
RESCUED LIVES

The “Bund”, resistance, and rescue in Nazi Germany”

MARK ROSEMAN

Essen November 10, 1938: A young German woman braves a baying crowd that has gathered in the wake of Kristallnacht and carries flowers to the elderly Heinemanns, finding the Jewish couple cowed and crushed amidst the shattered glass of their destroyed apartment.

December 9, 1939: A middle-aged Essen teacher dares to speak out in a rations queue against the idea that Jews have called Nazi atrocities in Poland upon themselves; someone reports her to the Gestapo.

May 10, 1940: A German-Jewish émigré in Holland, hearing the approaching German forces, finds comfort in writing to thank correspondents from the Ruhr area in Germany for their letters: “Letters were always a pleasure, but now each one is like a gift.”

September 17, 1941: Thanks for more material gifts are in evidence in a beautifully penned missive dispatched under the most difficult circumstances from Ostrow Lubelski in occupied Poland to Wuppertal. In it, the writer, a German Jewess, thanks a woman, until recently a stranger, for her kindness and inspiration, for the bread that the writer has managed to acquire in exchange for the cardigan she had been sent and for the potatoes that had been “underwear in a previous life”.

November 8, 1941: a Jewish woman in Essen about to be deported to Minsk breaks down in gratitude at the support she has been given by a local man.

April 12, 1942: an Essen gymnastics teacher, Jewish, writes a suicide note, dating it April 13, declaring that “she cannot face transport to Izbica in Poland”. In reality, she has taken the early train to Wuppertal and will spend three years on the run, protected by a group of friends.

May 10, 1942: a young non-Jewish German refugee from Essen gives an adult group in the First Christian Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma their first inside account of life in Nazi Germany, as part of a concerted effort to raise awareness of the plight of Jews.

August 31, 1943: a young Jewish woman slated for deportation slips out from under the watchful eyes of the Gestapo and flees her home, arriving in the evening at the apartment of a woman she has only recently come to know. She gives herself over to the protection of a shadowy group, surviving 20 months on the run thanks to their assistance.

All of these activities involved Germans under Nazi rule recognizing the plight of their Jewish fellow former citizens – and acting on that knowledge. With the exception of the émigré in Bartlesville (who had only stage fright to contend with), they all risked major retribution. Almost all of those involved were women. Their actions challenge our assumptions about what was even possible under Nazi rule. Their actions ranged from simple, symbolic gestures like bringing flowers to the beleaguered or sending letters to exiled deportees, to organized rescue actions that feel as much like resistance to the regime as help for an individual. All were inspired by one group, still almost unknown today, the “Bund, League of Socialist Life”.

Deploying a striking set of letters, diaries, Gestapo reports and other documents as well as memoirs and interviews, this book uncovers the hidden story of the Bund. It explores the group’s achievements and tribulations, the sources of its inspiration and success, and the reasons it fell into postwar oblivion. It also turns the spotlight onto the documents themselves – as a reminder that the past, and all the more so the hidden past under a dictatorship, reveals itself to the present only in shards and fragments. Like an archeologist, the historian needs to turn each piece this way and that before deciding where it fits. In the Bund’s case, because the treasure trove of sources – and particularly wartime sources – is so rich, the story we can piece together does much more than relate the history of a small, intriguing group: it challenges the way we have thought about resistance and rescue under Nazi rule. The Bund certainly was unusual, when compared even with the small minority of Germans who defied the Nazi regime, but uncovering its experience shows that our notions of resistance to Nazi rule, and even more of rescue in the Holocaust, have been constricting and in some ways misleading. “Rescue” has been the subject of morally uplifting or politically useful stories, and while the Bund’s rescue of individuals in some ways fits the bill, in other respects its motives, actions, and fears run counter to the usual commemorative accounts. For one thing, as the actions described above

show, the notion of “rescue” misses a great deal of meaningful action – action that was essential for saving lives. “Help” is the more capacious and accurate word. Those who helped, did so in the moment, and often did not know what the limits or the implications of their commitment would be. They did not see themselves as “rescuers,” and the survival of those who were “rescued” often hinged on many smaller and larger gestures of help – including the extraordinary risks they had to undertake themselves. This book seeks to rescue from memory the lived experience of actions and uncertainty, of risks and courage, in short of the possibilities and limits of action under Nazi rule.



When the “Bund, League of Socialist Life” originally formed in the early 1920s, it had no conception of the brutal dictatorship that was to come or any sense that its members would be engaging in clandestine activities. Many were peaceable, conscientious young people who had come to know each other through attending Essen’s adult education classes. Bent on self-improvement and inspired by the blend of Kantian and socialist ideas emanating from their teacher, Artur Jacobs, they formed a group. From this little crucible in the heart of the Ruhr industrial area, the founding members hoped to forge an ideal community, inspiring others to build the better society of the future. Under Jacobs’ leadership the Bund grew to perhaps two hundred members – workers, teachers, and a few middle class women with a social conscience. In meetings, study, physical exercise, and excursions the group sought to maintain a holistic and uplifting communal life, while reaching out to wider circles through adult education, experiments in alternative schooling, gymnastics training, and political meetings. In the harsh conditions of Nazi rule the group was forced to turn in on itself, its numbers shrinking to around a hundred, at times perhaps fewer. A few members were briefly imprisoned, others emigrated or chose the safety of private anonymity, and one or two may have been rejected by the group because they were thoughtless risk-takers who might attract dangerous attention from the authorities.

