

Nazi Party Membership in Canada: A Profile

by Jonathan WAGNER*

During the Depression a National Socialist movement with two relatively distinct components developed within Canada's German community. A pro-Nazi society, the *Deutscher Bund Canada* (DBC = German Association of Canada), was established for the so-called *Volksdeutsche* (Germans who had been born outside the Reich). The *Bund* held monthly meetings for its members and staged pro-Nazi celebrations such as Hitler birthday parties; it imported and distributed Nazi propaganda materials to Germans and non-Germans alike; it joined with other indigenous German-Canadian organizations and clubs to organize social events and to establish German language schools. The second arm of the Canadian Nazi movement was a separate Nazi party organization (*NSDAP*). This group was composed of non-naturalized German Canadians and *Reichsdeutsche* (Germans born in Germany proper) residing in Canada who had applied for and been accepted into the National Socialist Party. Although frequent contact existed between the *NSDAP* units and the *Bund* (the two groups often combined to hold public displays and to promote common causes), efforts were made to keep the memberships separate.

Up to the present time little serious effort has been made to deal with the Canadian Nazi movement in general and nothing has been published specifically describing the National Socialist Party here.¹ Part of the reason for this neglect relates to the problem of sources. Most often those Canadian historians who have dabbled in Nazism have stopped their investigations upon exhausting the limited Canadian (mostly English) sources. They have failed to look outside the country to European sources for additional information. What has emerged from this too limited approach is not only an incomplete picture but an inaccurate one as well. Lita Rose Betcherman's *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf*² is the best recent example of this kind of half-a-loaf history.

The following note illustrates how such a one-sided approach can be corrected. It will elaborate on a single aspect of the Canadian Nazi

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¹ The only essay describing the *Bund* in any detail is my own "The Deutscher Bund Canada", *Canadian Historical Review*, LVIII, 2 (1977): 176-200.

² L. R. BETCHERMAN, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975).

movement by utilizing sources located in Germany. (The procedure applied here to Canada's Nazis is appropriate for many other subjects such as immigration.) More specifically, party membership cards of those identified as living in Canada between 1933-39 provide the information for the note. At the Berlin Document Centre which contains the general card file of party members the cards of eighty-eight Canadian Nazis were discovered. The eighty-eight names were derived from RCMP suspect lists drawn up in 1939 or from the registers of those German nationals interned here for pro-Nazi activity at the outbreak of the war.³ Interestingly enough, in mid-1937 a secret report of the *Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP* (Foreign Organization of the Nazi Party) claimed eighty-eight party members present in Canada.⁴ Although the two 88's are not identical — the membership in 1937 was not entirely the same as in 1939, for new members had joined after 1937 and some older ones had returned to Germany — the list of Nazis culled from the Berlin Document Centre's files undoubtedly includes the vast majority of those resident here in the six years directly preceding the war.

The eighty-eight party cards furnish information about the members in five general areas. Each card provides the member's year of birth and the name of the town or city where he was born. In addition, the day, month, and year of the person's entry into the *NSDAP* is listed. Finally, the cards indicate the Canadian residence of the members and their occupations.

Table 1. — AGE OF CANADIAN NAZIS.

Age Group	1937		At Entry into Party	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
26 or under	2	2.3	6	6.8
27-32	18	20.4	13	14.8
33-38	29	33.0	20	22.7
39-44	19	21.6	25	28.3
45-50	18	20.4	21	24.0
Over 51	2	2.3	3	3.4
Totals	88	100.0	88	100.0

Traditionally, the National Socialist movement with its emotional, activist, revolutionary ideology has been associated with youth.⁵ Young people began it and they provided the dynamism for its expansion after Hitler's accession to power. The general party statistics from 1935

³ Public Archives of Canada, RG 25, G-1, vol. 1964, file 855 Em Part I, Minutes of Committee Meeting of 31 August 1939 to discuss treatment of enemy aliens and persons suspect of treason.

⁴ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Bonn, Chef AO 87, Akten betreffend Statistik, Kulturpolitik des AA, Zeitschriften, Statistik der AO der NSDAP, Stand 30. Juni 1937.

⁵ Peter MERKL, *Political Violence under the Swastika* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 12-13.

reveal that those under forty years of age composed seventy percent of the movement's total.⁶ In Canada this pattern repeats itself. The preceding Table 1 shows how the Canadian Nazi group relates to party developments in Germany. In 1937 only 22.7 percent of Canada's Nazis were older than 44. Likewise, just 27.4 percent joined the Party after the age of 45.

