

# Jews and the Year 1933: German Jews and the Question of Resistance

**Martin Arndt**

Jewish Studies, Department of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

**Email address:**

[martarndt@web.de](mailto:martarndt@web.de)

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**Abstract:** The article is based on a research of Jewish journals in the German language written in the 30s of the last century. It deals with the response of Jewish institutions, but mainly of Jewish journals (Many newspaper are archived under DigiBaeck <https://www.lbi.org/collections/digibaeck/>) to the assumption of power by the Nazis in 1933. It especially focuses on the Jewish Culture League and its umbrella union, the Reichsverband der jüdischen Kulturbünde (=Reich Association of Jewish Culture Leagues, from 1937). It is written from a perspective of understanding the historical context without adopting the position of a distanced spectator; it closely follows Marion Kaplan [8] by telling the story of Jews from the bewildered and ambiguous perspective of Jews trying to navigate their daily lives in a world that was becoming more and more insane. The paradoxical partnership that emerged between the Kulturbund theatre and the Nazis is emblematic of the complexities and concessions that mark the broader phenomenon of “art-making under duress” [13] Answering the charge that Jews should have left earlier, the questions remains if the Holocaust was possible to foresee. Fundamental ethical issues are raised, and questions of utilitarian ethics emerge, e.g. choices between a greater or lesser evil [1]. Are some of the responses a hard-won victory for the Jews, making life bearable and being a moral support, or was the non-resistance a deal with the devil that lulled the Jewish population into a false sense of security (Alan Steinweis). Were the Jews led to believe that Nazi-Germany could still be a home, and were some Jews falsely pacified, being stopped from seeking emigration while slowly a ghetto was built around the majority to be transported to the gas chambers? Is the way of manoeuvring through acceptable? Or has this compromising furthered the agenda of the Nazis? Would less cooperation between the Jewish organizations and the Nazi authorities have made possible for more Jews to have been saved, as stated most prominently by Hannah Arendt? Can we judge on this evidently life-supporting institution without considering the subsequent murder of many of its functionaries (e.g. Kurt Singer) and subsequent mass-murders? Were the Jewish leaders simply, as Arendt suggested, in the grip of ideology or did they act out of pure stupidity?

**Keywords:** Antisemitism, Holocaust, Nazism, Resistance

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## 1. Introduction

The article grew out of a close research of German-written Jewish journals and newspapers of the thirties of the last century. The main interest consisted in analyzing reactions of German Jews to the increasing power of anti-Semitic Nazism. In contrast to overall condemnations of the compromising attitude of Jewish representatives in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich the article documents strategies of survival. This cooperation was based on what was later called the illusion of a symbiosis.

## 2. Main Part

### The Dream of a Symbiosis

This photo vividly illustrates the complexity of the issue. It also symbolizes the end of what scholars have termed the Jewish-German symbiosis. The year 1933, however, did not yet offer a clear, unambiguous invitation to resistance, and to the majority of German Jews no clear indicator of the genocide to come was on the horizon. [8]. In 1933 appr. 500 000 people of Jewish faith were living in Germany that consisted of 65 million inhabitants which makes them 0,8% of the total population. The majority were assimilated Jews,

i.e. those who identified with the legal, political integration of the Jews within the Christian majority society with many of them giving up their visible signs of a Jewish identity (e.: the hat replacing the kippah) or celebrating Christmas. They saw themselves as German citizens of Jewish faith comparable to German citizens of Protestant or Catholic faith, and believed in a German-Jewish symbiosis which was, as the Zionist Gershom Scholem pointedly remarked, a one-sided declaration of love<sup>1</sup> Jews loved Germany and Germans; Germans didn't love Jews, even if they didn't hate them. One-sided love affairs usually don't work very well. Individuals and institutions were lived on the assumption that a cooperation, perhaps even merging of these two identities, should and could be made. German Jewry had to formulate survival tactics vis-à-vis the Nazi government of their own country [23]. The League of Jewish Women (=Jüdischer Frauenbund=JFB), e.g., was composed of patriotic Germans committed to their Jewish faith who believed that a synthesis of Germanness (Deutschtum) and Jewry (Judentum) was possible [8], a view that was, however, given up by its founder Bertha von Pappenheim after the promulgation Nuremberg Laws on September 15, 1935. She then wrote cookbooks for Jews who had difficulty buying kosher meat after Hitler had forbidden ritual slaughtering and began supporting Aliyah, i. e. the immigration of Jews to the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael). Much has been written about the argument made in Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1977) that if the community had remained leaderless, many more Jews would have survived in the face of the Nazi persecution and genocide. As for the leadership of German Jewry, she called the role of the "Jewish leaders... undoubtedly the darkest chapter in the whole dark story." Is this harsh condemnation a view that can be defended against the background of the concrete historical situation – or nothing more than an absolute moralism (Hans Blumenberg)?

