in 1938, as did Gertrud Jacobs, Artur’s sister-in-law, and other Bund members in 1939. In 1938, Sonja also took the train to Zurich to ask a contact there, Reja Farbstein, about the possibility of arranging for Dore to live and work abroad.1

Even when it wanted to, the group found it had little ability to affect the situation of those who remained behind in Germany. The Jacobses could do little to protect their son, Friedl, for example, now officially a first-degree mixed-race Jew (i.e., a child possessing two Jewish grandparents and, thus, subject to increasingly restricted opportunities in education, training, and employment), who lurched from one miserable school experience to another. For a while he attended a school in Kettwig, but he was
forced to leave by Easter 1934. His attempt to study at the Essen Engineering College in 1936 was thwarted by several members of the Nazi German Students’ League, who bullied and harassed him. Former classmates later recalled shouts of “Windows open, Jews out” and “It stinks of garlic.” (The notion that German Jews used lots of garlic in their cooking was absurd by any measure.) According to the classmates, Nazi students damaged Friedl’s drawing instruments and, as one witness remembered it, threw a full wastepaper basket at him across several rows of benches. After a few weeks of this, Friedl moved to an engineering school in Duisburg, but with the same miserable outcome. In the spring of 1938, the Jacobses sent Friedl to stay with relatives in Holland.

As for Jews who were not members, the Bund also made some efforts in their behalf. Else visited the nurse in the Jewish community offices in Düsseldorf to ask what help the group might offer. The Bund was systematic in its operations and tended not to engage in one-off efforts, so similar visits may have taken place in other cities. One well-documented individual recipient of help was twenty-four-year-old Eva Seligmann, a half-Jewish woman who in 1936 came to Essen to live in the Blockhaus for a year. The Seligmann case is interesting because it shows that even in the mid-1930s the links with leftist or left-liberal Jewish milieus that had been a feature of the Bund’s pre-Nazi world were not completely broken. The connection came through Gerda Simons, who, as a socialist, had been ousted from her position as a professor of education in 1933 but continued trying to assist former Jewish students. In introducing her former student Eva Seligmann to the Bund, Gerda doubtless recognized that the young woman’s background in the youth movement, her commitment to pacifism, and her interest in educational reform were all reminiscent of the Bund’s intellectual spirit.

Unable to find a job as a teacher after 1933 because of her “racial status,” Eva took a series of short-term positions before moving to Essen. At the Blockhaus, she earned board and pocket money in return for cooking and providing housekeeping and child care. Unsurprisingly, Eva found the Bund an inspiring community and formed friendships that would last a lifetime. But she could not advance in Germany in her chosen field, and the Bund was not in a position to provide financial support indefinitely. Luckily, she managed to immigrate to England before the outbreak of war.
Jews, particularly Jewish women, took advantage of the professional training Dore and Lisa were able to offer in gymnastics, and as late as March 1940, when interrogated by the Gestapo, Lisa was still listing half a dozen Jewish women as pupils. In addition to the professional qualification, the training no doubt provided moments of respite at a time of ever greater anxiety.

The Bund may have done more to help outsiders, although we lack the evidence. It is also possible that in these early years of Nazi rule, the Bund simply did not feel compelled to act. What Jews in distress needed was material help or connections abroad, and the Bund could provide neither. After the war, its members also admitted frankly that they had not been on the same wavelength as much of the Jewish community in the region. The Ruhr’s Jews, like the majority of those in Germany, were solidly middle-class and engaged in trade. They were patriotic, respectable, and for the most part socially conservative; their lifestyle bore no resemblance to the Bundists. In an interview, Gustav and Mathilde Zenker both remembered having to overcome their reluctance to help people with such different political views and from a radically different social milieu. It thus seems likely that the Bund’s efforts to help Jews remained limited during this time. It is surely no accident that Eva Seligmann had so similar an intellectual orientation to their own.

Overcoming Their Reserve

The events that came to be known as Kristallnacht were shocking and unforgettable, yet they also had a clear prehistory. The first half of 1938 had seen ominous changes. In March of that year, German Jews looked on fearfully as their counterparts in Austria were subjected to a brutal assault following the Anschluss. In April, German Jews were ordered to supply the authorities with a comprehensive list of all their assets. Jews’ ability to obtain and use passports was restricted, and in the summer a new Jewish ID card was announced. All this and more created a profound sense of foreboding.

With increasing frequency and vehemence, Hitler had also been publicly accusing “international Jewry” of blocking Germany’s foreign policy ambitions. As tension mounted over the Czech crisis in the autumn of 1938, Jews again found themselves on the receiving end of Nazi violence. The
crisis was resolved by the end of September with the Munich Agreement, but many Nazi radicals had been hoping for war, and now, having been denied it, they were spoiling for a fight. In October 1938, responding to pending administrative changes in Poland that would deny Jews with Polish citizenship living in Germany the right of return, the Nazis brutally rounded up Polish Jews in Germany and drove them across the border. Yet even these attacks paled in comparison to the violence on November 9 and 10.7

The immediate catalyst for Kristallnacht was the death on November 9 of an official in the German embassy in Paris, Ernst vom Rath. The Nazis never needed evidence to blame events on the Jews, but in this case, there was a direct Jewish connection. Vom Rath died from gunshot wounds inflicted days earlier by Herschel Grynszpan, a young German Jew of Polish descent who was furious at the deportation of his parents from Hanover in the nationwide roundup. When the news of vom Rath’s death reached Germany, the Nazi leadership happened to be assembled in Munich, celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Hitler’s Beer Hall Putsch—so it was easy for Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels to urge the regional party bosses to exact revenge. They, in turn, telephoned their subordinates back home to take action.

Mobs set synagogues on fire, forced rabbis and other Jewish leaders to parade through the streets, and desecrated and burned Torah rolls. Jewish shops were smashed, looted, doused with gasoline, and set ablaze. Jewish welfare homes, orphanages, and other public institutions were invaded, and their inmates terrorized and brutally assaulted. The doors of Jewish homes across the country were broken down, as rampaging hordes smashed, burned, stole, and battered. Police and fire services were ordered not to intervene unless non-Jewish property or lives were at stake. Hundreds died in the violence.8 Many older Jews never recovered either psychologically or physically from the events of that night.

In the fevered atmosphere of the days between the news of the attack on vom Rath and the announcement of his death, Artur foresaw that there might be trouble and traveled with Dore to Wuppertal, where they were less well known.9 Tove Gerson and Hedwig Gehrke stayed behind at the Jacobses’ house on Dönhof Street, where someone had scrawled on the steps that it was a “Jew house.” Tove later recalled her hesitancy to do anything
about the graffiti, in contrast to what she saw as Hedwig Gehrke’s no-nonsense working-class readiness to take a bucket and mop and wash it away. In Wuppertal, Artur and Dore were unmolested. “You will have been very worried about us,” Artur wrote to Friedl on November 12, 1938,

and therefore you should know that we are healthy and fine and apart from small disturbances at the house have not experienced anything bad. . . . You will have learned about the events from the newspaper. I don’t want to say anything about them at the moment. These were days that we will never forget. Not only the wonderful synagogue, but the beautiful youth center too was a victim of the flames.11

The Jacobses learned later that the Blockhaus had only narrowly escaped destruction.12

In 1942, hoping to alert the sleepy little oil town of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, to the reality of Nazi Germany, Tove dwelled at length on the events of those days. She had immigrated to the States in 1939, a few months after Kristallnacht, to join her half-Jewish husband, who had been there alone for a year while she’d continued her Körperbildung training with Dore and her political education with the Bund. Speaking to an American audience in her imperfect English, Tove described an incident that had occurred during the violence on November 10 and 11, 1938. Even as the assaults and vandalism continued, Tove had taken it upon herself to visit some family acquaintances who had been affected, a wealthy Essen Jewish couple, the Heinemanns, to express her solidarity in the face of the violence. She arrived at their home with flowers and much anxiety, was snarled at by someone in the crowd, but managed to get safely inside to find the old couple and their house in a state of utter devastation. Tove’s English notes for her 1942 speech survive in Harvard’s Schlesinger Library:

Fine old couple. Cultivated home. Serkin, Busch, Furtwängler have played in this home. How the home looked after the “action,” How people acted during and after the action: crowd curious and sensational—satisfied over misery of “the wealthy”; the neighborhood-friends watching from the window without
helping (high city-official), the craftsmen refused to take over repairs; man of the crowd menacing me because “flowers to Jews”; woman for cleaning refuses to come any longer. . . . Why could fright so completely defeat their humanity? Because they did not believe really in anything except their own security and happiness. The only exception was a Protestant minister who picked the couple up in their garden and took them mid through the crowd, home in his house. When the old couple asked him “how can you do this, this is dangerous for you.” He answered I have no time to think about what is dangerous for me or not.13

In later interviews, Tove filled in some of the details that are missing from this abbreviated version of her account. When she reached the Heinemanns, a mob of jeering onlookers was still milling around outside. She could not yet see the full extent of the damage, but the front door had been beaten on so badly that it would not open.

Awful the way people look when they act as a mob. The front entrance was completely destroyed so I went through the tradesman’s entrance. I was naïve, I had no experience of such a situation, I brought flowers, and a man ran out of the mob towards me and said “and you want to bring them flowers!” — I was frightened! When someone comes out of a mob directly at you. I mumbled something about “if you are yourself married to a Jew you are surely allowed to . . .”.14

The Heinemanns’ maid opened the door, and Tove walked in. The damage was indescribable. Windows had been smashed, and the mirrors downstairs were now simply shards on the floor. The carpets had been cut up and ruined. Sofas had been torn apart, their stuffing spilling out through jagged tears. The curtains were blackened where the mob had tried to set them on fire. The evidence of malicious, manic energy was almost unreal. Upstairs, Tove found the Heinemanns devastated and emotionally paralyzed, though still able to describe lucidly what had happened to them.

When the mob had arrived, the couple had been ordered into the garden. Frau Heinemann had asked if she could at least grab a coat for her
ailing husband, and this had been granted with abusive laughter. The police came and escorted her husband away, not unkindly, leaving Frau Heinemann alone in the garden while the mob rampaged within. After her husband returned, the couple were still not allowed into the house. Their neighbors, with whom they were on good terms (he was a city official), looked on timorously from behind their curtains but did not feel able to intervene. Finally, a courageous pastor arrived with a young friend of the Heinemanns’ and took them to safety. Now they were back in their ruined home. In one respect, Herr Heinemann was better off than many of his younger male contemporaries, thirty thousand of whom were being interned in concentration camps in the wake of the Kristallnacht pogrom, in order to increase the pressure on their families to emigrate.  