Yet the group survived, for the most part evading the Gestapo spotlight and maintaining a remarkable degree of associational life. Unable to reach out openly to others, and anxious not to be implicated as beneficiaries of a criminal regime, it struggled to find a new way of interpreting its role as the vanguard of the future. It worked harder still to stiffen the moral

backbone of its members. Under the guise of physical education classes it even succeeded in some quiet proselytizing among outsiders. When war started, many of the men were mobilized, some as soldiers to the front, others as skilled workmen to factories moved to less bomb-prone hinterland. Above all it was the women who were left behind in the Ruhr cities.

The Bund did not have a particular Jewish agenda, indeed it was hostile to all organized religion, and had always insisted that its members leave the church. But ever since Kristallnacht the Bund had felt called on to act in defense of persecuted Jews in the region. At the time of its formation back in the 1920s its members had shared an almost touchingly utopian dream that together they could change the world. Now, on their actions would depend real lives.

The men and women who belonged to the Bund were not extraordinary heroes. Sometimes their actions do not look very remarkable at all – a handful of rather quirky souls meeting in rainy Sauerland forests to celebrate the summer solstice. No doubt such meetings took courage – and bolstered it too – but carefully choreographed sylvan get-togethers in the drizzle were hardly designed to hasten the demise of the Nazi regime. Yet through them a collective was preserved that eluded detection and saved lives. The group offered many tens of persecuted individuals in the Ruhr region material assistance and moral support. They dispatched hundreds of parcels to deportees in Polish ghettos and the Theresienstadt camp, and even tried to assist deportees in Auschwitz. They provided a lifeline and hiding places for several individuals, with half a dozen surviving inside Nazi Germany thanks to their help. This book traces the story of the Bund from its beginnings to postwar, focusing particularly on the dark years of the Third Reich. In addition to uncovering the hidden story, it asks how a group of ordinary folk found and maintained the will to act, how they forged and preserved the cohesion that enabled them to operate under a dictatorship, and how they avoided detection.

Just as striking as the Bund's achievements under Nazism was the lack of recognition they received after the war. Jacobs and his group were surely justified in feeling that their courage, generosity of spirit, and resilience had proved their worth. Yet as early as 1947 they were noting forlornly, "Our flock has dwindled. One often feels very lonely. We are having to stand against the current just as we did during the 12 years of Nazism." By the early 1950s leading figures in the Bund were exchanging notes asking – where are young people in the Bund? Ten years later they were resigned to ageing gracefully together. Just as painfully, their status as political opponents of the Nazi regime was challenged in 1946, and their role as rescuers went

unacknowledged. The group produced lengthy accounts of its wartime actions but to little avail. The first important book on left-wing rescue in the Bund's home region came out as late as 1969 and only to pooh-pooh their claims. In the 1970s and 1980s two women who had been saved by the Bund sought to have their rescuers recognized at Yad Vashem as "Righteous among the Nations" and were rebuffed, twice. Inquiries the Israeli authorities made in Germany led to skepticism that the claims could be genuine. Moreover, with its focus on individual rescuers Yad Vashem was looking for specific individuals to recognize, and in the case of the Bund it was not clear who should be singled out. Artur Jacobs died unrecognized in 1968, his wife Dore ten years later. It seems undeserved that they should have had such difficulty in finding resonance in their lifetimes and that the Bund's story should not have been told until now, decades after the death of its leading members.



What the Bund had done was unusual and no doubt hard to believe. Yet the pointed refusals to honor its actions provide our first clue that there is something deeper at stake, something that has blocked the past from our view. Today we know that in Germany and elsewhere it took decades for the Holocaust to assume the central significance and resonance we take for granted. What is less recognized is the striking degree to which the politics of memory have shaped and continue to shape the way we imagine the nature of resistance and rescue.

For long after the war there was a failure to recognize local, everyday actions like the Bund's as resistance at all. After all, the group had not taken a potshot at Hitler, nor sought to bring down the regime, nor even posted leaflets in the dark to alert the neighbors to the evils being done in their name. Even when scholars began to unearth the surprising scale of local left-wing operations during the early years of Nazi rule (virtually all of them savagely crushed by the regime), aiding Jews was not seen as resistance. Foolhardy leafleting that led rapidly to imprisonment and sometimes death was now deemed worthy of recognition; purposeful small-scale actions that helped to sustain the lives of the persecuted were not. Such actions seemed too personal, not really political, and not even indirectly hastening the regime's downfall. More recently, the definitional net has been widened, and all kinds of nonconformism have been elevated to the level of resistance. But placing the Bund on the same level as a catch all category of "nonconformist" also seems short of justice to their brand of activism.