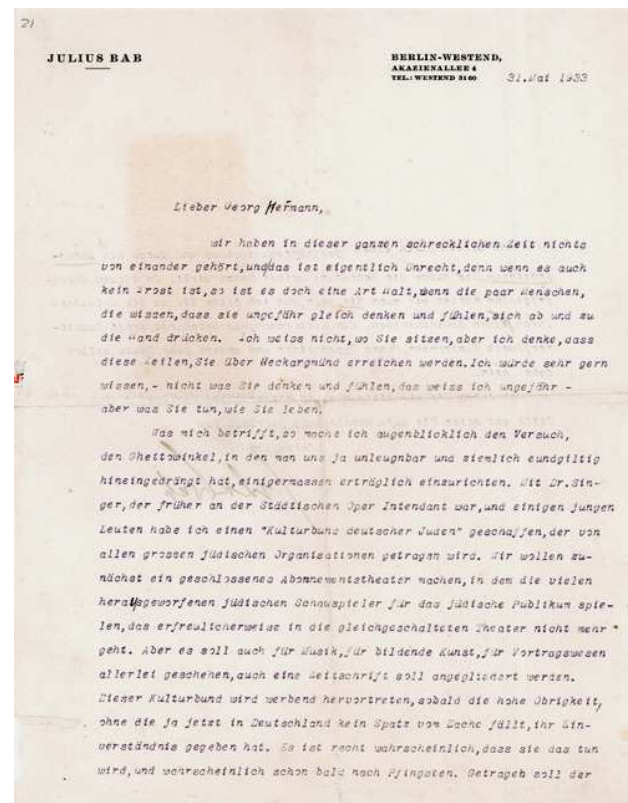


**Figure 1.** Jewish lampstand=menorah and the Nazi-flag (swastika)=book cover of [11]. Flagging of the Nazis-swastika and the seven-branched menorah which is sed in the religious rituals of Judaism.

<https://static01.nyt.com/images/2017/12/13/opinion/12Greenbaum/12Greenbaum-superJumbo.jpg?quality=90&auto=webp>

<sup>1</sup> Gershom Scholem, "Wider den Mythos vom deutsch-jüdischen Gespräch" (=Against the Myth of German-Jewish Dialogue), in: *Bulletin of the Leo Baeck Institute* 1 (1964), 278–281, also in: Scholem, Gershom: *Judaica* 2. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 5, 1995, 7–11.

In an attempt to maintain cultural life among the Jews after the rise of Nazism, the literary historian Julius Bab, among others, founded on July 17th, 1933 the Culture League of German Jews (Kulturbund Deutscher Juden=sometimes abbreviated as 'KuBu' [5] to make living bearable ("einigermaßen erträglich einzurichten")), after Hitler's regime had on April, 7th 1933, begun an official assault on Germany's cultural life with the 'Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums' (=Law for the Reconstitution of the Civil Service) which decreed that 'civil servants who are not of Aryan ancestry' were to be dismissed and which stopped non-Aryans, defined as any person descended from a Jewish parent or grandparent, from holding positions in the public sphere, especially at cultural institutions such as state-run music conservatories, opera houses, concert halls and theatres. With the enactment of the Berufsbeamtengesetz, musicians, writers, composers and actors who were on the public payroll were unemployed from April 1933. [20]



<https://www.jmberlin.de/1933/de/uploads/2013/05/Unbenannt-1.jpg>

**Figure 3.** Bab's letter.

The above letter reveals Bab's intention:

- 1) to make the ghetto-existence relatively comfortable;
- 2) to establish theatres to employ the recently dismissed artists and theatre-workers.

Bab ironically added that everything depended on the 'authority' without whose consent 'no sparrow can fall from the roof'.

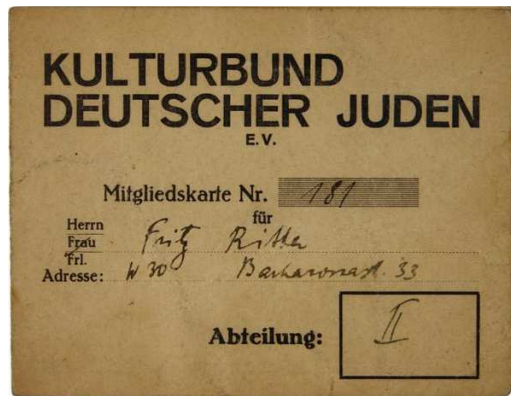


Figure 4. Kulturbund membership card-still the original name.

[https://i1.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/12\\_2\\_ritter\\_a2.jpg?resize=620%2C487&ssl=1](https://i1.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/12_2_ritter_a2.jpg?resize=620%2C487&ssl=1)



Figure 5. A photo membership card for the Kulturbund, allowing its holder to attend performances organized by the Kulturbund.

<https://i1.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/mitgliedsausweis-des-kbes1.jpg?resize=426%2C336&ssl=1>

Later critics remarked that these membership cards helped the Nazi-persecutors to identify and locate their victims. Was Arendt's condemnation justified or simply a lack of judgement that she so desperately was looking for in many of her works and which she defined as "the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly"? What could the work of the Kulturbund mean for the individual Jews? The Jewish actress Camilla Spira before 1933 had been on the way to a great, even global career, having starred e.g. in Fritz Lang's 1933 film 'Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse' (=The Testament of Dr. Mabuse).



Figure 6. The blonde Spira.

[https://www.anstageslicht.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Geschichten/Ignatz\\_NA\\_CHER\\_-\\_Engelhardt-Brauerei/Camilla\\_Cover\\_Funk-Woche-Febr33\\_Mabuse1000px.jpg](https://www.anstageslicht.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Geschichten/Ignatz_NA_CHER_-_Engelhardt-Brauerei/Camilla_Cover_Funk-Woche-Febr33_Mabuse1000px.jpg)

She also starred in submarine-film *Morgenrot* (=Sunrise-literally "morning-red") that glorified the soldier's duties and heroized death, and had the captain explicitly state that Germans may not know how to live, but they know how to die. It premiered in early February 1933 with Hermann Göring, Joseph Goebbels and Hitler being present. Then in March 1933, the *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* was forbidden, since the Nazis seem to have realized the similarity between Mabuse and Hitler. Now she became dependent on her work for the Kulturbund, even in small Westphalian villages. Was the new work she was forced to accept a humiliation or better than nothing?



