

A Nazi Runs for Mayor

Dangerous Brownshirts or Media Freaks?



Nazis battling anti-Nazis at Milwaukee Nazi demonstration in September 1974.

In Milwaukee, the coming of the Nazis uncovered mountains of emotion.

NAZIS A DILEMMA FOR JEWS read the headline of a lengthy news story in the *Milwaukee Journal*, the city's leading newspaper.

"Rarely, if ever, in the history of the Milwaukee Jewish community has a single issue provoked more dissension, wrought more anger, or spawned more discontent than that which has arisen as a result of the surfacing of the National Socialist White People's Party here," wrote the editor of the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*.

They have gained no apparent power or influence; their loyalists are universally regarded as beyond the pale of respectability. But—perhaps because some media people recall that Hitler's Nazis

started out as a small group composed mainly of lower-class hoodlums, or more likely because the media are always on the lookout for the sensational—the American Nazis have often been featured on television and in the press, and thus have gained widespread "visibility."

Milton Ellerin, of the American Jewish Committee, whose job it is to keep track of them, found that "Since the Yom Kippur War, units of the NSWPP have flamboyantly picketed foreign embassies, the White House, bookstores, theatres and Jewish houses of worship; appeared in full Nazi storm trooper regalia before Boards of Education and City Councils; distributed literature and defaced public buildings with propaganda stickers in downtown business areas; conducted . . . vigils in a dozen cities, and publicly announced the opening of new national headquarters in at least three cities."

The group reemerged several years ago under the leadership of a new commander, Matt Koehl, and began an aggressive campaign for political legitimacy. Since then, American Nazis have been involved in scores of incidents in cities as diverse as Milwaukee, San Francisco and St. Louis. They gravitate to areas and issues that are intense, sensitive and interracial in composition—integration in Milwaukee (two Nazi women ran for the school board this past April 5th and lost) and San Francisco, busing in Boston and Louisville, for instance—which they hope to exploit for their own political purposes.

"For example, we felt it would be intolerable for the Nazis to march on our Jewish Community Center [August 30, 1975]. They came with fifty-six storm troopers plus a dozen or so followers. The police were there in full force. The Nazis marched up and down the sidewalk yelling 'Hitler Lives!' and 'Dump Israel!'

"The fact that we stood two feet from the Nazis and with our chests pushed out, protecting our JCC, that made me feel good."



Local Nazis demonstrating outside the Milwaukee Jewish Community Center.

At the beginning of this eventful year, Arthur Jones campaigned vigorously and on February 17, 1976 received nearly 5,000 votes in the mayoral primary against the liberal and progressive incumbent Mayor Henry Maier. Jones finished in fourth place,

In his well-financed campaign's television announcements and large newspaper advertisements, he proclaimed himself the "white people's candidate," a man who would "with . . . courage and honesty . . . stand up as a white man for the white race." His

campaign material was festooned with pictures of the American flag and the Nazi swastika, "the ancient symbol of the white race," as he put it. He declared that, if elected, he would "do something about it." The "it" referred

to the Nazi Party program. It stood for tough crackdowns on crime, and opposition to all forms of gun-control, busing and "reverse discrimination." The party was also against "unnecessary spending," and in favor of "fiscal responsibility," and believed "in a government of, by and for the people of Milwaukee—not special minorities, sell-out politicians, social experimenters and Communist subversives."

Never in the history of this country had an avowed Nazi run for public office on a Nazi program. How was Milwaukee to respond?

His tone was virulently anti-black and anti-Communist, but anti-Jewishness was toned down. The Nazi literature used in his campaign was very similar in style, content and format to the campaign literature distributed by Richard Johanson, a 31-year-old native of Oakland, California, who ran for the San Francisco Board of Education in November 1976 and received even more votes than Jones—about 9,000. Johanson also sought election as the "white people's candidate" on the Nazi Party ticket. He lost.

Thus the Nazis posed an enormous dilemma for the Jewish community. The issue was over tactics, not goals. All Jews were committed to eliminating or neutralizing any "Nazi threat," but they were badly divided about exactly how to do it.

Do the Nazis have a right to exist?

And Carl Zimmerman, director of communications for WITI-TV, echoed the same sentiments, but felt that "Nazi activities could develop into something significant that could affect the rest of the country."

The Nazis pose a real dilemma for American Jews. On the one hand, they are a tiny, ineffectual and unimportant force in political affairs, little more than a nuisance element to both the American people and to the Jewish community. Yet, because of the memory of the Holocaust and the understandably nervous Jewish reaction to threats of anti-Semitism, a few insignificant Nazi fools can stir up more trouble than they are worth.

— Excerpts from a special report published by the American Jewish Committee.

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