Tove’s gesture of bringing flowers was not isolated; nor was it one she undertook completely of her own accord. The Kristallnacht violence had prompted the Bund to reconsider its own role and, ultimately, to decide that it was time for its members to raise their heads above the parapet. On November 10, Artur called on Bund members to act, with words that, Tove recalled, “became a mantra for us, namely, ‘overcome your reserve and end the isolation of the Jews.’” To avoid exposing the Bund, Artur cautioned everyone to offer help as individuals rather than as representatives of a group.  

After visiting the Heinemanns, Tove went with Lisa Jacob and others to the Jewish orphanage in Dinslaken, where both the staff members and the children had been subjected to the most brutal and humiliating treatment. The orphanage’s director, Yitzhak Sophoni Herz, and his charges had been driven into the street and made to watch the assault on their home. A jeering mob of over a hundred, among them individuals who just a week before had cheerfully done business with the orphanage, looked on. In a scene that resembled a public ritual of humiliation from the Middle Ages, the traumatized children were forced to process through the streets; they were then herded into a schoolyard and into the school hall, along with some older men and several Jewish women, some of them barely dressed.  

Elsewhere in the town, Tove met a distraught, impoverished older Jew who said that no store would sell him food. Tove bought what she could at a local shop and returned to find him hunched over on a trunk in his
darkened apartment. Jews’ houses in Dinslaken had been vandalized, and in many the electrical lines had been damaged, leaving them without power. The man told her how he had been dragged out of his house by SA men and forced to watch the synagogue burn. Tove learned that many women and their children in the city had not dared to go home and had spent the night wandering around in the cold. She saw children returning to their wrecked homes, so traumatized that they were hiccupping and literally gasping for air.

Because the orphanage itself was in such a terrible state, Tove went back to the Heinemanns a few days later to see if they could contribute financially toward at least making it livable. The door was opened by a distraught housekeeper; she told Tove that the old couple had committed suicide. Even if they had remained alive it is doubtful that they could have helped. The orphanage had been so thoroughly pillaged, and local policy toward the orphans was so heartless, that the institution could not be saved, and the children were transferred to Cologne.

In Remscheid, Maria Briel and Grete Dreibholz also sought out Jews in need. Maria remembered having great difficulty in reassuring the people they visited that they meant no harm. One family was especially wary; the Sternbergs were so alarmed by the women’s visit and so suspicious of their motives that Maria and Grete had to leave before they could even offer any practical assistance. In Mülheim, the Zenkers similarly sought out local Jewish families with offers of help. Others crossed the border into Holland to mail letters abroad on behalf of Jews, presumably so that they could tell relatives what was really happening and plead for assistance without fear of the censor. In Düsseldorf, Else Bramesfeld made the rounds visiting assorted acquaintances and again called on the Jewish Community Center nurse. She also visited close friends of Dore’s, including a distinguished former social worker, who gave her yet another dreadful account of the previous days. Else recalled:

When I arrived, she was sitting upstairs in a room that had been half cleared up and told me with astonishing composure what had happened. In the evening an SA troop had arrived, pushed her and the housemaid into the bathroom, and started its work of destruction. On the ground floor I saw a demolished room,
and upstairs too, furniture smashed to bits, pictures out of their frames, the portrait of her husband hung out the window, a cupboard with valuable glassware tipped down the stairs to the floor below, beds and upholstered furniture cut to pieces. Once the troop had gone, there were shards of glass underfoot everywhere.26

Across the Ruhr, Bund members sought to reassure, offer solidarity, and provide moral and practical support to Jews. In January 1939, Artur wrote to his son, Friedl, now safely out of Germany and living with relatives in Holland:

You can well imagine that under such conditions we have our hands full trying to help, advise, console, keep people from despair and keep the little spark alive. All our energies and those of our friends are focused on this. Often, we can manage only little things, the big things are beyond us. But at the right time in the right way little things can sometimes work wonders.27

After the war, Artur would write that Kristallnacht acted as a wake-up call to the world, alerting other nations not only to what the Nazis were doing to the Jews but to what might at any time be done to any state, any people, any church. The barbaric acts had awakened not only compassion and moral outrage, he argued, but also an instinct of self-preservation, paving the way for the common front against Hitler.28 It is true that the violence unleashed on November 9 and 10 did attract a great deal of international attention; still, Artur probably overstated the lessons the international community had drawn. For the Bund, however, Kristallnacht was transformative.29

Motives and Barriers to Action

We shall probably never know how many members of the Jewish community the group helped in those days, weeks, and months. Many of those assisted did not survive to tell the tale, and others dispersed across the
world. Had the recipients been able to record their memoirs in later life, would they have considered such actions worthy of remembrance? The gestures were often small, even if they conveyed to the recipients the invaluable knowledge that someone still cared about them. But would the elderly Dinslaken Jew whom Tove assisted remember that she had gone shopping for him because the local stores were refusing to sell him food? Would an elderly Essen lawyer who made it to the United States at the last minute have remembered that Bund members had crossed the border into Holland to mail letters for him? On an even smaller scale, would a Jewish family have recorded the visits of solidarity Artur Jacobs made before they immigrated? Probably not. The Bund was careful to conceal its identity, and consequently, the recipients rarely discerned the group impulse behind such seemingly personal gestures. At most they may have heard something vague from the visitor about well-wishing “friends” with whom he was connected. Mindful of the censor, in his letters to Friedl Artur referred to the Bund in the same way.

What kind of risks was the group running? Helping Jews was not yet criminalized, and there was thus no predictable penalty. There is little evidence that those who helped Jews on Kristallnacht were pursued by the authorities. Yet the Gestapo had long made it clear that loyal people’s comrades were expected not to mix with Jews. Even those who simply shopped in Jewish stores might find their photograph published under denunciatory headlines in the local press. During Kristallnacht itself, the atmosphere of violence made everyone fearful of stepping forward. Peeking out from behind the curtains, onlookers like the Heinemanns’ neighbors were undoubtedly worried that they would become targets themselves. Those like Maria Briel and Grete Dreibholz who reached out to strangers, only to be regarded with suspicion, must have felt triply isolated—at risk from the regime and the mob, unsupported by friends and neighbors, and feared as potential malefactors even by those whom they were seeking to reassure and support.

Why did they do what they did? A great deal has been written about the motives and factors that drove helpers or rescuers. After the war, the Bund itself would devote much thought to the question. But their answers were different from their observations at the time. The most revealing contemporaneous sources are the letters exchanged between the Jacobses
and their son, Friedl, in Holland, many of which have been preserved. Par-
ents and son were cautious, mindful of the censor, yet still had much to
say.31 One of Artur’s most striking ideas was that beyond just bringing com-
fort, the Bund might also help the victims gain new insights from adver-
sity and rid themselves of a bourgeois fixation on material well-being. In a
January 1939 letter to Friedl, after describing how much the Bund had on
its plate, Artur wrote:

If anything in these dark times can set our spirits in motion once
more and remind us of that spark of spiritual strength within, it
is these small moments when we see our words landing upon
fertile soil. People learn to see their lives from a completely dif-
f erent perspective. Hammered by fate, the old quest for a plea-
surable life, a good position, security and affluence, suddenly
falls apart. In its place, real life emerges, with other goals and
possibilities.32

In another 1942 talk in Bartlesville, this one to the American Association
of University Women, Tove sounded a similar note:

I saw rich Jewish women sitting in the rubble of their homes . . .
What I was most conscious of was that these women, who like
all of us had once clung to their possessions and their homes,
seemed no longer to even see their destroyed home, and seemed
to be completely uninterested in “stuff,” seemed to have com-
pletely moved beyond “stuff,” and had space within them for
only one thing and that was the question: how is this possible?
How is it possible that human beings can do this to people who
have never done anything to them, whom they don’t even know.
How is this possible?33

Bund members continued to express the idea that adversity was liber-
ating the victims from materialism until 1942. Artur, for example, made
similar comments about Jewish community leaders eking out a life in Essen.
But as the Bund came to fully apprehend the murderousness of the Nazi
project, the notion that hardship might be beneficial in any way became
unpalatable. There is no record of any Bund member expressing it after the war. Tove’s comments in 1942 probably reflect a moment of transition. She begins with the theme of leaving materialism behind, but she moves on, not to the “spiritual liberation” of former materialists but to search for the reasons for the violence.

Something that emerges clearly from Artur and Dore’s letters to Friedl is the extent to which their own experiences and Dore’s family and personal connections alerted them to the suffering of others. This might seem both obvious and banal, but the Bund’s postwar account of its actions denied that such personal ties played any role at all. The reality was, however, that as parents of a first-degree Mischling, Artur and Dore had from 1933 onward seen Friedl subjected to what Artur described in his diary as the most destructive kind of pressure, public ostracism. For a confident, secure individual, this would be hard enough, Artur felt, but for an insecure young man, it was a poison for which there was virtually no antidote. Unable to finish high school and forced to leave technical college under miserable circumstances, Friedl remained without a secure foundation, despite his multiple talents—without professional prospects of any kind and, in fact, without any kind of life goal.34

Moreover, Artur and Dore themselves were having to deal with the increasing barrage of measures aimed at Germany’s Jews. In a letter to Friedl on July 20, 1938, Artur, never one to dramatize, acknowledged, “We are so looking forward to getting away for a bit. Times have been hard lately and one needs some respite from the challenges and the unsettling events.”35 After the summer break, Dore wrote to a friend about how difficult it was to keep calm. One knew in the end who would win, at least in one’s head, she wrote, but the events of the day had become so threatening and so hideous as to overshadow everything. The feeling of powerlessness was overwhelming. You could see disaster approaching, and there was nothing you could do.36

Dore’s relatives and the couple’s Jewish acquaintances were leaving the country one after the other. By 1938, most of the Jews in the Bund had immigrated—among them Erna Michels to Holland, Berthold Levy to Sweden, Mikscha Brandsdorfer to Palestine, Wasja Enoch to the United States. In August 1938, Dore wrote to Friedl that her sister, his aunt Eva, had sold her business and would be leaving Germany soon for England. In the same
letter she mentioned other friends, “Ernst und Hedwig,” who were leaving to join their children abroad. “The decision came very quickly once Ernst lost his profession,” she explained. 37 Friends and relatives continued to be uprooted. From one week to the next, the Herzfelds, parents-in-law of Dore’s brother Robert, departed for Palestine without managing to sell their house. One son was in Brazil, the second in Paris, a daughter in Palestine, another in transit, and now the old couple had left, just like that.38 On September 6, 1938, responding to the continuing convulsions around them, Artur told Friedl, in language that was undoubtedly guarded, given that the letter would be intercepted by the authorities,

I have to say that I think you’ve actually been incredibly lucky, when I see how difficult it is for people trying to get out now. Even in the time since you left, our lives and choices have diminished significantly. Every day there are new obstacles. In this tense atmosphere, which places a large question mark over every kind of work and every life plan, you are able to work and study freely. You have people who are willing to help and offer advice at any time. All this gives you a big advantage over others. Whenever you find things difficult and have to do something unpleasant or overcome small difficulties, think about that.39

Germany’s Jews were subject to a huge levy, amounting in the end to more than 25 percent of their assets, to pay for the damage inflicted on Kristallnacht. The Blockhaus was listed as Dore’s property, and Artur thought they might have to sell it, but as an “Aryan,” he was able to transfer Dore’s property from her name to his own and, thus, protect it from confiscation.40

“Life here is hard,” sighed Artur on December 2, 1938, in a rare moment of vulnerability. “Every day brings new surprises. One’s heart is so heavy. Even if you remain reasonably composed through the day, you are vulnerable to all the demons at night.” By reaching out to others, helping them, and seeing how steadfastly they coped with the blows fate rained on them, Dore wrote, it was possible to gain courage, strength, and new faith.41 Of course, many Bund members were not Jewish and so did not have the same kind of encounters and challenges. But for them, Dore and Artur’s experi-
ence made palpable what Jews were going through. Observing Dore and Artur worrying about how their son was doing in Holland, Karlos Morgenstern wrote that they were combatants in a kind of war:

> What you and Gottfried [Friedl] are going through—and we experience through you—is truly a battlefront. On one side is the individual with his spiritual mission, and on the other all the entanglements which society and nature impose on him.  