<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mp/images/9460447.0005.202-00000001.jpg>

Figure 7. Cover of the League's Program, November 1933- still with the original name.

The Olympic torch and the Star of David in the above leaflet symbolize the hope of the Kulturbund for the survival of Jewry. Ernest Lenart, a former actor in the organization, tied this positive function to the League's insignia. This emblem, a torch and the hexagonal Star of David, appeared on the League's monthly publication and many programs. Lenart explains: "Not coincidentally the torch was the symbol of the Culture League."<sup>2</sup> The organization was "a ray of hope in a cloudy time."<sup>3</sup> Later, Julius Bab founded the German Jewish Book Society (Buchgesellschaft der Deutschen Juden), some months later significantly renamed Jüdische Buchgemeinschaft (=Jewish Book Association); likewise the Culture League of German Jews (Kulturbund

<sup>2</sup> Lenart, in Broder, 243.

<sup>3</sup> Lenart, in Broder: 247.



Deutscher Juden) was renamed the Jewish Culture League (Jüdischer Kulturbund in Deutschland) on December 31, 1938 – 1938 being the year that seems to have marked a turning-point in Hitler's treatment of the Jews and leading up to the night of November 9–10, 1938, when the Nazi regime coordinated a wave of antisemitic violence in Nazi Germany (in Germany known as *Kristallnacht* or the Night of Broken Glass). [11-13].

The same alteration of name happened to another institution, The Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden (Reich Representation of German Jews) was established in the aftermath of the 'Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums' in September, 1933 as an umbrella organization representing Jewish interests on a national level and was run by such prominent Jewish community leaders as Leo Baeck, who was the president of the Reichsvertretung in 1933. [11, 12]. For German Jewry, this was an umbrella organization comprising all the political and religious groups of Jews living in Germany. Its main task was the coordination of Jewish self-help activities: Programs were organized to provide whatever legal defenses were still acceptable to the Nazis, as well as to initiate and sponsor a variety of emigration efforts. [11]. Alongside these efforts, location of shelter and distribution of food and clothing for the elderly and handicapped, as well as for families suddenly impoverished, traumatized and dispirited was an ever-escalating responsibility. The Reichsvertretung changed its name to Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland (=Reich Association of Jews in Germany).



Figure 8. Poster of the 'Reich Association of Jews in Germany.

<https://i0.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/reichsvertretung-deutscher-juden.jpg?resize=620%2C213&ssl=1>

The changes of names (also from „Kulturbund deutscher Juden“=Cultural Federation of German Jews into „Jüdischer Kulturbund“=Jewish Cultural Federation) indicate the ambivalent and fragile status of the organizations. Kurt Singer, a well-respected German-Jewish physician, musicologist, music director, and one of the founding fathers of the Kulturbund, ambivalently spoke of 'We Jews in Germany, we German Jews'".[7]. Before emigrating to Holland in 1938, Singer proved a formidable force in navigating Nazi strictures about content, as well as intra-Jewish debates about the theatre's purpose, such as whether, under the circumstances, it ought to promote a distinct Jewish culture or provide entertaining plays of high artistic caliber and intellectual substance [13]. Do the Jews rightly and legitimately belong to Germany as the

Bavarians belong to Germany or is the term 'German Jews' an oxymoron that combines incompatible ingredients, as the concept of a German Jew was considered to be a contradiction in Nazi ideology. In July 1933, a somehow paradoxical partnership between the Kulturbund and the Nazi-regime was started off [7, 20]], but the word 'partnership' must, of course, be bracketed, as it camouflages the asymmetry of power. The relation can be described as a way for Jews to be creative in times of exclusion and discrimination. It offered entertainment to Jewish audiences and employed Jewish artists who had been fired as a result of racial decrees [8].



Figure 9. Kurt Baumann (1907-1983).

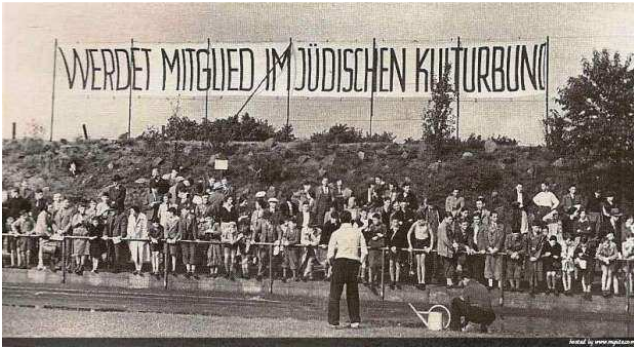
<https://i0.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/kurt-baumann.jpg?resize=244%2C344&ssl=1>

Kurt Baumann, a young German-Jewish production assistant, who had developed the preliminary plan for the Kulturbund, to be set in Berlin, from the outset feared his plan would not be supported by Zionists, who would insist that the organization should conduct its cultural activities in Yiddish or Hebrew. Baumann worked out a detailed proposal and contacted the former director of Berlin's Städtischen Oper (Municipal Opera House), Kurt Singer, a well-respected German-Jewish physician, musicologist, and music director. [20, 22].



Figure 10. Kurt Singer violin; Joseph Rosenstock, piano.