The Canadian ranks of the Nazi Party were filled with persons born outside Canada. *Reichsdeutsche* made up the vast majority of the membership (seventy-eight of the eighty-eight). With regard to the members' birth-place in Germany, Canada's Nazis reflected a general balance. All the major German states such as Bavaria, Prussia, and Saxony as well as most of the important cities were represented. Of the ten members with extra-Reich origins, seven came from eastern Europe. Again this pattern would be repeated in Europe, for the Nazis enjoyed some success among the socially and economically insecure *Volksdeutsche* living among the Slavs of the East.⁷

Of the eighty-eight Canadian Nazis six had committed themselves to Hitler's party before the *Machtergreifung* (accession to power) in January 1933. Indeed, the oldest party member among the sample joined in 1929. Table 2 reveals that *Märzgefallene*⁸ (those who rushed to join the party after the convincing Nazi electoral victory of March 1933) and post-1936 joiners made up the overwhelming majority of the Canadian branch of the *NSDAP*.

Table 2. — ENROLMENT INTO *NSDAP*, BY YEAR.

Entry Years	Number	% of Total
1929	1	1.1
1930	0	0.0
1931	2	2.3
1932	3	3.4
1933	4	4.5
1934	14	15.9
1935	3	3.4
1936	13	14.8
1937	11	12.5
1938	18	20.5
1939	19	21.6

The growth pattern in Canada which indicates that sixty of the eighty-eight or 68.2 percent of the total joined after 1936 resembles general developments in the Reich, where the greatest expansion occurred after

⁶ *Reichsorganisationsleiter Parteistatistik*, I (1935): 202-6.

⁷ See for example G. C. PAIKERT, *The Danube Swabians* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967) for a discussion of this subject.

⁸ Dietrich ORLOW, *History of the Nazi Party*, 2 vols (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1973), II: 48.

1936. Between that year and 1939 alone the membership in Germany more than doubled from 3.5 million to over 7 million. The large number of joiners after 1936 suggests that opportunism as a reason for entering the Party may have played as important a role in Canada as it did in Germany.

Information about occupation exists for eighty-five of the eighty-eight individuals. For comparative purposes, the job of each of the Canadian Nazis was categorized according to the general groupings employed in the 1935 Nazi Party census.⁹ Table 3 parallels the two groups of Nazis by occupational breakdown.

Table 3. — NAZI PARTY MEMBERS, BY OCCUPATION (% OF TOTAL).

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Party Members in Germany</i>	<i>Party Members in Canada</i>
Blue Collar	30.3	2.4
White Collar	19.4	11.8
Handicraftsmen	8.3	42.4
Tradesmen	7.5	17.6
Professionals	3.2	3.5
Civil Servants	12.4	4.7
Farmers	10.2	8.2
Others	8.7	9.4

From this table a number of interesting comparisons can be made. To begin with, the Nazi movement in both Germany and in Canada was not the product of the modern working class or proletariat. According to David Schoenbaum, Nazi Germany's workers "were about 30% under-represented" in the movement.¹⁰ The discrepancy in Canada was even greater. The relatively small number of farmers in the German Party is especially paradoxical, given the Nazis' deliberate, romanticized glorification of the peasant as the model German *Volk* hero and rural life as the best of all possible worlds.¹¹ Of Canada's German population (non-naturalized and naturalized both) in 1931 over sixty percent of the approximately half-million total was involved in agriculture. Thus the Nazis' failure here is obvious. The main party in Germany and its Canadian branch were largely composed of members of the lower middle class. In Germany the proportion drawn from the categories white collar, trade, civil servants, and farmers was 57.8 percent. For Canada the ratio was substantially higher with the same categories making up 84.7 percent of the total. Such high percentages seem to add credibility to the standard analysis which describes the Nazi movement in terms of a radicalized lower middle-income group.

⁹ *Parteistatistik*, I (1935): 53.

¹⁰ David SCHOENBAUM, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 72.

¹¹ See Martin BROZAT, "Die völkische Ideologie und der Nationalsozialismus", *Deutsche Rundschau*, 89 (1958): 53-68, or George MOSSE, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1963).

Finally, the cards of the eighty-eight *DBC* Nazis indicate where in Canada the membership resided. The provincial and major city distribution is indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. — RESIDENCE OF CANADA'S NAZIS.