Despite Karlos’s vagueness (he was surely trying to elude the censor), his meaning is clear. As leaders of the Bund and a mixed-marriage couple, the Jacobses kept all Bund members attuned to the Jewish fate under Nazi rule in a visceral, personal way. There were good reasons for many members to feel disconnected from Jewish suffering, particularly since the Bund had consciously rejected organized religion. But Karlos’s note shows that through Artur and Dore, other Bund members had a deep connection to the Jewish lot. Such personal links were vital, and yet they remain invisible in the group’s postwar pamphlets about its wartime achievement.

On November 18, 1938, Dore wrote to a relative in Holland that she wanted to leave Germany. Given her loyalty to the Bund, this was striking evidence of the toll persecution had taken on her health and psyche. In February 1939, Artur told Friedl that they were trying to get Dore to Denmark or England. In April, they obtained a quota number for immigration to the United States, though it seems likely that they took this step not out of a serious desire to cross the Atlantic but, rather, because it would encourage the Dutch authorities to give Dore temporary residential rights by demonstrating that she would not be a permanent burden on the public purse. As far as America was concerned, in retrospect, we know there was no chance that this quota number would have been processed before emigration out of Germany was halted in October 1941. Evidently, Dore and Artur had also been arranging to have friends or relatives provide financial guarantees to facilitate immigration to England—again, not with the aim of actually going there but instead to make Dore acceptable to the Dutch authorities.  

In the end, Dore’s health stalled their efforts to leave. In the wake of Kristallnacht, Dore’s sciatica worsened to the point of paralysis.  

March 1939, her condition deteriorated so dramatically that Artur was obliged to take her to a hospital, an event that involved considerable expense. Dore did not leave the hospital until late July, and she then stayed with Artur’s brother and sister-in-law in the Bund apartment in Wuppertal, where several members cared for her. Not until October 1940, more than eighteen months after falling ill, did Dore return to her own home on Dönhof Street, though she still needed two canes and a helping hand as she once more had the pleasure of visiting each room in the house. This was doubly difficult for a woman whose whole life and philosophy had centered on physical movement.

The Outbreak of War

The war would be the Bund’s finest hour. But the months between Kristallnacht and the outbreak of war were anything but auspicious. In addition to dealing with his wife’s continued ill health and seeking guarantors abroad, Artur was still involved in negotiating the transfer of Dore’s property, which “took a great deal of effort and worry—and expense,” as he communicated laconically in July 1939. Artur, never particularly fit in these years, succumbed to the pressures in the spring of 1939 and became so ill that for weeks he kept having to defer a trip to Holland to visit his son. Dore would not venture onto a train again until April 1941, and she remained unable to take part in Bund excursions until the summer of 1942.

The outbreak of war brought rationing, which gave the regime a new tool with which to discriminate against Jews. Jews were denied clothing coupons from the outset, and after December 18, 1939, they were allowed only basic food rations, whereas others received a supplementary card. The precise rules changed with each ration period. In December, Jews received less meat and butter than others, no cocoa, and no rice; in January 1940, they were permitted no meat or vegetables. In addition, they were forbidden from buying non-rationed foodstuffs, including chicken, fish, and smoked foods. On top of all this, Dore and Artur had an additional worry that the war might limit their ability to communicate with their son.

The war also soon reduced the group’s cohesion and ranks. Male members were subject to call-up, and in December 1939, the Bund’s celebration
of Gustav and Hedwig Gehrke’s marriage took on a special poignancy since Gustav, who had already been drafted, had to rejoin his unit in Poland immediately after. Gustav, Karlos Morgenstern, August Schwab, Reinhold Ströter, and Alfred Stürmer, among others, were drafted in 1939 or 1940, as were the sons of older members, including Käthe Franke’s son, Hans Hermann, Walter and Gertrud Jacobs’s son, Dieter, Ernst Jungbluth’s son, Eberhard, and Liesel Speer’s son, Friedl. As the war went on, even men who were exempted from call-up as skilled craftsmen were affected, as the authorities moved them and their factories from the Ruhr region to more remote areas in central Germany less exposed to the intensifying air raids. As a result, the Bund became a group even more reliant on women—as well as older men like Artur, Walter, and Ernst. Just a few younger men in protected occupations, such as Hermann Krahlsch, Erich Nöcker, and Gustav Zenker, managed to stay in the Ruhr for the duration of the war.52

In one respect, the outbreak of war provided the Bund with a brief sense of consolation: it threw much of the population into the same state of profound anxiety they had inhabited for some time. But this was short-lived. In April 1940, Denmark and Norway fell to the Germans, and on May 10, Germany invaded France and the Low Countries, placing Friedl once more under Nazi rule. To the horrified Bund, it looked as if the whole of Europe would be at Hitler’s feet and nothing could stop the Nazis from ruling indefinitely. Compounding this disaster were cheering neighbors, celebrating an unbroken string of victories bought with relatively few casualties, seemingly oblivious to the true nature of the regime they were endorsing. Whereas resistance groups abroad could often profit from a shared sentiment of patriotic resistance against an invader, in Germany opponents to the regime seemed disloyal traitors, impervious to the appeal of a resurgent fatherland.53

The Bund and Its Children

When, in later years, the Bund described the challenge of feeling so isolated in wartime, it referred to the incessant drone of regime propaganda and the roar of public acclamation. But at no point did these postwar accounts suggest that the group’s own children were susceptible to this
barrage. The reality was, however, that non-Jewish Bund members could not prevent their children from being exposed to Nazi influences. In January 1940, Artur wrote to his son, Friedl, in Holland; avoiding commentary in a letter that might be read by the censor, he noted that Ursula (“Ursel”) Jungbluth, Ernst’s fifteen-year-old daughter, “is a BDM [the Nazi girls’ organization] leader and completely absorbed by her role. She has grown very tall and pretty.”54 Talking to a youthful audience in Bartlesville in 1942, Tove offered an account of the activities of an enthusiastic member of the Hitler Youth, without quite specifying whether she was referring to a real individual. But the name she used was surely no accident: “Ursula J is doing her homework after school. A telephone call informs her that she must report immediately to such and such a place. Without hesitation, she drops everything and leaves.”55

Tove explained how the Hitler Youth groups appealed to children and described the dilemma of parents who opposed the regime, whose children would ask, “Mummy, why don’t you like our Führer?” Revealing one’s true opinions, even to one’s children, could be dangerous. Did one, in any case, have the right to involve a child in one’s own crisis of conscience? Tove concluded the talk with a question to her young audience: “Do you have some issue that is so important to you, to which you are so devoted, that you are willing to devote your free time, your strength, your whole being to it, just as the ‘Ursulas’ do for their bad thing?”

Meanwhile from Holland, no doubt with a caustic undertone, Friedl wrote to Ernst Jungbluth: “From your daughter Ursel I learned some time ago that she has become a BDM leader. Please tell her that I congratulate her. She will surely be very proud of her achievement.”56 With the outbreak of war, the regime’s grasp on Germany’s youth intensified. Membership in the Hitler Youth became compulsory, as did labor service for young women. At least one of the Bund sons, Friedl Speer, accepted conscription even though he could have been deferred as a student.57

Powerful as the regime was, its influence within the Bund might not have been so divisive had there not already been tensions between the generations. For the children, the fact of growing up in families more devoted to the larger cause than to their needs had been challenging, as had growing up with values that were at odds with those of their peers. In Friedl Jacobs’s case, his childhood had been dominated by his parents’ moral mis-
sion and their leadership role in the Bund. In my interviews, only a few former Bund children explicitly expressed negative feelings about their parents’ devotion to the group, but it seemed revealing that many did not want to talk about it at all, and Margarete, the one who was most critical, chose to speak only under a pseudonym. Other than Friedl Jacobs, none of the children joined the Bund after the war.

Looking at Artur and Dore’s correspondence with Friedl, one cannot help sympathizing with both sides of their unhappy exchanges. Friedl appears immature at times, petulant, needy, alternately critical and self-abasing. But to his parents, the most troubling aspect of his behavior was that he was slow to respond, often failing to acknowledge receipt of letters or information at moments when communication was critical. In 1939 Friedl was a crucial intermediary with the Dutch relatives who might have been able to help his mother leave Germany, but his poor communication with the relatives in Holland evidently made a bad impression, and hampered the Jacobses’ ability to elicit aid. The most bitter recriminations came from Artur on December 15, 1938, when the couple was still recovering from the aftermath of Kristallnacht: “We are very unhappy with you and feel completely disconnected from you.” Friedl was dilatory, too, in dealing with his own affairs, including his draft status. Although of “mixed race,” he was still legally obliged to register for military service. His parents were thus by turns deeply worried, irritated, and disappointed, and they became even more hectoring and interventionist, to a degree unexpected between parents and a son in his twenties.