[https://i1.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/kurt-singer-und-joseph-rosenstock\\_kulturbund-berlin\\_jc3bcdisches-museum-berlin.jpg?resize=440%2C336&ssl=1](https://i1.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/kurt-singer-und-joseph-rosenstock_kulturbund-berlin_jc3bcdisches-museum-berlin.jpg?resize=440%2C336&ssl=1)



**Figure 11.** A membership drive for the 'Kulturbund'.

<https://i0.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/judischekulturbund1.jpg?resize=620%2C336&ssl=1>

Singer recruited other Jewish leaders, such as Berlin's chief rabbi Leo Baeck, conductor Joseph Rosenstock, and journalist Werner Levie. When Baumann approached theatre critic Julius Bab with the project, the latter incredulously asked: "Are we allowed to do this?" Indeed, it was not clear how the organization would win the Nazi government's sponsorship. Singer struggled to generate interest within various government offices, but was eventually invited to meet with Hans Hinkel. [13]



**Figure 12.** Hans Hinkel, 1901-1960.

<https://i1.wp.com/forbiddenmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/hans-hinkel.jpg?resize=282%2C384&ssl=1>

Hinkel had been appointed head of the Preußischen Theater-Ausschuß (=Prussian Theatre Commission) by the new Prussian minister Hermann Göring immediately after Hitler's ascension to power. Hinkel recognized several reasons to support the Kulturbund:

1. the regime could exploit it as propaganda by citing it as supposed proof that Jews were not being mistreated;
2. it could function as a cultural outlet and source of income for Jews which would help to quell social unrest;
3. the creation of the League could help the Nazis ensure the end of perceived Jewish appropriation of German culture, and
4. finally, the organization could help ensure the end of Jewish involvement in German culture, and make the

Jews concentrate on Jewish art [8], cynically implying that Jews do not have great pieces of art. [20].

The latent motivation remains ambivalent. Was the tolerance of the Kulturbund by the regime a strategy to force the Jews to leave Germany or one step to the Final Solution? In April 1933, Hinkel began negotiating the operating terms for the creation of the Kulturbund with Singer. There were several stipulations:

1. the Kulturbund was to be staffed only by Jewish artists and financed by the all-Jewish audiences through a monthly fee;
2. only the Jewish press was allowed to report on Kulturbund events, further isolating Jewish activities from the racially accepted German population;
3. League programmes were to be submitted to Hinkel for approval before performance which allowed the regime to promote a repertoire they saw as appropriate for a Jewish organization.

In the middle of May 1933, the Kulturbund received the Nazi government's support. It should gain an immediate following and soon inspire similar organizations throughout Germany. From the very start the Jüdische Rundschau, a newspaper serving the Zionist movement, challenged this Teutonic mindset and demanded that the League confront the changing situation of Jews in Germany and the need for a repertoire specifically connected to Jewishness. [11, 20]. League organizers also differed as to the very definition of "Jewish" art. To address this controversy officially, Singer convened a Jewish Culture League Conference (= Die Kulturtagung des Reichsverbandes der Jüdischen Kulturbünde in Deutschland), on September 5, 1936 [3]. In speeches given the following day, prominent theatre and music scholars advised League representatives how best to satisfy all those involved through the performances of recommended Jewish works. The first performance on the Kulturbund Deutscher Juden first opening-ceremony on October, 1st, 1933 was, however, a German play, Lessing's 'Nathan der Weise' [7, 11, 13] which, according to later regulations, being written by a German, was actually forbidden to be played by Jews.

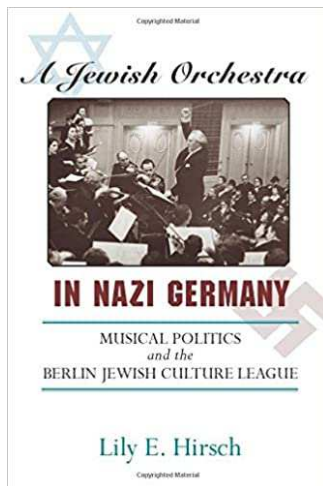


**Figure 13.** From: 'Nathan the Wise'.

[https://www.akg-images.de/Docs/AKG/Media/TR3\\_WATERMARKED/4/2/8/6/AKG447003.jpg](https://www.akg-images.de/Docs/AKG/Media/TR3_WATERMARKED/4/2/8/6/AKG447003.jpg)



The Nazis later realized that subversive character of the play by simply banning it together with the 1922 silent film version.



**Figure 15.** A cluster of kinetically disciplined string players swaying around Kurt Singer, the maestro-administrator, as he stands and implores the chorus to intone the opening phrases of George Frideric Handel's 1739 oratorio *Israel in Egypt*. [https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/41dfmTaLi3L.\\_SX331\\_BO1,204,203,200\\_.jpg](https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/41dfmTaLi3L._SX331_BO1,204,203,200_.jpg) [7].

Only a month following the mass sacking of all Jews in the performing arts, a precursor Kulturbund orchestra and chorus had in effect already been established in Berlin by the "Community of Jewish Musicians". A programme of symbolic works from Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus* by the Kulturbund Deutscher Juden Orchestra, in the (Bernburger Straße) Berliner Philharmonie was conducted by Kurt Singer on May 22nd, 1934 [2].