Province	(City)	Number	% of Total
Nova Scotia		0	0.0
Prince Edward Island		1	1.1
New Brunswick		0	0.0
Quebec	(Montreal: 25)	30	34.1
Ontario	(Toronto: 20) (Kitchener-Waterloo: 5)	25	28.4
Manitoba	(Winnipeg: 7)	8	9.1
Saskatchewan		3	3.4
Alberta	(Edmonton: 2)	5	5.7
British Columbia	(Vancouver: 11)	15	17.0
No Information		1	1.1

This table shows convincingly that the largest number of Nazis was to be found in the central provinces of Quebec and Ontario. Moreover, the figures indicate that the Maritimes had virtually no *NSDAP* members and that the most significant concentration in the West was to be found in British Columbia. Saskatchewan, the prairie province with the greatest number of Germans in relation to total population and the heaviest concentration of recent German immigrants, showed the lowest numbers. Finally, the Canadian membership in the Nazi Party was basically a phenomenon associated with the country's largest cities: sixty-four of the eighty-eight, 72.7 percent of the total, lived in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, or Vancouver.

At least two factors account for these four cities plus Kitchener-Waterloo forming the core of the Nazi movement here. To begin with, all five cities possessed significant concentrations of recently arrived *Reichsdeutsche*. Logically enough, Montreal and Toronto led in this area. Moreover, in four of the five a German consulate existed to provide the movement with support in the form of funds and propaganda materials.¹² Kitchener-Waterloo which did not possess a consulate was, nevertheless, situated close enough to both Montreal and Toronto for its Nazis to receive frequent support. Ottawa's absence as an *NSDAP* centre is interesting because after 1937 the German General Consulate was located there. However, the Consulate's staff was notoriously non-Nazi (at least in the eyes of the country's *NSDAP* leadership)¹³ and Ottawa did not

¹² Bundesarchiv Koblenz, R 57/474/41. The assistance rendered by Consul Heinrich Seelheim (Pg. No. 34 54646) to Bernhard Bott (Pg. No. 37 22864) of Winnipeg in the founding of the Nazi newspaper the *Deutsche Zeitung für Canada* represents such collaboration. See Bernhard BOTT, "Denkschrift zur Lage des Deutschtums in Kanada und zu der dort zuleistenden Volkstumarbeit", 25 August 1934.

¹³ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Bonn, Chef AO, Kanada 15, Heinz Weisbach to E. W. Bohle in Berlin, 7 February 1938.

have many resident Germans. In the western centres of Saskatoon, Regina and Edmonton there were Germans but few *Reichsdeutsche*. Furthermore, these cities lacked the direct contact to Hitler's Reich which a consular office would have provided.

In summary, one may conclude that the Nazi Party membership in Canada was composed of relatively young people who had been born in Germany and who obviously still felt strong attachment to the fatherland. In addition, the membership had come to the party in an opportunistic fashion; there were almost no *alte Kämpfer*¹⁴ among the ranks, as nearly all had joined after Hitler's accession to power. The membership was mostly composed of artisans and petty bourgeois elements whose social status in Depression Canada was uncertain or insecure. Finally, the numbers were concentrated in a few major cities predominantly in Quebec and Ontario.

With the obvious exception of the Canadian location, this composite profile resembles the German counterpart quite closely. In this regard, the Canadian experience represents a microcosm of the larger group. Furthermore, the personality or social traits exhibited in Canada are reflected elsewhere beyond Germany. For example, Sander Diamond, the leading authority on the American Nazi movement, has shown that America's Nazis were also young, lower middle-class, and recent immigrants.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Canadian *NSDAP* is distinguishable from other Nazi Party units. In Canada the Nazi Party never attracted the same numbers that it did in numerous other countries such as Argentina or Romania.¹⁶ No doubt several factors account for this difference, one of the most important being that Canada's German population reconciled itself to life outside the Reich better than some other German groups.

¹⁴ *Alte Kämpfer* means literally "old fighters" or those who had identified with and supported Hitler's movement in the trying times before the Nazis took power.

¹⁵ Sander A. DIAMOND, *The Nazi Movement in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

¹⁶ See for example PAIKERT, *The Danube Swabians*, or Arnold EBEL, *Die diplomatischen Beziehungen des Dritten Reiches zu Argentinien* (Landau/Pfalz: A. Kraemer, 1970).