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HQ & HQ DETACHMENT  
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*Held for Neuman 18.03*

9th July 1945.

TO : Col. M.C. Bernhays, G.S.C.,  
Executive, U.S. Chief of Counsel

FROM : Lt. Walter Rothschild,  
Chief, Documentary Research Unit. *R*

SUBJECT: German Monists Organization

1. Attached is a report published by P.I.D. of the Foreign Office in the PID/PW Series No.15 dealing with the German Monists Organisation.

2. This report might be useful in connection with the prosecution of religious organizations by the Nazi Government.

Enclosure:  
as stated above.



*Comm. Dr. Donovan -  
Rec. file.*

*16 July*

*WCR*

18.05

PID/PW Series No. 15

CONFIDENTIAL

The German Monists Organisation

Source was writer for and partner editor-publisher of various periodicals dealing with culture and philosophy, all eventually banned by Nazis. He appears to have been a genuine anti-Nazi all along, and his information is considered reliable.

Name of PW	HESSE, Franz
No.	300488
Age	32
Date of capture	10 Mar 45
Domicile	Cologne
Civil occupation	Editor and writer
Intelligence	High

June 1945

This paper has been translated from the German original by O.W.I., R & A Sec, Translators' Unit

G.E.M.



TRANSLATION BY O.W.I., R.&A. SECTION

'TRANSLATORS' UNIT.

THE STORY OF THE GERMAN MONISTS ORGANISATION.

In a democratic Germany of the future the churches will once more play an important part. They will be in a position to point out that they had to suffer injustice as well as ill-treatment under the National Socialist regime. Many Christians are anti-Nazis, partly from a conviction of long standing and partly as a result of the treatment meted out to them by the Third Reich. They are now fighting for a "Christian Democracy", for humanity, peace and tolerance.

It does not come within the scope of this discussion to examine to what extent humanitarianism, tolerance and democratic thought are the outcome of Christianity represented by the Church, and to what extent, for instance, the attitude of the Catholic Church, say, in Schuschnigg Austria, in Hungary, Slovakia, Italy or France Spain, was really democratic. Nor will I go in detail into the attitude of an extensive section of the Church toward National Socialism up to about the end of 1933. It is, anyhow, of no importance in this connection where the line should be drawn between the check imposed by National Socialism on excessive demands made by the Churches and the start of the terror against them. All I need to say here is that the Christian organisations are willing to assist in the reconstruction of a German democracy and must therefore be welcomed as allies in the task of eradicating National Socialism.

It strikes one, however, that when the ideological organisations, persecuted by the Third Reich are enumerated, only the C h r i s t i a n Churches and sects are mentioned, and it is they who are now claiming the right of cultural political leadership. Their representatives go so far as to make overtures to the Liberal Democrats and Socialists, even the most radical ones among them, and to assure them that, in a political and social respect they would willingly collaborate with them, but would ask to be left in charge of cultural affairs. Some even go so far as to say that only Christianity should be allowed to prevail in Germany, as everything non-Christian was National Socialist. There are many signs that point in the direction that such an aggressive outlook, if successful, would in future have unpleasant practical consequences as far as free thought, and freedom of science and culture are concerned. I have already been told by a convinced Christian that everything non-Christian was done for. Whoever is not a confessing Christian in the Germany to come will prove thereby that something of the Nazi spirit has adhered to him, and as everybody knows, the Nazis were going to be eradicated. That anyhow one of the causes of this war ~~was~~ to be ascribed to the non-confessional upbringing of German youth (whereas the corruption of part of German youth is in reality due to the teachings which the National Socialists substituted for Christianity and free-thinking humanism). This form of intolerance, by the way, is being preached by those very Christians and parsons who in 1933 publicly pronounced this threat: Whoever did not immediately join the Church was proving that he was not a National Socialist and therefore an enemy of the State. I must mention, however, that not all Christians were such opportunists.

In the face of these exclusive cultural demands made by the Church it must be pointed out that the Freemasons' Lodges and Free-thinking Organisations had to undergo a far worse terror. The Churches, after all, survived, conducted their services, could teach youth. The faithful could visit their places of worship and buy books dealing with their ideologies. It is true, some of their organisations were prohibited, religious Orders were harmed, political activities forbidden and the Christian Press controlled in that respect. In some cases, too, priests were persecuted. But what happened to Free-masons, Free-Thinkers, and Non-confessionals? Their organisations were utterly prohibited, their leaders were persecuted, their funds in most cases confiscated, they were robbed of every chance of getting into print or of holding assemblies. Free-masons could not be civil servants.