A closer analysis of the works played by the Kulturbund could show that the selection was purposeful and deliberate and the plays full of implications, e.g.:

1. The events depicted in the Handel-oratorio refer to the period 170–160 BC when Judea was ruled by the Seleucid Empire which undertook to destroy the Jewish religion, but ultimately failed. Victory has finally been achieved for the Jewish people (See, the Conqu'ring Hero Comes!), and news arrives that Rome is willing to form an alliance with Judas against the Seleucid empire. The people rejoice that peace has at last come to their country (O lovely peace).
2. Another example is the performance of Max Brod's (dramatized) pro-zionistic novel *Reubeni, Fürst der Juden* (=Reubeni, prince of the Jews) which culmintaes

in the sentence "Zu Kriegern habe ich euch erziehen wollen, jetzt schleicht ihr ja wie Lämmer umher ("I wanted to educate you for warriors, now you creep like sheep.") Brod wanted to create a heroic epos, to contribute to a Jewish renaissance and to fight assimilationism and its devitalized passivism. "Warum bitten, bitten! Warum müssen wir immer nur bitten!" (Why beg, beg! Why do we always have to beg!").

3. The same call for resistance pervades Frank Pollak's *Maccabi March*, performed by the orchestra. Sigmund Freud once said: "I have often felt as if I had inherited all the passion of our ancestors when they defended their temple, as if I could joyfully cast away my life in a great cause."<sup>4</sup>
4. The Mendelssohn-Violin Concerto supported by the Kulturbund was a special performance in 1934, because German orchestras no longer played Mendelssohn or any other Jewish composed music, as the Nazis considered Mendelssohn a Jewish composer, though Mendelssohn was raised in a Jewish family and later baptized as a Christian.
5. Stefan Zweig's *Jeremias* at Berlin's Kulturbund, 1934, directed by Fritz Jessner with music by Arno Nadel. It deals with the war of the Jews against Nebukadnezar who enslaves the Jews, but will be punished severely. *Jeremias* is depicted as having deep fear for Jerusalem. Salvation lies in the chance of a new Jewish state which will release the people from painful exile. Written while Zweig was a soldier during the Great War, it reflects his pacifist sentiments and Jewish religious background, his unconditional love of life, his distrust of the masses ("Wenn das Volk jubelt, ist Unheil im Werke"-if the mass jubilate, evil will come), and his aversion to hybris driven by the relentless for power. *Jeremias* represents a universalistic-cosmopolitan ethos (= "den Geist, der die Welt mit Liebe durchgütet und speist") whose promulgation is the mission of Jews. God begins with pains ("Qualen") and with bliss ("Seligkeit"). The drama and ends with consoling the line "A people can be put in chains, its spirit, never." (= "Man kann ein Volk bezwingen, doch seinen Geist.").

Margalit Wachsmann, Kurt Singer's daughter, described how in 1936 the Nazis instructed the Kulturbund that they could no longer play music composed by Austrians or Germans. The Nazis insisted the Kulturbund play Jewish music. However, Kurt Singer and his musicians did not know what Jewish music was. Reluctant at first to embrace Yiddish music, they came to enjoy it and include special programs to perform them. With Kurt Singer primarily being in charge of program approval the Kulturbund organizers did not generally gravitate toward "Jewish" works, as also the majority of the Jewish audience only gradually began to favour Jewish (i. e.: Eastern Jewish) productions and develop pro-Zionist views only around the end of 1936. To some,

<sup>4</sup> Martin S. Bergmann, *Moses and the Evolution of Freud's Jewish Identity*, in: (ed.) Mortimer Ostow, *Freud and Jewish Marginality* London 1997, S. 117.

such a 'Jewish' repertoire was, in fact, at odds with their sense of Germanness and threatened to turn their Jewish organization into a ghetto. So in order to gain an insight into the hidden implications a closer look at the *Mitteilungen* (Jüdischer Kulturbund Rhein-Ruhr=Jewish Culture League Rhine-Ruhr/1935) reveals:

1. that awareness of the inescapability of disaster inside the Reich existed, as the advertisements for immigration (to Palestine, North-and South-America, East-Africa) reveal, but it also reveals;
2. that many Jewish artists, carpenters, hair-stylists, musicians, and technicians all involved in the theatrical performances, could survive on account of the activities of the Kulturbund;
3. that the Jewishness could be emphasized ("die stärkere Betonung des Jüdischen"<sup>5</sup>).

In some ways, this organization appears as a positive haven for Jews and music during the early years of the Third Reich [8], especially when German neighbours avoided contact with Jews. The Kulturbund's performance of music and theatre within a German tradition certainly represented an element of spiritual resistance. We do not yet fully know how the reception of art-works and lectures organized by the Kulturbund worked, e.g. did listening to a speech about Rembrandt and the Jews reinforce pride and self-esteem, instil melancholy, frustration, despair or an rebellious mood? The unsettling aspect of this chapter comes from viewing it through the lens of the Holocaust. Already in 1933 the Zionist journal on July 25th, 1933, used the term "Illusionen" (=illusions) when reporting on the works of the Kulturbund. In response to that critical remark Kurt Singer felt urged to reply that the Kulturbund wants:

1. to financially and psychologically help and support dismissed, unemployed and despaired people ("Menschen"), saving them from stagnation;
2. to keep the belief in God and Jewish pride alive.

