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**William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion: A case study
of the Legion in Washington State, 1933-1942**

Hoppes, Karen Eldenne, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY AND THE SILVERSHIRT LEGION:
A CASE STUDY OF THE LEGION IN WASHINGTON STATE, 1933-1942

by
Karen E. Hoppes

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in History in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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1992

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Abstract

WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY AND THE SILVERSHIRT LEGION:
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by

Karen E. Hoppes

Advisor: Arthur M. Schlesinger, jr.

The social, political and economic conditions in America during the 1930s provided an ideal breeding ground for rightist ideologies -- chief among these was fascism. For many people seeking solutions to the problems posed during the Depression era, fascism represented a gospel of a new order. The view that political extremism was a product of imported ideologies and fanaticism ignores domestic economic and social factors and obscures the influences of charismatic leaders, local attitudes and unusual ideas.

By understanding local problems and responses -- how individuals reacted and why they reacted as they did -- it is possible to gain greater insight into the nature and substance of political extremism. A study of William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion in Washington State offers such an opportunity.

In a rather odious way, what Pelley offered was salvation. He exploited the alternative ideas of astrology,

spiritualism, and esoteric religions, which were closely linked in American history with utopian idealism, millennialism, and even social radicalism, to gain supporters. Each of these beliefs were included in his grandiose plans for a Christian Commonwealth.

A solid understanding of the man, his philosophical leanings and his millennialist message is necessary before one can understand the appeal of Pelley to those in the trenches. Consequently, this study first examines Pelley's political, economic and religious thought as it existed within a larger national intellectual context in America. Second, it answers questions about how the Silvershirt Legion actualized Pelley's philosophical messages. Finally it looks at how the Silvershirt Legion was implemented in a local community; how that community used the Legion to represent their local concerns thereby making the Legion different from Pelley's vision; and, what the Silvershirt Legion represented to the members. It is through such a study of local organizations that one can begin to understand the pattern of participation by "ordinary folks" in American fascist organizations.

PREFACE

Researching the Silvershirt Legion of America was a task taking many years. The Legion never amounted to a large organization, but it did stir up enough noise to be examined by the House Un-American Activities Committee and become the target of several state investigations.

The Silver Legion carefully guarded its membership lists, even when individual members felt free to flaunt their identities in public. This policy created a methodological challenge to identify the members. Without access to membership lists, standard techniques to analyze Silvershirt membership and recruitment failed. Only scattered rosters of the Silver Legion exist in public archives or in private collections.

Members were identified by using historical documents to trace Silvershirters who had publically revealed their membership, were identified as Silvershirters by opposition groups, or were listed on Silver Legion documents. If a name could not be verified by using public sources, the anonymity of the member was respected. Newspaper obituaries were also examined to identify members whose families listed the Legion as an organization in which the decedent was a member. Once identified, interviews were arranged with former members, contemporaries and opponents.

To locate interview informants, 110 names were culled

from the Silver Legion records held at the University of Washington. Checking telephone books, 65 members were contacted; 49 agreed to be interviewed. These members led to other members. In total, 420 members were identified. Notices about this research were mailed to every local newspaper, advertising supplement, historical society and public library in the 39 counties of Washington. Church bulletins, which could be identified, were also contacted. Thirty-three people responded to the notices. Of these, eight sent written recollections. In total, 82 people were interviewed, seventy-four agreed to an interview (if unrecorded and/or kept anonymous) and eight agreed to a recorded interview. In addition, local librarians, local and county amateur historians, newspaper editors and descendants of Silver Legion members contributed material from private and small public collections.

Interviewing was difficult. Normal problems of memory loss, distortion, selective recall and self-censoring that plague all interview situations were compounded by the age of the informants and the topic of the interview. Almost all the informants were over 70 years old and some had difficulty recalling the exact sequence of events. Some informants felt uneasy about discussing a political past that subsequent generations had condemned.

Several aspects of the interviewing process, though, were surprisingly easy and productive. Many informants had

little remorse about their time in the Legion. Some were proud of their membership and anxious to clarify what they saw as historical misunderstandings of the Legion. For all, participation in the Legion was one of the most significant aspects of their lives. Many informants had remarkable recall for details of events over fifty years before; memories, however, were confirmed with newspaper and documentary sources.

In the notice soliticiting informants and in the interviews themselves, no judgment of the Silver Legion was indicated. Few informants were satisfied with this; nearly all tried to elicit an evaluation of the Legion. Many interviews included polite sparring, with informants making laudatory comments about the Legion and seeking a positive response in return. Once informants had decided that their membership was not going to be denounced, they were forthcoming with opinions, prejudices and memories. The ease with which rapport was established is itself revealing. Members wanted to talk about the Legion and would do so with anyone they determined was "safe." Their determination was apparently based on physical (non-semitic) features and a Pacific Northwest heritage. Lacking spoken evidence to the contrary, members assumed that a common world view existed and was shared.

Other aspects of the interviewing process were difficult. Informants, initially, only wanted to talk about

the Legion in general terms -- activities, meetings and political positions. When pressed about why they felt or acted in certain ways, informants would respond with puzzlement or bemused forbearance, as if they were carefully and patiently explaining the obvious to a child. Life in the Legion, to most of the informants, needed no explanation. Most of the members were interesting, intelligent and well informed. These people, when approached with honesty, spoke openly about their activities, views and feelings.

I would like to thank my committee for the insightful critique, positive suggestions, intellectually demanding questions and frequent support that made writing this paper a rewarding scholarly challenge. I would also like to thank my husband, Joel, without whom this paper would never have been finished.

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CHAPTER 1

THE SETTING

The social, political and economic conditions in America during the 1930s provided an ideal breeding ground for rightist ideologies -- chief among these was fascism. For many people seeking solutions to the problems posed during the Depression era, fascism represented a gospel of a new order. When Anne Morrow Lindbergh spoke in 1940 of fascism as being a "wave of the future," and as American as a New England autumn,¹ she was not so much expressing a hope as enunciating what she perceived to be a fact.

A variety of scholars have proposed conditions which gave rise to fascism in America.² One study, written in 1935 by Raymond Gram Swing, has served as a foundation for many others. Swing suggested that four conditions made fascism probable in the United States: the impoverishment of the middle-class; economic stagnation; the paralysis of

¹Her thesis is expounded in The Wave of the Future (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940).

²For example, see Donald Strong for a more detailed list of conditions. Donald Strong, Organized Anti-Semitism in America (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), p. 178; and H. Arthur Steiner, "Fascism in Action," American Political Science Review, vol. 29 (October 1935).

democratic government; and the threat of Communism.³ According to Swing, the first two conditions existed in 1935, while the third and fourth were coming into their maturity. The government appeared to be in a state of acute crisis and many people were listening to harangues about the imminent danger of communist revolution.

It was a time of great despair. The gross national product, in constant dollars, plummeted by one-third between 1929 and 1933; as did disposable personal income. In 1928, three percent of the working force was unemployed; this increased to 26 percent in 1933 including professionals who suffered the highest rates of unemployment and underemployment of all classes of workers.⁴ The value of stocks on the New York Stock Exchange had dropped by over 80 percent in that period, representing a face loss to stock holders of about 75 billion dollars. Nearly five thousand American banks failed. Many large financiers and industrialists were in difficulty, but the middle-class was in greater trouble. Middle-class savings were wiped out, and small business shared with the working class the immediate disaster of lost purchasing power. The total

³Raymond Gram Swing, Forerunners of American Fascism (New York: J. Messner, 1935), p. 19.

⁴Bureau of Census, Census of Partial Employment, Unemployment and Occupations: 1937, vol. 4, p. 144. See also Christine B. Scriabine, "The Frayed White Collar: Professional Unemployment in the Early Depression," Pennsylvania History, vol. 49, no. 1 (1982), pp. 3-24.

economic losses of the period 1930-1934, were estimated by Wladimir Woytinsky, an economist for the International Labor Office, as roughly equal to the cost of the Great War of 1914-1918; that is, between 100 billion and 120 billion 1913 American dollars.⁵

In the early Depression, the federal government seemed unwilling or unable to solve the crisis. The Hoover administration discounted the seriousness of the Depression and argued that all that was necessary for a return of prosperity was a restoration of confidence. Hoover encouraged business leaders to maintain employment and wage levels and exhorted the nation to keep a stiff upper lip. He stepped up federal public works and encouraged construction by state and local governments; announced a tax cut; and, through the Federal Reserve System, pursued an easy credit policy. To support crop prices, the Federal Farm Board purchased vast quantities of wheat and cotton.

Yet these measures were largely nullified by other policies. Committed to budget-balancing, Hoover took away with one hand what he gave with the other. When he asked governors to accelerate public works, he instructed them to be energetic but prudent. The increase in federal spending for public works was so modest that it was more than offset by the drastic cut in state and local spending. The Farm

⁵Wladimir Woytinsky, The Social Consequences of the Economic Depression (Geneva: International Labor Office, 1936), p. 300.

Board purchases, on top of this, lost \$345 million and left farm prices lower than ever. Each action by the administration appeared to be inadequate for the job. It was, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., put it, a "crisis of the old order."⁶

The impotence of government before the economic crisis radicalized many Americans. Fear of revolution was widespread during the last months of President Hoover's administration. As reports increased about "hunger riots" in Oklahoma City, Minneapolis and St. Paul, the possibility of revolution seemed real.⁷ These stories suggested that most such riots were not spontaneous, thereby lending credence to the reports that a revolution could be organized. Indeed, the vigor with which the army dispersed the Bonus Expeditionary Force⁸ from Washington in the summer

⁶Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

⁷New York Times, January 21 and February 26, 1931 are typical of several articles that appeared in the nation's press sporadically during 1930.

⁸The Bonus Expeditionary force consisted of fifteen thousand unemployed veterans who converged on Washington in the spring of 1932. They announced that they planned to stay in the capital until Congress voted full and immediate payment of the bonus previously legislated. In July, the administration ordered the eviction of all the squatters from government property. General Douglas MacArthur was given command of four troops of cavalry and four infantry companies, with six tanks, tear gas, and machine guns. The troops rode into Anacostia Flats where the veterans were staying and drove the veterans and the families out and burned their shacks. The Administration published reports claiming that most of the veterans had been communists and criminals.

of 1932 was an indication of the government's fear of the ability of groups -- especially those that were organized, potentially violent, and single-issue oriented -- to foment revolution.

As the Depression deepened, the Socialist and Communist parties gained support from the populace. Within a matter of days after the Wall Street debacle, Socialist candidates in municipal elections gave good accounts of themselves. The voters in Reading, Pennsylvania, reelected a Socialist administration; in Cleveland, John G. Willert, the Socialist candidate for city council, ran a close race and had the support of that city's newspaper; in New York City, the Socialist leader, Norman Thomas, ran the best race any Socialist mayoralty candidate in that city had ever had.

The growing strength of the Socialist party was evident by 1930. The Socialists in Milwaukee increased their representation in the state legislature; in Reading, two more socialists were added to the state legislature; in California, Upton Sinclair polled over 50,000 votes for governor; and in New York, Socialist, Louis Waldman, running against Franklin D. Roosevelt for governor, received over 120,000 votes. By the 1932 election, the support was even greater. The combined Socialist and Communist votes increased from about 300,000 in 1928 to almost one million. In a number of states, left-wing factions operating in Democratic or Republican primaries, or as third parties,

succeeded in gaining considerable support.⁹ To many, it appeared that "Communism" was taking root in America.

The conditions were real: the crisis apparently imminent. The national mood was receptive to a degree to the most radical panaceas. "There was serious talk of revolution as early as 1931 -- and more than a tang of it in the atmosphere. . . ."¹⁰ In this milieu, a wide range of solutions were proposed; thus, were opportunities provided for a ". . . horde of ambitious leaders in the preparatory stage of fascism. . . ."¹¹ The success of demagogues of the most obvious stripe was widely noted. The condition was understandable, for

when institutions and social values are disturbed, it means the people are disturbed. And when people are disturbed, they are anxious to regain mental stability. The easiest and most usual way of accomplishing this is to look for a leader. . . . This process . . . is frequently followed by adults when they face their own limited resources.¹²

Most people were aware of a

. . . pervasive sense of insecurity, the sense of failing opportunities and of unavailing faiths, that engenders fear,

⁹David A. Shannon, The Great Depression (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1960), p. 91.

¹⁰Leland Baldwin, Recent American History (Rindge, New Hampshire: Richard Smith, 1954), p. 190.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Hadley Cantril, The Psychology of Social Movements (New York: J. Wiley, 1941), p. 234.

that corrosive of the human spirit, is the chief enemy of the democratic virtues -- of reason and sound judgment, of good will, of tolerance and humane dealing.¹³

Public confidence was shaken to the point that there was serious doubt about the stability of the American way of life.

To the gravity of the economic crisis must be added the dramatic changes engendered by the far-reaching activities of the New Deal, the recognition of Soviet Russia (a move which for commercial reasons had had considerable conservative backing), and the burgeoning power of the Fascist regimes. To some, this combination made Fascism appear as the wave of the future; the only hope of staving off Bolshevism. As early as July 1933, an editor of Current History wrote that "the new America will not be capitalist in the old sense, nor will it be Socialist. If at the moment the trend is towards Fascism, it will be an American Fascism. . . ."¹⁴ Even the historian, William E. Dodd,

¹³Carl Becker, "When Democratic Virtues Disintegrate," New Liberties for Old (New Haven: Yale University, 1941), p. 113.

¹⁴E.F. Brown, quoted in Albert E. Kahn, High Treason (New York: Hour 1950), p. 127. It is probable that this comment was prompted by the passage, two months previously, of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Richard Hofstadter's comment is highly apropos here: "It reminds me of the people who, because they found several close parallels between the NRA and Mussolini's corporate state, were once deeply troubled at the thought that the NRA was the beginning of American fascism." In Daniel Bell (ed.), The New American Right, (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 53. An example of Hofstadter's point is Harry F. Ward's, The

returning to the United States in 1938 after serving as Ambassador to Germany, said, "Fascism is on the march today in America. Millionaires are marching to the tune. It will come in this country unless a strong defense is set up by all liberal and progressive forces."¹⁵ Dodd was overreacting to the growth of fascist-styled groups in the country. Estimates of the number of such groups were made by a variety of sources: Congressman Dickstein usually cited 110; Donald Strong counted 121; Stanley High proposed 150-160; Albert Kahn mentioned 700; and Reverend L.M. Birkhead claimed 800.¹⁶ However, mere numbers of groups mislead. The overwhelming majority of American citizens were never involved with the fascist movements. Yet, these movements attracted more than their share of attention.

When Life magazine published a feature on fascism in America in 1939, it chose William Dudley Pelley and his Silver Shirt Legion as indicative of the threat. Included in the article was a photographic spread on a meeting of the Silvershirts in Chehalis, Washington. The implication was

Development of Fascism in the U.S. (New York: American League Against War and Fascism, 1935).

¹⁵In George Seldes, Witch-Hunt: The Techniques and Profits of Redbaiting (New York: Modern Age, 1940), pp. 291-292.

¹⁶Reverend L. M. Birkhead, "Fascism in America," Literary Digest, vol. 124 (August 14, 1937), p. 16; Stanley High, "Star Spangled Fascists," Saturday Evening Post, vol. 211 (May 27, 1939), p. 5; Albert Kahn, High Treason (New York: Hour, 1950), p. 190; Strong, p. 14.

that the Silvershirts prospered in rural America -- that extremism was a component of rural life. Local residents were quick to respond. Chappin D. Foster, editor of the weekly Chehalis Advocate, criticized the piece as misleading and "grossly unfair," and students from the local high school persuaded Life to publish several favorable photographs they had submitted.¹⁷ A significantly different response came from the radical novelist Robert Cantwell. Writing from New York City, where he was employed as a book reviewer for Time magazine, he praised Life's article but suggested that it neglected "some Northwestern history."¹⁸

Fascism cannot be explained only in terms of fanaticism; the histories of the places where it gains a lodging must also be taken into account. . . . Fear of radicalism, hatred and fear of social changes, distrust of the working class -- these show up most strongly in places . . . , which stand midway between conservative farming sections and relatively more radical urban communities.¹⁹

¹⁷Chappin Foster to Editors, Life, vol. 6 (May 1, 1939), p. 2; "Pictures to the Editor," (May 15, 1939), pp. 86-87.

¹⁸Cantwell, who had attended high school briefly in Chehalis before his family moved, described the lingering effects of the Centralia massacre, the 1919 confrontation between American Legionnaires and the International Workers of the World that resulted in four deaths and a mob lynching. The small southwestern Washington community of Chehalis had a population of nearly 5,000 and was the "twin" of its better known neighbor, Centralia.

¹⁹Robert Cantwell to editors, Life, vol. 6 (April 3, 1939), p. 8.

By emphasizing local factors, Cantwell challenged the assumptions that many Americans held about the origins and appeal of fascism. The view that political extremism was a product of imported ideologies and fanaticism ignored domestic economic and social factors and obscured the influences of charismatic leaders, local attitudes and unusual ideas.

By understanding local problems and responses -- how individuals reacted and why they reacted as they did -- it is possible to gain greater insight into the nature and substance of political extremism. A study of the Silvershirt Legion in Washington State offers such an opportunity.

The impoverishment of the middle-class, the economic stagnation, the paralysis of democratic government and the threat of Communism were also felt in the Evergreen state. The economic downturn in the months following the Wall Street crash deeply afflicted an already ailing Pacific Northwest economy.²⁰ Lumber production, dropped from 7.3 billion feet to 2.2 billion feet. According to trade journals, the industry operated nationally at only a fifth of its normal capacity. The number of production workers in 1933 fell to 59.1% of the 1929 total. Businesses

²⁰Earl Pomeroy, The Pacific Slope (New York: Knopf, 1965), pp. 293-296; and Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, Empire of the Columbia (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 501-02.

experienced a higher rate of failure than in other states. Between 1929 and 1933, the per capita income in Washington state declined 33%, as compared to the U.S. average of 28%.²¹ "There are . . . few in the world," lamented Grays Harbor timberman Alex Polson, "who have escaped Old Man Depression's oppressive methods."²²

Wheat prices dropped precipitously to thirty-seven cents per bushel, bringing hard times to Eastern Washington growers. Farmers, pressed to the wall before the stock market crash, were pulverized in its aftermath. In the fifteen years after 1920, the value of Washington farmland and buildings dropped from \$920 million to \$551 million. Over the same period, moreover, acreage under cultivation increased as operators sought to compensate for falling prices with added production. The average farm value in 1935 was less than half that of 1920.

In January 1933, there were 173,349 persons receiving public assistance in Washington state. By March, when Franklin D. Roosevelt had assumed the Presidency, the figure had risen to 286,498. By May, the total had reached 287,645 persons: a staggering 18.3% of the state's 1930 population. In spite of the reduction in unemployed brought about by projects funded by the New Deal's Civil Works Administration

²¹Pomeroy, p. 293. In 1947-49 dollars.

²²Robert E. Ficken and Charles P. LeWarne, Washington: A Centennial History (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), p. 111.

from November 1933 through March 1934, the Washington State Emergency Relief Administration provided aid to over 230,000 people in November 1933. By June 1935, this figure reached 246,045. Thereafter, the general assistance figures reported by the state declined sharply, not because the economic plight of many had ended, but because new programs -- federal and state old-age allocations, the Works Progress Administration and aid to dependent children -- removed some persons from the general assistance rolls.²³

The unemployment situation was compounded by the seasonality of work done by Washingtonians. The ability of year-round industries to absorb the seasonal labor force in Washington was already limited and seasonal unemployment in Washington was even much greater than in the industrialized East. The Depression made a bad situation only worse.²⁴

²³The figures given are to be found in State of Washington, Washington Emergency Relief Administration, Report . . . January 1933 to December 1934 (Olympia: State Printing Plant, 1935), pp. 8, 9, 12-14; and State of Washington, Department of Public Welfare, Report . . . January 1935 to December 1936 (Olympia: State Printing Plant, 1937[?]), p. 35. The administration of relief in Washington state during the Depression is examined in Bruce Blumell, "The Development of Public Assistance in the State of Washington during the Great Depression," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1973.

²⁴William S. Hopkins, Seasonal Unemployment in the State of Washington, University of Washington Publications in the Social Sciences, vol. 8, no. 5 (December 1936), pp. 111, 157. Hopkins gives 32.7% as the index of seasonality in the state.

Local government was hard-pressed to meet the costs of welfare and unemployment relief.²⁵ While nine counties, all of them in Eastern Washington, were in "excellent financial condition," and eight in "good financial condition," eighteen, including King, Snohomish, Whatcom, Yakima and Lewis Counties, had "some serious financial problems." Four counties, Grays Harbor, Pacific, Thurston, and Pierce, all in Western Washington, were in "very poor financial condition."²⁶ King County, the largest in the state with a 1930 population of 463,512 (of which 365,583 were in the city of Seattle) had expended \$1,569,615 in welfare and relief during 1931. The County had provided \$690,616 or 44% of this amount, while the remaining 56% came from private agencies. In 1932, the figures ascended markedly: the County spent \$4,162,274, of which private charitable sources provided only 18.5%. State and federal aid came to King and the other counties in 1933, but the total amount provided still rose.²⁷ For the fiscal year July 1, 1933 to June 30, 1934, King County had an unemployment relief converted case count of 28.1 per 1,000 population; only eight counties were higher. The highest were Pierce, Spokane, Grays Harbor,

²⁵Joseph P. Harris, County Finances in the State of Washington, University of Washington Publications in the Social Sciences, vol. 5, no. 4 (February 1935).

²⁶Ibid., p. 275.

²⁷Ibid., p. 352.

Snohomish and Skamania with case counts of 36.1 and upwards per 1,000.²⁸

In their impersonality, these percentages and figures can only hint at the distress and despair in the lives of thousands of Washington residents during the depths of the Depression. This was not unlike the rest of the country. The Hoovervilles of the land graphically attested to the breakdown of the economic system and the Depression's crushing effects. Seattle's own Hooverville of tar-paper, wood and tin shacks had sprung up along the waterfront where the Skinner and Eddy shipyard once stood in the industrial area south of downtown. (This was the largest of the several shantytowns built on the waterfront or near garbage dumps.) In Seattle's Hooverville, several hundred forgotten men, and some women, shunted aside by a situation beyond their control, huddled in the meager shelters. They were mostly white men between thirty and thirty-five, but there were also many blacks and some Filipinos.²⁹ Some managed to retain a belief in individualism. The typical Hooverville resident "had a distaste for organized charity -- breadlines and flophouses -- so he decided to build a shack of his own

²⁸Ibid., pp. 353, 360, 365.

²⁹Selden Menefee, "Seattle's Jobless Jungles," Unemployed Citizen (November 25, 1932), p. 3.

and be independent."³⁰ A few joined radical organizations, but most remained passive about their victimization.³¹

Some of Seattle's jobless came up with their own answer. In the summer of 1931, the Seattle Unemployed Citizens League was formed, based on self-help cooperatives and a modified barter economy. Socialists connected with the Seattle Labor School aided in this development. In the next two years, Seattle's innovative efforts attracted nationwide attention. Unemployed Citizens Leagues spread to other Washington cities and to cities elsewhere in the country. In May 1932, the Unemployed Citizens Leagues in Washington created an association, the United Producers of Washington, to unify their efforts.³² The League was seen as another example of Washington's radical leanings and, as one admirer put it: "the most striking social and

³⁰Ibid. See also the seven-installment series by Menefee called "Studies in Rugged Individualism," Unemployed Citizen (December 2, 1932), p. 1.

³¹Donald Francis Roy, "Hooverville: A Study of a Community of Homeless Men in Seattle," M.A. Thesis, University of Washington, 1935, p. 93.

³²Arthur Hillman, The Unemployed Citizens' League of Seattle University of Washington Publications in Social Sciences, vol. 5, no. 3 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1934), pp. 330-332. For brief references to the UCL effort, see: Frank Graham, Abolition of Unemployment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932); and Gilbert Seldes, The Years of the Locust, 1929-1932 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933).

economic experiment that has come out of these troubled times."³³

Washington State had long before acquired the reputation of being the hotbed of radicalism. Most of the reputation was based on the widespread membership in, and activity of, labor unions such as the International Workers of the World. During World War I, the I.W.W. staged a series of strikes in lumber mills around the state, halting an estimated 75 percent of the lumber output. In 1919, strikes throughout the state brought national attention to the far west. The 1919 Shipyard strike, in Seattle, closed down the entire city for six days, as sympathetic unions honored the striking shipyard workers. Negotiations, and a threatened intervention of the army, ended the strike.³⁴

The reaction to I.W.W. activity was violent. In 1916, a shingle-weavers' strike developed into I.W.W. free-speech agitation in Everett. Citizen vigilantes, including businessmen and professionals led by an aggressive sheriff, organized to keep the Wobblies out. Each minor clash fed the next and the fears of violence mounted. One evening several demonstrators were taken to the outskirts of town

³³Quoted in Finkins and LeWarne, p. 113.