In the following pages I will give a short account of the fate of merely a small section of the German Free-Thinking movement, I mean the German Monist Organisation which was founded in 1905 at the suggestion of Prof. Ernst Haeckel of Jena, and became the nucleus of many subsequent foundations among the people. Among the spiritual forefathers of the present-day German Monist Organisation were Spinoza, Hume, Locke, the French encyclopaedists, Comte, Feuerbach, Darwin, Nietzsche, Holnholtz, and Haeckel.

The German Monists were the only free-thinking community which kept its own periodical going for 6 years after 1933. All other organisations were completely paralyzed after their prohibition by National Socialism, because their members soon lost touch with one another owing to the lack of a Press organ. Goering's ragings finally crushed the last remaining free-thinking periodicals distributed all over the Reich in 1934. Only locally did one or two small papers still continue to be published, for instance the periodical "Freie Religion", in Mainz which, however, did not do justice to the broader conception of Free Thought. In Berlin "Ethische Kultur" held its own for a short time. One great organisation remained, though: The Union of Free Thought and Cremation. It was taken over by the National Socialists and turned into the "Greater German Union for Cremation" ("Grossdeutsche Feuerbestattungsverein") This union had nothing to do with Free Thought.

The periodical of the German Monists organisation was the "Monistische Monatsheft (Monistic Monthly Review) which changed its name in January 1932 to "Die Stimme der Vernunft" (The Voice of Reason), at the same time putting increased stress on humanitarian, cosmopolitan and pacifist thought in view of the growing threat of Fascism and Militarism. The Monists organisation had no party-political tendencies. Its members were, without exception, democrats or social-democrats. Party-political activities were left to individuals and were not a concern of the organisation. The German Monists organisation, whose members were mostly university graduates, merely aimed at providing the scholarly equipment for a practical political fight, whilst taking up a cultural non-political line without taking up a decided stand for any one party of the centre or the left. The following are the well-known names connected for some time and also more recently with the German Monists organisation: Hermann Sudermann, Prof. Unna (Hamburg), Prof. Immanuel Herrmann (Stuttgart), Prof. Robert Reimann (Leipzig), Wilhelm Boelsche (Schreiberhau), Prof. Friedrich Jodl, Pfarrer August Kalthoff (Martini Church, Bremen), Prof. Theodor Hartwig (Prague), Prof. Wilhelm Ostwald, Prof. August Forol (Yverne, Switzerland), Prof. Felix Linke (Jena), Prof. Heinrich Schmidt (Jena), Prof. H.H. Baego (Jena), Prof. Arnold Dodel, Herbert Eulenberg (Kaiserswerth), Dr. Graf Arco (Berlin), Dr. Rudolf Goldscheid (Vienna), Dr. Max Dori (Berlin).

Shortly after Hitler took over power the German Monists Organisation and its organ "The Voice of Reason" were banned. Many of its members were arrested, emigrated or lost their posts and means of living. Attempts failed to keep the Monists Organisations going locally. Only Cologne was successful. The President there, Dr. Paul Wolski (Leverkusen), registered the local Monists group and the authorities never noticed it. Dr. Raabe, the President of the local group Jena also failed to dissolve his group, but the police interfered and confiscated all the property of the Jena organisation. Prof. Heinrich Schmidt, the Director of the Ernst Haeckel Archive of the university and one of the leading personalities in the German Monists organisation did not collaborate in the continuation of the Jena local group as he had realised from the very start how impossible it would be to carry on in the old spirit under the Third Reich and to co-ordinate it. It was on his initiative that numerous local groups closed down on their own account soon after the seizure of power by the National Socialists.

Only two possibilities now remained for the members of the Monists Organisation: One was to resign, to give way to force and to retire completely from all free-thinking activities, in other words to extinguish the last live spark of free thought, even though it happened under the force of circumstances. That was one way of looking at it. The other side argued that on all accounts an

attempt should be made to carry on the Monists Organisation and its periodical in some form or other. This was particularly Prof. Schmidt's point of view.