Nothing is more important, so Singer, than "Selbstbehauptung." (=self-preservation). At the time, the Kulturbund was seen as lifeline for German Jews unwilling or unable to uproot themselves and leave their native country<sup>6</sup>. Is Kurt Singer's statement not right:

"Keeping outer politics at bay from our affairs and not mixing in the domestic affairs regarding Jewish policies. We nonetheless stand up more boldly than ever for our Jewish heritage and believe in drawing from that, all which is specifically Jewish in drama, music and various intellectual fields. [This] is our uppermost duty and must ultimately be our greatest gain! That we are living proof of what has been nurtured by German culture and its great masters does not need to be repeated to any German Jew. So, is this a compromise? Yes! But it is one that is made in the conviction that there is a will to join German Jewry's diverse communities of ideas into a single unit!" (Vom jüdischen Schicksal).

Was the work of the Kulturbund an opiate?

"Could it be that someone postponed his emigration because he could go to the opera, theater, concerts?... no one gave up or postponed his emigration because the Culture League existed; fundamentally it had been moral support for the Jews." (Herbert Feeden, in: [2].

Hannah Kroner, once a dancer in the Jewish Culture League, defended the League: it

"most certainly did not deceive me into wanting to stay in Germany, but it provided the opportunity to stay in physical shape, so vital for a dancer... it was not a happy time off the stage, but it was constructive and also happy while on stage, for which I am grateful."<sup>7</sup> (Letter from Kroner) [9].

The Zionist assertion that the Kulturbund was a stopgap until Jews could leave the country cannot be ruled out as the ads for emigration show that many of leaders must have considered the opportunity to leave Nazi Germany before 1939, but must also have simultaneously felt a responsibility to stay and help their fellow Jews. In addition, the frequent reports on Rahel Varnhagen (e. g.: Bayerische Israelische Gemeindezeitung-March 5th, 1933-no. 5) could show that assimilation does not rule out an identification with the history of Jews and a confession of loyalty to Judaism. Rahel did not want to give up this identity nor did she want to miss it, though this brought discrimination and misery. She compared herself with a refugee from Egypt and remembers and identifies with Jewish history and fate.

"A fugitive from Egypt and Palestine, here I am and find help, love, fostering in you people. With real rapture I think of those origins of mine and this whole nexus of destiny, through which the oldest memories of the human race stand side by side with the latest developments...The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life—having been born a Jewess—this I should on no account now wish to have missed."<sup>8</sup>

But why did Arendt in her analysis of Rahel on the 100st anniversary in 1933 in the *Jüdische Rundschau* not quote Rahel's deathbed sentence or only partially in her book *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (1958)? Does the quote "Aus dem Judentum muss man heraus" (*Jüdische Rundschau*) represent the only Varnhagen? Varnhagen did neither escape nor flee from her own history. Outward assimilation can for Varnhagen be compatible with inner loyalty. That Rahel always showed the greatest interest in her former coreligionists, endeavouring by word and deed to better their position, especially during the anti-Semitic outburst in Germany in 1819

<sup>7</sup> <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mp/9460447.0005.202/--ein-tanz-aud-dem-vulkan-the-legacy-of-the-jewish-culture?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

<sup>8</sup> "Welche Geschichte! — rief sie mit tiefer Bewegung aus, — eine aus Ägypten und Palästina Geflüchtete bin ich hier... Mit erhabenem Entzücken denk' ich an diesen meinen Ursprung und diesen ganzen Zusammenhang des Geschicks, durch welches die ältesten Erinnerungen des Menschengeschlechts mit der neuesten Lage der Dinge, die weitesten Zeit- und Raumformen verbunden sind. Was so lange Zeit meines Lebens mir die grösste Schmach, das herbste Leid und Unglück war. eine Jüdin geboren zu sein, um keinen Preis möchte' ich das jetzt missen." See: Amos Elon (2002) *The Pity of it All. A Portrait of Jews in Germany 1743-1933*.

<sup>5</sup> <https://archive.org/details/mitteilungenjdis1319>

<sup>6</sup> <https://forbiddenmusic.org/2017/10/08/vom-judischen-schicksal-the-jewish-cultural-league-or-der-kulturbund/>

is another reason for her becoming a model: On the day of her funeral Varnhagen sent a considerable sum of money to the Jewish poor of Berlin what Jewish leaders always supported. There seem to be subtle ways of resisting the Devil that arm-chair academicians fail to ignore.

The League was officially dissolved on 11 September 1941 “for the protection of people and state.”<sup>9</sup> Many League members had already emigrated by 1941. At this time, Germany was embroiled in war on two fronts — both with Britain and the Soviet Union. Hitler had also become committed to the elimination of European Jewry, and had approved the mass deportation of German Jews eastward. [7]. As conditions worsened for Jews in Germany, music of distraction, rather than a distinct nationality—Jewish or otherwise—became the order of the day. To exist, Kulturbund leaders had to collaborate with the enemy; Did they hereby lend legitimacy to the regime’s plans as a means of propaganda? The organization, according to some critics, may have contributed to the tragedy to come. The historian Alan Steinweis wrote:

“By providing Jewish artists and audiences with an outlet for creative expression, the [Culture League] rendered Jewish existence in National Socialist Germany somewhat less desperate than it otherwise might have been, thereby lulling German Jews into a tragically false sense of security about the future.” (Steinweis: 23). Was the role of the League “ein Tanz auf dem Vulkan” (“a dance on the volcano”/ Freeden) [4].

The C.V. – Another Dream?

