

Times
4/4/39

KUHN'S ARREST CLIMAX OF BUND'S HECTIC LIFE

American Imitation of German Nazi Party Has Failed to Pick Up Many Members in Three Years' Effort

By HUGH O'CONNOR

UNDER SPOTLIGHT

With the arrest of Fritz Kuhn on charges of embezzlement, the German-American Bund has been brought again into the national limelight. For three years Kuhn has been head and front of the organization. Now he is to be tried on the charge of having taken \$14,548 of the society's funds.

After the first year of his leadership, the annual meeting of the bund, in July, 1937, accepted his judgment that his conduct of its affairs during the previous year warranted his election for four more years instead of annually. He explained then that he wanted to be assured of enough time to build up an organization based on the principles of Hitler in Germany but adapted here to the use of Americans of German origin.

As to the strength of his organization, Kuhn officially claimed a membership of 8,299 in the report which the Department of Justice turned over to the Dies Committee two months ago. The Department found, however, that the claims of the local bund leaders added up only to 6,617 for the nation. Of these, Kuhn put 5,324 in the metropolitan district of New York. The Department of Justice made the figure 4,529.

Leadership Explained

The "leader principle" under which Kuhn dominates the bund was explained by him a year ago in sworn testimony before the New York State legislative inquiry headed by Senator John J. McNaboe. He said that he leads his German-Americans in all things—in their ninety-four local organizations in the principal cities of the country, in twenty-two camps where children pay for Summer vacations and are joined by their parents for week-end picnics.

He publishes and edits their four small weekly newspapers, each with a circulation found by the Department of Justice to be 2,000 copies at 5 cents each. He collects their dues of 75 cents a month, and admis-



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Bund leader Fritz Kuhn.

sions to meetings, usually 40 cents and up. Membership pins cost 25 cents. He banks the organization funds from these various sources of income. For all this, Kuhn told Senator McNaboe, he takes only \$3,000 a year, although it is a full-time job to lead the German-American Bund.

Herlands' Report

Commissioner William B. Herlands, who attempted to investigate the bund's payment of sales taxes in this city, reported to Mayor La Guardia last month that Kuhn apparently had never rendered any financial accounting to the bund members.

At the McNaboe hearing Kuhn expounded the principles and aims of his group. He hoped, he said, "to build an Aryan movement under the swastika to liberate America from the Jews."

Until 1936 the bund had been known as the Friends of the New Germany, under the national leadership of Heinz Spanknoebel and Fritz Gissibl, both veterans of Hitler's unsuccessful 1923 reach for power in Germany.

These two Hitler apostles in turn had attempted unsuccessfully to take control of the old-line German

organizations in the United States, after Hitler finally took over the government in Germany in 1933. Gissibl, who was the last leader of the Friends in 1935, gave up the attempt and declared that thereafter the Friends would proceed alone to follow the new German model.

The bitterness of the struggle meanwhile caused diplomatic embarrassment in Berlin and led the German Government to prohibit membership in the Friends among German nationals in America, effective Jan. 1, 1936.

New Name and Uniform

Thereupon Kuhn, who had been Detroit sub-leader since the organization of the Friends, succeeded to the national leadership and immediately declared its task had shifted. It was no longer to explain Germany to America, he said, but to lead America to the German principles—a position to be known as Americanism, not Nazism.

Kuhn's first step in this direction was to change the Friends of the New Germany to the German-American Bund in April, 1936. The next change was in uniforms. In March, 1937, the bund dropped the black breeches and riding boots of the Nazi elite guards and adopted a uniform which Kuhn declared to be modeled on that of the American Legion. Thereupon, Kuhn announced the bund was cooperating with 125 other American organizations against communism and the Jews. In the following July Kuhn was re-elected leader for four years.

In March, 1938, Berlin formally proscribed the bund as it had its predecessor, the Friends. In April Kuhn announced that the German national flag would no longer be displayed at all bund meetings, but only on national holidays of the Fatherland. At all other meetings only the American flag and the bund flag would appear. The bund flag carries the swastika, according to James Wheeler-Hill, national secretary of the bund, "as the sign of Aryan supremacy."

In September, 1938, the German title of the official bund newspaper, Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter, was supplemented with an English title "The Free American." The bund at the same time substituted a song of its American aspirations in English for the previously used Nazi anthem in German, the Horst Wessel Lied.

Two Celebrities

This brings the record down to the meeting last February, when the bund hired Madison Square Garden for the much-policed celebration of Washington's birthday with an "Americanism" meeting. The audience numbered 19,000, more than twice the total member-

ship of the bund in the entire United States. A month later, however, when the bund wished to celebrate Hitler's birthday, the audience failed to fill Ebling's Casino in the Bronx.

Outside the bund, however, Kuhn's shift to Americanism has failed to make headway among German-Americans. He still has no more members than Spanknoebel and Gissibl left in 1935. In explanation, his advisers suggested that the official proscription of the bund by the German Government had hurt its prestige here. Consequently another change of name was proposed for the movement.

The bund was to remain the spearhead of Kuhn's militants. And for those who did not like the bund or its history, Kuhn's New Jersey lieutenant incorporated a German-American Front, to support the American Constitution and "to avoid useless and ignoble propaganda."