I was a student at Jena at that time and supported this idea. After a discussion with an old league associate and after winning over for our plan the printer Albert Bessner of Dresden, we decided to publish a new periodical under a new name without mention of the word "Monists Organisation" which was taboo. It was, of course, impossible to find a publisher so the printer Bessner had to do the publishing as well. Albert Bessner was a reliable man who had, for a short time, been an inmate of a Gestapo prison for publishing anti-fascist literature. In spite of new dangers Bessner undertook to print the new periodical with all the risks involved. Those of the old German Monists who still remained, who had not emigrated, been arrested or silenced agreed in part to collaborate. Many refused to do so and even to take in the periodical as, living as they were in great poverty, they feared closer acquaintance with the Gestapo, or if they still remained in their old occupation did not wish to risk it. Others had been forbidden to write.

The new paper called itself "Natur und Geist" (Nature and Spirit). Prof. Heinrich Schmidt called himself the publisher and chief editor, and "Verlagsgemeinschaft Natur und Geist" was given as the publishing house. This "Verlagsgemeinschaft" (Publishing Company) was supposed to be a continuation of the German Monists Organisation in disguise. Every subscriber to "Natur und Geist" was a member of the publishing company. Regular meetings were held at which members were expected to discuss the trend of the paper and fix regulations. In this way, it was hoped that the remains of the organisation would be kept loosely bound together in expectation of the day when National Socialism would collapse. Soon, however, the police got wind of this new foundation and after a few weeks only the company with its statutes and meetings was prohibited. The periodical was able to carry on and the name "Verlagsgemeinschaft Natur und Geist" remained though it only comprised the small circle of editors.

The first number of "Natur und Geist" appeared in July 1933. All discussions on sociological, political and pacifist topics had to be discarded and we had to limit ourselves to subjects dealing purely with natural history and ideological matters. In the first numbers we quoted Rudolf Virchow on Liberty in Science in the "New National Life" of Germany (after 1871), and Friedrich Schiller on "Liberty and Bonds". This was a broad hint to the Third Reich meaning to say that Liberty and National State are not necessarily a contradiction in terms. Whenever Hitler or von Papen held one of their "peace talks (speeches?) these were mentioned in the periodical. It was left to the discretion of the reader to look upon it as sarcasm or not. As much as we could we set our own cultural standards by quoting some National Socialist utterance. For instance, we praised the decree that no child should be forced to receive religious instructions at school without the consent of its parents, or the laws for the sterilization of persons afflicted with serious hereditary diseases (which have existed for along time in some states in the USA). The result of this occasional apparently pro-Nazi leaning was, that after some initial difficulties with the Nazi authorities and cross-examinations of the printer Albert Bessner, it was possible all the same to convince official quarters to a certain extent of the harmlessness of our paper though their suspicion never quite left them. An emigre paper attacked Prof. Schmidt on account of this: He edits the paper "on completely fascist lines". We merely passed the matter over, knowing how easy it was for an emigre, far removed from the cudgel of the Third Reich, to criticise from the safe distance. Things were more difficult in Germany and Prof. Schmidt showed a great sense of responsibility in keeping alive an organ for Free Thinkers against the time of reconstruction after Hitler's fall, in spite of pressure from above and pro-Church tendencies still displayed by the Nazis at that time.

The Swiss democratic paper "Der Freidenker" (The Free-Thinker), on the occasion of Schmidt's death in May 1935, paid most well deserved tribute to his true political attitude (he was, by the way, a member of the SPD) and his struggle under National Socialist rule. The author had spoken to him just before

his death. It was not only political, but also financial pressure which was hard to bear and Prof. Schmidt had to make many sacrifices. The paper never made any profits, on the contrary both editors and contributors who mostly got no fees, had to subsidise it. Large-scale advertising was not possible for financial reasons and might also have drawn undesirable readers from the National Socialist ranks. During these years our only new subscribers were Jews who were not always in agreement with our outlook, but were glad to find a natural-philosophy periodical of a high standard which did not give vent to anti-semitic utterances.

Most of the contributors of "Natur und Geist" were members of the German Monists Organisation or of other leagues of Free-Thinkers. Some of them wrote under a non de plume for reasons of personal safety. Dr. Max Sebor became Dr. Sturm; Dr. Georg Kraner was Georg Marrok; Prof. M.H. Baego turned into Max Gaobe and Prof. Felix Linke G.F.Lossa.

