

3.6.2 Deutscher Bund¹

The New Germany's attempts to attract German-Canadians to the National Socialist ideology were carried out by the *Deutscher Bund, Canada* [Canadian Society for German Culture], organized in January 1934 with its western headquarters located in Winnipeg. It defined itself as the *organisierte Volksgemeinschaft des canadischen Deutschtums* [the organized *Volk* community of the German-Canadians];² its objective was "to unify Germans from coast to coast." The *Bund's* banner was a combination of a swastika and a maple leaf, and its members wore swastika armbands at their meetings. The group published a newspaper from Winnipeg, the *Deutsche Zeitung für Canada* (see 5.1.4).

The *Bund* spawned local groups with German-language schools, cultural facilities and recreational clubs. Across Canada, it attracted an estimated 2,000 members nationwide (but far fewer in Alberta and B.C. than in Saskatchewan and Ontario³), in part because it claimed to pursue cultural, not political, goals. Its affiliate, the German Labour Front, had an estimated 500 Canadian members. The numbers may appear small, but the *Bund* had no intention to become a mass organization: it wanted to be an elite group that would train and indoctrinate other Germans in Canada with *völkisch* beliefs and attitudes. In spite of apparent ideological overlaps with certain other groups the *Bund* did not have formal associations with Canadian fascist organizations such as the National Unity Party.

Karl Gerhard, the group's leader during its first few years, was an NSDAP member under the direction of the Hamburg-based *Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP*, which dealt with Party matters abroad. The second leading figure of the *Bund* was Bernhard Bott (see 5.1.4) in Winnipeg.⁴ The *Bund* was organized along the lines of the NSDAP in a pyramidal fashion. The national leader and his executive committee (headquartered in Montreal) occupied the highest rank. Below them were three district leaders (Quebec and the Maritimes, Ontario and the four western provinces). Each district was further subdivided into sub-districts. For each sub-district a leader (*Kreisleiter*) was appointed to oversee the activities of the local units in his section. These units, the *Ortsgruppen* and *Stützpunkte*, had their own leaders. An *Ortsgruppe* had 15 or more members, a *Stützpunkt* had at least five members.⁵

In Alberta, the *Bund* had its strongest presence in Edmonton (organized in 1934; 20 members in 1938⁶) and Northmark, located 18 miles southwest of Spirit River in northern Alberta (organized in 1935; 25 members). A *Stützpunkt* of the *Deutscher Bund* in Edmonton was founded in February 1934 with a Mr. Knodel as provisional leader of the *Deutscher Bund* for Edmonton and area until Paul Abele was appointed as *Stützpunktführer*;⁷ he later rose to become *Kreisleiter*.⁸ Although the *Bund* never sought to become a mass organization one may wonder how successful the Edmonton group's membership drives were: In September 1936, the *Deutsche Zeitung für Canada* reported "extremely strong interest" in the *Bund*, "which is apparent by the admission of four new members." Four weeks later, the acceptance of one more member was reported.⁹

The *Bund* clearly had ideologically motivated reasons to try to attract the German-Canadians to its cause. Many people joined and participated in its activities, not necessarily because of its political objectives, but for the cultural activities that it organized or sponsored. In Edmonton, the *Bund*

- showed films, e.g., "Deutschland erwacht" and "Der Tag der Nationalen Arbeit" on October 17, 1934 in the Gem Theater.¹⁰ After the 1935 German Day festivities, the *Bund* showed three films in one of Edmonton's movie theaters, viz. "Echo der Heimat," "Hitlerjugend im Zeltlager" and "Das gestohlene Herz;"¹¹
- held Christmas celebrations;¹²
- exhibited photographs, handicrafts, books, etc. at the 1935 German Days;¹³
- organized variety nights¹⁴ and family nights;¹⁵
- organized lectures on the development of National Socialism and the Saar question in 1934¹⁶ and "Die neue deutsche Wehrmacht" [The new German army] on October 18, 1936;¹⁷
- celebrated the return of the Saar to Germany¹⁸ and Hitler's birthday;¹⁹