Members of the Kulturbund were often members of the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (known as the C.V.-since August: 1936 Jüdischer Centralverein e.V., also: Zentral-Verein, Central Verein, CV, C.V., C.-V.therefore: C.V. =Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith) was founded by German Jewish intellectuals on March, 26th, 1893 in Berlin, with the intention of opposing rise of antisemitism in the German Empire. Shortly after its founding it had 1,420, and in 1926 approximately 60,000 members. [17]. This became one of the most important Jewish organisations of the pre-Holocaust age (by 1933 the C.V. had about 50,000 members in a community of about 600,000). The C.V. aimed to defend the German Jews against antisemitism – or, as its charter put it, to achieve “the protection of the civil and social rights of the German Jews”. The C.V. aimed to educate Germans to overcome the “misunderstandings” behind their aversion to Jews. It used all possible legal means to bring antisemites to justice and supported Liberal, Progressive and Social-Democratic parties against the antisemitic German conservatives and nationalists. To avoid the antisemitic charge of dual loyalty, the C.V., breaking with other Jewish organisations, abandoned the age-old Jewish solidarity world-wide, stating in its 1893 charter that it would give no aid to non-German Jews. The C.V.,

committed as it was to a “symbiosis” of Jews and Germans, could never accept a Jewish national ideology separating them from their self-perceived German identity. The leading C.V. spokesman for “symbiosis” of German and Jewish identity was Eugen Fuchs (1856-1923), who, typically of German Jews, believed that the German side in his make-up was stronger than the Jewish side and that he had more in common with Germans than with Jews. The correct response to antisemitism, in Fuchs’ view, was not flight but greater patriotism, more uncompromising German feeling (*deutscher Gesinnung*), and suppression of everything that made Jews different. In Germany even after 1933, the C.V. feared that Zionism endangered the standing of German Jews as loyal patriots. According to the statute of the C.V. the Jew is a German citizen of Jewish faith who is loyal to the German nation (=“*deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*”) who stands firmly on the soil of German nationality (“*auf dem Boden der deutschen Nationalität*”), and whose community with Jews of other countries is no less different from the community with Catholics and Protestants of other countries (=“*Unsere Gemeinschaft mit den Juden anderer Länder ist keine andere als die Gemeinschaft der Katholiken und Protestanten anderer Länder.*”<sup>10</sup>). Its first journal was started in 1895 after the antisemitism-scandal linked to Heinrich von Treitschke, and appeared twice a year.



Figure 16. The first journal *Im Deutschen Reich* (=In the German Empire). The successor-journal from May 1922 was the weekly *CV-Zeitung*.

9 For a transcript of the League conference, see *Geschlossene Vorstellung: Der Jüdische Kulturbund in Deutschland 1933-1941*, ed. Akademie der Künste (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1992), 266-297. ♣

10 [http://books.google.hr/books?id=bMqWApv10-YC&pg=PA171&lpg=PA171&dq=Centralverein+der+Juden&source=bl&ots=pXsv\\_SRBBN&sig=cz8WOxrGQfGJ5VyxETZGADsdPs&hl=de&sa=X&ei=\\_QMUUczMJYGfTQbk1oHoBA&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Centralverein%20der%20Juden&f=false](http://books.google.hr/books?id=bMqWApv10-YC&pg=PA171&lpg=PA171&dq=Centralverein+der+Juden&source=bl&ots=pXsv_SRBBN&sig=cz8WOxrGQfGJ5VyxETZGADsdPs&hl=de&sa=X&ei=_QMUUczMJYGfTQbk1oHoBA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Centralverein%20der%20Juden&f=false) page 166



The 1st issue justified the publication of a new weekly, addressed to 'good Germans' and 'good Jews', referring to the intention of gathering Jews who committed to 'German feeling'. "German Jews" have lived on German soil for centuries and thus feel secure. Highly interesting is the C.V.'s comment (February 2nd, 1933) on the assumption of power by Hitler in January 1933.

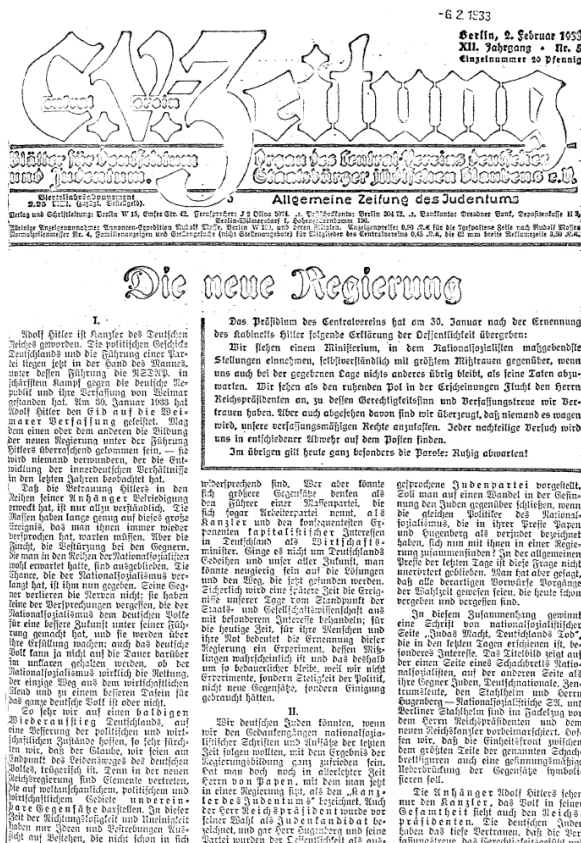


Figure 17. Issue of the 'Centralvereinszeitung' published by 'Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith'.