Yet away from the relationship with his parents, we know that Friedl was in fact an impressive young man. Milo Anstadt, later a celebrated Dutch journalist and writer, was a Polish Jewish immigrant to Holland and part of a circle of young Jews in Amsterdam. He became friendly with Friedl in early 1939, and it is clear that Friedl impressed Anstadt—the latter’s 1996 autobiographical novel De verdachte oorboog (the title translates roughly as “The Suspiciously Shaped Ear,” referring to an allegedly Jewish physical characteristic), devotes an entire chapter to him. If the author’s account is correct, in March 1939 Friedl was an astute enough observer of the international scene to have predicted that the Nazi invasion of the remaining Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia would be the last acquisition Hitler could attain without war. Another member of the young Amsterdam
circle, Susi Cohen, who already knew Friedl from Essen, similarly remembered his clear-sightedness. To his peers, Friedl seemed intelligent, serious, thoughtful, and kind, even if socially awkward and at times obsessed with his difficulties in making contact with the opposite sex. He was certainly in a difficult position—in addition to dealing with the German authorities, he did not have a proper job in 1940. His parents, particularly Artur, seemed always to know better. In February 1943, for example, responding to Friedl's dire prognostications about the Holocaust, Artur allowed himself to make fun of his son's remarks, writing, “No, my wise son.” Friedl's predictions, as it turned out, would prove all too accurate.

One challenge, not just for Friedl but for other Bund youngsters, was that they rarely dealt with their parents alone but, instead, faced an adult collective. There was no privacy. In January 1940, Karlos Morgenstern wrote to the Jacobses that “E” (probably Else Bramesfeld) had visited him in Braunschweig. “Since E’s visit,” wrote Karlos, “I have thought of you a lot. E read letters from Gottfried [i.e., Friedl] to you and from Erna to him.” Evidently, Else was traveling around with Friedl's letters in her luggage. This kind of sharing allowed the parents to gain group backing for their approach to their children, who were, of course, put in a very unequal position.

The clearest sign of the parental generation's unease is the self-congratulatory way Artur and others seized on any sign that despite everything, something of the way they had raised their children was shining through. After receiving a letter from Käthe Franke's daughter Ilse, for example, Artur commented that the “pure air” of her childhood still made itself felt. Similarly, in January 1941, Artur's brother, Walter, wrote to his nephew expressing his pleasure that Friedl had acknowledged the value of his parental home. He only wished that his own son, Dieter, felt the same. In June 1941, Walter exclaimed, “Ach, Gottfried, if you could all get together sometime and tell each other about your lives. I think then you would really know how to value some of your childhood memories. Because through the experiences that you have been forced to suffer, all of you now have enough perspective and distance to recognize the value of your family and childhood.”

But these moments of affirmation often gave way to open concern at
their children’s trajectory. When Friedl Speer was home on leave in March 1942, Artur lamented in his diary that the times were taking the children away from their parents and that the youngsters were failing to see through the regime’s rhetoric.

Listening to Friedl Speer
Still completely absorbed by his personal experience.

For him, war is still an exciting experience that gives impetus to life, satisfies one’s yearning for adventure, one’s desire to see the world and experience new things. One can tell, despite the frenzied retreat at the end and a couple of difficult days: he still has not experienced the real nature of war.

It is hard to listen to him.

No horror at everything that is terrible in this war, no question about the general fate, about meaning, causes or broader connections . . .

How rare it is that all the good that children stand to inherit from their parents—the convictions and wisdom their parents have acquired by dint of hard struggle—actually comes to life and blossoms anew.

How many countervailing forces there are in our age! How many countervailing forces in man?74

A visit from Käthe Franke’s son, Hans Hermann, en route to deployment in France, occasioned a similar bout of reflection. Artur admired the energy and down-to-earth character of the younger generation but, at the same time, despaired over its lack of idealism.75 A few days later, he was still worrying that all the care and thought the Bund had invested would go to waste. Would the children return to their spiritual roots? he wondered.76 At other times, he was more vehement. “And one day the cause is supposed to rest on them?!” he exclaimed bitterly.77

How adrift Artur and other Bundists must have felt on their fragile raft—not only at war with the regime and alienated from their neighbors but also unsure whether their own children would support them or carry on what they had started. Still, never once in the group’s postwar memoirs did the starkness of their wartime anxieties emerge.
In addition to their isolation, members of the Bund were always at risk. Working as a volunteer at the local ration-card distribution center in December 1939, Sonja Schreiber made an unguarded comment to a colleague about the fate of the Jews, as mentioned at the beginning of this book. A few days later, Friedrich Gross appeared at the Essen Gestapo headquarters to announce that his wife had been “deeply surprised and offended” by Sonja’s defense of the Jews. On March 8, 1940, the Gestapo brought Sonja in for interrogation. There was no doubt, the Gestapo officials reported, “that the accused has adopted the Jewish-Communist ideas of the married couple Jacobs. There is therefore no reason to doubt that she actually made the remarks reported by the witness Gross.”

Aiding Sonja’s cause, however, was a supportive letter from fellow educators who were members of the National Socialist Teachers’ League. Following interrogations, the Bund had the practice of going over what had been said and noting what should be amended or clarified. As a result, Sonja submitted to the Gestapo an additional statement to add to her sworn testimony. In it, she listed the names of two colleagues who had supposedly witnessed the conversation with Frau Gross, and she asked the Gestapo to interview them to determine whether Sonja had said anything political or critical of the state. The colleagues mentioned were indeed subsequently interviewed, and nothing negative emerged. Nevertheless, education officials admonished Sonja, placed an official warning in her personnel file, and withdrew the additional rations that she received because of her work. But, perhaps in view of the fact that Sonja had a sister who was well connected in local Nazi circles, the Gestapo did not take the punishment any further.

Around the same time, Lisa and Artur fell foul of the authorities after a neighbor of the Jacobses’, a sixty-two-year-old widow named Anna Gellingshausen, denounced them. Probably prompted by an Essen Gestapo officer seeking more material against the Bund in the wake of the Schreiber affair, Gellingshausen reported a series of suspicious goings-on, including suitcases being brought in and taken out at all hours, both at the house on Dönhof Street and at the Blockhaus. Even though she lived adjacent only to the Dönhof house, Frau Gellingshausen seemed to have knowledge of activities at both locations, which suggests that this was a put-up job, as
does the fact that a series of other denunciations were recorded at the same time. What added to her suspicions, she said, was the clothing worn by those doing the carrying—namely, the kind of clothing that before the Nazi seizure of power had been worn by those in the Wandervogel (the free-spirited youth groups that had emerged in the nineteenth century). “My impression was that these were former Communists,” she continued. That impression led to a combined Gestapo-SD search of the house on Dönhof Street and the seizure of forty books and thirty-two brochures. “Jacobs gave his agreement to the confiscation,” the Gestapo memo records dryly. Both Artur and Lisa underwent several hours of intensive questioning. In a restitution court hearing after the war, Lisa described the good cop, bad cop routine: “They tried to frighten me, threaten me, and also in a jovial way to get something out of me.”

For the Bund, this early phase of the war was the spiritual low point. In an uncharacteristically gloomy mood, Artur wrote to Friedl in April 1940, “No one has any control anymore over what happens to them, at least externally. All the more important that we prepare our inner selves for whatever comes. Life is hard.” A couple of months later, in an old ruined hut on an isolated hillside in the Sauerland, the group, normally so confident about the direction of history, was worrying about the future. Artur described the scene to a friend. Trying to ignore the rain coming in through the roof, they asked themselves, “Is the human race moving forward at all? Do we have any reason to believe that it will one day be different, better, more just?” Or was the idea of progress just an illusion, a self-deception to make life more bearable? Were the horrors of the old barbaric times destined always to return? Were violence, evil, lies, and brutality the inescapable lot of humanity?

Sometimes, the only way to cope with the misery was to reach out and help others.
The Bund's Achievement

Whoever saves a life saves the world, and the Bund had a hand in saving at least eight. Scholars have reckoned that on average it took seven, eight, or more people to save just one life in Nazi Germany. Survival trajectories have been recorded in which fifty to sixty helpers played a role in a single rescue. Saving even a single individual involved sacrifice, risks, and fear—sometimes over the course of many years. As a result, very few people managed to survive in hiding. In 1941, some ten thousand Jews were still living in each of the big cities of Frankfurt and Cologne; only a couple hundred made it through the Holocaust. In Munich, out of the 3,500 Jews present before the major deportations, just 77 have been documented as having successfully hidden in the city until the end of the war. In Berlin, where the anonymity of the metropolis offered certain advantages, only a quarter of those who sought to evade deportations by hiding were successful—around 1,700 saw liberation.

The Bund's aid, in any case, extended well beyond its rescue actions. In their readiness to enter destroyed Jewish homes after Kristallnacht, to venture into Jewish organizations and Jewish barracks in the era of deportations, to line up in the post office with packages for Theresienstadt, or
to brave a visit to the cells in a local police station with a message for imprisoned Jews, Bund members showed enormous courage. Their aid also had a keen moral and psychological dimension. Mindful of the spiritual predicament of the beneficiaries, they took pains not to undermine their dignity. However stark the differences were between the objective situation of the helpers and of those they were helping, Bund members tried to convey a sense of reciprocity. They were brave, they were thoughtful, and they were generous.

We marvel, too, at the energy and activity they were able to sustain amid persecution, denunciations, and total war. They talked, they argued, they hiked, they celebrated. They maintained contact with members stationed at the front, with Friedl and Erna in Holland, and with exiled friends in Scandinavia and the United States. They traveled to Holland and Switzerland, looked after friends and relatives subject to persecution. They disseminated information about Jewish persecution, and at least one of their letters found its way to a dissident military officer in Berlin. They followed the news, analyzed the regime, produced manuscripts, and prayed for their country to lose the war, even as they waited anxiously for news from loved ones engaged in the fighting. Despite all this courage, they knew they were compromised just by being members of German society: some Bundists were, after all, fighting for the army of a murderous regime. Yet their ethical radar remained intact—as their awareness of being compromised only proves. Their lives and deeds deserve to be remembered, commemorated—and understood.