³⁴See, Richard C. Berner, Seattle, 1900-1920: From Boomtown, Urban Turbulence, to Restoration (Seattle: Charles Press, 1991), pp. 285-308; Robert L. Friedheim, The Seattle General Strike, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); and Harvey O'Connor, Revolution in Seattle (Seattle: Left Bank Books, 1964).

and beaten. Undeterred, a force of 250 Wobblies tried to reenter town aboard the steamer Verona on November 5. Several hundred townspeople gathered at the dock, determined to "protect" the community. From a source, never established, came a single shot and then a rash of gunfire. Minutes later, two vigilantes and at least five Wobblies lay dead, and fifty people from both sides, including the sheriff, were wounded. No charges were filed against residents of the town, but seventy-five Wobblies were charged with murder. Tried in Seattle, the first defendant was acquitted, after which the others were released from prosecution. But the bitterness of sudden terror in a peaceful town lingered for years, and the "Everett Massacre" entered the lore of American labor history.³⁵

In 1919, another outbreak of violence followed the I.W.W. On November 11, parades and other festivities were held throughout the state to celebrate the first anniversary of the armistice. As in many towns, the American Legion, a new and energetic organization of veterans, eagerly led the celebration at Centralia, a logging and farming community of 7,500. Patriotic and proud, Centralia had a strong labor

³⁵Norman H. Clark, Mill Town: A Social History of Everett, Washington, from Its Earliest Beginnings on the Shores of Puget Sound to the Tragic and Infamous Event Known as the Everett Massacre (Seattle: University of Washington, 1970), pp. 210-225; and Norman Clark, "Everett, 1916, and After," in Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History, G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes, editors (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), pp. 228-240.

tradition and was a target of I.W.W. organizers. After being run out of town a few months earlier, Wobblies had returned to open headquarters in the Roderick Hotel. Rumors circulated that marchers would finish off the Armistice Day parade with an attack on the building and Wobblies armed in self-defense.

Townpeople cheered as Warren O. Grimm, a popular local war hero, led uniformed Legionnaires down Tower Avenue. They circled the block around the Roderick and then marched back, where Grimm ordered a halt. A shot was fired and gunfire erupted from several directions. Within minutes, Grimm and three other veterans were dead and a fifth later died of wounds. Ten Wobblies and Elmer Smith, a sympathetic lawyer, were promptly arrested and charged with murder. That evening, masked citizens broke into the jail, dragged Wobbly Wesley Everest from his cell and killed him, hanging his body from a bridge over the Skookumchuk River.³⁶

News of the "Centralia Massacre" spread across the nation. At their trial in Montesano, the Wobbly defendants claimed they only fired in self-defense. Although three were acquitted, the seven convicted received long prison

³⁶See: Tom Copeland, "Wesley Everest, IWW Martyr," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, vol. 77 (October 1986); Wilfred H. Crook, General Strike (North Carolina: Chapel Hill, 1931); Robert B. Gibson, "The Radical Experiment," unpublished manuscript, University of Washington, 1957; O'Connor, pp. 170-197; Robert L. Tyler, Rebels of the Woods: The IWW in the Pacific Northwest (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon, 1967).

terms. For many years, supporters waged a campaign to reduce the sentences, especially of those probably not involved in the actual killings. No one was ever charged with the murder of Everest nor was there a serious investigation of his death.

By the time of the Centralia Massacre, the I.W.W. in Washington was in serious decline. Eventually many of its goals were realized, but by other groups. The radical heritage of the I.W.W. did not completely disappear in the 1920s. The legacy of union activity and political revolution became infused in traditional Washington politics during the Great Depression.

A political revolution was the first major product of the economic crisis. Since the turn of the century, Washington had for all practical purposes been a Republican stronghold; at one point in the early 1920s, only two Democrats served in the state legislature. Nationally, Republicans had dominated presidential politics since the Civil War. But by 1932 things had changed. Washington's Governor Hartley was, according to most papers, out of touch and embarrassing to the Republican Party.³⁷ Hoover had once promised a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage; but the car, it was not observed, had since been repossessed, the garage had been foreclosed upon, and the pot stood empty.

³⁷Finken and LeWarne, p. 113.

In 1928, Washingtonians had favored Hoover by a ratio of two to one; even better than his national performance. Four years later, they rejected him just as decisively; his tally barely reaching 34 percent. New York Governor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, garnered 57 percent of the vote; double the Democratic returns of 1928.

While voter turnout improved nationwide, in Washington, the increase was an amazing 23 percent. This was due to more than just eagerness to throw the Republicans out of the White House. At home, Democrat Clarence D. Martin, a conservative mill owner from Cheney, won the governorship. Wesley Jones lost his bid for a fifth Senate term to Homer T. Bone, a Democrat whose political odyssey had included periods in the Socialist, Progressive, and Republican parties. Democrats won three-fourths of the seats in the state House of Representatives; increasing their numbers from eight to seventy overnight. Only the overlapping four-year terms of the state Senate prevented a similar landslide there.

Washington politics took a sensational turn. Seattle danceband leader, Vic Meyers, elected lieutenant governor in 1932, built a career by entertaining voters with larkish acts -- dressing as Mahatma Gandhi and leading around a herd of goats; promising a hostess in every streetcar; holding a coming-out-of-the-red party for his creditors and expressing hope that someone would tell him how to do whatever it was a

lieutenant governor did.³⁸ Editorial writers throughout the nation shuddered in print for the fate of the state. The liberal Oregon journalist Richard Neuberger penned a widely held assessment: "In addition to being the country's storehouse of timber, Chinook salmon, apples, and hydroelectric power, the Evergreen state is also the citadel of cockeyed and fantastic politics."³⁹

Following the tradition of radical politics, the Washington Commonwealth Federation, a union of assorted radical groups, became the next challenge to mainstream politics. The Federation's program was flexible and opportunistic, sometimes sounding like the New Deal, sometimes like the Communist Party, but it was the most radical movement to approach power since the Populists captured the governorship in 1896.⁴⁰

The power of the Federation was tested in the 1936 state Democratic convention in Aberdeen. The convention was overrun by Federation delegates. When the conservative opposition, which controlled the convention machinery, tried to use parliamentary tactics to neutralize the voting strength of the Federation, the assembled leaders simply

³⁸Murray Morgan, Skid Road: Seattle -- Her First Hundred Years (New York: Ballantine Books, 1951), p. 232.

³⁹Ficken and LeWarne, p. 114.

⁴⁰Albert A. Acena, "The Washington Commonwealth Federation: Reform Politics and Popular Front," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1975, pp. 30-46.

marched onto the platform, took over the agenda, voted themselves into power, and carried on. The chairman splintered four gavels before the convention ended; the delegates broke political precedent with even greater frequency. When the shouting died down and the Democrats read the minutes, they found that the Party was on record as favoring the nationalization of all banks, public ownership of all utilities and natural resources, and production for use; but it was not on record as favoring the re-election of President Roosevelt.⁴¹ The activities of the Federation and the I.W.W. led the Postmaster General, James Farley, in 1936, to propose: "A toast to the American Union -- 47 states and the Soviet of Washington."⁴²

⁴¹Fayette F. Krause, "Democratic Party Politics in the State of Washington During the New Deal, 1932-1940," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1971, pp. 47-51.

⁴²Mary McCarthy, "Circus Politics in Washington State," The Nation, vol. 143 (October 17, 1936), p. 442. According to McCarthy, "This rueful epigram is with some authority attributed to Postmaster Farley." However, in 1966, while preparing for his dissertation, Albert Acena wrote to Farley. Acena reports that Farley did not recollect having made the statement and noted that "many statements that I never made were attributed to me." Acena, p. 280. Nonetheless, the Farley quip has become accepted legend in histories of the Pacific Northwest or Washington State. See Ficken and LeWarne, p. 114; Murray Morgan, p. 248; Richard Neuberger, Our Promised Land (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 277; Earl Pomeroy, The Pacific Slope (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 245; Roger Sale, Seattle Past to Present (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), p. 148; and Carlos A. Schwantes, The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretative History (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 311.

But this perception was really not the case.

Washington was no more radical than the west in general. During the presidential elections of 1932 and 1936, the Communist, Socialist, and Socialist Labor candidates in Oregon and Idaho did as well as, or better than, they did in Washington. Other third parties in the Pacific Northwest deviated slightly from this pattern. The former Populist William H. ("Coin") Harvey, whose Liberty party was not on the ballot in Oregon, won nearly two-thirds of his total national vote in Washington (30,308) and Idaho (4,712) in 1932. In 1936, on the other hand, William H. Lemke, of the Union party, won more votes in Oregon (21,831) and proportionately more in Idaho (7,684) than he did in Washington (17,463).⁴³ In 1936, Washington was unique in only one way -- it was the only state in the Union where William Dudley Pelley was on the ballot. Pelley, the leader of the Silver Shirt Legion of America -- an organization with religious overtones that contemporaries often compared to the Nazi Brownshirts -- ran for the presidency as the candidate of the Christian party.

Washington's exceptionalism during the 1930s was probably due less to the radicalism of its parties, than to the "eccentricity and opportunism" of some of its politicians. The novelist, Mary McCarthy, made this point

⁴³Svend Petersen, A Statistical History of the American Presidential Elections (New York: Ungar, 1963), pp. 92-95, 127, 151, 161.

in 1936 when she described her home state's political atmosphere of "circus politics" as "wild, comic, theatrical, dishonest, disorganized hopeful; but . . . not revolutionary." However, "a smart promoter could now put the entire state under a tent, charge admission, and get it."⁴⁴

Into this milieu, came William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion of America. In a rather odious way, what Pelley offered was salvation. The Great Depression was not only an economic crisis, but, in the words of historian, Leo Ribuffo, it was also "a crisis of faith and morals."⁴⁵ The search for salvation was all consuming for some. Astrology, spiritualism, and esoteric religions, which were closely linked in American history with utopian idealism, millennialism, and even social radicalism, gained converts. William Dudley Pelley exploited these alternative ideas and included elements of each in his grandiose plans for a Christian Commonwealth.

The most important part of Pelley's thought was a strain of nondenominational millennialism. He often pointed to the evil of an Antichrist figure in the world who would soon be struck down on the fields of Armageddon by the Christian warriors led by the visible Christ. The imminent

⁴⁴McCarthy, p. 442.

⁴⁵Leo P. Ribuffo, The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), p. 244.

Second Coming, the fiery Last Judgment, and the peaceful thousand years of bliss were all promised throughout his writings. His naive political and economic ideology, the paranoid style exposing a so-called Jewish Sovietist conspiracy, and the search for eternal salvation were all components to the millennialist dream. On the surface, it was this doctrine that appeared to be what bound all the members. A closer look reveals otherwise.

For some, millennialism was the lure which attracted followers to Pelley. (Even after Pelley was gone, these members went to other millennialist groups). For others, it was only one of many components, which can be grouped under the rubric of "Christian" activism. It was the appearance of action, brought on by participation in the Legion, that was the mainstay of their faith. In either case, membership was based upon a perception that Pelley offered each individual some type of salvation -- either spiritual or political.

A solid understanding of the man, his philosophical leanings and his millennialist message is necessary before one can understand the appeal of Pelley to those in the trenches. Consequently, this study will, first, examine Pelley's political, economic and religious thought as it existed within a larger national intellectual context in America. Second, it will answer questions about how the Silvershirt Legion actualized Pelley's philosophical

messages. Finally it will look at how the Silvershirt Legion was implemented in a local community; how that community used the Legion to represent their local concerns thereby making the Legion different from Pelley's vision; and, what the Silvershirt Legion represented to the members. It is through a study of local organizations that one can begin to understand the pattern of participation by "ordinary folks" in American fascist organizations.

CHAPTER 2

**WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY:
THE MAN AND HIS DREAM**

On March 12, 1890, William Dudley Pelley was born in the small town of Lynn, Massachusetts. His parents, William G.A. Pelley and Grace Goodale Pelley were

devout, clean living orthodox people
strictly circumscribed by the Puritan
code of ethics and a literal
interpretation of the Jewish Holy
Scriptures.¹

He traced his father's side back to 16th century England, to Irish, Scotch and predominantly English origin. His mother's ancestors, of the Irish strain of Sullivan, supposedly came to America as early as 1639.²

William G.A. Pelley, an itinerant Methodist minister, raised his son with the "old-fashioned Odyssey of traveling

¹William Dudley Pelley, The Door to Revelation (Asheville, North Carolina: Pelley Publishers, 1939), p. 8. Pelley's autobiography is of limited use in trying to piece together the events of his youth. Pelley contradicted or altered many of the events described in the autobiography in other publications. Furthermore, many significant dates were excluded in the presentation. However, the autobiography gives us a view as to how Pelley described himself -- with or without historical accuracy. As a result, the events described in this paper are those which Pelley consistently described -- or events which can be verified by other sources.

²Ibid., pp. 8, 11.

from 'call' to 'call' "³ in the northern Massachusetts back hills. In 1894, in need of more income, father Pelley left a Lynn pulpit to operate a dry goods store and shoe store in East Templeton; two years later, he moved the family to West Gardner, where he sold advertising and wrote for the local newspaper and later opened a shop selling second-hand goods. In 1900, he moved the family again, this time to Springfield, where he was a furniture dealer, writer for the Springfield Union, and proprietor of Pelley's Parcel Delivery. In later years, young Pelley described himself as a "perpetually hungry, shabbily dressed and none-too-happy youngster."⁴

Pelley was first smitten by journalism while his father had been a reporter. At the age of twelve, he issued The Junior Star, with a circulation of one hundred copies. Later in his life, Pelley wrote that "the call of printing ink in my blood was inescapable."⁵ His father ended this adventure in reporting, however, when the son was threatened with a libel suit by a teacher who had been unfavorably mentioned in print. His father withdrew him from high school to become treasurer and general superintendent of the Pelley Tissue Corporation: his father's most promising

³William Dudley Pelley, "My Seven Minutes in Eternity," American Magazine, vol. 107 (March 1929), p. 139.

⁴Ibid., p. 140.

⁵Pelley, The Door, p. 29.

venture. It failed. In an attempt to support the family, young Pelley became a feature writer for the Springfield Independent (Massachusetts). At the time Pelley left high school as a sophomore, he was publishing The Black Crow, a pretentious monthly.

Pelley insisted that he lived a rather boring life as a child. The only change in routine for the youth came on Sunday. Even though his father had been forced to give up the ministry, he never once allowed his family to forget its religion. The entire day was taken up by the church, with a service at eleven, Sunday School at twelve, Junior League in the afternoon and more preaching at seven. It was most likely during these years that Pelley began to draw a distinction between his sincere personal religious convictions and a growing resentment for the rules and procedures of orthodoxy.⁶ Undoubtedly memories such as these influenced Pelley later in life to turn away from organized religion. Turning away, however, does not mean Pelley abandoned his faith -- only its ritualistic nature. In the end, Pelley maintained the components of his pietist upbringing.

Already a rebel by the time he reached adulthood, Pelley moved to Fulton, New York where he had become a "smoldering Bolshevik against every kind of authority --

⁶Ibid., pp. 31, 38, 313.

particularly against religious authority."⁷ For a while, he issued The Philosopher Magazine, an eccentric little journal devoted to a frontal assault on Christianity:

I had discovered myself possessed of a certain facility with iconoclastic language, no censor, and the scourge of my ignorance. Fresh from a wry, repressed childhood, cluttered up psychologically with the worst sort of New England inhibitions, revengeful that I had been denied social and academic advantages for which my hunger was instinctive, I proceeded to play lone hand and make things hot for several goodly people whose only indictment was that they represented authority. . . . My twaddle and blither were piling up to give me such heartburn in later years when I came to see that I merely took out on God what I should have taken out on an inhibited environment.⁸

He married Marion Harriet (Mary Ann) Stone in 1911. His first major personal tragedy occurred when his daughter, Harriet, born a year later, died of cerebral meningitis. From 1913 to 1917, Pelley owned and directed several small town newspapers in New England.⁹ In a later interview he termed himself a "restorer of old or sick newspapers."¹⁰ His program was to buy a small declining newspaper, build up its circulation, and sell it for a profit. At different

⁷Ibid.

⁸William Dudley Pelley, Seven Minutes in Eternity with the Aftermath (New York: n.pubr., n.d., [late 1933]), p. 46

⁹Albert N. Marquis (ed.), Who's Who in America, 1930-1931 (New York: A.N. Marquis Company, 1932), p. 1746.

¹⁰San Francisco Chronicle (December 28, 1922), p. 11.

times during this period, he was editor and publisher of the Chicopee Journal (Massachusetts), the Wilmington Times (Vermont), and the St. Johnsbury Caledonian (Vermont); he was also a feature writer for the Springfield Homestead (Massachusetts) and a crime reporter for the Boston Globe.¹¹

After his newspaper experiences, Pelley tried his hand at fiction. While accumulating the usual drawer full of rejection slips, he began selling enough to supplement his income. Under contract with the Crowell Publishing Company from 1917 to 1929, he was a prolific contributor of short stories and human interest articles to American Magazine. His pieces were also published by Collier's, Red Book, Cosmopolitan, McCall's and Good Housekeeping. In all, Pelley claimed that he authored 248 published short stories.¹²

¹¹Arthur Graham, "Crazy like a Fox: Pelley of the Silver Shirts," New Republic, vol. 178 (April 18, 1934), p. 264.

¹²Transcript of Record, United States of America v. William Dudley Pelley, et. al., No. Criminal 7391, In the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of Indiana, Indianapolis Division, May Term, 1942, p. 516. Pelley's stories centered around the New England town of Paris, Vermont. The everyday problems of average people served as his subjects. Usually the heroes of his stories were those people who were God-fearing, frugal, honest, and hard working. In essence, these were the same characteristics Pelley attached to his upbringing. For representative examples of Pelley's short stories, see: "Bud Jones -- Small Advertiser: The story of a Man who Had to Make a Hard Decision," American Magazine, vol. 85 (February, 1918); "Wanted -- A Younger and More Practical Man: The Story of a Simple Country Preacher who had Elements of Greatness," American Magazine, vol. 85 (March 1918); "Through Thick and Thin: The Story of a Man Who

In 1919, at age 27, Pelley was selected by the Methodist Centenary, with financing by the Rockefeller Foundation, to survey the Methodist missionary movement in Japan and Korea. Dr. Earl S. Taylor, a director of the Methodist Centenary Movement and a reader of American Magazine, suggested Pelley for this assignment. The selection was undoubtedly based on his writing ability and membership in the Methodist Church. When all passenger transport was commandeered for use in the Allied intervention in Russia, Pelley was marooned in Japan until hired as a publicity man by George S. Phelps of the International Y.M.C.A.'s Red Triangle. He later claimed that he had traveled 8,000 miles throughout Central Siberia, scouting out cities for a series of YMCA canteens. During this time, he also served as a courier from Ambassador Francis to Consul-General Harris and President Wilson and as a war correspondent for the Saturday Evening Post, covering the Allied intervention against the Bolsheviks in Siberia.

Pelley wrote about his experiences in Siberia and analyzed the situation there for Sunset Magazine and World Outlook in 1919 and 1920. Pelley's consistent references to "Christian white men," "White men's blood," "Japs," race and heredity showed a provincial New Englander's isolationist

Stood by his Friend," American Magazine, vol. 85 (May, 1918); "The One White Sheep in a Family of Black Ones," American Magazine vol. 85 (June 1918); and "Ask Any Father: A Story" American Magazine, vol. 104 (December 1927).

sentiments and assumptions about the superiority of a northern European heritage.¹³ He later reported that his time in Siberia gave him his active aversion to Communism. "I was there and saw communism installed before my gaze."¹⁴ Furthermore, while waiting for the boat to Siberia, he first encountered political anti-Semitism. An American who had served on the medical staff of the Tsarist army told Pelley that the Bolshevik revolution had been financed by Jewish bankers. Pelley claimed that this made no particular impression on him.¹⁵ However, later, he interpreted his experience as providing the necessary "enlightenment for the role I would . . . play in my own country."¹⁶

Returning to the United States, he found his newspaper, Caledonian (Saint Johnsbury, Vermont), in financial trouble. For several months, he struggled to keep it going, but failed. He left town -- and his wife -- after giving her some money. He felt their personalities were incompatible.

¹³See, "When Brown is Red," Sunset Magazine, vol. 42 (February 1919), p. 26; "Lo, the Poor Cynic!," World Outlook, vol. 5 (February 1919), pp. 25-26; "Hustling the Far East," Sunset Magazine, vol. 42 (March 1919), p. 13; "Dollar in Service on the Missionary Firing Line," World Outlook, vol. 5 (April 1919), pp. 9-11; "Siberia With the Lid Off," Sunset Magazine, vol. 43 (July 1919), p. 17; "Korea and Japan's Boot," Sunset Magazine, vol. 43 (October 1919), p. 22; "Siberia Back of Whiskers," Sunset Magazine, vol. 43 (November 1919), p. 17; "Behind the Dreadful March," Sunset Magazine, vol. 45 (July 1920), p. 32.

¹⁴Pelley, The Door, p. 123.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 123.

His first novel, The Greater Glory, was published shortly thereafter. It was a tale of filial infidelity and, like almost all of Pelley's fiction, was set in a small New England town and had a newspaperman as a major character.

Still restless, he began writing for the movies in 1924 after selling the screen rights to his third novel, Drag, to Warner Brothers-First National Pictures. The movie -- of religious motif, interestingly -- was reviewed by A.M. Sherwood, Jr., who praised it as "vastly entertaining," and worth following with "rapt attention from beginning to end."¹⁷ While in Hollywood, he wrote or supervised twenty-one films and made \$100,000 doing it. He wrote for, among others, Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, Colleen Moore and his friend, Lon Chaney.¹⁸ The Pelley Press in New York handled his publicity and Pelley issued The Plot, a pocket magazine of personal advertisement. The slogan of the Pelley Press was a cynical: "I Write 'Em, You Wreck 'Em."

And wreck 'em they did. Pelley remembered one of his religious parables bought by a studio and turned into a blood and thunder thriller which managed, by Hollywood's strange alchemy, to include the Russian crown jewels and the

¹⁷A.M. Sherwood, Jr, "The Movie: Drag," Outlook and Independent, vol. 24 (July 1929), p. 516.

¹⁸Some of the movie scripts Pelley wrote were: "The Light in the Dark" (Lon Chaney), "The Shock" (Lon Chaney), "The Fog" (Cullen Landis), "Her Fatal Million" (Viola Dana), "Jerry Out o' My Way" (Bert Lytell), "Ladies to Board" (Tom Mix), "Sawdust Trail" (Hoot Gibson), "Lady Bird" (Betty Compson), "Ladies Need Help" (Colleen Moore).

Tokyo earthquake. This sort of thing hardly helped endear the world to Pelley, or vice versa:

The world had become a trek, with occasional wells and watering-places, true enough, but with no important announcements awaiting me at stopping places. Few really cared whether I tarried or departed.¹⁹

So I fumbled and I fumed. I wrote heretically when I wrote at all. I threw myself at Hollywood and ate of the fleshpots.²⁰

He was making money from an actor's promotion company, real estate, a chain of hot dog stands and his magazine, High Hat. But the quality of his writing declined, and rejection slips began piling up. Pelley's standard reaction was rage, and rejecting a Pelley story was certain to bring a nasty letter by return mail.

Finally, emotionally and physically worn out, he rented a small bungalow on the California coast in the summer of 1927. He read much, as he had been doing throughout his life, but his main purpose was to unwind and regain emotional stability. For, as Pelley wrote, "I was a walking museum of how a man may reach middle life and yet be the worst mess internally that ever got into Who's Who in America . . ."²¹ After almost a year of eating regularly and beginning to enjoy life again, he began to feel that he

¹⁹Pelley, The Door, p. 217.

²⁰Ibid., p. 225.

²¹Pelley, Seven Minutes, p. 26.

was regaining emotional equilibrium. However, during the night of May 28-29, 1928, he underwent a mystical experience that altered his life.

According to Pelley's later account, he retired around 10:00 p.m. and read himself to sleep as usual. Between 3:00 and 4:00 a.m.,

I was awake, mind you, and whereas I had been on a bed in the shadowy dark of a California bungalow one moment . . . the next I was plunging down a mystic depth of cool, blue space, with a sinking sensation like that attends the taking of ether as an anesthetic. Queer noises were singing in my ears. Over and over in a curiously tumbled brain the thought was preeminent: So this is death!

Next I was whirling madly Someone reached out, caught me, stopped me. A calm, clear, friendly voice said close to my ear: 'Take it easy, old man. Don't be alarmed. We've got you and are here to help you!'²²

He found himself in a sort of marble-tiled portico, surrounded by alabaster walls and Corinthian columns, gazing at the smiling face of a friend who had been dead for over ten years. He met other people he knew, likewise saintly and friendly; likewise dead. A stunned William Dudley Pelley sat and listened to his friend expound the great fundamentals of the universe and human existence. For, as Pelley wrote:

I went someplace, penetrated to a distant place, and had an actual concrete experience. I found myself an

²²Ibid., pp. 10-11.

existing entity in a locality where persons I had always called 'dead' were not dead at all. They were very much alive.²³

After about two hours he was "caught in a swirl of bluish vapor"²⁴ that returned him to his body in the California bungalow, shaken and exhausted.