By contrast with “resistance”, rescue has almost always been treated as a nonpolitical, personal matter carried out by individuals from the goodness of their hearts. Not only Yad Vashem’s award of Righteous Among The Nations but also the vast majority of the scholarship and literature on rescue concentrates on the individual rescuer and his or her innate goodness or extraordinary personality. Often one individual could make all the difference, and it is certainly heartwarming to reflect on men and women imbued with such solid, simple virtue that at the crucial moment they could do no other than act. Sometimes simple altruism or empathy was enough to save the few when so many were murdered. But thinking in these terms hardly seems to do justice to the Bund’s purposeful and collective action – or, indeed, to many other gestures of help, which were sometimes less than altruistic, and often depended on more than one person.

The norms of the two genres, the resistance and the rescue story, thus differ from another, but neither works for the Bund. The group was not political enough to be deemed part of the resistance but was too collective and insufficiently apolitical to be identified as rescuer. Rescue has been understood very restrictively, above all because we have so often been seeking usable heroes and lessons for civic education. The result has been to leave out a great deal of history. In fact, from the historian’s point of view, the whole notion of rescue needs rethinking. Talking about “rescue” makes sense when we want to think about outcomes, and record or celebrate the fact that some Jews were still alive at the end of the war, thanks to assistance they received. But often the gestures that contributed to that survival along the way were too partial or short-term (or at least not initially impelled by long-term commitment) to be understood as “rescue” at the time. “Help” would be a more appropriate way of thinking about it. Moreover, defining rescue as a gesture prompted by altruism or empathy excludes assistance for money, for sex, to retain useful labor of someone who might otherwise be deported, indeed for all kinds of personal or institutional advantage.

Focusing on rescuers’ personalities to explain their actions neglects all the environmental factors that motivate, reinforce or camouflage their activities. These might be as simple and obvious as local topography or as diffuse and complex as local attitudes toward the state. A great many rescues were not solo actions but depended on networks – many of them, to be sure, very informal networks of material support or passive shared knowledge, a few far more organized groups. This book will explore the kind of network the Bund was – how it managed

to be supple and almost invisible, yet held together by bonds of steel; how it came to see in personal gestures of assistance and rescue an eminent political and moral good.

We will find, for example, that the habits and ties connecting the helpers were at least as important as their individual personalities. We will discover aspects of group daily life – the Bund’s strong interest in physical education and dance, or the housing collectives it formed in the 1920s – that were to prove unexpectedly significant in creating the spaces to act and the sense of safety and cohesion needed to do so. We can trace, in other words, the fragile but resilient threads woven in the 1920s, under very different expectations and conditions, that made it possible for an informal group without the trappings of a political party to be at the same time a tight-knit one. Some of the Bund’s characteristics were peculiar to the group, but the importance of informal networks in making action possible is not. In the German environment, where not just the Gestapo but also the neighbors were hostile, creating a shared and supportive space was psychologically vital.

Of course, collectives were sources of acute vulnerability as well as strength. Bund members were most exposed when they were most together. The network was also only as strong as its weakest link. Each individual member had to hold firm, bear the weight of her own fear, and shoulder her own responsibility. But still it is to the group, its habits, its quirks, its atmosphere, its hybrid nature, and its leadership, that we must look if we are to understand this hidden history.



It is not for nothing that historians refer to documents as “sources”. For the Nazi era, rich sources are doubly essential not only to determine who did what, but also to capture the murderous atmosphere, so different from the world in which we live now. But what kind of records can there be of clandestine activities that, by definition, occurred in the shadows? Often there is no paperwork to be found and this is why accounts of individual rescuers and academic analysis of rescue have relied so heavily on interviews. There are very good reasons for talking to protagonists – their memories can reveal things that could not be recorded at the time. They add the rescuer’s considered perspective from the vantage point of safety and maturity. Sometimes, even when there *are* contemporary records, it is the later testimony that enables us to understand them – for example, correcting a lie in a Gestapo report or alerting us

that a suicide letter left on a dresser for the authorities to find and duly record, was a fake. The interviews I carried out for this book with twenty or so individuals in Germany, the UK, Israel and the USA have left an indelible impression. Over and above the accounts they gave of the past, surviving Bund members – average age over 90 by the time I came to spend time with them – were in a way living documents themselves; through their physical bearing and moral stance they still conveyed a faint hint of what their group had once been. Upright and gently, intensely serious, they were still equipped with the enabling conviction that complex matters could be worked through and understood, that right-thinking people could and would arrive at the right conclusion, and that, having done so, they had to act on the consequences.

Yet, vital though these encounters were, interviews, it turns out, offer a very incomplete picture of the real history of rescue. What makes the case of the Bund so remarkable are the diaries, letters, circulars, Gestapo reports, speeches, and early postwar testimonies now dispersed across three continents. It is this paperwork, now a denunciation from neighbors in a Gestapo file, now a diary entry, now a letter, now a memorandum to the education authorities documenting why former grammar school teacher Jacobs should be stripped of his pension, that shows the unfolding apparatus of persecution. And it is the diaries, secret speeches, and family correspondence which – supplemented by interviews and by the Bund's early postwar publications about what it had achieved – show how the Bund adapted its way of life, practicing subterfuge, learning very reluctantly to lie, evolving both mission and modus operandi.