Motives and Means

Every Bund member I spoke with offered a lucky escape story. There was the time when documents, hidden in an umbrella, went flying down the street, because someone (no one told me who) forgot they were there and opened the umbrella against the rain. And there was the time Mathilde Zenker was able to escape from the Jewish barracks in Duisburg, where she had been smuggling in clothing and food, after a bombing raid scared away the guards. The Bund understood that it had been lucky, and because there were so few groups like it, it is difficult to say whether luck, in the
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end, was the decisive ingredient for its success. We know there were other rescue networks, like the Kaufmann Group in Berlin, that were destroyed by a denunciation. But though the Bund suffered numerous denunciations, none quite stuck.⁴

If luck was important, it was far from the whole story. Looking back, Bund members themselves had a sophisticated sense of the advantages that had helped them survive. The “Third Letter Abroad” drew attention, for example, to the fact that the Bund owned a number of buildings and thus had access to more or less protected living and meeting spaces. It also pointed out how important Körperbildung’s role had been as a central activity, offering camouflage for get-togethers and meetings. To outsiders and authorities, the classes did not look like nefarious political meetings but seemed to be focused on a harmless pastime—not least because similar movements of dance and gymnastics had been drawn into the regime’s orbit. Even when the Gestapo discovered literature on Körperbildung during house searches, the agents did not immediately assume that the group was involved in subversive activity.⁵ Most remarkably, as we have seen, Körperbildung classes became a safe space in which potential new recruits could be covertly sounded out. In one sense, Körperbildung was an “accidental” advantage, since Dore had conceived of it not as a means of hiding the Bund’s political character but as a political and philosophical project. On another level, it showed something systematic—namely, the virtue of having political networks that were organized around a lifestyle choice. The same was true of the Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund (ISK), whose vegetarian restaurants provided perfect meeting places.⁶

Another such “accidental” advantage enjoyed by the Bund was its large number of female members. During the 1920s and early 1930s, as we know, many had come into the Bund’s orbit because of the training and professional opportunities offered by Dore’s school. Others had been drawn by Artur’s erudite and spiritual version of socialism. After 1939, women’s significance increased rapidly as men were called up to the front. We know that when it came to helping Jews in Germany, broadly speaking, women played a disproportionate role. Nationally, approximately two-thirds of German rescuers were women.⁷ Apart from the fact that so many men were serving in the armed forces, the regime took women less seriously as political actors (though substantial risks remained). Women also tended—even
in the Bund, with its progressive attitudes—to be in charge of managing the household. The tasks of hosting, hiding, and feeding all fell within their realm. Notwithstanding the importance of Ernst Jungbluth, of couples like the Briels and the Zenkers, and of the rare solo male host like Hermann Schmalstieg, it is fair to say that the Bund’s rescue work was very much a woman’s business.

The Bund’s “Third Letter Abroad” drew attention to another of the group’s features that proved advantageous in a dictatorship: its hybridity and lack of official structures. The Bund had emerged organically from Artur’s adult education classes without the trappings of a party, and without being formally registered as an association. This did not, of course, make it invisible. During the pre-Nazi period, the group wanted to be known. As a result, it was targeted by the local pro-Nazi press, and in September 1933, after the police confiscated trunks containing incriminating records at Martin Schubert’s house, it was banned. But the absence of formal status as political party or registered association, and a concomitant lack of membership lists or financial records, meant that the full scope of the group’s activity was difficult for the authorities to discern. After 1933, the Bund rapidly built on this advantage by vigilant self-policing and the destruction of incriminating records. This was key—when the Kaufmann network in Berlin was fatally compromised in 1943, the disaster was less the denunciation per se than a notebook discovered in Franz Kaufmann’s possession containing the names of fifty helpers.8

If the group’s camouflage was largely unplanned, what was integral to its identity and vision was the forging of such haphazard arrangements into bonds of steel. The Bund’s fierce bonds of solidarity depended in part on “Weimar” resources—the habit of loyalty and deference to the charismatic leader and of self-sacrifice for the group. They also drew on the Bund’s particular philosophy, its notion that an ethical life, free from arbitrary whim, could be attained only through voluntary subordination to collective needs. Hidden within this philosophy were sometimes older, religious impulses, above all pietistic notions of struggling for holy life, that appeared in the ostensibly secular guise of working for the good socialist society.

Whatever their precise nature, the bonds that held the group together gave it the cohesion to engage in collective action and overrode individuals’ personal fears. Just as important in enabling action—and, again, probably
influenced by inherited religious influences—was the group’s embrace of both the macro and the micro. Its goal had always been vast and ambitious: to create a just, socialist society. But the means were small-scale, day-to-day decisions, commitments, and practices. At times this created a strange disconnect. For example, the group proffered grandiose rhetoric in the early 1930s about uniting the working-class parties in a time of crisis but offered as a vision of the way forward only its incremental, long-term model of a living and learning community. After the Nazis’ ascent to power, Bund members adjusted to the idea that they could no longer be a model to the outside world, and their strategy of gradual progress gave them a means of taking action in meaningful, if limited, ways. Their political reflexes had primed them to take small-scale action seriously and to devote themselves to attaining the possible.

Resistence and Resilience

During the 1950s, as we saw, “resistance” (Widerstand) was understood rather narrowly in West Germany to mean activity aimed at toppling the regime, and for many observers the only resistance that counted was organized military opposition. Once the Nazis had consolidated their rule, the German army had indeed been the only institution left with the autonomy and firepower to challenge them. However, the postwar focus on the plot of July 1944 ignored the sizable groups on the left that had organized against the Nazis from the very beginning. Since the 1960s, serious accounts of resistance have included the actions of the Communists, the Social Democrats, and the various small splinter parties. Should the Bund’s achievements stand alongside theirs?

With some important exceptions, the Bund never participated in a direct effort to bring down the regime. It did not collect arms and it did little leafleting, though some Bund members did protect other leftists on the run. It is worth noting, however, that a great deal of the “resistance” work by other left-wing groups—maintaining the network, keeping themselves informed, and so on—was not so different from the Bund’s. Most of these groups only occasionally took steps designed to challenge the Nazis’ power openly. When they did take part in leafleting, scrawling slogans in public
places, or trying to influence factory council votes, the result was often disastrous. The apparent distinction between the Bund and these parties, so evident to Hans-Josef Steinberg, is thus in reality often not so clear-cut. And unlike many of its counterparts, the Bund was successful in gaining several trustworthy new members during the Nazi years.

In the 1970s and 1980s, historians of German resistance widened their scope to include groups whose actions fell short of trying to topple the regime but in some way opposed Nazi efforts to bring them into line. As a result of this shift, Social Democrats who continued to meet and maintain some kind of community, for example, were now deemed to have offered resistance. Socialist pensioners’ regular gatherings in local inns, the historians reasoned, offered a more realistic, robust challenge to the Nazis’ control over society than foolhardy dissemination of poorly printed pamphlets. It is certainly true that in a society so effectively mobilized by the regime, even the simple act of maintaining political independence and integrity was an achievement. In his 1945 May Day speech, reminding his Meersburg friends of all they had been through, Artur said that the biggest challenge they had faced had not been the Gestapo or the concentration camps, terrifying though they were. Instead, it was the risk of succumbing to what he called the regime’s “inner embrace.” When almost every aspect of life had been co-opted by the regime, it was the temptation to fit in that had represented the greatest threat to the group’s integrity. What the idea of the pensioners’ group as a source of resistance gets wrong, however, is the inference that such clandestine gatherings might have burgeoned into a broad oppositional culture. Even in formerly socialist strongholds, working-class milieus did not remain intact. Denunciations undercut easy sociability and made even casual grumbling risky business. Against that background, isolated voices had little chance of joining up to create a groundswell of opposition, as the Bund’s profound sense of isolation makes clear.

In the postwar years, the Bund itself was inconsistent in the way it talked about resistance. Its members never doubted that they had constituted “a strong resistance group,” and, as we know, the group sought to enhance its postwar resonance with at times inflated language about its “battle” against the Nazis. For the most part, however, it used the term Widerstand, “resistance” as a synonym for “resilience”—for example, in referring to Bund
members’ “inner powers of resistance” or their ability “to resist twelve terrible years unbroken.” At the same time, they would have balked at being placed into the same category of passive endurance as, say, the socialist pensioners’ groups mentioned above. The most interesting distinction postwar Bund texts made is, in fact, not so much between actively fighting the regime and passively withstanding it but between living engaged with the world and living withdrawn from it. The terms “illegal work” and “illegal life” recur throughout the “Letters Abroad,” and the word “life” is often set in bold to indicate something far more than mere existence—something buoyant, rich, and purposeful. This was the group’s pre-Nazi distinction between a disengaged romantic utopianism, which it despised, and a committed life pursued in the heart of an industrial region, now reappearing in a new form. In the words of the “Third Letter Abroad”:

Not a life alongside the system, not a life withdrawn, and certainly not the “happiness of the niche,” as it were, a respite from the horrors of real life, but instead a life amid these horrors, permanently contending with the system, in the struggle and through struggle, through the shocks, suffering and uncertainties which it brings.  

The Bund was making an important distinction here. Its efforts at sustaining an ethical life and its commitment to dismantling every aspect of the regime’s philosophy did represent something more significant than get-togethers with other skeptics in the neighborhood pub. This is partly a question of motive and partly one of risk and effort. Its members found themselves having to make hard choices on a daily basis, choices that put them constantly at risk of denunciation and interrogation. It is interesting to note that the Nazis took efforts to maintain and develop illicit learning communities very seriously. Consider the example of an underground resistance group of young Jewish Communists, often referred to as the Herbert Baum Group. When they were captured after a now famous attack on an anti-Soviet exhibition in 1942, the official indictment explicitly identified the holding of Communist school sessions as one of the most serious offenses. The more historians have uncovered the degree of support the regime was able to elicit in its “dictatorship by acclamation,” the more
impressive the Bund’s ability to maintain its separate life becomes. Perhaps we do not quite have a category that fits this intense, self-conscious cultivation of a communal shared space. It was more than mere nonconformity, but less than active combat against the regime.20

What also distinguished the Bund from many oppositionally minded circles, of course, is that the Bund saved lives. Until a few years ago, none of the attempts at defining resistance—whether in Germany or the occupied countries—took help for Jews particularly seriously. In the historiography of the French resistance, rescue had long been marginalized, since it did not have the same liberatory goals as armed opposition to the occupiers. Those who sought to help Jews for the most part did not assail the regime or seek actively to bring it down, though there were participants in active resistance who also assisted Jews. However, as definitions of resistance broadened to include refusal to submit, then all Jews who did not accept death were engaged in it, as indeed were all who worked to help them survive. The Holocaust survivor and historian Arno Lustiger coined the term Rettungswiderstand,21 or “rescue-resistance,” which is now commonly used in the German historiography of rescue. In the French case, rescue, instead of being on the margins, is increasingly treated as the archetype of resistance.22 Even if we may feel that these moves risk blurring important distinctions, we can certainly agree that rescuers hoped to throw a small spanner into the machinery of destruction. The idea of “humanitarian resistance” tries to capture this.23

Rescue, Help, and Self-Help

Debates about the nature and limits of nonconformity, dissent, and opposition to Nazi rule have made clear that there are many ways of defining resistance. When it comes to “rescue,” however, the paradigms that thwarted Lisa and Marianne’s efforts to get the Bund recognized continue to exercise a powerful hold on our thinking.24 The most recent study on Germany carries the subtitle “individuals versus the Nazi system.”25 In the popular imagination, the individual, unpolitical rescuer, motivated by goodness of heart, remains the dominant archetype.