Pelley's experience, whatever it was, produced changes associated with many conversions. His physical characteristics altered: lines disappeared from his face, his skin took on a ruddiness, he stood straighter, he put on weight, and his voice lost its nervous edge. His insomnia disappeared and he was able to work twelve hours daily without strain. He gave up tobacco, coffee, tea, alcohol and meat. Old friends noticed the rejuvenation, he said, and, no longer high-strung, he found new friends. The result was that

people were going out of their way to perform services for me, to counsel me, to seek my society, to make me and my problems one with themselves -- yes,²⁵ even to offer me unsolicited loans.²⁵

Pelley could only conclude, like numerous converts to all kinds of faiths, "I had somehow been reborn . . ."²⁶

²³Pelley, "My Seven Minutes," p. 8.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 142.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 47-49.

He began immediately to try to understand what had happened, and read much in occult and esoteric fields. Before long, he had a stable and coherent body of ideas that was to form the basis of his religious philosophy. The experience of rebirth, Pelley wrote, brought the power of new senses to him. These new powers allowed Pelley to read Sanskrit without ever having studied it, to hear "clairaudient" messages from the other world, to describe unseen owners of watches and jewelry and, like Emanuel Swedenborg, to report events far from his physical presence.²⁷

Then, a second experience, which was "not quite so theatric and therefore hard to describe," plunged Pelley into a new existence. While pondering Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on the Oversoul, he experienced a "sort of cerebral vertigo, then a strange physical sensation at the very top of my head as if a beam of pure white light had poured down from above and bore a shaft straight into my skull."²⁸ He

²⁷Emanuel Swedenborg was a scientist, turned mystic, in the 1740's. During 1744-1745, he had a number of dreams and visions which left him with the power to converse with spirits. He believed that God had called him to bring a new revelation to the world and from 1745 until his death in 1772, he spent his time travelling and discussing this revelation with prominent theologians and philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and John Wesley. See, Singe Toksvig, Emanuel Swedenborg: Scientist and Mystic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).

²⁸Pelley, "My Seven Minutes," p. 142. Pelley described this event differently in his autobiography, The Door to Revelation, wherein he wrote that he had this same experience during a train ride to San Bernadino. Again

knew then, that he was not the same man he had been before, for he "had unlocked hidden powers within . . . and had augmented my five physical senses [with something] just as bona fide legitimate and natural as touch, smell, sight and hearing."²⁹ The unlocked power was a "mental radio" through which he could "tune in on the minds and voices of those in another dimension."³⁰

Fearing for his reputation, Pelley hesitated to publish these remarkable experiences. Supposedly, he yielded to a request for an article by the editors of American Magazine after having consulted with an oracle (who helped to compose the memoir in less than two hours).³¹ "My Seven Minutes in Eternity," appeared in the March 1929 issue of American Magazine. In his article, he struggled to prove the other-worldly nature of the experience, pointedly -- and inaccurately -- denying a personal history of "nerve

Pelley was reading Emerson's essay when the "entire club coach was filled with a Presence!" The presence informed Pelley that: "Jesus called Christ was not a Sabbath myth! he was not a theological postulation. He was not the Guess of ponderous savants. He was not an etching on the copper of the whimsical. He was not smug ethics on a salver, served with cracked ice and a bit of pious lemon. He was living, radiantly, overwhelmingly, REAL!" Pelley, The Door, p. 204.

²⁹Ibid., p. 141.

³⁰Graham, p. 265.

³¹William Dudley Pelley, Why I Believe, (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, 1933), pp. 93-94.

exhaustion."³² As Pelley remembered it, the response to his article was impressive. For, after all,

The circulation of this publication is around 2,225,000. Advertisers estimate that each copy of a given magazine is read by at least four persons. Which means that something like ten million people had access to that narrative, and because it was the first article in the magazine, most of them read it.³³ I know because of my mail in reaction.³³

He claimed that it took him and two secretaries several months to answer all the letters, mostly from people with similar experiences.³⁴

Pelley had been struggling toward some sort of psychological breakthrough for years. In "My Seven Minutes in Eternity," he admitted to having tried often "to correct my psychology and get back certain religious -- not theological -- cues that I . . . lost with the passing of boyhood."³⁵ Indeed, Pelley's experience was an illustration of what William James called a conversion by "self-surrender," in which temporary physical and emotional exhaustion was an essential element. Pelley's "escape" from Hollywood to the California bungalow followed the pattern which James outlined as "sick souls" who attempt to thwart anger, worry, fear, despair and other undesirable emotions

³²Pelley, "My Seven Minutes," p. 141.

³³Quoted in Graham, p. 36.

³⁴Pelley, Seven Minutes, p. 36.

³⁵Pelley, "My Seven Minutes," p. 141.

by surrendering themselves to their emotional pain. In essence, they "drop down, give up, and don't care any longer" and the "emotional brain centers strike work and lapse into a temporary apathy."³⁶ Once the convert has surrendered, "egotistic worry" subsides and faith that has been churning on the edges of consciousness takes possession of the mind. The result is a new sense of determination which is startling and sometimes permanent.³⁷ For, as James noted, "self surrender sees the change in terms of the old self; determination sees it in terms of the new."³⁸

Conversion applied a healing balm to Pelley's fears and painful memories and left him with a new determination. Since childhood, Pelley had felt himself to be a plurality of persons and, at different times, was unable to "tell which one was in command of me."³⁹ He felt like a whole crowd of people, the oracles now explained, because he (like everyone else) contained a "whole bunch of personalities."⁴⁰ Above all, Pelley was assured that no incident was futile. According to the oracles, his father had left home to keep "appointments in life" irrelevant to the family. Pelley and

³⁶William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (New York: Modern Library, 1958), pp. 176-177.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 251-252.

³⁸Ibid., p. 178.

³⁹Pelley, The Door, p. 302.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 295.

his wife, Mary Ann, had lost a child and a marriage in order to develop poise -- the "gift of peaceful consideration of the universe."⁴¹ From the higher perspective, life was only profitable. Pelley was thrilled with the news. His tribulations no longer seemed meaningless and his failures seemed to involve no personal responsibility.

These metaphysical experiences became the basis of his fourth novel, Golden Rubbish, published in 1930 by George R. Putnam's Sons. This novel, dictated to him by "the Voice,"⁴² combined a religious and political philosophy which eventually became the philosophical foundation of two organizations -- The League of the Liberators and the Silvershirt Legion of America. The novel presented contemporary characters as instruments of a new religion to be led by a "common man . . . who shall lead the nations into some sort of union."⁴³ Four years later, Pelley identified this common man as Adolf Hitler. The book went through one edition only and got poor reviews -- when it was reviewed at all -- testifying to Pelley's increasing alienation from the standard literary market. Even American Magazine excluded occultism from its pages when it changed editors.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 299-301.

⁴²Pelley, Seven Minutes, p. 44.

⁴³William Dudley Pelley, Golden Rubbish (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), p. 221.

By 1930, Pelley claimed that his clairaudient communications went "far beyond" the established mystical canon. More accurately, fellow psychic investigators introduced him to spiritualist notions which he shaped to fit his own personality. He began to attend spiritualist groups and met regularly with mediums who "confirmed" his visit to the cosmic portico. In a sense, he began to "thirst after things of the spirit."⁴⁴

Pelley correctly sensed that millions of Americans shared his own "thirst" for the spiritual and were willing to leave established denominations in their search for fulfillment. Large audiences listened to Sir Oliver Lodge, the British spiritualist who lectured in the United States during 1922-1923, and the theosophist, Annie Besant, who introduced a young Indian as the "World Teacher." Followers of Emile Coué tried to convince themselves that, "day by day, in every way," they were "getting better and better."⁴⁵

⁴⁴Pelley, Why I Believe, p. 63.

⁴⁵Paul Carter, The Twenties in America (New York: Crowell, 1968), p. 13; and George Mowry, The Twenties: Fords, Flappers and Fanatics (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 159. Emile Coué was a French pharmacist who took the country by storm. Coué argued that the body, mind, and spirit were a unity, and that all could be rehabilitated and perfected through the power of the mind. Although not a religion, Couéism compounded the doctrines of Christian Science, the Emmanuel Movement, and psychology. Supporters of Coué included Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, who after visiting Coué in France, returned to New York and founded a National Coué Committee, whose members included the cream of New York society. See also, Lyman P. Powell, "Coué: An Estimate and a Comparison," The American Review of Reviews (December, 1922), pp. 622-23; and Emile Coué, Self-Mastery

Kahlil Gibran assured readers in his bestseller, The Prophet, that God was "smiling in Flowers."⁴⁶ Unity, Cosmic Consciousness, the "I Am Movement," and disciples of George Gurdjieff⁴⁷ and Sister Aimee⁴⁸ all promised -- in varying proportions -- physical vigor, mental health, and eternal peace. Psychologists, reinvigorating an inquiry that reached back to William James, pursued scientific studies of

Through Conscious Auto-Suggestion (New York: Malkan Publishing Company, Inc., 1922).

⁴⁶Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet (New York: Knopf, 1923), p. 79.

⁴⁷George Gurdjieff was a Russian mystic who developed a system of teaching which involved self-observation and a system of dances which were supposed to use the body to its fullest powers by breaking up its usual rhythms and attitudes. Gurdjieff formed the Institute for Harmonious Development of Man with his pupil Ouspensky near Fountainbleau. Some of his pupils included Frank Lloyd Wright, Alfred Orage (editor of the New Age), and Lady Rothermere (wife of the newspaper baron). Gurdjieff, born near Tiflis in Georgia, Russia, claimed to have walked all the way from there to Tibet, where he studied in a monastery and learned the Oriental wisdom that informed his teaching.

⁴⁸Aimee Semple McPherson, Sister Aimee, started the Four Square Gospel movement. Aimee came from Kansas to California after having been a school teacher, a carnival sideshow barker, and a missionary. She arrived in Los Angeles, a divorcee with two children, unknown and without money. Within five years, she had organized her own religious movement supported by 30,000 members whose contributions built an enormous temple in Los Angeles. Her religion was light on theology but heavy on hope and "the helping hand." A mixture of showmanship, sensuality, and faith healing, her "religious productions" were calculated to appeal to transplanted mid-westerners and Southerners, alone and bewildered in the Los Angeles urban complex. See Shelton Bissell, "Vaudeville at Angelus Temple," The Outlook, vol. 149 (May 23, 1928), p. 126; and Morrow Mayo, "Aimee Rises from the Sea," The New Republic, vol. 61 (December 25, 1929), p. 136.

"paranormal" phenomena. Inevitably, mediums, mystics, and popularizers like Upton Sinclair, stretched scientific findings to fit their own metaphysics.⁴⁹

Between 1930 and 1933, Pelley built his own eclectic theology from various harmonial components. Spiritualism, Christian Science, theosophy, Rosicrucianism and astrology all provided Pelley with a foundation for his own brand of theology. However, the two major sources of Pelley's religious ideas were his personal revelations, which continued to arrive frequently and fairly regularly throughout his career, and his omnivorous reading in religion and esoterica. He also managed to absorb some "secular" science, mostly Darwinism, which he felt to be perfectly compatible with religion.

Pelley felt that behind everything in existence is Consciousness or Holy Spirit. Indeed, Consciousness is all that exists by itself. It is a limitless condition of which time and space are but two aspects.⁵⁰ Creation occurred

⁴⁹The history of "Paranormal" investigations is an interesting one, especially as these studies were used by the spiritualists. See, R. Laurence Moore, In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 175-79, 185-203; J.B. Rhine, New Frontiers of the Mind: The Story of the Duke Experiments (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), pp. 51-55. For a glimpse at how Upton Sinclair used the "paranormal" investigations, see, Upton Sinclair, Mental Radio (Pasadena, Calif.: Priv. pub., 1930).

⁵⁰William Dudley Pelley, Why the Holy Spirit Displays as Life (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, n.d. [1933?], pp. 13-14.

when Consciousness found itself unable to comprehend all of its own phases and aspects, there being nothing to act against and, therefore, nothing enabling it to observe itself under different circumstances. So it created the universe, the aim of which was the self-realization of Consciousness and the full development of all its capabilities. Matter is merely an expedient.

Consciousness lodged fragments of itself in material bodies to act and react with each other and with other matter. The experiences of each fragment increase self-awareness and progress toward eventual reunion with Consciousness. These fragments we know as souls; one of which exists wherever there is any self-awareness.⁵¹

There are an undetermined number of higher planes of existence above the merely physical. It was one of these planes that Pelley visited in 1928. Spirits could advance beyond the imprisonment of matter and inhabit very advanced planes.

The most advanced Spirit that man can contact is Christ, and God is the highest Spirit Christ can contact. Christ told Pelley:

When I say that I am Son of God, and refer to 'the Father,' invariably I refer to this Spirit, because with Him I am in touch and know no others beyond him. Of those beyond Him I have no knowledge, and probably never will have

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 11-13

knowledge, they ever receding as we approach them.⁵²

Christ is Man's chief mentor, teacher and guide, assisted by the Biblical 144,000 lesser Spirits. Divine fiat causes every great human occurrence, and these mentors periodically re-enter physical existence to form an elite caste of greats in every field, lifting humanity higher by prodding and the encouragement of emulation. Pelley was told he was one of these.⁵³

Every soul progresses by reincarnation. Each life has pattern and meaning, and adds new self-understanding. Ultimately, every life is beneficial, no matter how difficult or meaningless it may appear at the time.

Reincarnation occurs primarily because of karma; the sum total of all the moral debts from physical existence payable or receivable because of wrongs or favors done or received. Redressing these moral obligations is a chief consideration when a soul chooses the family into which it will be reborn.

According to Pelley's mixture of Darwinism, Genesis and the occult, the "Divine Mind" had created every soul 28 million years earlier. Some had descended to earth in order to develop independence. After some experimentation, they copied or appropriated the ape form as the highest mode of

⁵²William Dudley Pelley, How Divine Thought Shapes Events (Asheville, N.C.: n. pub., n.d. [1933?]), p. 12.

⁵³Pelley, Seven Minutes, p. 46.

biological expression. The missing link, therefore, was the injection of Spirit.

The first major event in human history was the Age of Abominations, the era when different forms of life were not mutually sterile. The result was rapid degeneration. Humans themselves came to possess beast-like qualities, and the planet would have been a total loss had not the spirit, later known as Christ, become alarmed and instituted the Mentorship. The first order of business was a radical and thorough purging of the entire world, testified to allegorically in the Biblical stories of Noah's Ark and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. To prevent future catastrophes, all species were rendered mutually sterile.

Pelley, convinced of the existence of lost civilizations, found the key to the birth, development and death of great societies in astrology. There is an enormous zodiacal cycle of 25,884 years, containing twelve zodiacal "months" of 2,157 years each, during which human affairs are dominated by the characteristics of the prevailing zodiacal sign. The last zodiacal month was the fire-sign, Aries, during which fire worship became universal, as exemplified by the leading religion, Zoroastrianism.

Pelley felt the earth to be in the closing days of the Piscean Age, characterized by the water motif. Many of Christ's miracles involved water, and great hydraulic and steam projects have wrought many changes. Also, these later

days of the Piscean Age have been marked by the world domination of the British sea empire. The Piscean Age is being replaced by the Aquarian Age, a zodiacal month characterized by an air sign. Aviation and modern communications are indicative of the change. By 2040 A.D., Pelley prophesied, humanity will have seen great cataclysms, and finally the emergence of a new and better world order.

Not only is the general outline of the future evident for those willing to look, but a detailed chronicle exists in the Great Pyramid at Giza. This idea has had much influence on esoteric schools of thought, and there have been many attempts at interpreting its alleged message. All the schools of thought hold that momentous historical events are indicated by significant architectural features within the passages and chambers, provided a given distance, the Pyramid inch -- and using a displacement factor of 2816 -- is taken as representing a year. Among the last occurrences recorded in this 6,000-year outline, Pelley found "the Birth of Christ, the discovery of America and the writing of Common Sense."⁵⁴ Pelley also found the end of World War I, the Great Depression, the founding of the Silvershirts, and the total collapse of the present order in the United States, climaxing on September 16, 1936.

⁵⁴Samuel Levenson, "Pelley's Kampf," Christian Century, vol. 57 (April 10, 1940) p. 478. Pelley had a particular fondness for Thomas Paine as the exposé of the "Purely Jewish God of Hate and Fear." Ibid.

Christ and the other mentors chose this epoch, Pelley said, for a concerted effort to purge Man of his beast-like qualities and to regain his original divinity. The attainment of this, so far, rare state is manifested by possession of occult talents and psychic abilities.

But Pelley was assured of a still greater destiny. In one of the earliest messages he received, he was informed that he had been chosen for an enormously important task:

You will find that during the next two years, through no agencies within your control, you will be at the head of a great spiritual movement, not only national but international as well. You will be guided along strange avenues and into strange offices. Be surprised at nothing! . . . you will perform a goodly service to the present human race and guide it out of its forthcoming quandaries under the Greater Leadership of Jesus the Christ.⁵⁵

Pelley considered himself a humble prophet authorized by God to lead America out of the wilderness by presenting the new order "not conceived by a few men after their own whims but as conceived by those who are planning the new world state from the Higher Dimensions of Time and Space."⁵⁶

Pelley pursued these new discoveries with characteristic zeal. Revelations came frequently, and, by the summer of 1929, he already had received thousands of pages of wisdom, including 400 pages of prophecy covering

⁵⁵Pelley, "My Seven Minutes," p. 45.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 49.

world events for the next twelve years.⁵⁷ In August, he received the message on the inauguration of the new world order. Throughout his career, this prophesy was presented as the source and justification for many important acts, always after the fact. After losing most of his money in the stock market collapse, he was able to scrape together enough money by May 1930, although it is not clear how, to start a new magazine, New Liberator. In this monthly, he cheerfully offered his own answers to others' problems; often sounding like a pitchman for a new sect:

This is a message for you of such self-improvement as you have ever encountered in your life . . .⁵⁸

Have you spiritual quandaries and questions? Over a period of time you will find them answered in a wealth of learning such as few books contain at the present time.⁵⁹

Have you physical or mental troubles? You will be shown to causes by which they originate, how or why you are living wrongly, and what you should do to bring about a method of meeting life

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 45.

⁵⁸William Dudley Pelley, "This Magazine," Liberation, vol. 1 (December 1930-March 1931), p. 183. Henceforth, for the sake of consistency, this magazine will be referred to as Liberation. Actually it was known variously as the New Liberator (1930-1931), New Liberator Weekly (1931-1932), Liberation (1932-1934), was not published again until 1937, New Liberation (1937-1938), Weekly Liberation (1938), Liberation (1938-1941).

⁵⁹Ibid.

that will sidestep further complications.⁶⁰

Are you poor in this world's goods, while others seemingly enjoy greater affluence? You will learn what true wealth is, where wealth comes from and why some people have it and others do not.⁶¹

The magazine, however, was not purely Pelley's religious pitches; unless otherwise noted, the contents were received "clairaudiently."

His articles featured a non-denominational stress of the spiritual over the material, an attractive consideration to readers suffering the shock-waves of the nation's most severe economic depression in history. Furthermore, Pelley urged his readers to take spiritualism seriously as a solution to their woes:

I maintain that He is not a nambypamby Sabbath-School symbol to be conveniently ignored for the remainder of the week, but a mighty leader of mighty men, a valiant commander for valiant followers, a strong elixir for strong mentalities -- a virile, vigorous, aggressive executive in this present campaign for Peace and Knowledge.⁶²

Within a year, New Liberator had about 2,500 subscribers.⁶³

⁶⁰William Dudley Pelley, "If You Know, You Avoid Catastrophe!," Liberation, vol. 2 (June 1931), p. 4.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 6.

⁶²Liberation, vol. 1 (May 1930), inside front cover.

⁶³Pelley, Seven Minutes, p. 54. Pelley's own estimate was four readers per copy.

Whether or not Pelley sought to create a cult, he threw himself into organizational work with his customary zeal. Once again, success eluded him; partly because he still could not focus his efforts, and partly because his followers were similarly afflicted. However, to give himself more time for writing and research, Pelley executed a trustee agreement with an associate for publication of New Liberator. In January 1931, Pelley discovered that the trustee had embezzled the funds, thus dooming further publication.

After salvaging what he could, Pelley decided to incorporate. In February, Pelley incorporated the Galahad Press in New York. Retaining thirty-four of its hundred shares of voting stock, Pelley divided the rest equally between two employees -- Mary Brenner and Olive Robbins.⁶⁴ Circulation of a new magazine, Liberation, began and, within a short time, over \$13,000 of preferred stock had been sold, out of a total capitalization of \$25,000. By the end of the year, for some unknown reason, Pelley shifted his headquarters to Washington, D.C. where he took up residence in the Hamilton Hotel.

The monthly magazine, Liberation, offered "instruction and inspiration from sources above and behind mortality,"

⁶⁴U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Hearings, 76th and 77th Congresses, 1938-1940 (1940), p. 4186. (Hereinafter, "Dies Committee.")

and "contents of this magazine . . . were received 'clairaudiently' via the Psychic Radio, from Great Souls, who have graduated out of this three-dimensional world into other areas of Time and Space."⁶⁵

In May 1931, Pelley took the first steps toward forming the movement prophetically promised him. Subscribers, he announced, could order a weekly series of revelatory monographs, the Pink Scripts, on various esoteric subjects. Those receiving them were to gather a group to hear each lecture read aloud. Typical lectures included: What is the Holy Spirit and How Does it Cure?, That Great Migration of Souls to this Planet, Which Souls Make Up the Dark Forces, Identify Your Soul in Eternity, and How to Understand the Workings of Karma. Thirty applied for the first monograph; within a year, he claimed 476 groups were meeting,⁶⁶ some, in rented halls. Pelley estimated that they were heard by 20,000 people,⁶⁷ whose donations would pay for the halls, literature and expenses of the instructors. Soon, these instructors were designated Chaplains and were loosely organized into the League of the Liberators.

In 1932, Pelley moved the Galahad Press to North Carolina. There Pelley had hoped to open a great occult university to train dedicated and educated crusaders. A

⁶⁵Liberation, vol. 2 (February, 1931), p. 1.

⁶⁶Pelley, The Door, p. 357.

⁶⁷Pelley's Weekly, vol. 1 (September 5, 1934), p. 5.

benefactor promised Pelley three hundred acres of land near Asheville, North Carolina, if Pelley could finance the buildings, and a Detroit supporter had promised an outright gift of \$50,000.⁶⁸ The financial side of the college was handled through a non-profit organization, the Foundation for Christian Economics, incorporated in North Carolina in February 1932. The Foundation began life with Pelley's thirty-four shares of Galahad Press stock and a \$6,000 fictitious chattel mortgage filed by two of Pelley's close associates.⁶⁹ Pelley got sixty shares and the two associates split the remaining forty.

Unfortunately, Pelley's Detroit supporter suddenly found himself unable to provide the promised funds. Pelley, seeing a conspiracy, blamed it on the Jews.⁷⁰ Then, suddenly, the North Carolina benefactor withdrew the offer of land because of Pelley's newly-expressed anti-Semitism.⁷¹ Pelley, undaunted, opened Galahad College on July 5, 1932, in a rented building in Asheville.

One hundred students attended the nine-week session, taking such courses as ethical history, public stewardship, spiritual eugenics, social metaphysics, Christian philosophy, educational theory, music, public expression and

⁶⁸Pelley, The Door, p. 372.

⁶⁹Dies Committee (1940), p. 4190.

⁷⁰Pelley, The Door, p. 385.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 386.

cosmic mathematics.⁷² Pelley gave 105 lectures and enjoyed himself greatly, although he was a bit disappointed in the students.⁷³ While the students were sincere, they were not the potential crusaders he believed he needed, nor were they the type of leaders who he hoped would strengthen the League of the Liberators.

After the college's first session, a mail-order course program was started. Students could sign up for all regular courses for a \$60 fee. The results were quite successful. For example, in a four-month period of 1932, more than 500 persons paid for a mail order course in "metaphysics."⁷⁴

However, even though the mail order courses were financially solvent, the rest of the college and the magazine had recurrent financial difficulties. Consequently, Pelley was urged by his business manager, George S. Anderson, to start writing again. Anderson believed that Pelley could

pull the institution up by its own
bootstraps if he [Pelley] could get out
and do some fiction writing again.
[Pelley] went to New York and secured a
new literary agent, and during the

⁷²Donald Strong, Organized Anti-Semitism in America (Washington D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), p. 45.

⁷³Pelley, The Door, p. 390.

⁷⁴U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Nazi and Other Propaganda, Hearings, 73rd Congress, 1934, p. 247. (Hereinafter, "McCormack Committee.")

latter part of November 1932, wrote --
some seventeen short stories.⁷⁵

The deepening Depression renewed Pelley's beat of "big drums." Not only had the oracles, in August 1929, anticipated imminent economic collapse, but, as Pelley recalled (conveniently, in 1936), they had predicted that he would lead a mass movement against anti-Christian conspirators and recast the social order. Specifically, the oracles told him to wait until

there exists a young Austrian. By trade he is a painter. He is coming to the head of the German people. His work is not yours for his is strictly political. Yours is economic but spiritual as well. He will become the great power in Central Europe. That power of his may extend over Russia, overthrowing the Legions of Darkness. The day that man ascends to the Chancellorship of the German people, take it as your timetable to launch your organization in America.⁷⁶

Though Pelley did not record the "message" at the time, he claimed, in 1936, that he had taken it seriously, especially after his favorite medium endorsed it.⁷⁷

Between 1930 and 1933, Liberation emphasized that something special was brewing in the universe. A "Great Time of Troubles" must correct humanity's softness and

⁷⁵MCCormack Committee, Executive Hearing, Asheville, May 2, 1934, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁶Pelley, The Door, pp. 378-79.