Regular meetings of local groups were precisely choreographed, with every member turning up at an appointed time, and no groups forming on the street. Interrogation techniques were practiced and practiced again, cover stories rehearsed until reluctant liars could voice them in their sleep. The Bund's program of assistance evolved over time, from offering places of refuge to left-wingers on the run in 1933, through family visits for local beleaguered Jews after Kristallnacht, the hundreds, perhaps thousands of small parcels sent to ghettos and concentration camps in 1942 and 1943, to the hiding places and rations for Jews in the second half of the war. Almost as important as the material aid was the moral support given in letters, gestures and supportive words to victims who did not realize there were still people in Germany willing to record the injustice of their persecution. It is this paperwork that allows us to trace the survival of Bund members themselves through the intensifying bombing campaigns and the tightening Gestapo control of the last years of the war.

Records of the time contain vivid detail, but they contain something more. They provide a picture of change that is often flattened by recollections made in later life. As the Bund noted immediately after the war when memories were still fresh, the way you had to respond to an arrest in 1933 was no longer true in 1939 and different again in 1942. More important still – and here even the earliest postwar recollections are already in a different universe from reports written under Nazi rule – they reveal to us the way the Nazi era looked *when the future was still unknown*. To reverse Kierkegaard’s famous dictum that “life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards”, history can only be viewed backwards, but in the case of the Nazi era can only be understood forwards.

Thus it is the record of a speech Jacobs makes during the Nazi era itself - “What is demanded of us now is to bind our whole lives to something that from an outside perspective is threatened, indeed is pointless. What the consequences will be for us remain completely in the dark” - that makes us realize two things not visible in postwar testimony. The first is that when they acted to help others Jacobs and his listeners did not know how or when the war would end, and if they would survive to breathe the air of freedom. The second is subtler – that the Nazis had deprived the group of its original self-assigned mission. The Bund’s *raison d’être* before the Nazi era had been as a “showcase”, living out in miniature the just society of the future. In 1933 the possibility of doing this came abruptly to an end. The group was now left to wonder whether there was any point at all to its experiment, indeed, as Jacobs’ speech suggested, to fear that it might be pointless. The advent of the Nazi era, he said in a speech in 1944, looking back now with the renewed confidence of one who knew the war was going to end, “was one of life’s profound crises, the kind which are also crises of belief, and which contain something of death within them”. Help and rescue activities gave the group a substitute mission, offering a way of doing good on a one-to-one level that tested them in a way their pre-Nazi commitment had never done. Secrecy prevented the rescue work from being in any sense a model to others. This ceased to be true, however, as soon as the war was over. Now, having outlived the Nazis, the group could show its ability to weather the Nazi storm as a lesson to others. Now, through its history of practical action, it could again aspire to be a model to inspire others to follow their example – and this is the stance of its postwar publications. The fears and uncertainties about the group’s own role that had once dominated the horizon and constituted the essential backcloth to its activity, are thus lost from view – but not in the documents from the Nazi era itself.

And there is an even subtler point. Unlike postwar accounts, contemporary documents are for the most part not yet colored by the moral filters of the post-Nazi era. These filters are very strong when historians write about rescuers operating within Nazi Germany, the land of the perpetrators; we have a clear sense of what belongs to the story and what does not. As distinct from Gestapo threats, we do not normally include in our narrative hardships that affected the whole population, such as the massive impact of bombing on daily life or the uprooting of populations because of the Soviet advance. At most we allow ourselves to allude to bomb damage if, say, someone in hiding lost their place of refuge and had to move on. Quite apart from our reluctance to acknowledge civilian suffering in Nazi Germany, our tendency is to concentrate on what made the rescuers swim against the tide, what made them different, what equipped them to act, and indeed these are the questions posed by this book. But we tend thereby not to notice a slippage – not to notice that we may be filtering out decisive experiences simply because the rescuers shared them with their compatriots, or because they are of a personal nature and are not necessarily specific to the hero.

To read wartime diaries and letters is to get a completely different picture. Then Dore Jacobs' disabling sciatica, or the destruction by bombing of the Bund's shared house in Wuppertal with the loss of most of their possessions or, most disturbing, the news for the Jacobs' that their son had gone missing, presumed arrested by the Gestapo, were too intrusive to ignore. If we want to understand what the group had to contend with when it acted, such matters surely have a claim on our attention too. In August 1943, for example, what adds immeasurably to our admiration for Artur Jacobs' energetic intervention on behalf of Marianne Strauss and his interest in her fate is that he was facing the arrest of his son, the ill health of his wife, and the loss of his possessions, all at the same time. Suddenly we realize that our characteristic postwar emphasis on threats emanating from the regime encompasses only a fraction of the story.