Only very recently has scholarship begun to upend our assumptions.
We are now learning how often money, property, cheap labor, sexual favors, or religious conversion were the price of help. This was clearly not true for the Bund, for whom the deed was its own reward. Yet the Bund differs markedly from the expected model of the “righteous gentile,” not least because of the way it functioned as a network. We do not know how many other groups with a strong political or philosophical basis acted to help Jews. It seems not many. But if we extend our definition of groups to include more loosely defined networks, then it is the individual rescue that begins to look more like the outlier. The majority of German rescues may have been initiated by individuals, but most required support from a network of social relationships. At their most passive, those might be mere audiences of complicity, groups of acquaintances and neighbors who were in the know and willing not to inform the authorities. For Berlin, where by far the largest number of Jews survived, research has shown that many rescues depended on more active social networks—whether to provide new places to stay when existing ones became compromised or helpers lost their nerve, or to help with food, money, documents, and moral support. Of course, such networks were fragile and often failed to sustain assistance long enough to ensure survival. Even the Bund was sometimes left with no other option than to hand those it was helping on to others.

When help is collective, can we still justify the central emphasis scholars have placed on the individual rescuer’s personality? Ever since Samuel Oliner and Pearl Oliner’s foundational work on the “altruistic personality” in the 1980s, psychologists and ethicists have characterized rescuers as having a high degree of empathy, or what the Oliners called “extensivity.” Other influential analyses have seen the rescuers as exhibiting a distinctive degree of personal autonomy, enabling them to think independently and form judgments unaffected by prevailing views. Clearly, some Bund members possessed these qualities. But does the individual’s capacity for empathy or any type of individual personality really account for such a coordinated campaign of action? In its postwar Report on the Help Operation for Jews, the Bund attributed its commitment, as we saw, not to “cheap empathy” but to principle. Indeed, it argued that principle had driven it to act on behalf of people for whose bourgeois lifestyle they felt more antipathy than sympathy.

Yet if individuals’ ability to empathize seems a poor way of understand-
ing how the Bund worked, the Bund’s own postwar depiction of itself does not convince, either. Certainly, the Bund’s ethical philosophy was a vital resource that nourished its members’ commitment to one another and to the persecuted. Artur was eminently justified in seeing their actions as the expression of their principles. But we have also learned that personal connections were crucial. Above all, these ties created awareness of Jewish persecution. Reconstructing the Bund’s experience, rather than relying on its postwar self-account, corroborates existing scholarship suggesting that rescue, like other forms of collective action, is very rarely the result of principle alone, even when conducted by highly politically or religiously motivated groups. Group dynamics, internal pressures, and leadership all have a part to play. The Bund’s forthright assertion that it was motivated by principle rather than empathy is therefore probably just as misleading as explaining the group’s actions in terms of individual psychologies. For different members of the group, varying degrees of idealism, group loyalty and friendships, empathy with the victims, potential shame at letting others down, and so on combined to impel them to act.

Michael Gross’s work on Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a French village that sheltered thousands of Jews from the Nazis, suggests that the personality of the leader of a group or network was crucial. Artur was a charismatic man, and his self-confidence and sense of conviction were infectious. His decisive role is probably more attributable to classic leadership qualities than to qualities of empathy. As far as empathizing is concerned, what likely made the suffering of the Jewish world so evident to him was the fact that he was in a mixed marriage. As leader, he was then able to transform this direct experience into a group mission.

We might add an intriguing twist to this discussion in that the Bund, like other bündisch groups in the 1920s, had emphasized the personality of the natural leader as an important part of what gave the group structure and coherence. What seems at least as significant as Artur’s particular qualities, therefore, is the shared “ideology” of personality, so strong in the 1920s, an ideology on which the Nazis also drew. In other words, the widely shared assumption that there should be a natural leader fostered a readiness among members to follow a particular individual, and to do what that leader asked. That, in turn, helped furnish the group with the cohesion, loyalty, and trust essential for acting against the regime.
Mixed-marriage couples like the Jacobses played a leading role in other networks of help. In Munich, such couples could be found at the center of many rescue actions. In Berlin, Otto Weidt, the owner of a workshop for the blind and deaf who saved a number of Jews, was supported by the "Aryan" wife of a Jewish doctor. Converts, too, bridged gentile and non-gentile worlds, and they also are overrepresented in informal networks, such as the Kaufmann Group in Berlin. In Holland, rescue and survival rates were higher in areas where there were more converted Jews. Converts and Jews in mixed marriages brought together those affected by Nazi policy and those in a position to assist. The role of mixed couples was strengthened in Germany not least because in 1933 there had been some 35,000 Jews in mixed marriages (or about 7 percent of the Jewish population), and even by December 1942 there were still 16,760 such couples left in the country. Moreover (and no doubt because of the size and influence of this group), there was the fact that the Nazis had, with regional variations, long exempted persons in mixed marriages from deportation.

This leads to one other facet of the Bund’s story. Our search for selfless rescuers has often overshadowed the role of Jewish “self-help.” The type of rescuer that our accounts have honored most is one who not only helped but did not have to help, since he or she was not in the firing line. The recognition of the righteous at Yad Vashem explicitly excludes Jews, presuming that Jewish help was self-interested and thus does not carry the same moral weight. In the Bund’s case, however, we saw at every stage that the distinction between helper and helped, Jews and non-Jews, is more ambiguous than we might expect. The Jacobs family were “victims” as well as helpers, and Lisa Jacob and Marianne Strauss were far from being passive recipients of aid. Scholars are beginning to pay greater attention to Jewish “self-help,” whether in actively participating in resistance, organizing and providing resources to assist rescue actions, initiating their own rescue, or showing great enterprise in evading capture. So much of Lisa’s and Marianne's survival hinged on their initiative, self-possession, and courage. Even while in hiding, they continued to help others. Lisa maintained extensive correspondence and sent parcels to deportees in Theresienstadt. Marianne, too, continued to send parcels to her loved ones in Theresienstadt, as surviving friends were able to acknowledge after the war, and even
arranged assistance for an endangered friend—just as Hanna Jordan had done when she was on the run.36

Rescue, Experience, and Memory

A recurrent theme of this book has been the sometimes subtle, sometimes stark contrast between the Bund’s experience during the Third Reich and its later memories. By contrast, in her magisterial study of rescue based on interviews conducted decades after the war, Nechama Tec wrote that rescuers’ memories of the dramatic events in which they were engaged are too powerful to become clouded over time.37 Certainly, many episodes of the Bund’s wartime life emerge vividly in later narratives or interviews. Even the exaggerations in the “Letters Abroad” are often rhetorical overreach rather than outright errors of fact. Yet subtle shifts in the framing, along with new emphases and exclusions, means that the group’s postwar texts tell a different story from the one that unfolds from the wartime records.38

Such differences were evident even in the immediate aftermath of liberation, when the Nazi “present” had only just become the past. Freed of uncertainty as to whether they would survive and if the regime would fall, Bund members now viewed their past hopes and fears in a new light. New knowledge about the Holocaust flooded in, overwhelming even a previously well-informed observer like Artur. It also put much that one had thought and feared into a new perspective. Life under Nazi rule had, in any case, been at once so extraordinary and yet often so mundane that it was hard to grasp even at the time, and it rapidly became ever more elusive. In a letter penned to Wasja just a week after liberation, Dore was already doubting that she would ever be able to convey what they had lived through.39

Adding to the problems of translation into a postwar idiom were the new political pressures of the postwar era. The group wanted to use its Nazi record to appeal to a postwar audience and establish its fitness to lead. But even if it had not sought to do so, it would still have found many of the choices, dilemmas, perceptions, and even the language from its days under Nazi rule no longer appropriate to the postwar era. Artur’s hope, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, that Jews might be cured of materialism by their
sufferings, for example, was in light of Auschwitz now unthinkable. As the generations sought to find one another again after 1945, the wedge the Nazis had driven between some Bund members and their children, as another example, was similarly too uncomfortable to articulate.

Often such omissions reflect conscious choices about what was relevant or seemly. But the persistent absence, in the postwar writings, of the terrifying and transformative experience of air raids, for example, feels like more than a simple narrative choice. In an insightful, if controversial, lecture given at the University of Zurich in 1997 and later published as a book, the writer W. G. Sebald argued that the postwar period was characterized by a striking inability to engage with the real terror of the bombings. Local publications in many German cities diligently documented the extent of the destruction, yet these accounts were always couched in pious and formulaic language that buried the real experience deeper under the rubble. Perhaps because Bund members felt it would contradict the image of vigor and promise they wished to present, perhaps because of their rather old-fashioned understanding of the psyche, perhaps because of a deeper trauma, in the collective texts that survive from the postwar period, the Bundists never wrote about their fears and their vulnerability—except where doing so reinforced the idea that the group had been stronger together than each individual could have been alone.

Some of the contrasts between wartime experience and postwar accounts were no doubt peculiar to the Bund. Some arose because the Bund’s “memory” was being produced collectively for a purpose, and not narrated privately to a curious interviewer. But the very real difficulty of recapturing dilemmas faced, choices made, perceptions noted, and traumas experienced under Nazi rule is far from unique. These tensions between experience and memory are not limited to rescue, but they feel particularly relevant for rethinking rescue, because so much of what we want to find out about the rescuer relates to the rescuer’s mental world and decisions at the time. Discovering the ways in which the Bund came to remember its past, and also the many ways it failed to achieve recognition, makes us realize how unwittingly retrospective our approach to rescue has been.

It was the postwar search for appropriate heroes, after all, that created frame and canvas for our image of the rescuer and, in the process, denied some a place in the picture. Yad Vashem’s model of the “righteous,” much
as it responded to a deeply felt need to honor those who had helped, was not dictated by history per se; rather, it was the result of postwar diplomatic, political, and religious considerations. In Europe, in recent decades, public interest in rescue has grown, driven, above all, by hope of gleaning useful lessons for civil society and perhaps even training the Good Samaritans of the future. Yad Vashem’s model of the “righteous” has shaped other countries’ approaches to public commemoration of the rescuer, even beyond the Holocaust (for example, in Rwanda).

The model has also decisively influenced scholars’ treatment of the subject. Many have not only followed Yad Vashem’s definition of who counts as a rescuer but have restricted their analysis to individuals recognized by Yad Vashem. And it has probably colored the rescuers’ memories themselves. Most scholarship on the subject, after all, has relied almost exclusively on interviews recorded decades after the fall of Nazism. Given that Yad Vashem and other commemorations created a framework of public recognition for “rescue” that simply did not exist at the time when the lauded acts occurred, it is hard to believe that this does not have an impact on the self-concept and memory of those now (quite rightly) praised as rescuers.