⁷⁷William Dudley Pelley, "The Block and the Wedge," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (January 15, 1936), p. 4.

greed. Many "demon" souls had been reincarnated and one, formerly resident in Genghis Khan, possibly dwelled now in Josef Stalin. In this bloodcurdling version of the politics of apocalypse, however, mortals placing themselves in tune with the infinite would encounter "no real suffering."⁷⁸ They could look on with poise, knowing that Master Souls would be "steering" trends from above, while Great Souls on earth would handle details. Pelley believed that Jesus, the greatest soul, would return during his lifetime. Indeed, Liberation reported sightings of the "materialized Christ" by "responsible persons" and printed recent "photographs" of Him in flowing robes.⁷⁹

While reassuring readers that Depression-era disorder contained both meaning and seeds of a happy ending, Pelley simultaneously moved toward a more "valiant" personal calling. He pronounced himself, by oracular brevet, an officer in the army of reincarnated great souls.⁸⁰ At the same time, he announced the formation of the Silvershirt Legion of America and brought the "work of Christ militant

⁷⁸William Dudley Pelley, "The Wild Hoards of Genghis Khan may Swoop Again Out of Riotous Asia," Liberation, vol. 2 (April 1931), p. 210-12.

⁷⁹William Dudley Pelley, "Strange Stories Comes of Christ Being Seen," Liberation, vol. 2 (April 1931), pp. 195-97; "Photographs of Jesus," Liberation, vol. 1 (January-October 1930), p. viii.

⁸⁰William Dudley Pelley, "The Brevet," New Liberation, vol. 2 (June 1931), p. 1.

into the open."⁸¹ As Pelley described the fateful event, half a dozen years later:

It so happened that I was working late one night in my office at the east end of the main college building when Marion Henderson, my secretary, came in with the Asheville evening paper. I saw eight-column headlines. Curiously I picked it up. The date was January 30, 1933. And screaming from the page were the significant words --

ADOLPH HITLER BECOMES GERMAN
CHANCELLOR

I looked at the lines. I read them again. I sought to comprehend them. Something clicked in my brain! . . . I laid the paper down. The prophecy heard that night in the 53rd Street flat before going up to Mrs. Leslie's was working! 'Tomorrow,' I announced, 'we have the Silver shirts!' Anderson [his business manager] scowled. Marion was puzzled. One of them demanded, 'What do you mean, Silver shirts?' 'Let me alone tonight!' I begged. 'Tomorrow you'll know everything.'⁸²

And they did. To set off in this new direction, Pelley issued a call-to-arms to his supporters to join him in this new endeavor.

⁸¹Pelley, Why I Believe, pp. 54-56.

⁸²Pelley, The Door, p. 392. Pelley wanted to connect his experiences with Hitler to prove the revelations true. He argues that his revelations and rebirth was similar to an experience of Hitler's. Changing history to meet this need, Pelley wrote, "It has been said of Hitler that he came from his tent one morning during the Gallipoli campaign and announced to his companions that he had dreamed a dream -- that's the way they took it -- during the night, that it was his destiny to save the German people. . . . I daresay that Adolf would understand exactly what happened that night in my bungalow. . . . The Door, p. 200.

In the first weekly issue of Liberation, Pelley outlined the new aspects of his movement:

I knew as far back as the early days of 1929 that the ultimate aim of the Liberation Gesture was not religious. Spiritual, perhaps. But not religious.

I have known privately -- that despite all that has transpired in the last thirty months, the true Liberation movement has not even been born . . .

Now I proceed to a program of Action . . .

I shall use this journal -- to talk to you about great issues of Cosmic and Civic Elucidations, and to make their application to practical problems something more than a thesis.

The real work of Liberation must now be commenced.⁸³

The real work for Liberation would come from the ranks of the Silvershirt Legion of America.

⁸³Liberation, vol. 4 (February 15, 1933), p. 8.

CHAPTER 3

**THE POLITICAL PELLEY:
THE APPLICATION OF ESOTERICA**

From 1933 until World War II, Pelley devoted most of his energy to the Silvershirt Legion of America. The creation of the Legion, Pelley believed, advanced the work of ultimate "Liberation" to the level of "sociological application."¹ As leader of the Silvershirts, Pelley felt a "Great Thrill" and urged others to come forward and be valiant.² He pronounced Jesus a Silvershirt ahead of his time. Jesus clairaudiently accepted the commission and echoed the call to "Stand Forth as Knights."³ Thus sanctified, Pelley at last considered himself, "part of the very essence and fiber of my country's current history."⁴ Buoyed by a pyramidologist's inference that a "new

¹U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Nazi and Other Propaganda, Hearings, 73rd Congress, 1934, p. 7330. (Hereinafter, "McCormack Committee.")

²William Dudley Pelley, "We Must Recast Ourselves in a More Heroic Mold!," Liberation, vol. 4 (March 18, 1933), pp. 2-3.

³William Dudley Pelley, "Chamberlains of Valor," Liberation, vol. 4 (February 18, 1933), pp. 1-2.

⁴Ibid.

theocratic state" had been conceived on January 31, 1933, Pelley deduced that his Silvershirt Legion was the embryo.⁵ Consequently, he gave fresh emphasis to pyramid prophecy and looked forward to the predicted day of triumph -- September 16, 1936.

Detecting affinities between Silvershirts in America and Brownshirts in Germany, commentators quickly put Pelley on their lists of aspiring führers.⁶ Pelley himself fueled this speculation. After 1933, he openly praised Hitler's anti-Semitism and foreign policy, cooperated with the German-American Bund, and fashioned a remarkable anti-Semitic program. All social issues, he told Silvershirts, were reduced to "one problem" -- whether "Christian tenets could survive assault from the atheists of Judah."⁷

Pelley first manifested anti-Semitism in print in 1931 or early 1932 in the Confidential Bulletins, a series of weekly reports on national economics. Even before this, his esoteric writings with political implications had been

⁵Greater detail on the Legion's organization and activities will be discussed in Chapter 4.

⁶See, John J. Smertenko, "Hitlerism Comes to America," Harper's Magazine, vol. 167 (November 1933), p. 663; Arthur Graham, "Crazy Like a Fox: Pelley of the Silver Shirts," New Republic, vol. 178 (April 18, 1934), pp. 264-65; Samuel Levenson, "Pelley's Kampf," Christian Century, vol. 57 (April 10, 1940), p. 4; and Harold Lavine, "Fifth Column 'Literature'," Saturday Review of Literature, vol. 22 (September 14, 1940), p. 2.

⁷William Dudley Pelley, The Door to Revelation (Asheville, North Carolina: Pelley Publishers, 1939), pp. 197-98.

dotted with rather vague references to the revolutionary menace, the coming combat with the anti-Christ, and the grim fate awaiting any patriot daring to expose the conspiracy. Pelley's autobiography records many instances before the Silvershirt period when he encountered anti-Semitism, but they did not, according to him, seem to have had any impact until Pelley became an occultist. Anti-Semitism did not become a major Pelley theme until the Silvershirts were formed. Thereafter, articles and pamphlets without Pelley's religious ideas or his proposals for social reform were frequent, but, it was a rare one which did not include some attacks on "the Hebes."

The inner dynamics of Pelley's explicitly racial anti-Semitism are harder to trace than the ideological sources. As early as 1928, he began writing a book to account historically for "racial urges." By that fateful night of May 28, he had gotten as far as chapter three, but was stopped completely on trying to define what races were. He remembered asking himself before retiring, "What Are Races?" He returned from "eternity" believing that they represented gradations of spiritual development. The Master Minds placed least capable souls in black bodies. From this point, there was an, "upward cycle after cycle by brown, yellow, red and white men."⁸ Thus, Pelley summarized, in

⁸William Dudley Pelley, "Silver Shirts Mean to Fight Universal Vulgarization," Liberation, vol. 4 (July 8, 1933), pp. 4-5.

The Door to Revelation, whites had "attained something cosmically which Semitic Asiatics have not attained."⁹

In his anti-Semitic tracts, Pelley wove together stereotypes common since the turn of the century; lore from The Protocols and the Learned Elders of Zion and The International Jew, spiritualism, and his deepest personal hopes and fears. His primer, Forty-five Questions Most Frequently Asked About Jews, assumed that readers already distrusted "greedy" Jewish businessmen. Additional "definitive" Jewish traits included lewd dress, vulgarity, and arrogance.¹⁰ Pelley insisted that Jews were "Oriental." The East European Ashkenazi displayed a "'schnozzle' nose" and manners offensive to "Christian refinement."¹¹ Sephardic Jews were harder to spot and sephardic women were strikingly beautiful, but their "Jewish temperament" inevitably surfaced.¹²

Pelley's rejection of orthodox Protestantism facilitated a particularly comprehensive anti-Semitism. Following Madison Grant and William J. Cameron, the compiler of The International Jew, he denied that Jesus was Jewish. Rather, the Galilean had descended from emigrant Gauls.

⁹Pelley, The Door, p. 322.

¹⁰William Dudley Pelley, Forty-five Questions Most Frequently Asked About the Jews and the Answers (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, 1939), pp. 8, 15-16, 35.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 36-37.

¹²Ibid., p. 38.

Furthermore, because the Bible was not "literally" God's word, no one should confuse the Almighty with Moses's "tribal" deity. In Pelley's paraphrase of Exodus, Jews debased "pure blooded" Egyptian masters, favored an "ancient version" of the National Recovery Administration, and established the "essence" of Communism in Canaan.¹³ Jesus was the "outstanding 'Jew-baiter' of his day,"¹⁴ but Jews had corrupted the New Testament to suggest otherwise. His chief target, the Sanhedrin, still led the Jewish campaign for world conquest.

The campaign would be waged through the manipulation of the economies of every civilized country, always with the aim of increasing Jewish power. Jews were especially strong in finance, where Jewish "international bankers," such as Kuhn, Loeb and Company and the Rothschilds, maintain and increase a stranglehold on the world's money. Depressions are Jewish-prolonged panics, kept going artificially, so that the Jews, as the chief creditors, would acquire more power.

The Jews used their vast resources to enslave whole nations. No politician or newspaper, especially in the finance-tyrannies, called republics and democracies, could hope to survive without Jewish backing. Jewish-controlled

¹³William Dudley Pelley, No More Hunger (Asheville, N.C.: Foundation for Christian Economics, 1939), pp. 137-42.

¹⁴Pelley, Forty-five Questions, pp. 36-41.

newspapers extolled Jewish-controlled candidates and policies, and the ignorant public trooped to the polls to vote for conspirators and crooks in elections where all the important issues and people were Jewish tools. Pelley felt that the conspiracy reached into every facet of life. Among its fruits were the assassination of Lincoln, Esperanto and the Wassermann test.¹⁵

While anti-Semites disagreed as to how old the conspiracy was, Pelley traced it back several thousand years. Indeed, "Communism is as old as Judaism,"¹⁶ and the conspiracy was already strong enough at the beginning of the Christian era to censor the Bible so as to remove or mitigate Christ's blanket condemnation of everything Jewish.¹⁷

The progress of the conspiracy had been especially rapid of late. Its considerable power was augmented when the Jews swarmed out of the ghettos. Probably their greatest triumph, before this century, was the acceptance of the Jewish profit system by the Gentiles.

Besides subverting existing social systems, the conspiracy invented one of its own: Communism. Pelley staunchly maintained that Communism was Jewish from

¹⁵The Wassermann Test, named after August von Wassermann, was developed in 1906 for the diagnosis of syphilis.

¹⁶Pelley, No More Hunger, p. 198.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 53.

beginning to end. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky were said to be actively Jewish, and long lists purporting to show the Jewishness of the Soviet bureaucracy and other Communist parties and endeavors were circulated by the handful. The U.S.S.R. was the base from which the Jews began their final assault on Christian civilization.

Pelley felt that Jewry in the United States had advanced almost as far as that in the U.S.S.R.; mostly since 1929. Even before that, however, the United States had suffered from the Jews. The Federal Reserve System was a scheme to wrest control of money from the hands of Congress; the Civil War was planned by international bankers in London; and America was tricked into World War I by Woodrow Wilson's Jewish advisors. And, of course, the top Jewish conspirators in the United States, Bernard Baruch and Felix Frankfurter, were long-time subversives. Since 1929, the Jewish-made Depression had greatly enriched the conspiracy all over the world at the expense of the Gentiles. Most of the world was owned outright by the Jewish creditors or their stooges, but the populace was ignorant of this truth.

The New Deal was the conspiracy's instrument for Communizing the United States. The Dutch Jew, Franklin D. Roosevelt, presided over an army of strategically placed Jews, and the leading New Dealers were all condemned by Pelley as Jewish. One of his most widely circulated pamphlets was nothing but a list of allegedly Jewish

government employees.¹⁸ While appearing to make needed reforms in American society, the administration's real purpose was to destroy the United States and make it utterly helpless before Jewish-Communist depredations. Its fiscal policies were to bankrupt the country; its social welfare measures were a good excuse to loot the treasury and destroy what was left of American self-reliance; its economic policies were strangling business through regimentation and confiscation; and its sickeningly swollen bureaucracy provided employment havens for every subversive who wanted a job. This dedicated cabal, backed by a great electoral mandate, was swiftly and effectively transforming America into a Soviet state.

But Pelley felt America's troubles to go deeper than the Jewish problem. The United States, "grand old nominal and theoretical republic,"¹⁹ got off to a bad start as soon as it became independent.

The Colonials wanted to get rid of George III, exactly as the Russians wanted to get rid of Nicholas II. But when both kings had been discarded, they set up a government which in nowise corrected those fundamental economic evils that in the present hour of civilization are the basis of

¹⁸William Dudley Pelley, What Every Congressman Should Know (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, 1939), p. 63.

¹⁹William Dudley Pelley, "Know America After Collapse," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 2 (April 1, 1935), p. 1.

tyranny."²⁰ The American system was "no more political freedom, than Russian Communism is the rule of the proletariat."²¹

The one thing that delayed this inevitable crisis was apparently identified for Pelley by Frederick Jackson Turner. Borrowing Turner's notion of the economic impact of the closing of the frontier on American society, Pelley argued that the Depression afflicted the United States largely because the frontier had closed and, additionally, machinery was producing more goods than underpaid workers could afford. The resulting structural problems were then exacerbated by Jewish financiers.

According to the scenario Pelley sketched in 1935, Jews would replace Roosevelt ("another Kerensky") with somebody worse, thus enjoying ten days of triumph until Gentiles rallied behind "a Hitler." During the crisis, Silvershirts would function as "Lords Protector" of constitutional liberty. Their Chief, presumably the "Hitler" at hand, would quickly destroy Communism by jailing fourteen (unspecified) Jews who financed it. Unhindered by subversives, the nation would pass constitutional amendments creating the Silver Legion's "piece de resistance" -- the Christian Commonwealth.

²⁰Pelley, No More Hunger, p. 55.

²¹Ibid., pp. 92-95.

The Christian Commonwealth -- in many ways an amalgam of Pelley's ideas on the occult, metaphysics, anti-Semitism and some stock intellectual notions of the 1930's -- was patterned after many of the ideas expressed by Edward Bellamy in Looking Backward.²² As he wrote in No More Hunger, this "theocratic State," as the Commonwealth was also called, would establish a corporate State, with centralized government control of production and distribution. All instruments of production would be the property of the Commonwealth, and everyone would be employed and paid by the Commonwealth in a sort of super-civil service wherein all were members of one of the six corporate occupational categories.²³

The lowliest citizen would have \$1,000 (which Pelley then felt to be enough to live on) in Commonwealth dividends deposited for him at the beginning of each year in a Commonwealth bank, as his share of Commonwealth common stock. Realty stock would be issued for the purchase of a home, and merit stock would be earned by special talents and accomplishments. Except in extremely rare cases, \$100,000 would be the maximum annual income. Pelley predicted that

²²Pelley admired Bellamy to the point that he pronounced Bellamy to be an "adept psychic." Bellamy, however, was curious about parapsychological phenomena, but was not a committed spiritualist, let alone an "adept psychic." William Dudley Pelley, "Remember Edward Bellamy's Parable of the Water Tank," Liberation, vol. 4 (March 25, 1933), p. 5.

²³Pelley, No More Hunger, pp. 90-101.

money would disappear, and be replaced by non-transferable Commonwealth bank checks. Robbery, kidnapping and all other crimes for gain would disappear with the disappearance of money. Hoarding would be ended by cancelling any unspent amount remaining in an account at the end of the year. Inheritance would be prohibited.²⁴

Major legislation could be enacted only after 51% of the population had approved it in a plebiscite. The secret ballot would be abolished, and every citizen's vote would be published in the newspapers. This, said Pelley, would end vote fraud.²⁵

Pelley argued that the Commonwealth would solve the evils of usury by the "Money-Bund," eliminate all charity problems, promote technological advances, and end "the growing crime wave, for racketeers and extortionists could not operate, there being nothing but Federal Credits in the Great Government Bank for use as tributes or ransom moneys."²⁶ The Commonwealth would exist because

there is nothing to stop putting this
plan into operation but the frenzied
antagonism of the great predatory money

²⁴Ibid., pp. 201-02.

²⁵Ibid., p. 120.

²⁶See the Nine Point Plan of the Silvershirts, "Political Parties: Right Wing," Miller Collection, Seattle Public Library, Seattle, Washington. (Hereinafter, Miller Collection.)

interests who would thus be shorn of their power to exploit the masses.²⁷

The Christian Commonwealth would deal harshly with the conspirators. Pelley originally advocated a quota system for Jews in business and the professions, but later preferred rigid segregation. Each state would be provided with a Beth Haven -- the only place in that state where Jews could own property or receive protection of the law. This would effectively emasculate Jewish power. Pelley promised that the leading plotters in the administration would be tried by Silvershirt juries and imprisoned for life. Anyone advocating their release, for any reason whatsoever, would likewise receive life imprisonment.²⁸

Citizenship requirements would be based on race. Consequently, members of minority groups, as well as those racially eligible for citizenship who were unable or unwilling to participate in the Commonwealth, would be wards of the State.²⁹

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸When Pelley was questioned by the Dies Committee on February 3, 1940, he testified that had the Silvershirts achieved power, he would have put into effect Hitler's policies toward the Jews. Realize, of course, this discussion takes place before the building and use of extermination camps. Therefore, it cannot be guaranteed that Pelley supported an extermination of the Jewish population. Even so, one can assume that he would be in favor of the slaughter because of the comments made throughout his career. For an example, see Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (July 22, 1936).

²⁹Ibid., p. 400.

Pelley was contradictory in some aspects of his program. On the one hand:

Whoever says I am scheming to alter the American form of government -- to Fascism, Naziism, or any other 'ism' is a Strategizing Prevaricator working secretly for Communism or Communistic Jews.³⁰

But, on the other hand:

It is not a question as to whether or not the United States wants to go in for Fascism, the question will be, if she doesn't go in for Fascism, she must openly espouse and shed her blood for Bolshevism. . . . It is something to prepare for, the certainty of Fascism in the United States, if for no other reason than world inertia! We are moving toward Fascism in Seven League Boots!³¹

He also felt that there was a Dictatorship-Monarchy-Republic-Democracy-Dictatorship cycle in human affairs, and that the United States was well into its democratic stage.³² The United States would be cleansed by a protectorate of all the outstanding Christian leaders in the country, each one dominant in his own locality, who would institute the Commonwealth. This "great hierarchy of Christ Men"³³ would likewise keep the country inviolate from the Jews.

³⁰Liberation, vol. 8 (November 7, 1937), p. 7.

³¹Liberation, vol. 8 (January 1937), p. 4.

³²William Dudley Pelley, After Dictators, What? (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, 1939), p. 50.

³³Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (April 1, 1936), p. 3.

Pelley's based his timetable largely upon the Pyramid prophecies of David Davidson, a leading English pyramidologist. Pelley predicted that on June 9, 1936, there would be a second bank holiday, which would attempt to save America's rotting financial structure from collapse, but it would not work.³⁴ A period of chaos would follow, during which the government would try to institute an open Soviet dictatorship, and America's Gentile population, increasingly aware of the true situation, would engage in armed resistance to this unconstitutional usurpation.³⁵

Much of the violence would be directed against Jews.

Either the Jews must win out, and install in the United States the same sort of a Gentile-liquidation bund that they so tragically installed in Russia, or the Christians of the United States must put the issue of Jewry above all other issues and treat with it drastically. This means a pogrom . . . of colossal proportions!³⁶

Silvershirts would rapidly come to the fore of the resistance, to enlighten and direct, and to restore order. By September 16, 1936, the conspirators would be decisively routed. By November 27, 1939, the powers of evil would be

³⁴The entire chronology is in: William Dudley Pelley, The Pillar of Cloud (Asheville, N.C.: Christian Party Press, 1935), pp. 11-15. See also: The Plains of Jerico (Asheville, N.C.: Christian Party Press, 1936).

³⁵The period of chaos is dealt with in some detail in: William Dudley Pelley, Manna in the Wilderness (Asheville, N.C.: Christian Party, 1936).

³⁶Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (July 22, 1936), p. 1.

thoroughly harnessed. Pelley would retire from office on March 4, 1945 and die in 1962. From August 1953 to 2001, those nations which chose not to follow America's example would disappear, as the Christian Commonwealth showed its complete superiority over other systems. The earth would then see a world State providing justice, prosperity and happiness to every honest person. On September 17, 2001, Christ would return and begin His rule from the capital at New Jerusalem, ushering in the Millennium.

While Pelley was working out his timetable for Silvershirt action, he neglected to pay the bills for his publishing ventures. As a result, on March 20, 1934, a Washington, D.C. printing firm filed suit against Galahad Press on an unpaid bill of \$111. The Galahad Press apparently ignored the summons because no one representing Galahad Press appeared in court. The plaintiff received a Judgment on March 30. The court sent a deputy Sheriff to its headquarters to collect the bill and court costs. He left, after being told that the Galahad Press no longer existed. On April 14, the court appointed a receiver for Galahad Press who shortly reported that he could get nothing from it. Consequently, the court impounded everything in the headquarters that belonged to Pelley.³⁷ After a request

³⁷U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Hearings, 76th and 77th Congresses, 1938-1940 (1940), p. 4195. (Hereinafter, "Dies Committee.")

by creditors to have Galahad Press declared bankrupt, the court declared bankruptcy on May 2, 1934.

During the bankruptcy proceedings, the court closely examined Pelley's writings. Someone noticed advertisements in The New Liberation for stock in Galahad Press, and the claim that it was solvent. Court examiners discovered that one issue, printed in North Carolina, contained the advertisement. Since Galahad Press had never registered with the North Carolina authorities, this constituted a violation of the state's Blue-Sky law and put the claims to solvency under North Carolina jurisdiction.

A bitter legal vendetta, lasting almost twenty years, began on May 23, 1935 when North Carolina indicted Pelley, Bob Summerville (editor of The New Liberation) and Donald Kellogg (Galahad Press secretary), for sixteen counts of stock fraud. Summerville and Kellogg were arrested, then released on \$2,500 bond each. Two days later, a judge ordered the police to seize all records and correspondence of the Silvershirt Legion, the Foundation for Christian Economics and Galahad Press for use in the proceedings.

The state arrested Pelley on June 15, when he returned to Asheville from a trip to California, and was later released, like the others, on a \$2,500 bond. Meanwhile, the bankruptcy court sold Galahad Press' assets. The sale realized \$1,200 to pay Galahad's \$22,000 in bills and the \$13,000 due the preferred stockholders. However, the

Foundation for Christian Economics and the Silvershirt Legion had maintained successfully in federal court that they were separate corporate entities and should not be included in the bankruptcy proceedings. Pelley was quite indignant about the sale of Galahad's assets.

The trial began on January 7, 1935. Thirteen of the sixteen counts in the indictment were dropped, leaving charges that the defendants had published a stock advertisement without having registered the stock with the North Carolina authorities, that they had advertised stock for sale in an insolvent Corporation, and that they had sold stock in North Carolina without registering.

The prosecutor, Zeb Nettles, was determined to remove Pelley and his associates from North Carolina, and the thirteen days of trial must have been most unpleasant for the defendants. The prosecution had the services of none other than George Anderson (Pelley's former business manager), who helped interpret Pelley's financial records. Pelley was especially anxious about the jury, which he doubted was capable of understanding the finer points of either corporate or metaphysical endeavor.³⁸

The court acquitted Kellogg on all three counts and Pelley and Summerville were exonerated on the most serious charge -- selling unregistered stock in North Carolina. But they were convicted of advertising stock without

³⁸Pelley, The Door, p. 460.

registering, and of advertising stock in an insolvent corporation, despite their defense that only one issue of The New Liberation containing the advertisement had been printed in North Carolina, and that, at the time, there was only one subscriber in the state, and she did not buy any stock.