- celebrated solstice on a farm near Ellerslie;²⁰
- opened a lending library in Edmonton in January 1938. Among its holdings were items such as “Der Hitlerjunge Quex,” “Kleine Rassenkunde,” “Die S.A. erobert Berlin,” and a few German classics;²¹
- participated in the German Days, giving it a cultural and political dimension and in 1937 became a member of the newly founded *Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft* that assumed responsibility for the organization of German Days;²²
- launched a program to aid impoverished German homesteaders in Alberta and Saskatchewan, but this effort had with little success. The February 3, 1936 number of the *Deutsche Zeitung für Canada* reported a total of a donation of one dollar and a package from Saskatchewan.²³ A year later, the *Bund* appealed to its readers again to help German-Canadian farmers in the West who were suffering from drought and poor harvests. The *Deutsche Zeitung* acknowledged that Canadian authorities were doing what they could, but German-Canadians should collect money, food and clothes for their fellow German-Canadians anyhow.²⁴

In Calgary, an auxiliary (*Stützpunkt*, soon to be an *Ortsgruppe*) of the *Deutscher Bund* was founded in February 1938 (10 members) as reported by a contributor to the *Deutsche Zeitung für Canada* who wished the new *Stützpunkt* a *Sieg Heil*.²⁵ Its cultural-political program resembled closely that of Edmonton’s. The group

- sponsored lectures. For instance, 65 persons attended the March 18, 1938 meeting of the *Bund* where a Mr. Biederstädt gave a lecture on Austria’s *anschluss*. Plans were made for a lecture on “Was ist völkisch?” for April 3, 1938 in the Eagle Hall.²⁶ On May 1, 1938 there was a lecture in the Eagle Hall on the topic “Was ist international?” Songs and a recording of a Hitler speech were played;²⁷
- organized family picnics in St. George’s Park in Calgary. The children were especially welcome because they would be taught German songs and poems to generate interest in German culture;²⁸
- discussed the establishment of a German school with representatives of German-speaking churches and the German Club “Vergissmeinnicht.”²⁹ From September 8, 1938 on, the *Bund* sponsored German classes for children in three different German-speaking churches; 70 students was enrolled. There were also singing lessons and games. Lectures were organized for the adults;³⁰
- showed films: The *Ortsgruppe* Calgary organized a concert with two films, namely “Urlaub auf Ehrenwort” and “Die Kolonialschule” in March 1939.³¹

Several *Bund* groups were set up in northern Alberta between 1934 and 1939. In November 1933 a working group (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) was founded in Dapp, north of Westlock. A *Stützpunkt* was organized in Ponoka in March 1934,³² and another one in Vegreville in late 1935 (15 members).³³ An *Ortsgruppe* was launched in Northmark in 1935 with 10 members,³⁴ and in early 1939 an *Orgru* was formed in Freedom in the same area.³⁵ These groups organized summer and winter fests, entertainment evenings and picnics with songs, dances, recitals, etc. The political component of these events centered around the condemnation of alleged anti-German smear campaigns and appeals to “stick together.” The swastika and the Canadian flag were raised, both anthems were sung; lectures were designed to “unmask Communism.”³⁶

Some of the prominent members of the *Deutscher Bund* in Alberta were the following:

Paul Abele was born in 1877 in Schloss Zeil in southern Germany. He attended the universities of Munich and Erlangen and was a pharmacist in Germany and Switzerland for several years. He immigrated to Canada in 1911 and took over a homestead near Dapp in northern Alberta. But he soon went back to the pharmacy, working in Leader and Regina, Saskatchewan. He returned to Alberta and received a diploma from the University of Alberta. Not long after, Abele opened his own pharmacy (*Deutsche Apotheke*) at 10224-101 Street in Edmonton. In 1938 he moved his pharmacy to the McDougall Court. He retired in 1955 and died two years later.