These remarks have already hinted at something almost never explored in histories of rescue, namely, that even the rescuers themselves feel obliged to repackage their own experience into the "usable" categories of the postwar period. I did not expect to be second-guessing the Bund's own claims when I began this investigation. When I originally encountered the Bund, it was through writing the survival story of Marianne Strauss, a young woman whom the group

protected for almost two years. True enough, in the course of that investigation, detailed in *The Past in Hiding*, I realized that for a survivor such as Marianne, memory, even vivid memory, had been pushed and pulled by forces that sometimes recast the original experience. For one thing, Marianne had seen loved ones taken away while she herself survived. It proved impossible for her to live with these memories without gently revising the account. In her years in hiding, she had also invented for herself a new persona, which she lived to the full, as a member of the Bund. That wartime self gradually disappeared from her own consciousness in later life, even if Marianne's admiration for the group never left her. It was only the miraculous rediscovery of her wartime diary after her death that allowed it to come back into view. The wartime phase as a "Bundist" was only one of the radical discontinuities in the life of a woman who had begun as the shy daughter of wealthy provincial Jews, had blossomed as a feisty teenager away from parental supervision in one of the few educational opportunities left for Jews in Nazi Berlin, had spent the war on the run, protected by a group of largely gentile, left-wing strangers, and after the war had become the wife of an Orthodox Jew in Britain and a mother, and found it increasingly hard to believe that all those former lives were her. I discovered that under these conditions even a powerful recall and an active mind reworked or represented some aspects of the past, while retaining astonishing recall in others.

But it did not seem likely that the Bund's recollections would display the same kinds of shifts. After all, the forces to which Marianne was subjected were the result of the radical displacements, traumatic losses and forfeit of a homeland that had been her lot, a lot in no way shared by her rescuers. Moreover, the Bund had collectively described its own experience very early after the war and in later conversations its members, by and large, adhered to the same account. No one meeting Bundists in later life and spending time with them could doubt their sincerity. To encounter them was to come away inspired not merely by their record but also by the way they maintained their principles and commitment into old age. Marianne herself felt guilty to the end of her life because she felt she had not managed to live up to their example.

The Bund had endured the sad experience of not being believed by postwar historians or by Yad Vashem. Part of the background to such skepticism was the recognized fact that there were post-war benefits to claiming the status of a rescuer – benefits that at different times and places were sometimes legal, sometimes financial, sometimes political, and sometimes moral. Former Nazis facing denazification tribunals scrambled to gather evidence that they had at one

stage or another been helpful to Jews. While we know that demonstrable antisemitism or Party membership did indeed not always preclude having assisted Jews, many of these claims were of course illusory. By the 1960s in West Germany there was kudos to be earned by claiming to have resisted the Nazis, and a historian such as Hans-Josef Steinberg was therefore ready to dismiss the Bund's claims about its role as self-serving exaggeration. At various times in the postwar decades it became official Polish policy to publicize stories of rescue, stories designed to counteract overseas accusations that Poles' wartime behavior and postwar Communist policy were antisemitic. Some of these stories were genuine enough, but not all, and the politics generating them was all too obvious. It is not surprising that Yad Vashem had learned to be cautious in evaluating the applications reaching its door.

In the Bund's case, however, it would not have taken much sleuthing to affirm the essential veracity of their claims. The evidence was and is irrefutable that the Bund had done remarkable things in Nazi Germany, and that it had not enjoyed the recognition it deserved. And yet as more and more records turned up in private collections and public archives, subtle shifts in the rescuers' own accounts became visible. I mean by this not the failings in recollection that afflict us all, for certainly even a rescuer's memory is subject to lapses and attrition, though in my experience the narratives of wartime action often remained fresh and vivid sixty years on. It was rather that the forces impelling memory to rework and shift the ground of wartime experience had been present, at least in the Bund's case, almost from the first days after the war, as they formulated their collective account. For the Bund, their wartime record took on a political and moral purpose – to prove the group's fitness as model and as inspiration. With the best of intentions, the result was to repackage the past, offering a language that subtly exaggerated the group's role as resisters of Nazism, and underplayed many of the burdens and challenges that had made its actions so remarkable.

After the war, for example, the Bund represented its aid work as the result of a philosophically grounded commitment to showing solidarity with those excluded from the community. Jews, it argued, received the most assistance because they were the most endangered. It had acted not from mere empathy, rather from its sense of what it was to do good in the circumstances of the Nazi regime. Indeed, in challenging the idea that mere sympathy or empathy had driven its actions the Bund noted that it had felt very alienated from those it helped, whose class, background, way of life, and outlook was so different from their own.

It is certainly true that the group opposed organized religion and required its members to quit church or synagogue. It was anti-bourgeois and anti-materialist, and would have felt at odds with the lifestyles of many of the Ruhr region's largely middle-class Jewish population. Yet the documents, and indeed some outside testimony to which the documents led me, offer a different picture. It is no longer so obvious in the post-war period quite how many Jews had been in the Bund's orbit before the Nazi era. Dore Jacobs, the co-founder, was Jewish by background, and though not at all religious had been in her youth the proud founder of the Zionist blue-white youth group in Essen. A chance connection for me with Suzy Cohen, a former friend of the Jacobs' son, Gottfried, now based in Israel and Australia, revealed that in the 1920s even newly arrived eastern Jews like Suzy Cohen's mother had found the Bund inspiring and drifted into its orbit. After 1933, the group saw one member after another emigrating to Holland, Palestine, the US, Sweden, and Britain. In 1939 the Jacobs' son, in exile in Holland, was considering learning Hebrew and leaving for Palestine, something that his mother embraced with equanimity, his father with deep sadness at the possible loss of ties to the German homeland. By the time I reached surviving members, this whole prewar network had largely disappeared from view.