Both Pelley and Summerville received sentences of one to two years at hard labor, suspended for five years, provided they not violate the law again, and provided that they remain on good behavior. In addition, the court fined Pelley \$1,000 and assessed \$719.50 in court costs. He found consolation in the thought that the fines were used for school construction. Since he had only \$200, he issued an appeal to his mailing list and received much more than the needed amount. Pelley was greatly relieved, since each charge carried a maximum sentence of five years.

Pelley later wrote that through a clairaudient communication, he learned that Christ's reaction to his predicament was, "Think ye that I allow my servants to fall in pits?"³⁹ With the courtroom battles out of the way, and with Christ's reassurances, Pelley could refocus his attention to fulfilling the Silvershirt vision.

The Pyramid date of September 16, 1936 was the key to Pelley's program. To facilitate what he believed to be the inevitable, he announced the formation of the Christian

³⁹Ibid., p. 470.

Party on August 16, 1935, declaring himself a Presidential candidate. He began traveling immediately to set up Christian Party groups throughout the country. By January 1936, sixteen states had Christian Party organizations.⁴⁰

The campaign existed almost entirely in the pages of Pelley's Weekly (a temporary replacement for Liberation). Furthermore, Pelley actively campaigned only in Washington State because the forty-seven other states refused him admission to the November ballot. He suspected the Republican nominee, Alfred "Mossman" Landon, to be of Jewish ancestry and chided the Union Party for ignoring the Jewish threat. Praising Robert E. Edmondson, James True and Eugene N. Sanctuary, all of whom purported to uncover President Roosevelt's Jewish ancestry, Pelley still insisted that his own opposition to the Jewish conspiracy was far more fervent than theirs.⁴¹

Until September 16, the Great Pyramid date, Pelley's Weekly predicted with mounting assurance Silvershirt entrance into the "king's chamber"⁴² of victory. The election results were dismal. Pelley received 1,598 of the

⁴⁰The states were: New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, California, Indiana, Michigan, Washington, Oregon, Utah and three unnamed others. See, Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (January 15, 1936), p. 4.

⁴¹William Dudley Pelley, "Get Ready to Save Your Country," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (January 22, 1936), pp. 1-4.

⁴²William Dudley Pelley, "Enter King's Chamber Today," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (September 16, 1936), p. 1.

almost 700,000 votes cast in Washington State. He blamed this defeat on sabotage of the voting machines by Jewish conspirators.⁴³

Since the Pyramid date did not install Pelley in the White House as prophesied, he faced the classic problem of explaining why his prediction did not come to pass. If Americans preferred useless panaceas to the Silver Legion's unprecedented program, Pelley wrote in October, 1936, "What is it to me?" Instead of compromising, he would, "withdraw into seclusion of . . . metaphysical studies."⁴⁴ He offered versions of two classic answers.⁴⁵ Humbly, he admitted that he, not the date, was wrong. The prophecy was allegorical and he misinterpreted its meaning. However, he was sure that the prophecy was true and some significant beginning had quietly occurred on September 16, 1936. The victory by General Francisco Franco's Spanish insurgents might just have been the "signal" that portended the "crack" in the

⁴³Pelley received 300 votes less than that received by the Communist Party candidate and 1,200 votes less than that received by the Socialist Labor Party candidate. See: State of Washington, Department of State, Abstract of Votes Polled at the General Election, (November 3, 1936), p. 42. The campaign will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

⁴⁴William Dudley Pelley, "Heavy Meetings in Washington State," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (October 4, 1936), p. 4.

⁴⁵An interesting study on the issue of prophets and prophesy failures can be found in: Leon Festinger, et al., When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1956).

Communist ramparts to which prophecy referred. This crack would lead to Pelley's apocalyptic scenario and the ultimate rule of the Silvershirts.

After the loss of the Christian Party at the polls, Pelley turned his attention to strengthening the Silvershirts financially and publicly. In 1937, the Legion purchased their own printing apparatus. It was used for publishing almost all Silvershirt literature and, in particular, the pamphlet, What Every Congressman Should Know, in which Pelley claimed to identify all the Jews who worked for the federal government. The pamphlet was sent to every Congressman, along with Liberation and No More Hunger.

Pelley's search for financial security for the Silvershirts turned up only George S. Fisher, of New York. Fisher, the proprietor of the Just-So Dress Company, gave Pelley \$20,000 or so in four years.⁴⁶ Fisher's help, plus the rise in other contributions, made New Liberation first a semi-monthly and, finally, in December 1937, a weekly again under its old name and size. Pelley also began issuing Little Vistas, a small monthly magazine of historical biography, and Reality, a large, esoteric monthly.

Pelley's activities appeared to be successful until November 22, 1937, when U.S. Senator Robert M. LaFollette, Jr. signed a subpoena for Spencer Warwick, Silvershirt Liaison Officer for Ohio, to appear before the Senate

⁴⁶Dies Committee (1940), p. 7276.

Committee on Education and Labor as part of its investigation of strike breaking. Warwick, and his associate, Howard Luse, were on the executive committee of the John Q. Public League, a company-sponsored group attempting to mobilize opposition to a bitter steel strike in Warner, Ohio. Also involved was the Association of Leagues, an organization headed by another Silvershirter, who was likewise active in attempting to stop the strike.⁴⁷

Pelley took this action by LaFollette as an indication that the real battle for Silvershirt ascendancy had begun by noting that:

All this nation is waiting for at the present time is for some personality to step forth, typifying supreme antagonism to Radicalism, [of which] . . . LaFollette and his Forty Spies may perhaps create that personality in THE SILVER LEGION's head by antagonizing every American who believes in Pelley's principles . . . to Pelley's everlasting gratitude . . .⁴⁸

He next planned a strategy to strike back by making several trips to Washington, D.C. and hiring Harrison F. McConnell as his attorney.⁴⁹ On January 26, 1938, Pelley and Warwick filed a Complaint and requested an injunction against the

⁴⁷George Rennar, "The Silvershirts," Senior thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1965, p. 66.

⁴⁸William Dudley Pelley, "Catching Bears by Their Tails," Liberation, vol. 9 (January 6, 1938), p. 5.

⁴⁹McConnell, originally from Montana, was James True's legal counsel for two or three years. He also advised Governor Hoffman during the Hauptmann Trial.

Committee, charging that the whole investigation was nothing more than a Communist plot.⁵⁰ The court denied their request, but not before Pelley's counsel served subpoenas on Committee members and attorneys representing the Committee went to court. Finally, after Warwick's appearance was delayed several times due to actions by his counsel and at the request of the Committee, the subpoena was withdrawn on April 1.

Pelley was ecstatic. He portrayed this fight with the LaFollette Committee as a major defeat for the Communists and boldly planned more Silvershirt activity. Claiming that Silvershirts and Silvershirt officials had been pushed around long enough by LaFollette, "it is time for these stooges for Reds to grasp that the Silver Legion is henceforth taking the offensive . . . we shall begin to clean house in our national government."⁵¹ He intended to institute a series of legal actions to force the exposure, in court, of the whole New Deal-Communist plot. The first was to be a case against Secretary of Interior, Harold L. Ickes, and Indian Affairs Commissioner, John Collier, for alleged foisting of Communism and Communists, on American Indians.

⁵⁰Liberation, vol. 9 (January 21, 1938), p. 6.

⁵¹William Dudley Pelley, "Legion Suddenly Wins," Liberation, vol. 9 (April 18, 1938), p. 3.

Meanwhile, Pelley urged an increase in recruiting members for the Silver-shirts. The goal he established was for one million members by the end of 1938. There were two reasons for the increase in membership: the LaFollette affair and the heartening success of anti-Communism abroad; particularly Hitler's Anschluss with Austria.

With an increase in membership, came an increase in publication. In all of 1937, Silver-shirt headquarters sent out 1,091 express shipments of literature to various posts throughout the country. In the first seven months of 1938, 1,168 express shipments were sent out. In all of 1937, eight of the largest customers for Pelley literature, together, purchased 759.5 pounds of literature. In the first seven months of 1938, these same eight persons ordered 1,708.5 pounds of literature.⁵² In 1937, and the first seven months of 1938, Pelley sent out 3.5 tons of literature.⁵³ The gross income for the Asheville establishment was \$33,669.27, and Pelley's reported personal

⁵²Dies Committee (1939), pp. 4209-11. The 1937 express shipments were as follows: 1,022 shipments to the West Coast, 57 to North of the Mason-Dixon line, and 12 to South of the Mason-Dixon line. In the first seven months of 1938, the express shipments were: 1,154 to the West Coast and 14 to the East Coast. Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., p. 4237.

income was \$3,991.02, for a net loss of \$1,281.72.⁵⁴ The average weekly payroll was \$363.46.⁵⁵

Pelley's main new publishing ventures in 1938 were: Thinking Alive, a deluxe esoteric volume, and The World Hoax, by Ernest F. Elmhurst. Pelley rewrote Elmhurst's book to some degree, which irked the author:

Regrettably, I am less than unanimous with my publisher, W.D. Pelley, about the proof-reading: he is a completely dictatorial nature and does not let anyone tell him anything about the printing business. What can one do? . . . My next book will go to press in July, and, except for a few corrections by my secretary, is ready for printing, provided that Mr. Pelley does not receive a new brainstorm during the night.⁵⁶

In 1938, not only were membership and publications more active, but there was also a revival of Congressional investigations of alleged subversion. This Special Committee on Un-American Activities, chaired by Representative Martin Dies, had not called Pelley; but Pelley still did not like it.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 4235.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 4222.

⁵⁶The book was one of Pelley's most popular products and, unlike any other Pelley anti-Semitic work, remains in print to the date of this dissertation. American Historical Association, American Committee for the study of War Documents, Records of the National Socialist German Labor Party (NSDAP), U.S. National Archives, Microcopy Number T-81, Washington, D.C., 1956, frame 22,558.

By 1939, Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion began to fight for their existence. In May, the Federal Bureau of Investigation carried out a survey of people on Pelley's mailing list.⁵⁷ Pelley responded by planning resumption of the suits against Ickes and Collier.⁵⁸ However, the major serpent in the Silvershirt garden was the Dies Committee. It had been investigating a number of smaller anti-Semitic organizations and had made it clear that Pelley was a prime target for the near future. Chairman Dies' equanimity could hardly have been helped by one of Pelley's new pamphlets⁵⁹ which charged that the Committee was a tool of the Jews in their desire to destroy patriotism. Dies expressed surprise at the widespread circulation given this pamphlet, especially in his own district.⁶⁰

Two occurrences which the Committee undoubtedly resented were the testimony of Fraser Gardner and Pelley's new lawsuit. Gardner had applied for a job with the Dies Committee, swearing that he had no connections whatever with any of the organizations under investigation. However,

⁵⁷Ronald S. Green, Jr., "The Aftermath of Seven Minutes in Eternity: William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirts," Harvard University, Honors Thesis, April 2, 1965, p. 57. Green quoted a letter from FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover.

⁵⁸Pelley estimated that these suits would cost between \$20,000 and \$25,000.

⁵⁹William Dudley Pelley, Dies' Political Posse: Information for Gentile Patriots Served with Dies' Subpoenas (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, 1939).

⁶⁰Liberation, vol. 10 (August 28, 1939).

Gardner was on Pelley's payroll as a researcher. The Committee discovered this, grilled Gardner about it, and voted to have him cited for contempt of Congress. He was tried and convicted of perjury. There is no indication that Pelley, or any other Silvershirt, knew of Gardner's actions in this matter.

On September 9, 1939, Pelley's attorney, Floyd Hatfield (a Silvershirt member from Washington State), filed suit in Washington, D.C. asking \$3,150,000 for libel and slander from the Dies Committee, its members individually and one of its investigators. Pelley had great hopes for this suit, but it was to prove a failure. On October 3, Committee members filed for dismissal of the suit on the grounds that Pelley was both a thief and a subversive who circulated un-American and unpatriotic material. Besides, they maintained, Pelley was objecting to legally privileged material.⁶¹

Meanwhile, Pelley's old nemesis from 1935, Zeb Nettles, the former prosecutor, had become a judge. Apparently, to everyone's surprise, Nettles issued a warrant for Pelley's arrest, based upon his violation of the 'good behavior' clause of his 1935 suspended sentence. The court ordered bail of \$10,000. Pelley was out of the state, but the

⁶¹New York Times (October 4 and 5, 1939).

Buncombe County Sheriff raided Pelley's headquarters and seized voluminous files and correspondence.⁶²

The day after the raid, the Sheriff again appeared, this time acting on behalf of the state tax authorities, who attached Pelley's printing plant and equipment and prepared to sell them at auction, unless he paid a \$701.35 tax bill by November 3. Pelley issued an appeal to loyal Silvershirts and they raised the necessary money.

Pelley still had not appeared. A Dies Committee investigator was in Asheville while all the seizing and attaching was going on, but he left shortly to look for Pelley elsewhere. The Sheriff finally issued a wanted circular on Pelley which, in place of a photograph, reprinted one of the standard Hial Cummings drawings from Liberation. The circular described Pelley as about fifty years old, neatly dressed and distinguished looking, "a good talker, highly educated and interested in physic [sic.] research."⁶³

So the search continued, and Pelley's presses, which Pelley claimed had been turning out \$70,000 worth of literature per year before Judge Nettles issued his order, were forced to cut back drastically. He immediately suspended Reality, his esoteric magazine. Production of

⁶²The story is in Liberation, vol. 10 (October 14, 1939), p. 4.

⁶³Equality, vol. 4 (May 1939).

other material lessened considerably. Public meetings ended and attendance at private ones dwindled.

Pelley finally appeared at the hearing room in Washington, D.C. on February 7, 1940 and was promptly put on the stand. He testified for three days, during which time the Committee, which had been prepared for, and had been looking forward to, this appearance for quite some time, spent much effort trying to prove that Pelley was a common thief. They seem to have been unsure about the religious aspects of the movement. Investigator, Robert Barker, a defendant in Pelley's abortive \$3,150,000 lawsuit, had pored over Pelley's finances from 1931 in detail. The Committee examined the Fraser-Gardner episode carefully and made much of a number of Pelley's pro-Hitler statements. What seems to have outraged the Committee most of all, was Pelley's insistence on praising them for the good work they were doing against Communism. His technique "was a sort of suffocation by affection."⁶⁴ In fact, he testified that his counter-subversive organization had itself become unnecessary. The Silver Legion had been founded

to propagandize exactly the same principles that Mr. Dies and his Committee are engaged in right now; in other words, antagonism to subversive influences in the United States.⁶⁵

The Committee did not appreciate Pelley's sudden support.

⁶⁴Liberation, vol. 11 (February 21, 1940), p. 1.

⁶⁵Dies Committee, Report, vol. 12 (1940), p. 7225.

While Pelley was testifying, the North Carolina authorities requested his arrest on the parole violation charge. On February 10, as Pelley was leaving the hearing room, the authorities arrested, jailed, and shortly released him on \$2,500 bond, pending an extradition hearing. On March 12, the court ordered him extradited to North Carolina. However, within a matter of hours, Pelley's attorney, T. Edward O'Connell, secured a Writ of Habeas Corpus on the grounds of the likelihood of "violent physical abuse," prohibitive bond, and the vagueness of the alleged violations of the law. O'Connell subpoenaed Dies and Representative Samuel Dickstein, who had accused Pelley of treason before the Dies Committee, and Investigator Barker, alleging they had instigated the latest North Carolina trouble. On April 5, the court denied Pelley's petition, and dismissed the proposed testimony of Dies, Dickstein and Barker as irrelevant. O'Connell became so vehement in his protests, that the court threatened him with a citation for contempt. Pelley and his attorney, then filed a long, involved series of appeals.

On January 7, 1940, Pelley announced in Liberation, that

fundamentally, the time is ripe for gradual minimizing of the importance of all vigilante organizations and groups as such, and ballooning America's reactionary forces to Communism,

Judaism, and Rooseveltism into the status of a movement!⁶⁶

This cryptic message meant that Pelley was trying to break the news gently, that the Silvershirt Legion of America, Inc., was no more. In the same issue, Pelley said that the plotters all over the world were on the run, and that the Silvershirts were not needed as a separate organization. But, he later admitted⁶⁷ that this organization, through which about 25,000 Americans had passed,⁶⁸ was forced to disband by Dies Committee pressure.

Pelley, now, extremely short of money, decided to bide his time. In April 1940, to no fanfare, the Fellowship Press, Inc. appeared in Noblesville, Indiana. In December, Pelley announced that Fellowship Press had purchased Galahad's printing equipment. The presses were shortly transferred from the former bank in Asheville, which had served as Silvershirt headquarters, into an old box factory at Indianapolis.⁶⁹

Pelley moved there too, and soon had reestablished himself. Liberation disappeared forever, replaced by Roll-Call, "the Voice of the Loyal Opposition." It was the same size, shape and format as its predecessor, but the anti-

⁶⁶Liberation, vol. 11 (January 7, 1940), p. 1.

⁶⁷William Dudley Pelley, The Foundation Message (Indianapolis: Pelley Publishers, 1940), p. 19.

⁶⁸Dies Committee, Report (1940), p. 7211.

⁶⁹New York Times (December 20, 1940).

Semitism was noticeably toned down. For a while, Pelley also issued Revelation, a magazine of prophesy devoted mainly to Hitler's coming defeat of England, and the ultimate victory of the Christian Commonwealth over the New Deal.

Meanwhile, Pelley and North Carolina went a few more legal rounds. The defendant was optimistic, claiming that he had "a terribly vital role to play in this American scene before this summer or year is out."⁷⁰ However, before the year was out, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, and Pelley planned yet another organization. The invasion, said Pelley, brought the world to the climax and created a situation where propaganda became secondary to action.⁷¹ He said that his previous endeavors had all been preparing him for this historical moment. America would now see the fulfillment of what he had been working for all these years. He would begin traveling immediately.

The new organization was the Galilean Fellowship -- a loosely-organized group, supposed to meet once a week in a format much like that of the League of the Liberators. The plans were completed in August, and the first meetings were to be held in November.

In September, Roll-Call was supplemented by The Galilean, a large monthly magazine for those followers of

⁷⁰Pelley's Bulletin, vol. 1 (May 29, 1941).

⁷¹Ibid. (November 28, 1941).

Pelley interested primarily in the metaphysical. It was almost devoid of politics.

North Carolina began pressing for the kill. On October 13, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the decision of a lower court that Pelley could be extradited. He arrived in Asheville assured of money for a bond, but no one Pelley could present was acceptable to the authorities as surator.⁷² So Pelley was arrested, fingerprinted, photographed and jailed. After Pelley's attorneys had filed for a Writ of Habeas Corpus demanding that the prosecution show why competent bondsmen were being turned down, some local ladies finally were declared acceptable. Pelley was released on \$10,000 bail.

He was still planning lawsuits himself. He urged others to sue the President for his allegedly unconstitutional foreign policy,⁷³ and someone had talked him into reopening his 1935 conviction, on the grounds that he had been railroaded by Congressman Dickstein, Walter Winchell -- his least favorite commentator -- the B'nai B'rith, Felix Frankfurter and some fifty-six others. Pelley planned to sue them for \$750,000 damages.⁷⁴

⁷²Ibid. The November 1, 1941 issue contains the whole story from Pelley's viewpoint.

⁷³Roll-Call, vol. 3 (November 1941).

⁷⁴Pelley's Bulletin, vol. 1 (November 1, 1941).

On December 7, 1941, in the face of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Pelley ordered Roll-Call stopped. He had considered the growing possibility of war and had decided that if it came, Roll-Call would be replaced by literature allowing him to say anything he so desired, from a spiritual approach.⁷⁵ He felt that publications with purely secular formats might be suppressed, but that a religious one would stand a better chance of surviving.⁷⁶

So, in late December, The Galilean became a weekly. One issue out of four was a 32-page, purely esoteric, periodical. Naturally, it got more political as time went on. The other three issues were sixteen pages and were devoted to politics. Pelley boasted that 1942 was going to be his biggest year yet for publishing.

North Carolina, however, had other plans. After Pelley went through a hectic, last-minute search for a new attorney, his trial began in mid-January. The charges against Pelley were that he had libeled President Roosevelt, that publicizing his own pamphlets constituted false advertising, that his facetious comments on not being jailed in 1935 were contempt of court, and that the existence of the Silverhirts had violated the state's Anti-Klan Law.

The witnesses included Dies Committee investigator, Robert Barker, two F.B.I. agents who visited Pelley in 1939,

⁷⁵Ibid. (August 1, 1941).

⁷⁶Indianapolis Star (August 1, 1942).

and six residents of Asheville, who testified about "American Hitler" statements made by Pelley. The evidence introduced included, a stack of German propaganda pamphlets and periodicals seized in the raid.

The jury found Pelley guilty. The court ordered him jailed -- over the protests of defense counsel. The next day, the court sentenced him to a term of two-to-three years in the state penitentiary and ordered him to wear stripes. Pelley executed another \$10,000 bond and a few smaller ones, and appealed. He hoped to win with a due process case, alleging great irregularities in the original warrant, in the seizure of his records, and in the conduct of the trial itself.⁷⁷

Touring the country, Pelley gave talks on esoteric matters and on the gravity of the situation facing the United States. He prophesied that on July 27, 1942, the conflict would climax and the United States would go through a three-year period of renovation.⁷⁸ His predictions were incorrect. On April 4, 1942, F.B.I. agents arrested Pelley at the home of his friend and benefactor, George B. Fisher in Darien, Connecticut, for violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

⁷⁷Enumerated in Pelley's Bulletin, vol. 2 (January 24, 1942).

⁷⁸Ibid. (February 20, 1942), p. 2.

Pelley had plenty of warning about his impending arrest. Four other anti-Semites had been arrested under the same law since the attack on Pearl Harbor, and, in March, Pelley saw a newspaper article stating that Attorney General Francis Biddle was preparing a sedition indictment against him.⁷⁹ But a speech by Biddle saying that criticism of men and policies should not cease in wartime, and the government's circumspect handling of Father Coughlin, made Pelley overconfident.

On June 9, an Indianapolis federal Grand Jury returned a sixty-nine page indictment against Pelley; Lawrence A. Brown, secretary of the Fellowship Press, Inc.; Agnes Marian Henderson, Pelley's secretary; and Fellowship Press, Inc. The Espionage Act of 1917 forbade making and distributing false statements intended to interfere with the success of the United States armed forces and to promote the success of its enemies.⁸⁰ Pelley was indicted on twelve counts: nine

⁷⁹Pelley Bulletin, vol. 2 (April 1, 1942).

⁸⁰The indictment specifically charged violation of Section 33 of the Espionage Act of 1917. This statute defines a seditious person as one: "Whoever, when the United States is at war, shall wilfully make or convey false reports or false statements with intent to interfere with the operation or success of the military or naval forces of the United States or to promote the success of its enemies and whoever, when the United States is at war, shall wilfully cause or attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of duty, in the military or naval forces of the United States, or shall wilfully obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service of the United States to the injury of the service of the United States." Transcript of Record, United States v. Pelley, et. al., p. 551.

for false and seditious statements, one for intent to bring about a revolution in the armed forces, one for intent to obstruct recruiting and one for conspiracy to perform all of the above. Brown and Henderson were charged with conspiracy alone. Each count carried a maximum imprisonment of twenty years and a fine of \$10,000.

Pelley confidently expected the trial to last as long as two months. Envisioning the trial to be a great opportunity to expose the whole Jewish-Communist conspiracy, he drew up a list of 297 Jews he intended to subpoena.⁸¹ Meanwhile, his attorney made a final abortive attempt to have himself declared under the jurisdiction of the North Carolina Supreme Court, and to have the indictment quashed on the grounds that women were excluded from the Grand Jury and that unauthorized people were in the jury room while the indictment was being written.

The prosecution was prepared to meet Pelley's demand for an ideological battle, at least to the point of attempting to prove that Pelley's allegedly seditious statements were false.

The trial began on July 29. The government's case charged that Pelley's materials were seditious in nature; a conspiracy had been entered into by the defendants; and that Pelley was sympathetic to the enemies of the United States. Among the false and untrue seditious statements cited by the

⁸¹Pelley's Bulletin, vol. 2 (June 17, 1942).

prosecution was an article in the December 22, 1941, issue of Galilean, wherein Pelley asserted: "We have by every act and deed performable aggressively solicited war with the Axis."⁸² In another article, "The Resplendent Order On Its Way," in the January 5, 1942 Galilean, Pelley furthered his attack by writing:

It is futile to plead that American territory and property were wantonly attacked in the Hawaiias. The attack obviously resulted from a baleful and provocative diplomacy which appeared to neglect no opportunity to make actionist enemies of all major countries on the globe but England.⁸³

The government also argued that Pelley sought to hinder the war effort in an article "Who Are to Blame" published in the December 29, 1941 Galilean. In this article, Pelley negated the enthusiasm for the war with the statement:

From North Carolina to Seattle, Washington, you can travel in these Mobilizing Moments, and hear scarcely a word of condemnation of the Nipponese, Germans, or Italians.⁸⁴

In addition to other articles in the Galilean, the government quoted a statement which Pelley had published in the pamphlet, We Fight For This Republic Only!, which said:

The typical American who has something in his skullcase other than sawdust or cement, is disclosing by his private

⁸²Transcript of Record, United States v. Pelley, et. al., p. 3.