Paul Abele was very active in Edmonton’s German-speaking community and was one of the most strident defenders of the New Germany and National Socialism in Alberta. He gave speeches at many German celebrations, exhorting the Germans to stand up for their rights and to reject the New Germany’s defamation by the media,³⁷ and became president of the committee that organized Edmonton’s German Days.³⁸ On the occasion

of Austria's *anschluss*, he praised Hitler's work and called on the German-Canadians to stand together and to reject the defamers "whose voices will be silent soon."³⁹

On April 20, 1936—"Führer's birthday"—celebrated by the *Deutscher Bund*, the Austrian-Albertan **Fritz Leikert** read out his poem entitled "Unserem Führer."⁴⁰ Two years later, Leikert invited all Germans, and of course, all Austrians, to a festive evening on April 20, 1938 in the Edelweiss Club to celebrate Austria's *anschluss*.⁴¹ At the festivities ("Grossdeutscher Festabend"), the speakers were Paul Abele, F. Leikert and A. Triska, who spoke on behalf of the City of Vienna emphasizing the development of the German idea under Schönerer and Wolf. There were more speeches and then a record was played with Hitler speeches. The Horst Wessel-Lied concluded the official part of the celebrations.⁴² But at all times Leikert firmly rejected any allegations that the Germans in Canada wanted to transplant German politics to Canada. According to him, Canada would find its own ways to cope with its problems.⁴³

Günther Pankow was the *Ortsgruppenleiter* of the *Deutscher Bund* in Northmark north of Grande Prairie. The *Bund* was very active in the local German-speaking community. For example, it organized a German Evening on February 24, 1936 that 60 adults and 30 children attended. There were speeches, folk songs and dances.⁴⁴ In 1937, the group had a summer fest and a winter fest which attracted 40 guests. Events included the presentation of songs, poems and plays as well as dances.⁴⁵ In July 13, 1938, the *Ortsgruppe* Northmark had a picnic. The Canadian flag and the swastika were raised at the beginning of the celebrations. Events included sports, songs, and dances.⁴⁶

Otto Tangermann was the editor of the *Alberta Herald* between 1937 and 1939. He tried to defend Germany's image in the Canadian public's eye in the late 1930s, but he held strongly *völkisch*—many Edmontonians thought Nazi—views. In July 1938, for example, he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Edmonton Bulletin*, objecting to a letter sent in by a Mr. Gallen which suggested that all Germans in Canada holding public office should be fired. Tangermann said that German-Canadians were proud of Germany's achievements, and Mr. Gallen evidently was unable to distinguish between the Canadian Fascist Movement and the purely cultural German Fascist organizations [sic].⁴⁷ At the German Days in Edmonton in 1938, Mr. Abele gave a speech vilifying the smear campaign against German-Canadians and concluded with a threefold "Sieg Heil!" On that occasion Otto Tangermann presented a resolution against the defamations of the Germans, which was accepted by the participants in the German Days.⁴⁸ One year later, at the German Day celebrations on August 7, 1939, Edmonton Alderman Campbell urged the association organizing German Days to make contributions to the mutual understanding of Germans and Canadians, and warned that Canada would not allow subversion of its democratic ideals. Tangermann, the organizer of the German Days, rejected charges that the association organizing German Days was a Nazi movement.⁴⁹

Johann Tobber from Dapp, north of Westlock, founded a "working group" in this settlement in 1933. He gave a speech, reprinted in the *Courier*, in which he extolled National Socialism as a *weltanschauung* and showed its practical application for the Germans in Dapp and elsewhere.⁵⁰ He related the Canadian soil to the German-Canadian character: In his view, German-Canadians were tougher, simpler (*einfacher*) and less complex than the Germans in Germany. German-Canadians had to fight for their culture, but they could enrich the world-wide German *Volksgemeinschaft* by creating a German-Canadian identity and culture.⁵¹

¹ The most useful scholarly analysis of the origin, activities and demise of National Socialism and its supporters in Canada has been provided by Jonathan Wagner, *Brothers beyond the sea: National Socialism in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University, 1981), and *A history of migration from Germany to Canada: 1850–1939* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), and by Grant Grams, *German emigration to Canada and the support of its Deutschtum during the Weimar Republic: the role of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut, Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland and German-Canadian organizations* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001). See also Lita-Rose Betchermann, *The swastika and the maple leaf: Fascist movements in Canada in the thirties* (Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1978).