All this is not to discount the value of retrospective accounts. Later reflections and memories on the part of rescuer and rescued are in many cases all we have to go on. The way the women and men who took such risks under the Nazis come to interpret their actions as they grow older is often interesting and, indeed, moving in its own right. Yet it is surprising how often we have assumed that postwar accounts give us direct access to wartime selves, and how little effort has been made to understand the rescuer’s thoughts and perceptions in the moment. Perhaps we need to reverse Kierkegaard’s famous dictum “Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.” History can only be viewed backward, true enough, but if we want to truly comprehend the rescuer’s actions and trajectory, we have to try to be with the rescuer in the moment—to reclaim their lives, as they were being lived.

In light of the Bund’s experience, we wonder, in fact, if the notion of rescue itself is not too retrospective. Does it really capture the myriad of choices, motives, and actions at the time? After the event, once it is clear that lives have been saved, it may make sense as a concept. But helpers often did not know what the extent and duration of their support would be. Even
after the event, “rescue” may be misleading, because it implies that Jews’ survival was the direct result of an intent to save them, whereas most survival trajectories were more complicated. In the Bund’s case, acts of solidarity with no immediate prospect of saving anyone seem at least as impressive as those that we know contributed to saving a life. Walking through a hostile crowd to present flowers to the Heinemanns after Kristallnacht was never going to lead to a “rescue.” After the war, once the full scale of the Holocaust was known, such acts perhaps looked less meaningful. But viewed from the conditions of the time, Tove’s march through a baying mob or Grete’s visit to the prison to reassure the Strausses seem gestures as splendid and courageous as any.

Lives Reclaimed

The Bund’s postwar intellectual trajectory is full of bitter ironies. The group talked up its game to the point of provoking detractors. It hid how fragile it had felt at times during the Nazi era and the war, making it harder for us to see its true heroism. The lessons it drew from the past did not match the ones contemporaries wanted to hear. The Nazis had discredited the very traditions from which the Bund drew its strength. As a result, the reflexes of postwar generations were different. After the war, even some of the Bund’s own members found the discipline of the “order” unpalatable. Many of the former servicemen soon withdrew their involvement. The Bund’s belief in the logic of history, a belief that had helped it maintain its bearing despite the brutal challenges of Nazism and total war, also did not make sense to others. Probably others could understand the Bund’s view, as indeed we can, that some kind of faith might be essential for the future of humanity, encouraging humility, and creating a shared perspective beyond the narrow needs and drives of the self. But neither they nor we are convinced that the Bund had found the “objective spiritual force” or the underlying logic of history. The failure to convey this faith—or, to put it another way, the obsolescence of its Kantian belief in progress—was another part of the group’s postwar disappointment.

The Bund nevertheless deserves recognition. We may think of Artur and Dore, Walter and Gertrud, Ernst, Ellen, Lisa, Sonja, Else, Fritz and
Maria, Änne and August, Gustav and Mathilde, Reinhold and Grete, Alfred and Tilde, Liesel, Karlos and Karin, Karl, Doris, Meta, Grete, Hedwig and Gustav, Hermann, and all the others as righteous individuals. A few of them have now been recognized as such. But it was, in the end, the group—or, as Bund members would say, die Sache, “the cause”—that had triumphed. For all our distance from their beliefs, and their habits of obedience and obeisance, still there remains in the Bund’s achievement a hint of something more universal. The intensity of their focus on the here and now meant that every gesture counted. That translated into flowers, parcels, a shared couch, saved lives. Yet all the while the group’s eyes were cast “heavenward,” toward the great goals of human freedom and ethical responsibility.
ABBREVIATIONS

AAK Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin
AB1, AB2, AB3 The “Auslandsbriefe,” or “Letters Abroad,” written by the Bund after the war. Copies in the BAE.
AJ Artur Jacobs
AJD Artur Jacobs’s diary. Unless otherwise stated, the copies are to be found in the Jacobs Nachlaß in the Stadtarchiv Essen. But some are in the BAE.
ASE Alte Synagoge, Essen
ASP Papers of Alfred Stürmer (private papers of Alfred and Tilde Stürmer, his parents), Munich
ASTE Aussenstelle Essen (the Gestapo branch office)
BAE Bund archive, in the Blockhaus, Leveringstrasse, Essen
BMP Papers of Barbara Martin, Marl
DJ Dore Jacobs
DJGU Dore Jacobs, “Gelebte Utopie”
EB Else Bramesfeld
EJ Ernst Jungbluth
EP Ellenbogen Papers
GJ Gottfried (Friedl) Jacobs
JP Jungbluth Papers
<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>KfH</td>
<td>Kammer für Haftentschädigung (restitution court for loss of liberty)</td>
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<td>LAN</td>
<td>Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (formerly Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf)</td>
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<td>LHAK</td>
<td>Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz</td>
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<td>LJ</td>
<td>Lisa Jacob</td>
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<td>ME</td>
<td>Marianne Ellenbogen, née Strauss</td>
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<td>NGJ</td>
<td>Alte Synagoge, Essen, Bestand 45-2AS, Nachlaß Gottfried Jacobs</td>
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<tr>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>Stadtarchiv Essen Bestand 626, Nachlaß Jacobs</td>
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<td>NRW</td>
<td>Nordrhein-Westfalen</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBP</td>
<td>Papers of Stefan Brandt, Berlin</td>
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<td>SLC</td>
<td>Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Speer Papers, Wuppertal</td>
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<td>S Sch</td>
<td>Sonja Schreiber</td>
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<td>StAE</td>
<td>Stadtarchiv Essen</td>
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<td>StapoD</td>
<td>Staatsleitpolizeistelle Düsseldorf</td>
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<td>StAR</td>
<td>Stadtarchiv Remscheid</td>
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<td>StAW</td>
<td>Stadtarchiv Wuppertal</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBP</td>
<td>Papers of Wolfgang Briel, Barsinghausen</td>
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<td>WG</td>
<td>Wiedergutmachung</td>
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<td>WGA</td>
<td>Wiedergutmachungsamt</td>
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<tr>
<td>WE</td>
<td>Wasja Enoch</td>
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<td>WJ</td>
<td>Walter Jacobs</td>
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vol. 5, 109–26. Finally, on the important role of Jewish self-help, see Konrad Kwiet and Helmut Eschwege, Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand: Deutsche Juden im Kampf um Existenz und Menschenwürde, 1933–1945, Hamburger Beiträge zur Sozial und Zeitgeschichte (Hamburg: Christians, 1984), and Moore, Survivors: Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe.

8. The book also draws on interviews with a further ten Bund members, friends, or children conducted by others.


10. This is pursued above all in chapter 10 and the Conclusion. For the historiography of resistance, see the references in Tuchel, “Vergessen,” and chapter 10. The best surveys of rescue’s postwar reception in Germany are Dennis Riffel, Unbesungene Helden: Die Ehrungsinitiative des Berliner Senats 1938 bis 1966, Reihe Dokumente, Texte, Materialien (Berlin: Metropol, 2007), and Kobi Kabalek, “The Rescue of Jews and the Memory of Nazism in Germany, from the Third Reich to the Present” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2013).

1. **Years of Innocence**


3. Ibid., 18, LHAK 405A, 1290, Städtisches Realgymnasium Essen to Provinzialschulkollegium, Koblenz, September 16, 1919; LHAK, Schreiben des Städtischen Gymnasiums und Realgymnasiums Essen-Rüttenscheid an das Lehrerkollegium des Städtischen Realgymnasiums Essen in the


5. The 1924 Bund was preceded by a short-lived organization created in 1923—the Bund für Proletarian Education. BAE, DJGU, 27. The gender balance is based on Norbert Reichling’s and my reconstruction of who made up the group’s Inner Circle. Jacobs, Bramesfeld, et al., Gelebte Utopie, 13. In addition to the Bund’s own sources, see Behrens and Reichling, “Umbau des ganzen Lebens: Frauenbildung und Geschlechterfragen in der sozialistischen Bildungsgemeinschaft ‘Bund’ seit 1919”; Reichling, “Der ‘Bund’: Jugendbewegte Bildungsarbeit und Lebensreform im Ruhrgebiet”, and Reichling, “Mit Kant gegen die Nazis: Der ‘Bund’ und sein vergessenes ‘Judenhilfswerk’ im Rhein-Ruhr-Gebiet.”


8. Anyone familiar with the Weimar political scene will recognize, for example, many similarities between the Bund and an organization that was better known at the time, the Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund—also known as the ISK or the “Nelson-Bund”—which was led by the philosopher Leonard Nelson. Werner Link, Die Geschichte des internationalen Jugend-Bundes (IJB) und des internationalen sozialistischen Kampf-Bundes (ISK): Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich, Marburger Abhandlungen zur politischen Wissenschaft, vol. 1 (Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1964); Karl-Heinz Klär, “Zwei Nelson-Bünde: Internationaler Jugend-Bund (IJB) und internationaler sozialistischer Kampf-Bund (ISK) im Licht neuer Quellen,” Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung 18, no. 3 (1982): 310–59, and Udo Vorholt, Die politische Theorie Leonard Nelsons: Eine Fallstudie zum Verhältnis von philosophisch-politischer Theorie und konkret-politischer Praxis (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998).

4. Calls to Arms

1. Information contained in LAN, Denazification files, NW 1022-5 11804, Luise Speer; NW1022 J 24280, Ernst Jungbluth; NW 1022, J 31069, Gertrud Jacobs; NW 1005 G33 1048, Emml Schreiber.


3. BAE, Box “Bund 2,” handwritten and typewritten report headed “Else, January 1986”; extract from letter to Artur Jacobs on the occasion of his eightieth birthday from Gerda Hajek Simons, reprinted in DJGU, 215; BAE, “Zum Gedenken an Gerda Hajek Simons,” Essen, January 1984; and Eva Seligmann and Heide Henk, Erinnerungen einer streitbaren Pädagogin (Bremen: Ed. Temmen, 2000). It is another sign that some outreach was possible that Gerda Simons’s connection with the Bund was established at a group retreat only in 1934.

4. LAN, RW 58-58105 Jacob, Elisabeth Sara, Interrogation, March 1, 1940.


8. The official death toll of ninety-one on November 9 and 10 is too low. It probably runs into the hundreds. Evans, The Third Reich in Power, 580–611.


10. Ibid.

11. NGJ, AJ to GJ, November 12, 1938.

13. SLC, MC447 Box 2, Folder 31, manuscript titled “Adult Group in First Christian Church,” May 10, 1942.
14. Interview with Tove Gerson, Essen, January 1997. The remarks following the quote also draw on an interview Gerson gave to an Essen trade school in 1988, the tape recording of which can be found in the BAE.
21. Ibid.
25. SLC, MC447 Box 1, Folder 16, autobiographical statement with Boston University.
29. In his perceptive study *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge*, Frank Stern has shown how in the postwar period the West German population telescoped onto Kristallnacht what had been a much longer history of anti-Jewish measures, and thereby hid its own acceptance or tolerance of a much longer, more gradual process. See Frank Stern and Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism (Universitah ha-‘Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim), *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge: Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany*, Studies in Antisemitism (New York: Published for the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism (SICSA), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, by Pergamon Press,
1992). But in the Bund’s case, the contemporary evidence suggests that it really was Kristallnacht that decisively pushed it into action.