⁸³Ibid., p. 603.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 5.

conversation . . . that he is getting utterly fed up on the clique seeking to prosecute this war on a basis of 'social gains,' and is reaching a mood of surliness where unwittingly he gloats when any of the Axis Powers report success abroad -- even against our own forces.⁸⁵

Witnesses called by the prosecution included two traveling salesmen who testified that, contrary to Pelley's claims, they had found no disunity,⁸⁶ a bank president and the treasurer of a life insurance company, who said the United States was not bankrupt, a newspaper analyst to refute the disunity claims, and General Lewis B. Hershey, head of the Selective Service Board, who said there was no differentiation between drafting Jews and Gentiles.⁸⁷

The key prosecution witness was Harold D. Lasswell, an eminent political scientist and propaganda expert. He testified that he had examined all the issues of The Galilean published since the Pearl Harbor attack, and found them to contain 1,195 statements consistent with the fourteen major Axis propaganda themes -- or, rather, statements consistent 1,195 different ways, since they would be counted more than once if they contained more than one such element -- and forty-five statements contradicting the themes. The most frequent consistencies were in charging

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

⁸⁶ Indianapolis News (July 31, 1942).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

that the United States was weak and lacked the necessary materials and manpower, that the United States was corrupt, that Japan was powerful and resourceful, and that the world was menaced by Jews, Communists and plutocrats.⁸⁸

Furthermore, several former Silvershirts testified that they had attended religious meetings conducted by Pelley since the Silvershirts disbanded, and had distributed Pelley's post-Pearl Harbor literature. Over defense objections, twenty excerpts from Pelley's autobiography were read to the jury. Other material introduced by the prosecution during the trial included a number of letters written by Pelley and Brown, and the texts of the American declaration of war.

Pelley's attorneys had issued subpoenas for Lindbergh, former U.S. Senator, Rush Holt, one of the most intemperate isolationists, General George Van Horn Moseley a fascist sympathizer, William Allen White of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, Federal Reserve Board chairman Marriner Eccles, and three salvage divers who had been at Pearl Harbor. The subpoenas for Holt and Moseley were withdrawn at defenses' request, Eccles was excused by the court because he said he did not have the requested information on America's financial condition, and White was too ill to testify. The three divers were excused by the court at the request of the Navy. They were to testify as

⁸⁸ Indianapolis Star (August 1, 1942).

to the truth or falsity of Pelley's claims about the actual amount of damage at Pearl Harbor -- Pelley said it was enormous. The charge that Pelley had exaggerated the losses was dropped from the indictment to avoid releasing any information to the enemy.

Lindbergh testified for a few minutes, giving a summary of his career and stating that he felt most Americans had opposed America's entry into any foreign war. A Chicago art dealer swore that he had found plenty of disunity, but on cross-examination, admitted finding none since Pearl Harbor. Former Congressman Thorkelson testified that the United States was bankrupt, disunited and the aggressor.

On August 5, Judge Robert C. Baltzell found Pelley, Brown, Henderson and Fellowship Press guilty. Pelley was convicted on eleven counts and was sentenced to fifteen years.⁸⁹ Brown got five years and Henderson got two, suspended. Fellowship Press was fined \$5,000. Addressing his words to Pelley, Judge Baltzell explained his reasons for rendering the lengthy sentence:

I have read all your articles presented in the case. Such things must not be permitted when the country is fighting for its very life, and our boys are being sent to face death.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Report of Proceedings, Court's Decision, United States v. Pelley, p. 735.

⁹⁰Transcript of Record, Ibid., p. 573.

Referring to Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion, Judge Baltzell told him that his punishment "must be firm -- rather severe in fact -- because you are the leader and without you it cannot go on."⁹¹

Pelley and Brown were jailed immediately. Pelley's attorneys began a vigorous and elaborate series of appeals and other legal actions. These actions were of no avail. In 1944, Pelley was one of the thirty defendants in the mass sedition trial -- one of the most confused, and least productive, major trials in American history. The defendants were charged with violating the Sedition Act of June 28, 1940, the so-called Smith Act. The indictment charged that the defendants conspired to:

Advise, counsel, urge and cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny and refusal of duty by members of the military and naval forces of the United States; distribute and cause to be distributed written and printed matter advising, counseling, and urging insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny and refusal of duty by members of the military and naval forces.⁹²

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 600-602.

⁹²Transcript of Record, United States v. McWilliams, et. al., District Court of the United States, District of Columbia, No. Criminal 73,086 (November 13, 1944), pp. 320-321; New York Times (January 4, 1944), p. 10. The indictment was instituted by O. John Rogge, special assistant to Attorney General Francis Biddle. Rogge had gained prominence in New Deal circles as a lawyer for the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. For a biographical sketch of Rogge, see: "Sedition Hunter," Newsweek, vol. 22 (December 27, 1943), p. 48. Although he was a liberal, Rogge sought to revise the traditional civil liberty doctrine of personal guilt. During this so-called "Mass

In essence, they were charged with conspiring together, in league with Germany, to promote a military mutiny, overthrow the government and establish a Nazi regime. Pelley played no part in the trial, except for the introduction of mostly familiar stacks of his correspondence as evidence and the reading of more excerpts from his autobiography.⁹³ The trial dragged on for several months. However, when the presiding judge died, the subsequent judge refused to rule on the case. Attempts to revive the trial failed and the court dismissed it in 1946 and ordered Pelley transferred back to the penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Pelley became eligible for parole on August 12, 1947. It was denied on February 2, 1948. In September, after more legal action had failed, the Justice for Pelley Committee was born, headed by Pelley's son-in-law, Melford Pearson.⁹⁴ It published several pamphlets on the subject and agitated

Sedition Case," he tried to supplant it with the doctrine of conspiracy in which guilt by association would play a prominent role. For a discussion of this see: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), pp. 201-203. For an interesting critique of the trial by two of the co-defendants, see: Lawrence Dennis and Maximilian St. George, A Trial on Trial: The Great Sedition Trial of 1944 (New York: National Civil Rights Committee, 1945).

⁹³For example, see: Transcript of Record, United States v. McWilliams, et. al., pp. 8,412-8,715; pp. 12,485-12,565; pp. 16,174-16,198; pp. 16,810-17,021; and New York Times (July 28, 1944); (August 1, 1944); (August 8, 1944); and (August 10, 1944).

⁹⁴See: Melford Pearson, Life Imprisonment for Exposing Communists! (Noblesville, Indiana: n. pub., 1947), 30pp.

among anti-Semites, most of whom immediately took up Pelley's cause. However, little more than a letter writing campaign was organized.

On February 14, 1950, William Dudley Pelley was paroled from the Terre Haute penitentiary. He walked out of the prison into the waiting arms of a man with a warrant for his arrest. It seemed North Carolina still wanted him. Authorities arrested him again, but he was released within a few hours on a \$1,000 bond. After a delay of several months, North Carolina's plea was disallowed by the courts.

Pelley leaped back into the legal arena with a libel suit against Walter Winchell, who still referred to his old enemy as "William Smelley Pelley," and a petition that his sedition conviction be vacated.⁹⁵ Neither succeeded. The latter stayed in the courts until 1955, when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the original sentence.

By this time, Pelley returned to publishing. He issued Over Here and Valor, two large, occasionally political, slick-papered monthlies. He also published numerous books, pamphlets and leaflets, and a series of wire recorded messages received from such people as Thomas Jefferson, Henry Ford and Nostradamus. Esoterica meetings and study sessions were once again held throughout the country under

⁹⁵William Dudley Pelley, et al., Justice is Truth in Action, (Noblesville, Indiana: Justice For Pelley Committee, 1952). This pamphlet contains the text of the motion to correct the alleged illegal sentence. It was filed in federal court in Indianapolis on July 1, 1952.

the auspices of the Soulcraft Chapels, later the Soulcraft Fellowship. These meetings were composed mostly of former followers.

Pelley reprinted his major metaphysical works, removing the anti-Semitism. In 1961, a likewise sanitized No More Hunger was published. Pelley fell ill shortly thereafter, and issued the last edition of Valor in 1962. Pelley died in the summer of 1965, with little fanfare. So ended William Dudley Pelley's sojourn on the American political scene.

Whatever happened on the night of May 28-29, 1928, it transformed William Dudley Pelley into a prolific, driven, public figure. His philosophical tenets were expressed in voluminous books, articles and pamphlets that just seemed to pour out of his pen. He appeared to literally be a man possessed with a need to get out the "truth." The need, however, had its practical side too. Theorizing was one thing: putting the theory into practice was another. For this, he needed a vehicle that would demonstrate how his ideas could work, in practice when applied to the real world. It is this vehicle to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 4

THEORY AND PRACTICE:
THE LEAGUE OF THE LIBERATORS AND
THE SILVERSHIRT LEGION OF AMERICA

The Silvershirt Legion of America was the organizational manifestation of Pelley's socio-political-religious beliefs. The Legion, in turn, was a refinement of the League of the Liberators. Pelley hinted at the formation of the League of the Liberators in his 1921 novel, The Fog. "It seems," he wrote, "as though God had picked out certain persons throughout the human race, endowed them with the divine Order of Merit, favored them with the Cosmic Urge to approach Idealism . . . [a] groping for fellowship with other immortals in that divine Legion of Honor."¹ A League of "awakened liberators," was entrusted with a prophetic mission and stood "at the threshold of a wholly new era, now being ushered in by international conflict and universal depression."²

The function of the League was two-fold: as a group with a missionary zeal, it would "go on indefinitely

¹William Dudley Pelley, The Fog (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1921), p. 387.

²Liberation, vol. 2 (April 1931), inside front cover.

imparting . . . knowledge from higher worlds of matter"³; and as a nondenominational spiritual fraternity, it would "impart a purer and finer theology among men."⁴ In essence, the League was a fraternal, as well as religious, discussion group intended to prepare members for the Second Coming.

The League's organization, which became the pattern for the Silvershirt Legion, was complex in theory, but simple in practice. The nation was divided into 13 Departments. Each Department was under the supervision of a Department Governor from the largest city within each region: Boston, New York, Washington, Chicago, Memphis, Dallas, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. Each Department was subdivided into 13 Divisions and each Division into Chapters. The complexity of the structure was greatly simplified by the fact that the important Liberator activities were conducted at the local units within each of the Chapters. Pelley claimed the first Chapter meeting took place on May 3, 1931. By the following month, he further claimed, meetings were being held in 200 Chapters. In November 1931, he said that there were 400 local groups in 44 states, with each group gathered "to study profound phases of Cosmology."⁵ Each Chapter was

³Liberation, vol. 2 (June 1931), pp. ii-iii.

⁴Liberation, vol. 2 (July 1931), inside front cover.

⁵Liberation, vol. 2 (April 1931); (May 1931), pp. 2, 8-9; (June 1931), p. ii, iii; (November 7, 1931).

headed by an Assembly Chaplain who received written instructions each week directly from Pelley. These instructions, Pelley hoped, would systematize each group's Sunday evening study session.

The routine of these Sunday night meetings was established by the weekly Program of Services sent by Pelley to the members. The typical Program consisted of six parts, each led by the Assembly Chaplain. A general introduction to the week's lecture was followed by an Invocation, after which the Chaplain read "A New Sermon On the Mount." The highlight of each meeting was the five-page lecture or lesson from "The Books of the Liberation," referred to as that week's "Script." Typical topics were "Light and Dark Forces," "Individuality," "Revisiting Earth," "The Purpose of Vibration," "The Cosmic Purpose Being Served by Social Disruption," "Psychical Development," "Did Jesus Really Live?," and "The Process Known as Dying."⁶ This "lesson" segment was followed by "The Lesson's Significance" which showed "its practical application to the problems of mortality."⁷ Each meeting ended with the reading of the Benediction: "And now with bowed heads, in an interval of silence, do we listen to His words of benediction on us."⁸

⁶Program of Services for the following Assemblies: Tenth, Eleventh, Thirtieth, Thirty-Third, Forty-Third, Forty-Eighth, Forty-Ninth, One Hundred Eighty-Fifth.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

The content of these lessons represented composites of Pelley's spiritual, metaphysical, and psychical thought, especially in preparation for the Second Coming. In one lesson, members were told: "You are those Masters, apart from the theory, a Mentorship order that entered life to lead! We tell you; we rally you. We call you to your leadership. We make of you masters in times of great tumult."⁹

In addition to publishing weekly instructions for Assembly Chaplains, the national headquarters at Asheville was also the location of "Silent Contact." By writing their full name and addresses, church affiliation, religious training, and exact hour in the day when they customarily meditated, Liberators could, supposedly, be healed by this Pelley service.¹⁰ Let the Liberators in Asheville know of the ailment and all the Liberators would pray with the sufferer at the pre-noted time -- so they could 'silently contact' Jesus together and get the attention that was needed from Christ.¹¹

⁹Program of Services, Nineteenth Assembly, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰Liberation, vol. 2 (April 1931); (May 1931), p. 289; (June 1931), pp. ii, iii; (August-September 1931), p. 124; (November 7, 1931); vol. 3 (November 21, 1931), p. 214; (October 1932), appendix; vol. 4 (February 18, 1933), p. 10.

¹¹The service appeared quite popular. Some members wrote Pelley requesting that he silently contact Christ to find out if an upcoming medical surgery was safe. Pelley telegraphed in response: "rely on irrefutable tenet that no one can pas over until allotted moment planned from instant of Birth. If time has not come surgery cannot be anything

Though Pelley wrote each Sunday's Program, he had little personal contact with individual League members. Vinton Sumner, an interpretative travelogue lecturer who joined Pelley in early 1931, had complete responsibility for membership recruitment and management. Sumner, Pelley said, had a "feverish sincerity and an uncanny ability for inspiring men and women in the field."¹² Under Sumner's direction the League of the Liberators grew so rapidly that by early 1932, Sumner could no longer keep up with publication requests from the membership. As a result, he sent literature to the chaplains without making appropriate entries in the headquarters books. After blistering letters complained about the lack of responsiveness from Sumner, Pelley wrote the chaplains requesting an inventory of materials received. These adjusted accountings were made part of the annual stockholder's report. Pelley estimated that \$10,000 worth of materials had been lost.

In April 1932, Sumner left Asheville and the League. Writing that he had "profited immensely by the experience of

but excellence. Supreme confidence in planned rightness of whatever happens will conquer crisis." William Dudley Pelley to Julia A. Hay, March 3, 1933 in "Records relating to W.D. Pelley," Special House Committee on Un-American Activities Authorized to Investigate Nazi Propaganda and Certain Other Propaganda Activities, House of Representatives, Record Group 233 (HR 73-F30.1), tray 13423. (Hereinafter SHUAC.)

¹²Pelley, The Door to Revelation (Asheville, North Carolina: Pelley Publishers, 1939), p. 244.

the year,"¹³ he requested that Pelley settle an unpaid debt with him. According to the records, Pelley never paid the money. Sumner finally gave up attempting to collect the debt, noting that "all human relationships, social, political, economic, etc. find stability only when men mean what they say and stand by their word."¹⁴

In early 1933, the news of Hitler's accession to the German Chancellorship led Pelley to create his more famous group -- The Silvershirt Legion of America. He viewed the new organization as growing out of the League of the Liberators. However, where the League had proposed the theory of the Second Coming, the Legion had a more active role as Christ's Column to crush the Jewish Sovietist Antichrist. The Silvershirt Legion was created, Pelley wrote, as "the Christ Militia to respect and sustain the sanctity of the Christian Ideal . . . to deify Patriotism and pride of race" and to fight those forces which seek to "undermine national unity and thwart the agencies of law and order or circumvent any principles of our Federal Constitution."¹⁵ Pelley announced that the basic objective would be "to foster, promote and develop political and

¹³Vinton Sumner to William Dudley Pelley, April 1932. SHUAC, Tray 13429.

¹⁴Vinton Sumner to Bob Summerville, March 22, 1933, SHUAC.

¹⁵Pelley's Weekly, vol. 1 (September 5, 1934), p. 3.

patriotic principles for the betterment and welfare of its members."¹⁶

Pelley began by bombarding his mailing list with news of his new venture. Although little in the line that he was now pursuing was inconsistent with his pre-Silvershirt ideas, 40% of his support soon disappeared.¹⁷ The loss of support was apparently a reaction to the increase in Pelley's anti-Semitic rhetoric -- even though this rhetoric was nothing new. The Liberation Fellowship correspondence course students began receiving anti-Semitism along with the esoterica, and appear to have remained with Pelley more consistently than any other group.¹⁸ Pelley later testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee that "uniformly the metaphysical supporters have been 100 percent behind my Legion work."¹⁹

¹⁶Jean Burton, "The Silvershirts," Modern Monthly (February, 1934), p. 19. See also State of North Carolina v. William Dudley Pelley of the Silver Shirt Legion, Superior Court of Buncombe County, January Term (1942), p. 203.

¹⁷Liberation, vol. 8 (June 1937), p. 2.

¹⁸Liberation, vol. 4 (July 8, 1933). George S. Anderson, Pelley's business manager, always more interested in the religious aspects of the movement, complained that many people were diverting their contributions from the Liberation Fellowship to the Silvershirts.

¹⁹U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Hearings 76th and 77th Congresses, 1938-1940 (1940), p. 7280. (Hereinafter, "Dies Committee.")

The Silvershirt Legion resembled the League of the Liberators in that it was rigidly structured in theory but rather simple in practice. In 1934, the Legion was incorporated in Delaware as a fraternal, non-profit, noncapital corporation with Pelley as President or National Commander, Harry F. Sieber as Treasurer and Lee Collie as Secretary. Units were organized in a quasi-military fashion. Pelley, the National Commander, was aided by a five-man General Staff consisting of The Chief, The Chamberlain, The Quartermaster, The Sheriff, and The Censor. The United States was divided into nine administrative districts with all operations directed by Pelley from national headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina.²⁰ On a state level, a Department of Local Posts was organized to recruit members, a Department of Silver Rangers was to supervise military instruction and a Department of Industrial Relations was to handle finances.²¹ In addition,

²⁰Liberation, vol. 5 (January 1934), pp. 4-5. These divisions existed strictly on paper and were never fully operational. See Appendix A for the Administrative Districts.

²¹North Carolina v. Pelley, pp. 189-190 and pp. 196-198. Another organizational pattern was described by Pelley in a letter to Dr. John D. Leach in August 1933. "Each state is divided up into Zones, with a Zone Leader or Recruiting Officer over each. These zones contain a layout of the cities and towns within it, or each zone, with a local Recruiting Officer for each city and town. The latter do the actual hoof-work, forming "cells" and Rallies as five adult males in each place are procured. The local Post men are therefore under a Zone leader, and the combined number of Zone Leaders make up the staff of the State Provost Marshall for recruiting. The latter maintains a State

in each state there existed a Commander, an Adjunct, a Purser, a Bailiff and a Solicitor. Finally, each local post had its Chaplain, Scribe, Almoner, Marshal and Advocate.²² This complex system was dropped in 1937 and replaced by a State Liaison Officer with authority over all Silvershirts in that state.

A more accurate picture was provided, not by these regional divisions, but by the personal relationships between Pelley and his State Commanders in the states where membership was most heavily concentrated. Pelley later described these State Commanders as "liaison officers, who were purely messengers of mine."²³

To provide this new organization with appropriate literature, Pelley, on February 18, 1933, revived Liberation: A Journal of Prophecy and the Higher Fraternity as a twelve-page weekly devoted to politics. Its articles, almost all written or edited by Pelley, were in a bright,

headquarters, either at the State Capital or in the State's principal city with his Zone Men as extenuations of himself and representing him in the Zone districts. The State Organizer, or Provost Marshall, is directly under myself or the General Staff, and the Zone Men are directly under the State Organizer. Each Zone Man in turn appoints, and is held responsible for, the local people who go after enlistments." William Dudley Pelley to Dr. John D. Leach, August 1933, SHUAC, tray 12329.

²²Dies Committee, XII, pp. 7234-7235; see also p. 7225; II, pp. 1226-1227; U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Outline of Evidence: The Silvershirt Legion of America (The Silvershirts) (December 23, 1942), p. 53.

²³Dies Committee, VI (1940), p. 4246.

journalistic style full of sarcasm and sprinkled with anti-Semitic cartoons. The vocabulary was pure Pelley, shot through with terms such as "marplots," "chicane," "Yiddishers," and "Jew Deal." Roosevelt was referred to as "the Great Relaxer," "Rosenvelt," "the sick man of Hide [sic.] Park," or "Frankly Destructive Roosevelt." Whenever a Jew was quoted, it was always in a ridiculous, ersatz ghetto-patois.

Membership in the Silvershirt Legion was restricted to native-born or naturalized citizens at least eighteen years of age and practicing Christians. Before attaining active status, recruits had to take an oath "to uphold physically, if the need arises, the Constitution of the United States and the constitutional form of representative government."²⁴ Recruits filled out application cards giving height, weight, physical disabilities, racial extraction, military experience, name and address of family physicians, name of prospective member's bank and, for "metaphysical" purposes, the exact hour and minute of birth.²⁵ Membership dues at first were \$10 a year, but were soon reduced to a \$1

²⁴Liberation, vol. 4 (December 9, 1933), p. 2.

²⁵William Dudley Pelley, Pelley to All District Leaders of Posts (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, 1938).

enrollment fee in order to avoid charges of running a membership racket.²⁶

Finally, recruits were trained in the "Council of Safety." The Councils consisted of four to ten members who met with their sponsor once a week for nine weeks. During this time, prospective members were required to read and agree with the "four primers." The first two, The Hidden Empire and The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, were anonymous examinations of the international Jewish conspiracy to control the world. The last two, The President Knows and No More Hunger, proposed changes that the United States must make to purify and Christianize itself. In addition to the required readings, recruits were required to conduct weekly discussions of the following nine lessons: "The Reds are Upon Us, Why Pick on the Jews, Roosevelt's Red Racket, Skulls for Sale!, Marplots by Moses, After Roosevelt, What?, Reds on the Run!, This Way, Little Jew, and America Convalescent!."²⁷

²⁶Liberation, vol. 4 (October 21, 1933), p. 6. In early 1933, Pelley described a system where state organizers received 10% commissions of any membership from their state. Interestingly, the recruiters who brought in a new member could also receive a 10% commission. Furthermore, any additional donations made by any member of the state could result in a remittance of 20%, to be divided between the State Organizer and the Recruiter. See William Dudley Pelley to Dr. Leach, SHUAC.

²⁷Samuel Levenson, "Pelley's Kampf," Christian Century, vol. 57 (April 10, 1940), p. 477.

Members pledged themselves to "commit no act against America's despoilers of the present moment that is not countenanced or directed by the Chief of the organization over his signature."²⁸ This pledge called for complete adherence to Pelley's policies. Members could be expelled for failure to uphold "tenets of the Christian faith," or if they committed acts or preached doctrines "inimical to the social success of that faith."²⁹ They could also lose their silver shirts if they made "a false representation of race, religious faith, or political principles," if they "promoted or other-wise affiliated with other organizations subversive of the ends of the corporation," or if they "prompted secession movements within the corporation."³⁰ Moreover, members could be discharged for insubordination, for "relaying information as to the corporation's intimate business or plans to subversive individuals or organizations," for "misusing corporation funds," and for "making unauthorized statements or spreading irresponsible reports."³¹

Silvershirters were required to attend all meetings and rallies in uniform. The men were to wear silver-gray

²⁸North Carolina v. Pelley, pp. 223-224.

²⁹Ibid., p. 201.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 201, 207.

³¹Ibid., p. 207.

shirts, with a silk "L" stitched on the left breast. The "great scarlet 'L' emblazoned" over the heart signified Love, Loyalty, and Liberation. Breeches were blue corduroy knickers to be worn with long socks. On each man's blue tie his personalized national number was to be embroidered. Women wore a red and blue shirt with their silver-gray shirts. The Legion's anthem was "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and the flag was a "snow-white banner" with the scarlet 'L'.

The total membership number and distribution has been subject to much speculation. Since the Legion never published its rolls, the statements of Pelley and the educated guesses of others are as close as one can come to the truth. The most reasonable estimates of members are a mid-1933 total of 700-800 growing to a peak membership the next year of 15,000 and dropping off to 5,000 by 1938. Pelley confirmed these figures under oath before the House Un-American Activities Committee. He also claimed that he had signed a total of 25,000 membership certificates in the 1933-1940 years and claimed, in addition, the existence of roughly 75,000 sympathizers. Although he stated on numerous occasions that 47 or 48 states had Silvershirt posts, in the spring of 1934 he more reasonably pictured posts in 12 states, eventually expanding to 22 states. The Silvershirts were well represented in the mid-west, with contingents in Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Nebraska,

but the largest posts were in the far west -- California and Washington. Despite occasional exaggerations by Pelley and frequent ones by his critics, the Silver Legion in actuality was never a large organization. Longings for "One Million Silvershirts" were whimsical dreams by the Legion leader, as was his 1933 comment that "thirty years from today will your children recount with pride: 'My father and mother were SILVER SHIRTS!'"³²

Pelley, usually referred to as "the Chief," presided over a resident secretariat in Asheville, assisted by a few close aides and a variable number of salaried employees.