"Natur und Geist" was, of course, bound hand and foot in a spiritual sense. As I already mentioned political matters could not be discussed. We were unable to defend the Jewish philosopher Spinoza who was being defiled from all sides. We had to look on in silence whilst Nietzsche was deliberately turned into an apostle of Militarism and Dictatorship. When certain people in the NSDAP declared Ernst Haeckel to be a precursor of National Socialism we were asked to voice our agreement. We did this in a rather short and feeble manner, merely in the form of a review without expressing a point of view, but we could from then on take pleasure in referring to the "National Socialist" Haeckel whenever the State Police came to make investigations. We also had to watch helplessly the way new books coupled the National Socialist racial theories with the scientific theory of the origin of the species, thus endowing it, in the eyes of unsuspecting readers, with a scientific veneration. We also had to be very careful in the use of the word "atheism". This was ranked with Marxism in the Third Reich, the Fuehrer of which had, after all, been sent by God himself. Otto Knopf, Prof. of Astronomy in Jena, had some unfortunate experiences in this respect. In his book "Christentum oder Wissenschaft" (Christianity or Science?) referred to the Fuehrer Adolf Hitler, who was so great that he could manage without God's help. Thereupon the book was prohibited.

Our relationship with the "Deutsche Glaubensbewegung" (German Faith Movement) and its related groups was not an easy one. This movement originated in part from small nationalistic free-thinking groups, and in part from extreme right-wing circles adhering to a romantic-nordic Protestantism. National Socialists joined their ranks. The German Faith Movement, which was anti-Christian, anti-Freemasonry, believed in God but was founded on nordic-mystical ideas in complete accord with the NSDAP, its Chauvinism and its anti-Semitic tendencies, and later on received a certain amount of support from the SS. (See, for instance, the Weekly, "Nordland"). The German Faith Movement had nothing in common with the great liberal and Marxist-Free-Thinking organisations and Freemason Lodges and none of its members belonged to those organisations which were prohibited in 1933. The Faith Movement (Weekly "Durchbruch") advocated leaving the Church. This was usually done for political and anti-Semitic reasons (Hauer: "Christianity in Germany stands and falls with the question as to whether Christ was a Jew.") In comparison with the old Free-Thinking Movement towards leaving the Church the National Socialist variety was of little importance, and numerically the German Faith Movement was weak compared with the great free-thinking groups existing during the years before 1933. It went even further down-hill when quarrels and internal splits set in. (One of its co-founders Prof. Hauer, Tuebingen, and Graf Reventlow left it. The former published the monthly journal "Deutscher Glaube", the latter the "Reichswart") As the NSDAP claimed in 1937 the exclusive right to use the word Bewegung (movement), the German Faith Movement was re-christened "Kampfring Deutscher Glaube". Its weekly became "Sigrune". Apart from this there existed numerous other small groups belonging to the Nordic Faith Movement who all claimed that their blood and race-doctrines were the only ones which could bring salvation.

It was then hinted to us that we should take up a positive attitude towards these religious tendencies. We did it very guardedly, usually merely giving an account of their activities. Later on we dropped it altogether and took no more notice of them. For the Faith Movement made more and more radical and terroristic demands. Though completely negative in its outlook, it became

positive and mystical in factual matters and worshipped primitive Germanism, as it saw it, at the same time sinking to an ever lower level. The decline went on rapidly and it only succeeded in influencing a very small fraction of the German non-Christians. Members became fewer and fewer and the movement went to pieces, in no small measure owing to its noisy and demagogic propaganda which people got tired of. The only group which remained in existence and was fairly strong was "Deutsche Goetterkenntnis" (Knowledge of German Gods) which rallied around Ludendorff's periodical "Am heiligen Quell Deutscher Kraft" (Round the Sacred Fount of German Strength.) This movement chiefly lives for the purpose of fighting the bogey of "cosmopolitical powers". Jews, Freemasons, Free-Thinkers, Democrats, Marxists, Christians, and particularly Catholics belonged to this movement.