² *DC&DH*, March 7, 1934, 4.

³ Wagner, 68.

⁴ "Deutscher Bund Canada," *Metapedia*, http://en.metapedia.org/wiki/Deutscher_Bund_Canada. Also, based on Wagner, *Brothers*, 65–66.

⁵ Wagner, 67.

⁶ Elizabeth Gerwin, "A survey of the German-speaking population of Alberta." M. A. Thesis (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1938), 108.

⁷ *DC&DH*, Feb. 14, 1934, 4.

⁸ *DZC*, Apr. 8, 1936, 4.

⁹ *DZC*, Sept. 2, 1936, 4.

¹⁰ *DC&DH*, Oct. 5, 1934, 4.

¹¹ *DZC*, July 17, 1935, 4.

¹² *DZC*, Dec. 24, 1935, 4; Dec. 30, 1936, 4.

¹³ *DZC*, July 21, 1935, 4.

¹⁴ *DC&DH*, Oct. 30, 1935, 4.

¹⁵ *DZC*, Oct. 30, 1935, 4; Dec. 1, 1937, 4.

¹⁶ *DC&DH*, Sept. 5, 1934, 4.

¹⁷ *DZC*, Oct. 11, 1936, 4.

¹⁸ *DC&DH*, Jan. 23, 1935, 4.

¹⁹ *DC&DH*, Apr. 17, 1935, 5; May 6, 1936, 4.

²⁰ *DZC*, July 3, 1935, 4.

²¹ *AH*, Jan. 5, 1938, 2.

²² *DZC*, March 3, 1937, 4.

²³ *DZC*, Jan. 27, 1937, 4.

²⁴ *DZC*, Sept. 1, 1937, 3.

²⁵ *DZC*, March 9, 1938, 8.

²⁶ *DZC*, March 30, 1938, 4.

²⁷ *DZC*, Apr. 27, 1938, 4.

²⁸ *DZC*, June 1, 1938, 4.

²⁹ *DZC*, Aug. 3, 1938, 3.

³⁰ *DZC*, Nov. 2, 1938, 4.

³¹ *DZC*, March 29, 1939, 4.

³² *DC&DH*, March 21, 1934, 4.

³³ *DZC*, Nov. 27, 1935, 4; March 30, 1938, 4.

³⁴ *DC&DH*, March 6, 1935, 5.

³⁵ *DZC*, March 15, 1939, 4.

³⁶ *DZC*, Nov. 27, 1935, 4.

³⁷ *DC&DH*, Nov. 1, 1933, 4.

³⁸ *DC&DH*, June 3, 1936, 4.

³⁹ *AH*, Apr. 27, 1938, 1; *DC&DH*, Apr. 29, 1931, 5.

⁴⁰ *DZC*, May 6, 1936, 4.

⁴¹ *AH*, March 30, 1938, 2.

⁴² *AH*, Apr. 27, 1938, 2.

⁴³ *AH*, May 11, 1938, 1, 4.

⁴⁴ *DZC*, Apr. 1, 1936, 4.

⁴⁵ *DZC*, March 10, 1937, 4.

⁴⁶ *DZC*, July 27, 1938, 4.

⁴⁷ *EB*, July 16, 1938, 4.

⁴⁸ *DZC*, Aug. 10, 1938, 4.

⁴⁹ *EJ*, Aug. 7, 1939, 9.

⁵⁰ *DC&DH*, Nov. 22, 1933, 5.

⁵¹ *DZC*, July 14, 1937, 7.