³²Liberation, vol. 4 (December 30, 1933), p. 12; vol. 9 (January 14, 1938), p. 1; Pelley's Silver Shirt Weekly, vol. 1 (August 29, 1934), p. 1; (September 19, 1934), p. 8; McCormack Committee, pp. 250-253; Dies Committee, III, p. 2360; V, p. 3472; VI, p. 4253; XII, p. 7210, 7211, 7212, 7213, 7253; Donnell Portzline, "William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Shirt Legion of America," Ed.D. Dissertation, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 1965, p.215; John Werly, "The Millenarian Right: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America," Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, 1972, pp. 218-220; Donald Strong, Organized Anti-Semitism in America (Washington D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), pp. 40, 50-52, George Britt, The Fifth Column is Here (New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc., 1940), p. 113.

Various other sources have estimated Pelley's membership in the Silver Legion quite incorrectly: Rep. Dickstein testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1940 that Pelley had once claimed his group numbered 3,000,000. Dickstein preferred the number 75,000. Dies Committee, XII, p. 7254. Dorothy Waring, who testified with Dickstein, estimated Pelley's 1934 membership at around 80,000 to 100,000. Dies Committee, XII, p. 7547. Travis Hoke reported an estimate by The New Republic of 2,000,000 Silvershirts. Travis Hoke, Shirts! (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 1934), p. 13. Finally, Pelley himself wishfully predicted "A Million Silvershirts by 1939!" Liberation, vol. 9 (March 28, 1938).

The three key staffers in 1933 were the increasingly unhappy George S. Anderson, still in charge of funds, "Major" Luther I. Powell, bombastic former Khaki Shirt and Ku Klux Klan organizer who was now a sort of field representative and sometime organizer, and Robert Summerville, managing editor of Liberation and overseer in Asheville during Pelley's frequent absences.³³

Pelley immediately began seeking support for his Legion from outside the ranks. One of his first acts was to visit the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. and ask for money. Anderson related that Pelley said he failed to contact his man.³⁴ It is more likely that the Germans were not

³³The Khaki Shirts was a quazi-veterans' organization founded by "General" Art J. Smith. The membership consisted of non-veterans and participators in the Bonus expeditionary Force at Anacostia Flats. The Khaki Shirts dedicated itself to "manocracy: a new philosophy of economics." The program included the abolition of Congress, the payment of the military bonus, the re-evaluation of silver at a 16:1 ratio, nationalization of the banks, and the largest army and navy in the world. The national headquarters was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. However, the center of Khaki Shirts activity was in Reno, Nevada. The formal dress of the group was a Khaki Shirt, riding breeches, a brown suede riding coat and a plumed headdress. The major activity of the groups was the sale of shirts and boots. See Nathaniel Weyl, "The Khaki Shirts," New Republic, vol. 72 (September 21, 1932), p. 145; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), pp. 78-79; John J. Smertenko, "Hitlerism Comes to America," Harper's Magazine, vol. 167 (November 1933), p. 663; Strong, p. 48; Hoke, pp. 24-25.

³⁴U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Nazi and Other Propaganda, Hearings, 73rd Congress, 1934, p. 255. (Hereinafter, "McCormack Committee.") It should be kept in mind that by the time he testified Anderson was a bitter opponent of Pelley's, but it is interesting to note that

interested in giving any assistance since they already had their hands full with a United States State Department investigation.³⁵

Silvershirt contacts with the Germans in the early period were limited and sporadic. The only real activity was in the summer of 1933, when Pelley spent considerable time in Philadelphia wooing Rudolf T. Kessemeier, resident manager of the local office of the North German Lloyd and Hamburg-America steamship lines. Pelley reported to Asheville headquarters, "Kessemeier . . . is supporting what we are doing 100 percent."³⁶ Pelley spoke too soon: he was unable to get any money from Kessemeier. After failing with Kessemeier and the German government, Pelley told his membership that the Silver Legion was more than an offshoot of fascism in Europe. He announced in Liberation that the "Silver Legion attempts to rise above the ordinary

while Pelley several times denied under oath receiving any money from the Germans, he never denied trying to ask for it. See his affidavit on Nazism in Liberation, vol. 8 (November 7, 1937), p. 1.

³⁵The State Department concluded that the German government had unregistered agents of the NSDAP in the United States. For background on the NSDAP's difficulties in the United States, see: Leland V. Bell, In Hitler's Shadow: The Anatomy of American Nazism (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1973); James Compton, The Swastika and the Eagle (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967); Alton Frye, Nazi Germany and the American Hemisphere, 1933-1941 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967); William F. Hare, The Brown Network (New York: Knight Publications, Inc., 1936); and O. John Rogge, The Official German Report (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961).

³⁶McCormack Committee, p. 294.

Fascist brawling that has unfortunately distinguished certain anti-Jewish and anti-Communist 'Shirts' abroad."³⁷ After this announcement, an occasional domestic pro-Nazi would recommend³⁸ or attack³⁹ Pelley, but there was no consistent contact, or attempts at it, by either side. Ironically, the NSDAP Foreign Press Office did not automatically receive Silvershirt literature; it had to ask for it.⁴⁰

Contacts with domestic Nazis were somewhat more substantial. From the beginning, Pelley had some cooperation from the Friends of New Germany. Through the efforts of Paul Hans Alexander von Lilienfeld-Toal, Pelley's foreign adjutant, contacts were made with Heinz Spanknoebel, the leader of Friends of New Germany.⁴¹ Pelley and Bob Summerville, the managing editor of Liberation, considered accepting German members in the Silvershirts, but decided that it was important to restrict membership to citizens.⁴²

³⁷Liberation, vol. 4 (July 22, 1933), p. 5.

³⁸American Historical Association, American Committee for the Study of War Documents, Records of the National Socialist German Labor Party (NSDAP), U.S. National Archives, Microcopy Number T-81, Washington D.C., 1956, frames 24,495-24,496.

³⁹Ibid., frame 24,549.

⁴⁰Ibid., frame 24,595 and 24,648.

⁴¹McCormack Committee, p. 266.

⁴²William Dudley Pelley to Bob Summerville, SHUAC, tray, 13434.

However, Pelley still wanted German support. He proclaimed that he was the "one man in America who can give the Germans the equitable representation and Square Deal to which they are entitled. . .."⁴³ These contacts resulted in several literature and speaker exchanges. Pelley also tried to obtain financial commitments from other German organizations, but failed on the national level. Some financial arrangements were made but only by the local posts.⁴⁴ In any case, neither Pelley nor his state Chaplains ever adequately exploited this relationship.⁴⁵

Pelley did claim to have had a long talk in 1934 with a very close friend of the Japanese Ambassador in Bayside, New

⁴³"German-Americans Should Support the Commonwealth," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (March 4, 1936), p. 1.

⁴⁴For example, the Deutscher Veteranenverband (German War Veterans) donated \$200 to the Silvershirts in Portland, Oregon. It was a one-time donation and was never reciprocated. See Friends of New Germany and German American Bund, "Right-wing Extremists," Rennar Collection, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

⁴⁵In California and Oregon, the relationships between Silvershirts and the Friends of New Germany (later to be the German American Bund) were quite extensive. See: Morris Schonbach, "Native Fascism During the 1930's and 1940's: A Study of Its Roots, Its Growth, and Its Decline," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1958; Arthur Whitten, "Subversive Activities: Their Extent and Meaning in Portland," Senior thesis, Reed College, Portland, Oregon, 1939; and Karen Hoppes, "An Investigation of the Nazi-Fascism Spectrum in the Pacific Northwest, 1924-1941," M.A.T. thesis, Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, Oregon, 1983.

York.⁴⁶ The friend promised to take up Pelley's attitude with the Ambassador.⁴⁷ Nothing appears to have come of it. However, a stack of copies of Liberation went to Tokyo each week, and Pelley was quite pleased about this.⁴⁸ In addition, No More Hunger was translated and printed in Japan in 1941 as Uenaki Seikatsu ("The Life Without Hunger"). It went through one printing only;⁴⁹ Pelley claimed twenty-one.⁵⁰

Pelley also contacted Russian emigré groups. Silvershirt literature, correspondence and periodicals reveal that favorable responses were received from a few organizations. In a report forwarded to Pelley from his foreign adjutant, Paul von Lilienfeld-Toal noted that "in the average, it seems . . . that [the Germans] are not very anxious to keep in close touch with us, as the Russians apparently are."⁵¹

⁴⁶Pelley to Orville Roundtree, December 11, 1937, "Silvershirt Legion of America," Roundtree Collection, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. (Hereinafter, "Roundtree Collection.")

⁴⁷Pelley, The Door, p. 123.

⁴⁸William Dudley Pelley, Scourge of Cords (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, 1938), p. 3.

⁴⁹Ronald S. Green, "The Aftermath of Seven Minutes in Eternity: William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirts," Honors Thesis, Harvard University, April 2, 1965, p. 65.

⁵⁰William Dudley Pelley, The Foundation Message (Indianapolis: Pelley Publishers, 1940), p. 19.

⁵¹McCormack Committee, p. 272.

It was always more fruitful for the Silvershirts to work among the native-born. One man who had a strong influence on Pelley, and who gave some assistance to the Silvershirts, was Congressman Louis McFadden of Pennsylvania. Beginning in 1933, Pelley claimed several meetings with McFadden in various locations around Washington D.C. Pelley reported that they talked about Jewish power and what it was doing to America.⁵² He gave McFadden "the benefit of all data coming into my possession that in any way helped him in the historical speeches he subsequently made in the Congress on the Jewish question -- speeches that thus became unassailable government archives."⁵³ After McFadden delivered the first anti-Semitic speech on the floor of Congress in several years, Pelley sold 505,000 reprints of McFadden's speeches and consulted with him until 1937.

Although the Silver Legion did "not claim to be a competitive organization with any other 'Shirt' body in America or elsewhere,"⁵⁴ Pelley maintained contact with a variety of leaders of American anti-semitic organizations. Two close friends were the anti-Semitic leafleteer, Robert

⁵²Pelley, The Door, p. 238.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Liberation, vol. 4 (July 22, 1933), p. 5.

Edward Edmondson,⁵⁵ and the editor of the small, but expensive, Industrial Control Reports, James True.⁵⁶ Royal Scott Gulden of the Order of '76⁵⁷ and Gerald L.K. Smith were constantly courted by Pelley in order to make them into Silvershirts.⁵⁸ Smith went so far as to visit the Asheville

⁵⁵Robert Edward Edmondson created a weekly anti-semitic bulletin, the Edmondson Economic Service. The bulletin was distributed to members of various anti-semitic organizations, including the Silvershirts and the German-American Bund. See Strong, pp. 79-82.

⁵⁶James True was an aging anti-Semite who gained notoriety in 1936 when he told the editor of the radical New Masses: "We're not going to drive the Jews out of this country! We're going to bury 'em right here!." True went on to develop a stubby, hardwood truncheon called the "kike killer." See Liberation, vol. 8 (January 1937); "Jew Shoot," Time, vol. 28 (August 24, 1936), pp. 40-41; Liberation, vol. 8 (May 1937). The James True Associates first appeared in July 1933, and attained little save notoriety. The Industrial Control Reports, a weekly newspaper, had a small but steady circulation. For more information on James True, see: Strong, pp. 125-128; Schonbach, pp. 319-321; John Roy Carlson, Undercover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underworld of America (Philadelphia: Blakiston Company, 1943), pp. 145-146, 166-167.

⁵⁷The Order of '76, founded by Royal Scott Gulden in New York City, had a total of 168 members in 1934. By 1936, the group had formally dissolved. In 1937, Gulden announced that "the menace of Communism was over and stated that he was busy 'hustlin real estate' and making himself a nice living." See Strong, pp. 131-132.

⁵⁸McCormack Committee, III, p. 277 and Pelley, The Door, p. 408. For more information on Gerald L.K. Smith see: David H. Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party, 1932-1936 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969); Alan Brinkley, Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); Leo P. Ribuffo, The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the

headquarters, and Pelley claimed that Smith, his wife, and her brother, M.A. Sorenson, actually became members in August 1934.⁵⁹ Smith apparently agreed to work for Pelley and "proselyte [sic.] the states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri and Iowa for the Silver Legion."⁶⁰ Smith created a cavalcade to march throughout the south and recruit members. However, soon after Smith left Asheville he disappeared from the Silvershirts and reappeared a few months later as a staunch supporter of Huey Long's Share-Our-Wealth clubs. Pelley also had some contact with Harry Jung of the anti-radical, American Vigilant Intelligence Federation, especially after Jung decided Communism was Jewish, after all.⁶¹

Pelley sought out a solid source of membership and organizational help. One group which looked promising was the disintegrated Ku Klux Klan. Early issues of Liberation tried not only to convince former members of the Klan to

United States: Gerald L.K. Smith, 79th Congress, 2d Session, January 30, 1946; Elna M. Smith and Charles F. Robertson, eds., Besieged Patriot: Autobiographical Episodes Exposing Communism, Traitorism and Zionism from the Life of Gerald L.K. Smith (Eureka Springs, Arkansas: Smith Foundation, 1978).

⁵⁹Pelley, The Door, p. 272.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹The American Vigilant Intelligence Federation was created in 1927 as an investigative agency of persons and organizations considered subversive by the Federation. The files were sold to businessmen who were interested in the background of particular employees or competitors. See: Strong, pp. 83-108.

join the Silver Legion, but noted that they were doing so in droves.⁶² Indeed, Klansmen could be found frequently within Silvershirt ranks in certain units. In the Detroit, Minneapolis, Baldwin Park (California), Philadelphia, and Oklahoma City posts, the Klan was well represented in the membership.⁶³ However, outside of "Major" Luther Powell, former Klansmen were less frequently found in leadership positions.⁶⁴

Pelley spent much time away from Asheville, usually cultivating some person or organization for donations, or solving personality problems within Silvershirt units. Money remained the greatest concern to the folks left behind. Pelley was forced to spread receipts thinly over a variety of projects and crises. As a result, the organization always operated on a slim margin. Only fragmentary figures are available for the amount of money collected in the early period. Pelley said that when his printing establishment closed in 1934, the turnover was \$50,000 a year.⁶⁵ However, Pelley also said that they were

⁶²For example, see: Liberation (September 16, 1933); and (September 30, 1933).

⁶³Strong, p. 52; Werly, pp. 242, 247. A discussion of the importance of the Klan to Silvershirt membership will be discussed in Chapter 7.

⁶⁴Strong, p. 57.

⁶⁵Leaflet inserted in Pelley's Weekly, vol. 1 (September 12, 1934).

having trouble paying the bills⁶⁶ and that contributions made up the margin.⁶⁷ These contributions were quite frequent.⁶⁸ Contributions were to be divided between the organizational strata. All posts were expected to be self-supporting, but this would have been difficult if they engaged in extensive activity. No one but a few clerks in Asheville ever lived solely on Silvershirt money. Some attempts were made to compensate state organizers in the early days, and Pelley apparently intended that all Silvershirt officers and employees should receive salaries, but he rarely had cash for this.

Even for salaried employees, the payroll was sometimes late and occasionally, never came at all. This caused some bad feelings,⁶⁹ but Pelley could hardly have done more and kept the organization together. Creditors were frequently victims of the money shortage as was Pelley himself. Despite the favorite charge of most of his enemies that Pelley was "unscrupulously exploiting the ignorant" with an "abhorrent type of racketeering," or that he "went around to rich old women, playing up to them and got their money," Pelley never made any great personal profit from the

⁶⁶Pelley's Weekly, vol. 1 (August 29, 1934).

⁶⁷Leaflet inserted in Pelley's Weekly, vol. 1 (September 12, 1934).

⁶⁸Strong, p. 54.

⁶⁹McCormack Committee, p. 587.

Silvershirts.⁷⁰ Pelley continually answered such charges with claims that "money has never been the prime motivating factor," and "there are easier ways of making a living."⁷¹ Showing his frustration with the criticism and attacks, he complained that "[I]f anyone is so screwy as to imagine this 'war' is a profitable frolic, he can have it."⁷² Finally, he lamented that

There is not the slightest self-pity or regret in the statement that from an earning capacity of \$25,000 a year, I have dropped to a revenue of about \$35 a week, taken out of the receipts from the work [for] my personal living expenses.⁷³

⁷⁰Schonbach, p. 303; Gustavas Myers, History of Bigotry in the United States (New York: Capricorn, 1960), pp. 346-347, 356; Carlson, Undercover, p. 344; Minneapolis Times (August 5, 1938); New York Times (August 29, 1939); New York Daily Mirror (September 9, 1942); Arthur Graham, "Crazy Like a Fox: Pelley of the Silver Shirts," New Republic, vol. 178 (April 18, 1934), p. 265; Martin Dies, The Trojan Horse in America (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1940), p. 327; Stanley High, "Star Spangled Fascists," Saturday Evening Post, vol. 211 (May 21, 1939), p. 7; John L. Spivak, America Faces the Barricades (New York: Covici Friede, 1935), p. 225; William Gellerman, Martin Dies (New York: The John Day Company, 1944), p. 110; Portzline, pp. 195-196; and Werly, pp. 225-226.

⁷¹Liberation, vol. 2 (March 1931), p. 183; vol. 4 (August 5, 1933), p. 12.

⁷²Liberation, vol. 9 (December 14, 1938), p. 12.

⁷³Pelley, Seven Minutes, p. 82; see also Liberation, vol. 1 (June 1930), p. 62; vol. 8 (December 28, 1937), p. 12; Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (March 4, 1936), p. 1; (March 11, 1936), p. 2; Pelley to D.D. Clarke, December 11, 1937, Roundtree Collection; Dies Committee, XII, p. 7221.

Pelley apparently was telling the truth. His reported personal income in 1932 was \$2,371 and in 1933 \$2,946.01.⁷⁴ In December 1933, in an attempt to increase his personal salary, he established the Liberation News Bureau in Washington, D.C. Its sole product was a newsletter aimed at businessmen, edited by the erstwhile Silvershirt Foreign Adjutant, Paul von Lilienfeld-Toal. The Bureau issued a mere six newsletters and stopped. In eight months, its bank account had deposits of \$3,653.10⁷⁵ which should have been enough to continue publication. However, Toal constantly complained about an insufficiency of funds, indicating that perhaps the income was used for other purposes besides the Bureau. While there is no record of what these funds were used for, by 1934, Pelley's reported personal income was \$4,108.92.⁷⁶

With Pelley's continued absences from Asheville, the working relationships among the headquarter's personnel began to boil. In late July 1933, George Anderson abruptly departed headquarters. Pelley was still canvassing the East coast when Asheville reported a sudden fifty percent drop in receipts. At the same time, complaints were received from people who were not getting the literature they had ordered.

⁷⁴Personal Income Tax Return, 1932; Accounting, 1933, SHUAC, tray 13223.

⁷⁵McCormack Committee, p. 4190.

⁷⁶Dies Committee, p. 4223.

Already unhappy with Anderson, Pelley and his attorney-friend, Hugh Ward, opened Anderson's desk, to find two thousand letters containing literature orders, each attached to currency or a money order. Anderson's excuse was his mistrust of clerks handling money. Nothing was missing, but it took six days to straighten out, and Anderson was promptly discharged.⁷⁷

This matter was hardly rectified before Pelley was off on another trip. By August 1933, regional headquarters were opened in Oklahoma City to care for the burgeoning membership. The Quartermaster Corps, which was in charge of the Silvershirt uniform, was moved to the new regional headquarters. Pelley also planned a major encampment for Silvershirt cavalcades. Glory-hungry Powell, who now sported the title of Silvershirt Chief of Staff, was placed in charge of organizing the regional headquarters. Powell arrived late in Oklahoma City. He was unable to leave his Shreveport, Louisiana, home until Pelley paid his lapsed house rent.⁷⁸

In the style of conspiratorial politics, one of Powell's first actions as Chief of Staff was to appoint John Edward Rawlins as Special Investigator for the Silver Legion. Rawlins, an old acquaintance of Powell's from his

⁷⁷Pelley, The Door, pp. 396-397.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 417.

Klan days, was ordered to go to Germany to perform two tasks:

(a) Receive instructions for organization of Storm Brigade. We can not lose much valuable time, and before forming our own plans we want detailed information concerning the successful plans of the S.A. Our friends will willingly give you the instruction. They have complete details of all strategic points of approach to every one of our larger centers, and will know what they are about. DO NOT CARRY WITH YOU PHOTOGRAPHS OR MAPS.

(b) Purchase a quantity of side arms. Negotiate for a two year credit on future shipments. Consult on methods of bringing them in. WE MUST HASTEN THE ACCUMULATION OF ARMS.⁷⁹

Powell ordered that the document was to be read, memorized and destroyed. However, a special exception was granted to Rawlins. Powell told him to be careful carrying the orders on his person, at no time must the orders "LEAVE YOU -- AND NEVER SURRENDER IT. DESTROY IF DANGER OF BEING TAKEN."⁸⁰

Rawlins never went to Germany and no contact was made with the German government regarding arms purchases. Powell created the orders as a way of showing his importance. Pelley, it appears, did not authorize the expenses or the mission. However, Powell in his bombastic style, assured Rawlins that "you have his [Pelley's] blessing. If you

⁷⁹Powell to Captain Rawlins, December 12, 1933, SHUAC, tray 13424.

⁸⁰Ibid.

return to us with successful accomplishments, you shall know the generosity of the Chief at its highest."⁸¹

Pelley had high hopes for a continued upsurge in support. A conference in Oklahoma City planned a nationwide series of Silvershirt daily and weekly periodicals. The conference leaders also dreamed of a Silvershirt fleet of airplanes to be used for literature distribution if the Legion were denied the mails.⁸² The leaders called for a Silvershirt daily to be distributed in the Southwest. However, it was one thing to call for a daily and quite another to pay for its production. The best the Legion could do was to print an eight-page weekly which, beginning in November, was called the Silver Legion Ranger. An associate of Pelley's suggested a possible editor:

I said, 'Who's Craig?'

'James Craig. The tall, elderly, white-haired man who attended the session Sunday. He used to be desk man on the Kansas City Star. What's more, he's broke.'

'I know,' I said. 'Everybody's broke. And Craig's about to be ejected for non-payment of his rent!'

'That's right,' agreed Jasper. 'How did you know?'

'Because I'm Santa Claus. I go around the nation fixing up men about to be ejected for non-payment of their house

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Liberation, vol. 4 (September 16, 1933).

rent. It's part of the ritual for becoming a Silvershirt.'⁸³

Shortly before the Silver Legion Ranger appeared, Powell departed. He had been in his element at the Oklahoma headquarters, basking in the publicity and surreptitiously trying to build his own little empire within the organization. Pelley ordered him back to Asheville to work under the supervision of Harry Sieber.⁸⁴ Instead, Powell went to Texas and announced himself as leader of the Anti-Communist Legion of the World. It never got anywhere and soon disappeared.

Also headquartered at Oklahoma City were the Silver Rangers, whom Pelley described as "vigilantes of a New Order."⁸⁵ Any Silvershirt member could join, provided he had a horse, could make it to Oklahoma and was ready to help put down the Communist revolution. Not many came and the idea of an elite force was abandoned, although Pelley had hoped the idea would catch on nationwide, so that every state would have its vigilante force of Silver Rangers "in support of increasingly harassed public authorities seeking to uphold law and order."⁸⁶ Also dropped was the idea of a school in Oklahoma City to train Silvershirt officers in

⁸³Pelley, The Door, p. 275.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 414.

⁸⁵Liberation, vol. 4 (October 14, 1933).

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 12; Silver Legion Ranger, vol. 1 (November 1, 1933), p. 4.

combat tactics.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the idea of a Silvershirt encampment was forgotten since the promised Oklahoma support was not forthcoming.

As Pelley began to fight his battles against the McCormack Committee, as well as the North Carolina authorities, the Legion was left to its own devices. The investigations wrecked havoc on the various state posts. By 1936, Pelley complained that the Legion was chaotic in many areas from lack of proper leadership, that headquarters was always swamped by the constant referral of local problems to Asheville, and that undesirable elements needed to be dropped.

The complex organizational system was changed in order to make the Silver Legion more efficient. Now each state with an organization was headed by a Liaison Officer with authority over Silvershirts in that state. Few of these Officers, if any, tried to impose rigid discipline. The internal structure of the units varied widely; some even adopted standard parliamentary procedure. The subject matter of the meetings and the expertise with which they were handled, likewise varied.⁸⁸

The character of the organization in this later period was shaped in no small part by the former Washington State

⁸⁷Liberation, vol. 4 (October 21, 1933).

⁸⁸The leadership differences between the different posts will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Christian Party Chairman, Roy Zachary, who, in early 1937, became Silvershirt second-in-command with the rank of Field Marshal.