Of course it was quite impossible for us to collaborate with such nordic heroes. I must, however, mention a certain scientific movement which we befriended considerably, under Dr. Baer's as well as my influence: This was the positivism of the "Vienna Circle" which based its ideas on those of Ernst Mach and Albert Einstein. Scholars like Joergen Joergensen, von Mises, Rudolf Carnap (USA), Hans Reichenbach (Stambul), Niels Bohr (Sweden) Philip Frank (Prague), Moritz Schlick (Vienna) belonged to this circle. With the motto "Unity in Science" its conception of science was empirical. It was very international, and though unpolitical, definitely democratic. (In England the most widely-known Positivist is the philosopher and physicist Prof. Bertrand Russell. H.H. (?H.G.) Wells is also very much inclined towards positivism. The Vienna Circle published the journal "Erkenntnis" with the sub-title "Annals of Philosophy" through the Publishing House of Felix Meiner, Leipzig in Germany which never permitted itself to be coordinated. The same firm published books on subjects of modern atomic science, philosophic logic, and literary criticism. The publishing house Julius Springer in Berlin published a whole series of positivistic books dealing with every scientific problem including sociology and ethics. After the annexation of Austria by Hitler the Vienna Circle was prohibited as it was suspected of cosmopolitical and democratic tendencies. With their sober and strictly empirical views the Positivists were very averse to the unscientific and mystical racial theories of the NSDAP. Furthermore Jews belonged to the Vienna Circle (Hans Reichenbach was one of them) "Die Erkenntnis" still appeared abroad. The publishers Stockum & Zoon in Holland brought out a series of positivistic books in various languages under the heading "Unified Science Book Series". The first volume (1939) was called the "Kleine Lehrbuch des Positivismus" (Small Manual on Positivism) by Richard von Mises, which was suppressed in Germany and only made available to specialist scientists.

From 1937 onwards we limited our work more and more to matters of pure science. Gradually I gave up the cultural struggle which had been mostly directed against the totalitarian claims of the Catholic Church. National Socialism was becoming more and more the declared enemy of the Churches, not so much from reasons of cultural and scientific enlightenment, but rather to enable it to enforce its nordic blood-phantasies warlike education. They employed methods against Christianity which were terroristic and despicable and mocked liberty and humanity. It was impossible for us to identify ourselves with this sort of thing, much as we should have welcomed it in the old days that, for instance, religion was no longer taught in schools, compulsory religious services in schools were abolished, as well as the ban imposed by certain professions on non-Christians, also that schoolbooks dealt with the subject of the origin of the species.

Round the middle of 1938 I drew up a program in a special number of "Natur und Geist" under the title "What we Are Aiming At". Although it was very carefully expressed - though directed against the Myths of Alfred Rosenberg - we received an official reprimand. But we were once more lucky and the periodical was allowed to carry on. Here are some sentences from the program which were objected to: "A reasoning man of the present day will not allow his thoughts and actions to be guided by... speculative fables. He is no longer satisfied with the ancient or modern myths which... metaphysics spun around Nature and Spirit. As they are not the outcome of the scientific learning of our days these mythical teachings and speculative inventions are not suited to point the way

of present-day thought and actions.... We shall look very critically into all attempts, which are becoming very frequent, to represent metaphysical speculations, occult teachings, etc. as scientific. Our periodical is therefore meant for all those who like to think in a matter-of-fact, clear, and unhazy manner.... and whose aim it is to build their idea of the world as well as they actions on a foundation of scientific truths." The program as a whole was also criticised for not once mentioning the word "National Socialistic World Conception;" which after all is decisive.

In January 1938 the paper was taken over by the publishers Otto Lautenbach, Weimar. In October 1938 difficulties <sup>were</sup> once more made by the Propaganda Ministry and it was demanded from us that we should come into line with the National Socialist German Faith Movement. When, in May 1939, we were most sharply instructed to publish anti-semitic articles we closed down in June. The publisher, Lautenbach, who had merely a commercial interest in "Natur und Geist" and had hoped, unavailingly, for new subscribers from among our midst for his semi-fascist paper "Die Schule der Freiheit" (The School of Liberty") agreed immediately. After all there was no profit to be made out of "Natur und Geist."

Thus the last stronghold of the free-thinking spirit in Germany had fallen. The outbreak of war soon after severed the last ties among members. It will be difficult to call it back to life after the war. It is very likely that the R. Catholic Church will get the upper hand after the war in matters of culture and the education of Youth by virtue of its martyrdom under the National Socialists. This Church is in its organisation as powerful as ever, also as far as its personnel is concerned, whilst Protestantism, whose ministers have been called up and killed or taken prisoner has been considerably weakened, not to mention the Free-Thinkers and Freemasons who have no form of organisation or press organ.

After the war it will be the task of Free-Thinkers to avoid every form of schism, to join together in one great organisation and to demand equal status with the Christian Churches. By means of mutual respect and indulgence it will be quite possible to collaborate with the Church, in spite of ideological differences, to create a new German democracy in which peace and liberty of thought will prevail. All can be done with a good will!