What is striking, in fact, is how many personal connections made the Bund aware of what was happening to the Jewish community. Dore Jacobs and Lisa Jacob, another Jewish member who survived the war thanks to Bund assistance, not only experienced threats to themselves, but were conscious of the fate of friends and relatives. At the center of the Bund the personal connections to the Jewish world, the strong basis for empathy, were vital. Given the nature of the Bund's network, the moral imperatives resulting from this sentiment were then imparted even to those with little contact to the Jewish milieu and thus translated into wider action. In this way the Bund's experience was in fact closer to the classical accounts of rescue than it itself claimed; personal bonds and empathy combined with principle to mobilize them to act.

There is another dimension to the "Jewishness" of the Bund's rescue. Lisa Jacob was one of the Jews the group rescued, but she was also a helper in her own right. It was she, for example, who, with Tove Gerson, drove to a Dinslaken Jewish orphanage after Kristallnacht to offer assistance and she who, in 1940, instituted the extraordinary correspondence with Trude Brandt in Ostrow Lubelski. Even on the run she remained extremely active, continuing to lead a group of younger members within the Bund. And even the rescued who became part of the

group only after they were on the run, like Marianne Strauss, were extraordinarily enterprising in their own right – indeed could not have survived without helping themselves in many ways. Rescue here was thus not simply the courageous gentile extending a hand to the endangered Jew (though courageous gentiles *did* extend hands to endangered Jews), but a cooperative enterprise involving strong links to the Jewish world, and active Jews assisting themselves.

The Bund's distinctive approach during the 1930s and 1940s not only depended on, but made a virtue of this self-help. One of the striking features of their approach was the degree to which they sought to counteract, for those they helped, the morally and psychologically debilitating position of being merely dependent. Thus, in the communication with Trude Brandt, Lisa made it a point to ask advice, learn from Trude's experience as teacher and mother, and to emphasize the two-way nature of their exchange. And thus, on the eve of deportation, Artur Jacobs assured a "Frau K" that it was the *Bund* that benefited from assistance, because otherwise they would suffocate from the atmosphere of injustice. But after the war, in the narratives to persuade the outside world of the Bund's fitness to lead and to act as model, the agency of the helped necessarily disappeared from view. This was not only because the Bund wanted to emphasize its actions, but also, now that the revelations of mass murder were in full view, because it was no longer possible to imagine that helping the victims feel "equal" in the exchange was in any way adequate, even seemingly.

There are many other facets of the Bund's memories that do not quite convey the same past as emerges in the light of the sources they left behind. Indeed, it is the blurring and overreaching in their account that may have at least partly influenced both historians and Yad Vashem against them. Yad Vashem does not give the award to Jews, and the Bund's coyness about the Jewish links within the group helped undermine the efforts for their recognition. But in pursuing those parts of the story withheld from memory what emerges is no less heroic, indeed, in some ways it becomes more so. We learn of the personal obstacles facing Bund members, the rifts with their children, the moral choices faced day by day which they knew implicated them to some respect in the regime, the links of philosophy and sentiment that moved them to reach out to others, and the increasingly spiritual fatalism that sustained this supposedly anti-religious, socialist group in its darkest years. To uncover the historical rescue is not to disrespect the rememberers, on whose vivid recollections we are in other ways so dependent, and to whom this book is dedicated. But we have to be willing, in a way that writers about rescue until

now have not been, to understand the way in which *memory's* notion of rescue came into being, in order to recover the historical rescue from memory.



Though it is the years of Nazi rule that command our attention, we cannot help asking what happened to the Bund once the group was living in freedom. It had hoped to turn its experience under Nazism into a lesson for its members and others. The record surely spoke for itself. Unlike so many other groupings, they had survived the Nazi years more or less intact, had retained, indeed strengthened, the bonds that united them, and had acted – with courage, selflessness, shrewdness, and success. It seems a historic injustice that they were unable to capitalize on their achievement. Why did the Bund not offer an inspiring alternative for a generation of young people looking for a new political and spiritual home? Why, by 1947, did it feel that it was “swimming against the tide” “just as in the Nazi years”? The questions seem all the more relevant given Europe’s efforts in recent years to turn rescuers into usable and inspiring exemplars of civil courage.