The article written by Ludwig Holländer

1. abstains from any reference to Hitler's antisemitism though expressing concern about the antisemitism of the leaders of an antisemitic party;
2. is certain that more important issues than the Jewish question ("Judenfrage") will determine the government's course;
3. is sceptical of the government's longevity in account of its internal antagonism between an economically left-winged and economically right-winged faction;
4. expresses the belief in President von Hindenburg's sense of justice and order that is the best antidote to an adventurous and dangerous policy;
5. reprints Hitler's constitutional oath (the equality of all citizens, freedom of conscience & religious expression);
6. expresses its solidarity with what is genuinely German and
7. expresses its support for Germany's internal and external freedom and her fight against social ills;

8. But the same issues reports on;
9. desecrations of Jewish cemeteries;
10. the growing pessimism among Jewish communities on how to prevent political antisemitism: Does it still make sense to fight against antisemitism?
11. pseudo-racial views among the German population.

The tone of this article clearly contrasts with the tone of the article published in the Zionist journal Jüdische Rundschau from January 31st, 1933 which directly refers to the anti-Jewish character of the new government. When on November 12th, 1933, a referendum on withdrawing from the League of Nations was held in Germany alongside Reichstag elections the C. V. fully supported the vote. The measure was approved by 95.1% of voters with a turnout of 96.3%, thus giving Hitler an overwhelming majority. One highly illuminating person was the Dresden Jew, veteran of World War I, man of letters and historian of great sophistication, Victor Klemperer, who recognized the danger of Hitler as early as 1933, chronicling in unparalleled detail the progressive elimination of every private space, the arbitrary cruelty toward those whom the regime defined as Jews, and finally the operation of an opaque (to those who were its victims) apparatus of extermination, that worked slowly, but steadily. [11]

"Last Sunday afternoon the Kaufmanns and Frau Rosenberg were here for coffee. There was a terribly heated scene, when Herr Kaufmann declared he had resolved on a "Yes" in the plebiscite. The Central Association of German Jews had after all given the same advice "with heavy heart." I completely lost my temper, thumped the table with my fist and repeatedly bellowed at him, whether he considered these rulers, to whose policies he was assenting, to be criminals or not. He refused to reply; I had "no right to put this question." For his part he asked me mockingly why I remained in my post. I replied that I had not been appointed by this government and did not serve it and that I represented Germany's cause -with a very clear conscience, that I was a German and I above all." (Victor Klemperer, I Will Bear Witness/November 1933).

But generally speaking, the illusionary and destructive character of the German-Jewish symbiosis became clear only gradually, if at all, but came to a standstill and was definitely and finally broken on the Kristallnacht (=The Night of the Crystal=Broken Glass) on November 9–10, 1938 when some 30,000 Jewish males were rounded up and taken to concentration camps. The pogrom was at once the peak and conclusion of mob violence against Jews and the date when what could still be considered harassment of a minority gave way to the measures that led to the "Final solution." At that traumatic point Jews began to understand their dilemma [8]. The largest Zionist journal inside Germany, the Jüdische Rundschau was forbidden in 1938. In 1939, the high-ranking member of the CV, Fritz Friedländer, left Germany for Shanghai to become co-editor of the Shanghai Jewish Chronicle, a daily newspaper for the Jews in the Far East. (=Tageszeitung für die Juden im fernen Osten). He had written a book on Heine und Goethe which may be seen as an

example of the fundamental principle underlying the CV, the togetherness of Germany and Jewry.

### 3. Conclusion

The idea of cooperation was severely attacked by Hannah Arendt. The controversy showed that you must be aware not to adopt the pose of an intellectual condescendingly looking down on the acting persons. Arrogance should be avoided, and a heartless tone is highly inappropriate, as Gershom Scholem critically remarked. Without claiming that all or even most of Jews were heroes, you cannot say that many of them were Quislings who cooperated in the genocide of Jews. You need not be a Jewish patriot to realize that under the hellish conditions of the Nazi-regime even praying to God of Israel can be an admirable sign of, if not of outer resistance, than at least of keeping one's human dignity, and of escaping from despair. It is highly incorrect and unfair to assert that the Jews were slaughtered like sheep without showing resistance, a position shared by Raoul Hilberg, Bruno Bettelheim and Hannah Arendt. One must always try to be immune to a pursuit of brilliance; the best way is to bear empathically in mind what the concrete situation was. And as a German one has every reason to show discretion in this aspect of the discussion and to avoid any hyper-moralistic attitude. But as so frequently, we are waiting for more material on the theatre-opera-concert- and performances organized by the Kulturbund. Analyzing them could be both illuminating, adventurous – and astonishing, as survival techniques (like even laughing/Lipman) may reveal. What can, at least, be said is that Jewish audiences surrounded by life-threatening enemies and barred from attending public entertainments found an outlet to enjoy music and theatre-performances. The League not only provided physical work, but also spiritual nourishment and emotional comfort to those who were suddenly cut off from the only culture they knew [6]. In the Kulturbund's later years, after 1938, this laughter and entertainment, as it would be in the concentration camps, acted for some as a coping mechanism—a form of evasion, self-possession, and even liberation. Is humour like art in general a way of looking at the circumstances through a different lens, of counteracting the mind-numbing reality, of providing another perspective on the world, of re-energizing the victims and of saving them from deep depression? Though hard to understand, even humour was both a psychological weapon and a defence mechanism, a diversion, a shield, a morale booster. The psychological benefits of laughter open a large space for further research. [10].

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