30. SLC, MC447 Box 1, Folder, 16, autobiographical statement with Boston University.

31. Information on the correspondence in the Alte Synagoge provided by Susi Cohen. E-mail from Susi Cohen to Mark Roseman, July 31, 2011.

32. NGJ, AJ to GJ, January 21, 1939.

33. SLC, MC447 Box 2, Folder 31, manuscript titled “Rede vor der American Association of University Women. Bartlesville,” March 9, 1942.

34. AJD, October 4, 1944.


36. DJ, “Brief an eine emigrierte Genossin (1938),” in DJGU, 129.

37. NGJ, DJ to GJ, August 21, 1938.

38. NGJ, AJ to GJ, February 21, 1939. Although the letter refers only to the Herzfelds, the information matches that for Salomon Herzfeld, Robert Marcus’s father-in-law. See Schröter, Geschichte und Schicksal der Essener Juden, 581.


40. Ibid., and AJ to GJ, February 21, 1939.

41. DJ, “Brief an eine emigrierte Genossin (1938),” in DJGU, 129.

42. NGJ, Karlos Morgenstern to AJ, January 10, 1940.


44. NGJ, AJ to GJ, June 30, 1939.

45. NGJ, AJ to GJ, January 21, 1939.


47. NGJ, AJ to GJ, September 28, 1940, and October 28, 1940. Bund records sometimes still refer to the house as the Eyhof, using the name of the street before 1931.


49. NGJ, AJ to GJ, letters April 22, May 5, May 8, May 11, and May 20, 1939. Lisa Jacob to GJ, July 14, 1939; AJ to GJ, 4 April 1941; and AJD, June 27, 1942.


51. NGJ, DJ to her sister, Eva von der Dunk, April 20, 1940.
52. NGJ, AJ to GJ, January 3, 1940. The letter says “im Felde,” so presumably Poland is meant. On call-up and U.K. status, see denazification files in LAN, NW 1035 6444; 1013—I/l 121; 1013 I/ PP 45; 1013 I/ DN 10; NW 1013 II/ ED 9990; and NW 1002—AD 268.

53. AB3.

54. NGJ, AJ to GJ, January 8, 1940.

55. SLC, MC 447, Box 1, Folder 30, Oklahoma correspondence re speeches, Tove Gerson to WE, April 15, 1942.

56. NGJ, GJ to EJ, October 2, 1942. Only in 1944 did Artur offer clear but cautious evidence that Ursula had been rethinking her relationship to the regime.

57. NGJ, AJ to GJ, April 16, 1940. Interview with Friedl Speer, Wuppertal, April 2000.

58. NGJ, DJ to GJ, October 10, 1938, and November 3, 1938.

59. Ibid.

60. NGJ, AJ to GJ, December 15, 1938. See also NGJ, DJ to GJ, February 6, 1939, and February 18, 1939; AJ to GJ, February 18, 1939.

61. See the letters from Artur and Dore to GJ on July 13, 17, 20, and 23, 1938 and April 20, 1939.

62. “Het Vrije Denken” in Milo Anstadt, De verdachte oorboog: Autobiografische roman (Amsterdam: Contact, 1996); see, in particular, 239.

63. Ibid., 241.


65. NGJ, Erna Michels to Dore, June 1, 1939. Anstadt, De verdachte oorboog; e-mail to the author from Karien Anstadt, March 29, 2011; ASE, IN. 614, Susi Cohen interview with Judith Hess, September 5, 1996.

66. NGJ, AJ to GJ, June 29, 1940.

67. NGJ, AJ to GJ, February 8, 1943, and GJ to AJ, February 2, 1943. See Friedl’s later marginalia in a letter from his father sent on October 4, 1942.

68. NGJ, Karlros Morgenstern to AJ, January 10, 1940.

69. NGJ, LJ to GJ, July 10, 1939; WJ to GJ, January 23, 1941; and EJ to AJ, October 8, 1942.

70. NGJ, AJ to GJ, April 2, 1940.

71. NGJ, WJ to GJ, January 23, 1941.

72. NGJ, WJ to GJ, June 16, 1941.

73. NGJ, AJ to GJ, October 3, 1938, and AJ to GJ, November 12, 1941.

74. AJD, March 17, 1942.

75. AJD, October 23, 1942.

76. AJD, October 26, 1942.

77. AJD, September 13, 1943.
Notes to pages 76–80

78. LAN, RW 58-41452, undated transcript, Friedrich Gross, Riesweg 64 (Eingang December 9, 1939) and subsequent documents; memorandum, StapoD, AStE, March 6, 1940, signed Kosthorst.

79. LAN, NW 1005 G33 1048, Emmi Schreiber, “Lebenslauf (ab 1930),” no date [November 1945], and RW 58-41452, Regierungspräsident to Gestapo Düsseldorf, May 6, 1940.

80. LAN, RW58 580105, statement by Anna Gellingshausen, Essen, February 28, 1940.

81. LAN, RW58, 19223, StapoD, AStE, Vermerk, Essen, March 7, 1940.

82. LAN, 3000, 72, Dore Jacobs, “Sitzung of the Amtsgericht Essen,” February 27, 1953.

83. NGJ, AJ to GJ, April 16, 1940.


5. Lifelines

1. AJD, October 14, 1942.

2. According to Jacob, “‘Der Bund’: Gemeinschaft für sozialistisches Leben und meine Rettung vor der Deportation,” 116, 127, the originals of the surviving letters are in Kibbutz Hazorea, the only kibbutz to be founded by the German youth movement. The copies I saw were in the possession of Trude’s grandson Stefan Brandt, Berlin, reproduced in DJGU; and in Rainer Funk, “Erleben von Ohnmacht im Dritten Reich: Das Schicksal der jüdischen Verwandtschaft Erich Fromms aufgezeigt anhand von Dokumenten und Briefen auf dem Weg in die Vernichtung,” Fromm-Forum 9 (2005): 35–79.

3. On the copy of Trude Brandt to Frau Bruchsal, January 29, 1941, in SBP, someone, presumably a Bund member after the war, has corrected “Bruchsal” to “Jordan.” Hanna was the twenty-year-old daughter of a left-wing Wuppertal couple, a “mixed-race” Jew who would become a celebrated stage designer after the war.

4. SBP, Trude Brandt to “Frau Mitzi,” July 13, 1941; Trude Brandt to “Frau Bruchsal,” January 29, 1941; and Trude Brandt to “Frau Mitzi,” September 17, 1941. In a small publication of letters from Trude Brandt, the author Rainer Funk has simply assumed that “Mitzi” was Lisa Jacob and, using this guesswork, has altered the name of the recipient accordingly; see Funk, “Erleben von Ohnmacht im Dritten Reich.”


68. Not to be confused with the Bund’s publication of the same name—see below and note 73.

69. A completion date of 1975 is given in the later published version of *Gelebte Utopie*. However, at the time, the Bund reported that the manuscript was completed only in 1977, and even then not all parts were finished. BAE, “Chronik des Bundes,” 1977, 1, 25–26.


71. DJGU, 5.

72. DJGU, 232.


75. Copy of a letter to Mordecai Paldiel, September 3, 2003, in the author’s possession.

76. Announcement from Yad Vashem, dated April 18, 2004, sent, along with other documents, to the author.


**Conclusion: The Rescue of History**


2. Schrafstetter, *Flucht und Versteck*, 9–11. How small these figures were is underlined by the fact that they include those in mixed marriages who were endangered only later in the war.


10. Interview with Änne Schmitz, Wuppertal, January 1997.


15. AB3, 10.


17. AB3, 2.

18. AB3, 3.

19. John M. Cox, Circles of Resistance: Jewish, Leftist, and Youth Dissidence in Nazi Germany, Studies in Modern European History (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 96.

20. Just how challenging it was to maintain this kind of stance emerges strongly from Janosch Steuwer, “Ein Drittes Reich, wie ich es auffasse”: Politik, Gesellschaft und privates Leben in Tagebüchern 1933–1939 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2017).


28. These were crucial, for example, in “Aryan” Warsaw. Paulsson, Secret City.


31. Tec, “Toward a Theory of Rescue.”


34. As well as Gross, see also Christian Gudehus, “Helping the Persecuted: Heuristics and Perspectives (Exemplified by the Holocaust),” *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence* (2016).


38. One additional reason for the contrast is that different kinds of records survive from different eras. During the Nazi years, the Bund could not express itself publicly. If Bund members put pen to paper, they did so in the intimate medium of letter or diary. Afterward, they must have decided that these private sources, as the only surviving testament to the Nazi era, were worthy of preservation. This also held true the first year or so after the war. From this period, too, a rich trove of letters has been preserved. Later, however, when the Bund finally had the ability to disseminate collective reports and manuscripts, many of which have been carefully preserved, its members deposited fewer personal documents in the archive.

39. BAE, AB1, 1–2; Artur Jacobs, “Ansprache zur Maifaier 1945,” in DJGU, 175; and BAE, copy, DJ to WE, Meersburg, May 8, 1945.
40. As both Robert Moeller and David Crew have pointed out, war stories and Holocaust accounts were for a long time mutually exclusive. Moeller, War Stories; Jörg Echternkamp, “Von Opfern, Helden und Verbrechern—Anmerkungen zur Bedeutung des Zweiten Weltkrieges in den Erinnerungskulturen der Deutschen, 1945–1955,” in Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland, ed. Jörg Hillmann and John Zimmermann (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002), 301–18; and David F. Crew, Bodies and Ruins: Imagining the Bombing of Germany, 1945 to the Present, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017). Even now, the recent expanding literature on Germans as victims in the war remains for the most part quite separate from work on the Holocaust or resistance. See also William John Niven, Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Some important exceptions that have begun to interweave the two narratives include Atina Grossmann, Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), and Stargardt, German War.


42. See Crew, Bodies and Ruins.

43. Though the collective memory did then determine the story Bund members narrated individually.

44. On hindsight and moral judgment in the Holocaust generally, see Mariot and Zalc, “Reconstructing Trajectories of Persecution,” 85–112. For German Jews, see also the introduction to Matthäus and Roseman, Jewish Responses to Persecution.


Jerusalem to Paris,” and Gensburger, “L’émergence de la catégorie de Juste parmi les nations comme paradigme mémoriel.”