This book uses the Bund experience to show that courageous action against dictatorship does not provide simple moral or political lessons for how to act and think in a democracy. In early post-war Germany, those lessons were in any case too painful to hear. Acknowledging that an everyday group had had the knowledge and wherewithal to act, and without fatal consequences, went against the grain. The rapidly accepted postwar myths in West Germany were that the population had not been Nazi, that they had not known what was being done in their name, and that only elites had had the knowledge and power to act. Thus, the only resistance that could be acknowledged (though attitudes even to this remained ambivalent for years) was the resistance of military (and even this was initially hard for Germans to swallow) or church leaders. Exceptions could be made for religiously or ethically inspired martyrs, but the avowed political nature of the Bund’s action was troublesome in an era when there was a great deal of skepticism towards politics. Indeed, Inge Scholl consciously depoliticized the actions of her murdered siblings, the resistance heroes Hans and Sophie, in order to make their actions palatable to postwar audiences. By not becoming martyrs, the Bund members had not elevated themselves into the hallowed sphere, safely out of ordinary human reach. What was unacceptable was the implication that many more people must have been able to act.

The Bund also suffered from the tragic irony that its achievement drew on the virtues of the same German youth movement traditions that the Nazis had so corrupted. As already intimated, the idea of the “altruistic personality,” so influential in work on rescue, does not do much to help us understand the Bund. But on another level, the idea of “personality” was central for the group. The Bund drew on an ideal that was very strong in the 1920s and which the Nazis had raised to an essential principle, namely the binding role of the natural leader. The idea of a “Bund” – a word poised between “league” and “covenant” – had gained particular force in the 1920s through the “Bündisch” youth, a heterogeneous movement united by a common style of tight-knit, self-directed youth groups devoted to their leader and rejecting the stuffiness of bourgeois family and organized society. In that sense the Bund was in many ways typical of much of the youth-movement inspired scene in the Weimar Republic, drawing on shared notions of leadership and loyalty. Unlike the Nazis, the League of Socialist Life did not have a Führer-cult, but it was consciously inspired by the charismatic leadership of Artur Jacobs. In rejecting all that after 1945 – hierarchy, devotion to the cause, the group above personal freedom, the romanticism of the shared ideal – postwar youngsters, the “burned children” of the Nazi period, could not embrace the Bund. The children of the founders had in any case often felt second best to the cause and the Nazi years had pulled some of them also in a different direction. Some had for a while even transferred their enthusiasm to the Hitler Youth. Others felt that, as soldiers, they had gained a knowledge of the world that superseded the insights of the group. The Bund’s achievement might be acknowledged post-war and some of its ideas welcomed, but young people – whether outsiders or the founder generation’s children – found themselves unable to embrace the Bund’s hierarchy and style.

Finally, such ironies apart, the Bund’s postwar fate is a reminder that both resistance and rescue may depend on qualities that are not useful civic virtues in a democracy. The Bund was not a democratic group, at least as we might understand the term. Indeed, they consciously opposed their idea of organic community to what they saw as mass democracy’s arbitrary rule of numbers; they accepted an inner hierarchy and wanted to be an elite; and they strove for the active individual but did not think in terms of citizenship. Like many German groups from the 1920s, they yearned for deep social unity rather than the pluralism inherent in modern democracy. They were inspiring and acted heroically, but they did not provide easy role models for postwar Germany. Recognizing this too is part of recovering the real history of help from the sanctified “rescue” of public commemoration.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

This book uses at least four different generations of sources – the records that were produced by or about the group at the time, before during and after the Nazi era; the accounts the group produced immediately after the war (1945-1948) about its experiences under Nazi rule; later memoirs produced by Dore Jacobs, and then by her and other members of the group about the Bund's history, in addition to memoirs from those rescued by the group, all produced from the 1960s to the 1980; finally, interviews by me and others with surviving members of the group since the 1990s.

For the pre-Nazi era, the Bund left behind a remarkable collection of published or printed materials about its activities and philosophy. In addition, Nazi confiscation of other papers means that for the last years of the Weimar Republic handwritten documents from the group's inner circle are also available. From the Nazi years Gestapo reports and official investigations offer some surprising insights, but the richest rewards in contemporary sources are to be found in Jacobs' extensive and remarkable diary, the frank correspondence between the Jacobs and their son Friedl, a huge collection of other lectures and papers deposited by the group in the Essen city archive, diaries from Marianne Strauss and Lisa Jacob in private possession, the extensive wartime correspondence between Lisa and Trude Brandt in Poland, and personal papers from many other members, including significant file deposits as far apart as the Remscheid city archive in the Ruhr and the Schlesinger Library, Harvard. These are then complemented and juxtaposed with the various layers of postwar memories and conversations described above. Together they constitute an absolutely unparalleled set of sources on a rescue and resistance group, and the different generations of record allow fascinating and unique comparisons to be pursued between lived and remembered experience.

Pictorial material from the 1920s, 1930s and 1950s is also wonderfully rich.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Lived Utopia. The Bund before the Nazis

Chapter 2: The Assault. The Bund in the first year of Nazi rule

Chapter 3: From Vanguard to Refuge.

Chapter 4: Breaking Through the Reserve.

Chapter 5: The Deluge.

