

Surrender To The Nazis?

The disturbance created by the appearance of some uniformed Nazis at San Francisco school board meetings calls for a dip into Jewish historic memory. There is a great myth that needs to be exploded, for those who don't remember what happened.

The myth is that the Nazis won in Germany because there was no early militant effort to outlaw them or to break their heads. Everyone, according to the myth, sat on his hands. How far from the truth!

The spawning ground of the German Nazi Party was the Thule Society, founded in 1918. The Thule Society formulated the Nazi program, including the centrality of anti-Semitism, trained early Nazi leaders, and was the basis on which Hitler built the Nazi Party. It was a small group, but very active under the leadership of Rudolf Count von Sebottendorf, born Rudolf Glauer. The Thule Society specialized in anti-Semitic activity, speeches, leaflets. Its members were arrested at various times for their activity and put under such pressure that they were forced underground, operating for a while under the name of the Study Group of German Antiquity. Then, in Munich, on April 26, 1919, seven members of the Thule Society were again arrested. They were all subsequently, and extra-legally, shot and killed.



Raab

This, of course, seemed the ultimate "militant" action. And, according to historians, it served to give a real boost to the Nazis of the Thule Society. For example, Karl Dietrich Bracher, whose book, *The German Dictatorship* is called by Professor Peter Gay, "the first serious comprehensive history of the Nazi phenomenon," commented on what came to be known as the "Hostage Murder of Munich." He said that this action against the Nazis "furnished another effective platform for a radical anti-Semitic campaign, which now was assured a sympathetic hearing by the people of Munich."

This was the model for what was to happen over and over in the early days of the German Nazi Party. The Nazis had their meetings broken up and their heads broken regularly by other political groups. And vice versa. What was the result? A spiral of violence which helped to knock the props out from under the legal and democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic, none too sturdy to begin with. And this in turn helped to create the chaotic and lawless situation in which the Nazis found it easy to gain power.

It is from such practical lessons of Jewish history, not from any rigidly abstract theories, that the organized Jewish community shares its reactions. Indeed, while the JCRC believes that the main fight against the Nazis is the daily fight to strengthen our democratic institutions and opinions—the JCRC has now approached private attorneys, the City Attorney's office and the State Attorney General's office, with respect to possible legal means of banning the wearing of the Nazi symbol at meetings such as those of the school board.

If there is a way of doing it without breaching the constitutional principle that really protects us against fascism, it will be found. But it would be self-destructive to try to do it in ways that will breach that principle. Some day, some group might say to the school board: "We are incited to anger by the sight of the Star of David, and therefore you should bar from your room anyone who wears such an emblem." We would not want to have created a precedent by which such a request could be enforced. Indeed the courts, hopefully, wouldn't let us.

So, to say that even the Nazis in America are protected by the First Amendment and other statutes is not an abstract civil libertarian position. It is the most practical, the most militant, indeed the most courageous position to take against the Nazis. It would be easier, simpler, and certainly more emotionally satisfying to hit each of these uniformed cretins over the head with the nearest hard object. But that would be a craven surrender to the Nazis; and we have not survived in order to surrender abjectly every time a couple of dozen Nazis are imported to make an appearance in San Francisco.