Chapter 6: Soul Parcels

Chapter 7: In Plain Sight

Chapter 8: The Test of Total War

Chapter 9: The Endgame

Chapter 10: Our Flock has Grown Lonely

Chapter 11: An Unusable Past

Chapter 12: The Resistance of Memory

Epilogue

CHAPTER 1: THE LIVED UTOPIA – THE BUND IN WEIMAR

Explores the emergence and associational life of the Bund in the 1920s. Offers biographical vignettes of the founders and the circumstances by which the group came into being. Describes the philosophy and life-style of the group, the nature of the members' commitment, and its status as an "anti-religious sect". Important element in retrospect is that this was a place where Jews and Christians meet. But the Jewish connections of the group are lost in its postwar self-representation and memory. Explores the role of dance and eurhythmics in group formation and identity. Reflections on women, bodies, careers, "politics" in this milieu.

CHAPTER 2: THE ASSAULT

Using Gestapo and state records, memories, denunciations preserved in the archives, and contemporary correspondence, the chapter explores the Regime's attack on the Bund and the left in the region more generally.

CHAPTER 3: FROM VANGUARD TO REFUGE

With a rich array of sources, the chapter examines the ways the Bund sought to rebuild its life under the assault, both in terms of its strategy, and the resources on which it was able to draw. It focuses particularly on the cohesion and camouflage provide by the group's commitment to physical education.

The chapter concludes by looking at the way the Bund narrated its survival after the war, and shows that the almost disabling threat to the Bund's mission, that the contemporary records reveal, is less evident in memory. For its members, the group changed from socialist vanguard to personal refuge.

CHAPTER 4: BREAKING THROUGH THE RESERVE

Thanks again to the extraordinary richness of sources, this chapter explores the Bund's response to Kristallnacht and the changing mission in the run up to the beginning of the war. It shows too the personal costs for the group, and particularly its Jewish members, and the hidden story of efforts to leave the country by Dore Jacobs.

CHAPTER 5: THE DELUGE

This chapter looks at the war's initial impact on the group, examining the gap between the way we imagine the impediments to resistance and rescue, and the kinds of challenges that the war posed. It shows how the Bund retained its sociability, and it became above all a network of women, as the men were drawn off to front and industrial work elsewhere. We also gain remarkable insight into the way in which a committed anti-Nazi group, without any high-level contacts, observed the evolution of war and final solution, gaining a clear view of the latter by the end of 1942, but not wanting quite to believe what it knew.

CHAPTER 6: SOUL PARCELS

Armed again with unusually rich documentation – though also attentive to the many things we do not know – this chapter explores the developing scale of the Bund's help for Jews in wartime. It shows the attention the Bund paid to the spiritual predicament of the recipients, as well as the efforts it put into material provisions. It also shows that the Bund actions were understood at the time as a way of combating their own sense of complicity in the regime

CHAPTER 7: IN PLAIN SIGHT

This chapter introduces the Bund's rescue operations for Jews on the run. Gestapo records, wartime diaries, and postwar accounts allow a vivid account of someone who rescued herself as much as she was rescued by others, namely, Lisa Jacob, last full Jew in the group not protected by mixed marriage. Chapter explores her preparations, suicide note and flight, and the way she "hid in plain sight" moving from place to place funded by the group and eventually with a fake

identity pass. Her continued role in group leadership, meetings and excursions. Her example evidence of the power of the network, but also the number of people needed to protect even one person on the run.

CHAPTER 8: THE TEST OF TOTAL WAR

Perhaps more than any other, this chapter identifies the sharp difference between contemporary perspective and postwar memory. Chapter begins with paradox that as war turned, group increasingly hopeful of outcome, and yet increasingly oppressed by conditions. The Ruhr in wartime. Bombing raids – the new intensity of night raids 1942 and 1942. The group’s dramatic experience of bombing, loss of family, homes, possessions. Travel difficulties. Uncertainty. Increasing worry about members at the front. Children at front Italy, Hungary, Crimea, Poland, France. Death of Jungbluth’s son. All these events do not normally belong to our sense of the barriers to *rescue* – because they involve the sufferings of the whole population, in modern terminology, the “perpetrators”. Additional problems for the Jacobs as “mixed race” couple. Dore’s aunt died in Theresienstadt. A lot of this strikingly invisible in postwar period. The wartime pressures do not figure in the Bund’s postwar accounts.

CHAPTER 9: THE ENDGAME

The chapter looks at the increasing chaos and radicalization that characterized the last year of the war, the dispersal of the remaining core membership of the Bund, and the continued assistance given Jews and forced laborers.

CHAPTER 10: “OUR FLOCK HAS GROWN LONELY” 5000 WORDS

The chapter explores the Bund’s efforts to revive and rebuild, and the challenges they faced in winning new members. Asks why they were unable to capitalize on their wartime record, and how the Nazi experience had paradoxically undermined their ability to mobilize following.

CHAPTER 11: AN UNUSABLE PAST

Chapter explores the different ways to memorialize and remember rescue and resistance, and the Bund's challenge in gaining recognition.

CHAPTER 12: THE RESISTANCE OF MEMORY

In one of the book's most distinctive chapters, it explores how the Bund's own representation of their experience evolved over time, and the key ways in which it diverged from their wartime experience.

EPILOGUE:

Concludes by discussing the nature and limits of the Bund's achievement and what its experience, and the relationship between its experience and its and others representation of help for Jews tell us about the large phenomenon of "rescue"