Zachary had been trained as a teacher, and had performed such tasks as running a lumber mill and doing clerical work for the Port of Seattle. He had been a Liberty Party organizer, and had come to the Silvershirts through his pre-Silvershirt interest in Pelley's esoterica.⁸⁹ He described his new job thus:

My time in Asheville is limited and when I get in there from a trip, there is a stack of letters on my desk a foot high. It keeps me from having any time at all at home with my family and all they hear from me is my snoring at night after I have sneaked to bed in the wee small hours of the morning. Only a day or two of this, and I am out on the road again, making contacts, staging meetings, trying to take care of correspondence, and making contacts with people in territory already covered and yet to visit.⁹⁰

Zachary's primary job was organization. He was much needed. Bob Summerville was married in 1936 and thereafter was unable to devote the time needed; Pelley requested that he leave the staff. Harry Martin, Summerville's replacement, died in late 1937. After Zachary arrived, staffing stabilized. The top administrator was Alfred H.E. Talpey, a 54-year old former insurance executive with a

⁸⁹Interview with Mrs. Ruth Zachary, August 22, 1978.

⁹⁰Roy Zachary to Orville Roundtree, April 4, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

Harvard degree in electrical engineering who joined the Delaware Silver-shirts in 1934. Lawrence Brown was editorial researcher for the Pelley Publishers and Jesse B. Kling was, among other things, Pelley's personal secretary. The Asheville staff reached a high of thirty employees.

Zachary was a calming influence. Pelley considered him "the right man for the place and already has enough posts to visit and people to see, to keep him going for the next six months."⁹¹ His participation allowed Pelley to devote himself to producing literature and pursuing financial contributors. As a result, Pelley's reported personal income for 1937 rose to \$6,435.58; and, if Pelley's publishing activities, now conducted under the name of Skyland Press, Inc., had a net loss of \$617.25, they still had taken in \$19,150.⁹²

One of Zachary's first tasks was to determine the level of commitment from the membership. Zachary realized that some supporters did not wish to take part in active militia work "such as might be occasioned by political activity in time of stress."⁹³ These members, he noted, wished to be known as corresponding members, "doing what is possible by their moral support to enhance the national good through

⁹¹William Dudley Pelley to Orville Roundtree, June 19, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

⁹²Dies Committee (1939), p. 4234.

⁹³Zachary to All Silver-shirts, 1937[?], SHUAC, tray, 13435.

their endorsement of the organization and the publicity they can give it among their friends."⁹⁴ Others wished to do active promotional work such as holding recruiting meetings, making the purposes of the Legion known to "responsible officials who may be in sympathy with its objectives," or proselytizing the message through the distribution of literature furnished by headquarters.⁹⁵ Still others, whom Zachary called the "most efficacious of all," were those who clamored for direct personal activity and "only await the proper direction to combine under effective leadership for positive work in their localities."⁹⁶

Zachary, then, set the goal of classifying the membership so as to allocate positions where individuals could contribute according to their talents and inclinations. Classification was accomplished by having each member fill out a new enrollment form. The form, Zachary noted, would "enable us to obtain confidential data for Headquarters, making you eligible for heavier responsibilities in the matter of material entrusted to you. . . ."⁹⁷ What was clear was that Zachary wanted to "clean up" the ranks and make the Legion a more efficient and effective organization.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid.

"Wanting to" and "being able to" were two different things. Time and events were catching up. Pelley's troubles caused the organization to flounder. The Dies Committee investigations, the North Carolina trials, the Sedition Trial, the normal financial difficulties, the disarray caused by Zachary's predecessors and America's involvement in World War II all were factors in hastening the demise of the Silver Legion.

CHAPTER 5

**PELLEY AND THE SILVERSHIRTS:
THE INTERPRETATIVE DEBATE**

William Dudley Pelley and the Silvershirt Legion offer interesting interpretative challenges for historians as they try to analyze what Pelley was politically and why people were attracted to his organization. On the one hand, Pelley's beliefs were similar to European fascism, on the other hand, he seemed to offer a new vision of home-grown religious fundamentalism.

Contemporaries quickly saw Pelley as a prototype Hitler who planned to bring National Socialism to the United States. A 1933 article in The Nation accused the Legion of "working hand in hand with the American Nazi representatives."¹ Samuel McCoy, in a 1934 article for Raymond Moley's Today magazine entitled, "Hitlerism Invades America," gave a lurid picture of Nazi storm troopers guarding Silver Legion meetings.² An American Civil Liberties Union pamphlet surveyed the American "shirt"

¹Ludwig Lore, "Nazi Politics in America," The Nation, vol. 137 (November 29, 1933), p. 617.

²Samuel D. McCoy, "Hitlerism Invades America," Today, vol. 1 (April 7, 1934), pp. 3-4.

movements in that same year and referred to these groups, including Pelley's, as "officially or secretly friendly" to Germany.³ In 1935, George Seldes in one of several exposés called "Hitlerism Marches in America," described the direct import of National Socialism in the various American "shirt" groups.⁴ After the outbreak of war in Europe, these accusations, as illustrated by George Britt's The Fifth Column Is Here, increased. Britt described a unified American fifth column numbering over one million. Pelley's Silver-shirts were supposedly an integral part of the movement conspiring to establish National Socialism in America.⁵ The following year another exposé was published, I Find Treason. The author, Richard Rollins, had infiltrated several groups during the thirties, including the Silver Legion, and called Pelley "an incipient American Fascist."⁶ Rollins warned of a massive fifth column under the direct organizational control of Hitler.⁷ The prosecution painted a similar picture at Pelley's sedition trial. The 1942 Outline of Evidence opened with the

³Travis Hoke, Shirts (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 1934), p. 8.

⁴George Seldes, "Hitlerism Marches In America," Today, vol. 1 (March 9, 16, 1935).

⁵George Britt, The Fifth Column Is Here (New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc., 1940), p. 117.

⁶Richard Rollins, I Find Treason (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1941), p. 11.

⁷Ibid., p. 13.

statement: "The approach used in this outline to demonstrate the subversive and disloyal character of the Silvershirts is to sketch the similarities of their doctrines and techniques to those of the Nazi party."⁸

It is not difficult to understand these conclusions, for Pelley and the Silver Legion resembled the Nazis in many ways. The most obvious similarity was in the name and initials of Pelley's group: Silver Shirts sounded much like Hitler's Brown Shirts, and the initials, resembled the Nazi SS corp. Pelley's fascination with the glories of war, his fastidious dress, and the Legion's preoccupation with military titles, flag and uniform invited the Nazi comparison.

Liberation commonly carried illustrations of armies of medieval knights on white horses riding gallantly off to battle.⁹ Pelley argued that the Silver Legion was merely perpetuating military virtues that had characterized the history of the United States. In his spiritualistic version of colonial history, Pelley compared himself to Roger Williams; his Silvershirts to the Separatists; and the Legion's struggles against the Roosevelt Administration to

⁸U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Outline of Evidence: The Silvershirt Legion of America (The Silvershirts) (December 23, 1942), p. 1.

⁹Liberation, vol. 4 (February 18, 1933).

the Separatists' battles against the king's sheriffs.¹⁰ Pelley's literature lauded many heroes of history and sought to convey the impression that his organization was striving to protect the traditional virtues for which they supposedly stood. He praised Paul Revere for his ride to warn the people of Lexington, which led to a "shot heard 'round the world," but lamented the fact that his historic shot was being muffled by "the blare of Hebrew jazz and the blat of demagogues, playing the game of alien overlords."¹¹ He expressed hope for the country, however, because his Silver Legion represented "New Minute-Men ready to fire another shot heard 'round the world."¹² Referring to Nathan Hale as a "Nordic, dying for a principle,"¹³ Pelley maintained that he too was fighting to preserve the "wholesome Nordic culture."¹⁴ Taking his cue from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Pelley told his prospective followers that "the Silver Shirts are swarming" to ensure that:

¹⁰William D. Pelley, Cabin Smoke: The Thirteen Explorers, vol. 2 of Little Visits with Great Americans (Asheville: Pelley Publishers, 1939), p. 11.

¹¹William Dudley Pelley, "Americans, Get Ready to Save Your Country from Chaos!," Liberation, vol. 4 (June 3, 1933), p. 1.

¹²William Dudley Pelley, "Silvershirts are Marching," Liberation, vol. 4 (June 3, 1933), p. 12.

¹³William Dudley Pelley, Editorials by Pelley: Published During 1936 in Pelley's Weekly (Asheville: Pelley Publishers, 1936), p. 24.

¹⁴"German Americans Should Support the Commonwealth," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (March 4, 1936), p. 4.

This nation under God is going to have a new birth of freedom -- and government of the people, for the people, and by the people, is not going to perish from this earth.¹⁵

Pelley tried to reassure his followers that they were saving America just as Mussolini and Hitler had saved their countries.

Do you know that this strictly Christian Militia, the Silver Shirts of America, means to save America as Mussolini and his Black Shirts saved Italy, and Hitler and his Brown Shirts saved Germany -- but without altering our republican, representative form of Constitutional Government, if it can be managed?¹⁶

Those who wrote of Pelley nearly always mentioned his meticulous personal appearance. Pelley was customarily referred to as "diminutive, helped somewhat toward dignity by gray hair and a well-tended Vandyke,"¹⁷ or a "small dapper man with a too-neatly combed and clipped Van Dyke beard."¹⁸ Pelley and Hitler were strikingly similar in

¹⁵William Dudley Pelley, "The Silver Shirts are Swarming From Oregon to Texas," Liberation, vol. 4 (September 23, 1933), p. 3.

¹⁶William Dudley Pelley, "Silvershirts of America are Mobilizing to Protect Your Life," Galilean, vol. 1 (January 1936), p. 3.

¹⁷Stanley High, "The Star-Spangled Fascists," Saturday Evening Post, vol. 178 (May 27, 1939), p. 7.

¹⁸Rollins, pp. 9-10. See also U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Hearings 76th and 77th Congresses, 1938-1940 (1940), vol. XII, p. 7539. (Hereinafter, "Dies Committee."); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: Politics of Upheaval (Boston:

appearance: two small men, meticulous in dress and manner, both wearing uniforms; one with a "well-tended Vandyke" and the other with a neatly trimmed mustache.

The Chief adopted the symbols of militarism (e.g., uniforms, flags, military titles, command structures) for his Silver Legion organization. The symbolic likenesses between the Nazis and the Silver Legion were just as obvious as the stylistic similarities between the two leaders; Silvershirts and Brown Shirts marching side by side to battle.

Pelley helped his critics reach their judgment that he was a Nazi prototype. Pelley not only physically emulated Hitler, but he constantly praised the Führer with comments such as: "Hitler is a Man of Destiny,"¹⁹ "Americans have a racial block to split, as the Nazis had in Germany,"²⁰

Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 80. The exception to this description is found in John Roy Carlson's Under Cover. Desiring to expose Pelley as a reprehensible demagogue, Carlson referred to "the sweatiest, unhealthiest, clammiest hand shake I ever hope to experience. [He was] leaning against a desk, his striped shirt open down to his puffed up belly. His undershirt was sweaty, stuck against a chest puny, narrow and sunk in. His lips were thick and the blood in them seemed to be sluggish and clotted. His hair was streaked with lifeless grey. His brows, jet black by artificial means - hung bushy over sunken eyes. His goatee and mustache, both of them white, stuck out of his small wizened face. My initial impression was one of revulsion and disgust at the limp, dissipated grayness of the man before me. He smelled of decay." John Roy Carlson, Undercover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underworld of America (Philadelphia: Blakiston Company, 1943), p. 399.

¹⁹Liberation, vol. 4 (April 22, 1933), p. 5.

²⁰Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (January 22, 1936), p. 4.

"Germany with Jewish control broken had few economic troubles and no unemployment problem,"²¹ and "Hitler is a winner."²² A witness who testified before the Dies Committee, stated that in a 1936 speech Pelley went so far as to mention "that he had been called by his enemies as a pro-German. He said he was proud of being pro-German; he was proud of the fact that he had been called the Adolf Hitler of America because that is what he considered himself."²³ Throughout his publications, Pelley generously praised Hitler. He was elated by Hitler's 1933 rise to power; he tempered the acclaim somewhat after the outbreak of the war, and never really rejected the Führer until the 1942 sedition trial.

It is little wonder then, that contemporary critics labeled Pelley a fascist. The personal similarities were great between Pelley and Hitler as leaders and the symbolic similarities were somewhat apparent between their respective organizations: the Silver Shirts and the Brown Shirts. Yet symbolic ties, no matter how calculated, did not necessarily make Pelley a Nazi. Despite his sympathies for the plight of Germany, the extent to which he belonged to the National Socialist movement needed to be determined not on the

²¹Liberation, vol. 9 (February 21, 1938), p. 3.

²²Liberation, vol. 11 (July 14, 1940), p. 3.

²³Dies Committee, IX, p. 5496. See also Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (January 22, 1936), p. 4.

grounds of symbols and sympathy, but on ideology and structure.

The first scholarly examinations, providing a general analysis of the panorama of fascist organizations, were by Victor Ferkiss, "The Political and Economic Philosophy of American Fascism" and Morris Schonbach, "Native Fascism During the 1930's and 1940's: A Study of its Roots, its Growth, and its Decline."²⁴ Both dissertations provide a foundation for much of the historical work on fascist organizations in America.

Ferkiss set himself two tasks: to formulate a definition of fascism; and to demonstrate the nature and scope of fascist ideas in American intellectual and political life, their antecedents and their probable future. Ferkiss defined fascism in terms that broadened the rather limited descriptions as reactionary capitalism or as consummation of the theory that the individual is subordinate to the state. Although he recognized these two important aspects of fascism, Ferkiss saw fascism as:

a set of answers to social problems - an interconnected whole - which develops into a mass movement under the stimulus of certain social conditions. It is not the result of deduction from abstract principles about the nature of man and

²⁴Victor Ferkiss, "The Political and Economic Philosophy of American Fascism," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1954; and Morris Schonbach, "Native Fascism During the 1930's and 1940's: A Study of its Roots, its Growth, and its Decline," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1958.

his destiny, but is arrived at by the accretion of ad hoc proposals, and only later and secondarily, if at all, finds a metaphysical superstructure and rationalization.²⁵

Fascism, then, was largely both popular and spontaneous, arising as an answer to social crisis. For Ferkiss, the major social cause was "the capitalistic crisis of over-production and unemployment coupled with the alleged inadequacy of the alternative of maintaining or returning to laissez faire or of moving toward the socialist State."²⁶ To separate European fascism from American fascism, Ferkiss commented that "techniques of political action and a few minor pieces of data for propaganda are the primary contributions of European to American fascism."²⁷

"The major element in the intellectual ancestry of American fascism," Ferkiss continued, " . . . is the

²⁵Ferkiss, p. 24. The validity of Ferkiss' statement is supported by the fact that most scholars who have sought to define fascism in America have concentrated on the characteristics of the system rather than attempting to describe its philosophy. In contrast, scholars on European fascism are intensely involved in looking at the philosophical foundations of fascism on the European landscape. See: Ernst Nolte, Three Faces of Fascism (New York: Holt, Rinehard, and Winston, 1963); John Weiss, The Fascist Tradition: Radical Right-Wing Extremism in Modern Europe (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); Gordon Allardyce (ed.), The Place of Fascism in European History (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971); Walter Laqueur (ed.), Fascism: A Reader's Guide (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).

²⁶Ibid., p. 27.

²⁷Ibid., p. 323; see also p. 40.

Populist tradition."²⁸ Noting similarities between the programs of native fascist movements and the Populists, Ferkiss saw fascism as a continuation of the "great grass-roots tradition which it took over in its dying days and used as a vehicle."²⁹

Ferkiss's conclusions, unique in tracing fascism to Populist thought, tried to show a unity to what other historians saw as disparate fascist dogmas. H. Arthur Steiner, in a 1935 article in the American Political Science Review, suggested that the American movements could at best be termed "quasi-Fascist," but the conclusion must remain that "we find no formal Fascism in America today."³⁰ Morris Janowitz, in a perceptive study of the Black Legion, argued similarly that "Nazi doctrine was too positive for their state of mind and too disciplined for their disordered individualism."³¹

Morris Schonbach disagreed with Ferkiss and took a slightly new direction. Surveying a variety of

²⁸Ibid., p. 326; See also pp. 321, 323, 331, 365. Ferkiss extended his work on the connection of Fascism to Populism in an article, "Populist Influences on American Fascism," Western Political Quarterly, vol. 10 (June 1957), pp. 350-373.

²⁹Ibid., p. 365.

³⁰H. Arthur Steiner, "Fascism in America?," American Political Science Review, vol. 29 (October 1935), p. 830.

³¹Morris Janowitz, "Black Legions on the March," America in Crisis, ed. Daniel Aaron (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 323.

organizations -- both European-based fascist organizations in America as well as native fascist groups -- Schonbach found a distinctive American Native Fascist movement in which the absence of consistent ideology marked the chief difference from National Socialism.³² He based his conclusion on the "bulk of Native Fascist output, on the mean, so to speak, of Native Fascism, rather than on its roots and possible tendencies."³³ Whereas Ferkiss put the various fascist groups in the context of other political groups, Schonbach's contribution was to study each of them for themselves. His finding was that the groups lacked the cohesion that Ferkiss seemed to assume. What was necessary, Schonbach argued, was to look at each group separately and not as part of a unitary "movement."

Several studies have, in a limited way, combined the styles of Ferkiss and Schonbach. These newer studies both looked at the overall philosophy of fascist groups and compared the individual philosophy of two or more groups. The result has been to fill in more details about the variety of the American fascist experience.³⁴ However,

³²Schonbach, p. 25.

³³Ibid., p. 21.

³⁴For example, see Gustavus Myers, History of Bigotry in the United States (New York: Capricorn, 1960); David H. Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969); Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab, The Politics of Unreason: Right-wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970 (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Geoffrey S. Smith, To Save a Nation: American Countersubversives, the

these works discussed numerous groups within a comprehensive theory of native fascism. The problem is that this approach did not appreciate the fact that fascist organizations were each truly independent in translating their political philosophy into an American context. There still existed a need to examine each group by itself.

Two attempts to focus on the Silvershirt Legion of America were dissertations by Donnell Portzline, "William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Shirt Legion of America" and John Werly, "The Millenarian Right: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America."³⁵ Both saw the Silvershirts as an essentially fascist organization with an uniquely American perspective.

Portzline and Werly both approached the Silvershirt program by examining the life, philosophy and religious tenets of its leader -- William Dudley Pelley. They argued that the organization had no existence outside of Pelley. However, they interpreted Pelley differently. Portzline saw Pelley's movement as little more than a carbon copy of

New Deal and the Coming of World War II (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Alan Brinkley, Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

³⁵Donnell B. Portzline, "William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Shirt Legion of America," Ed.D. Dissertation, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 1965; and John M. Werly, "The Millenarian Right: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America," Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, 1972.

European fascist political movements in that "the tenets and programs of the European fascist leaders were known, interpreted, endorsed, and expounded."³⁶ Werly, on the other hand, argued that Pelley was not a fascist in the European sense because "when the political and economic ideology of Pelley is measured against the tenets of National Socialism, it becomes obvious that his [Pelley's] was not a Nazi ideology."³⁷ Werly went on to argue that Pelley's organization had a religious aspect largely ignored by other historians distracted by the more obvious resemblances, although only symbolic, to political fascism.

Werly, then, prepared the ground for a new perspective -- that of Pelley's religious tenets. Werly's argument was against contemporary sources which nearly always either chastised Pelley as being a Nazi traitor or dismissed him as a religious charlatan.³⁸

³⁶Ibid., p. 73.

³⁷Werly, p. ii.

³⁸For example, Travis Hoke, in a 1934 survey of "shirt" movements for the ACLU, referred to the Silvershirt leader as "some mysterious demagogue who promises to ennoble" the hatreds of anyone joining the Legion. Hoke, p. 20. An article in New Republic the same year commented that "the supposition that he [Pelley] may be mentally broken, that his sudden foray into spiritualism in 1929 was the result of an intellectual collapse, has superficially, a certain measure of plausibility." Arthur Graham, "Crazy Like a Fox: Pelley of the Silver Shirts," New Republic, vol. 178 (April 18, 1934), p. 265. John Spivak was extremely critical of those who prey on the fears of "honest and earnest citizens" who become "easy converts to the mystic nonsense of men like William Dudley Pelley." John L. Spivak, America Faces the Barricades (New York: Covici Friede, 1935), p. 229.

Werly also took exception to the skeptical conclusions of the early dissertations about the credibility of Pelley's beliefs. Ferkiss found little political sense to Pelley's thought concluding that he "was a sincere madman or an imaginative charlatan."³⁹ Schonbach rejected the "crackpots and lunatics" analysis of Ferkiss and treated Pelley's thought as a mixture of politics, religion, metaphysics and mysticism: the last element of which "ingratiated him with a public which might otherwise have been immune to his blandishments."⁴⁰ Donnell Portzline considered the religious thinking of Pelley as "a principal reason for the growth of the Silver Legion." While not calling Pelley a spiritual lunatic, Portzline concluded that the Silvershirt leader exploited religious sympathies to the end of political demagoguery.⁴¹

Werly's different approach was to place Pelley into the pattern of millenarian thought in America by arguing that Pelley's writings contained major premillennial characteristics:

nondenominationalism, universalism, vivid descriptions of the Antichrist, a description of a world of absolutes, an evident trait of pessimism, a theme of imminence, a belief that conditions will steadily worsen until the reappearance of Christ and the fiery literal

³⁹Ferkiss, p. 276.

⁴⁰Schonbach, pp. 27, 30, 304.

⁴¹Portzline, p. 30.

Armageddon, and an assertion that Christ will establish and rule a thousand year Kingdom of God on earth.⁴²

An understanding of premillenarian thought, Werly concluded, gives "the precepts of William Dudley Pelley . . . a unity which they otherwise lacked."⁴³

⁴²Werly, p. 192.

⁴³Ibid., p. 212. The two most common types of chiliastic movements are premillennialism and postmillennialism. It is important to realize that both are more similar than different: both contend that the Scriptures are the authoritative word of God and that the death of Christ was a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice. Furthermore, both believe in a personal return of Christ to earth. When Christ returns, all persons will stand in judgment and the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished. The major difference between these two movements relate primarily to the time and purpose of Christ's return.

Premillennial thought contends that the thousand year reign of Christ on earth will come at the beginning of the millennium rather than at its end. After the proclaiming of the gospel throughout the earth has proven to be of no avail and the world has become a hopeless wreck, then Christ will return and with his saints reign for a thousand years. The righteous will be raised and Satan bound and locked in the abyss. At the end of a thousand years, Satan will be unbound and attempt to regain power, but to no avail. Lost souls will then be raised and they, together with Satan, will be judged and hurled into a lake of fire where they are doomed to everlasting torment. The earth will then be cleansed by fire and become the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed.

Postmillennialists believe that the thousand year reign of Christ on earth will come after the gospel has been spread and become effective throughout the world. The condition thus reached will last for a thousand years. In this period, the Jews will be converted to Christianity. After a brief but terrible conflict between the Christians and evil forces, Christ will appear and the general resurrection and the final judgment will follow. The earth will then be destroyed by fire and a new heaven and a new earth will be revealed.

For more information on the historical nature of millennial movements, see: Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961); Harrison Franklin Hall, Modern Premillennialism and the Christian

Werly's connection of millennialist themes to Pelley's thoughts was reasonable. Millennialism does offer a level of coherence to Pelley's ideas and takes him beyond being a simple fascist or religious lunatic. But Werly contended that Pelley was a premillennialist. This is where he went astray. Just because Pelley sounded like a premillennialist, it did not make him a premillennialist.

Millennialism, both pre and post, was more complex than Werly recognized, especially in its connections with fundamentalism. As Ernest Sandeen writes, "Fundamentalism was the outgrowth of the 'millenarian' movement that developed . . . through Bible institutes and conferences concerning the interpretation of Biblical prophecies."⁴⁴ It was "united by [a] fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought."⁴⁵ However, fundamentalism was primarily a

Hope (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1920); Loraine Boettner, The Millennium (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publishing Co., 1958); Ira Brown, "Watchers of the Second Coming: The Millenarian Tradition in America," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, vol. 39 (October 1952); Ernest L. Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949); and Ernest L. Tuveson, Redeemer Nation (Chicago: University Press, 1968).

⁴⁴Ernest Sandeen argued that millenarianism was "crucial in understanding fundamentalism." Ernest Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1830 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 5.

⁴⁵George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 4.

religious movement. It was a response to doctrinal challenges from the new biblical scholarship and from the scientific theories of Darwinism. The former, under the banner of the "Higher Criticism," undermined belief in the inerrancy of the Bible, and challenged its historical authenticity. The latter, under the banner of natural selection, posed an even more serious threat, not only because it postulated a different story of creation, but also because many intellectuals accepted Darwinism as a reason to reject any Christian base.

As these ideas from scholarship and science began to infiltrate Protestant seminaries, to gain sway over numerous ministers, and to affect the laity, a backlash erupted. In 1910, thanks to the contributions of Milton and Lyman Stewart, chief stockholders in the Union Oil Company, the Reverend Amzi C. Dixon began publication of a set of twelve pamphlets, entitled, "The Fundamentals." These pamphlets, mailed free of charge to an estimated 250,000 pastors, evangelists, missionaries, theological students, Sunday School superintendents, and YMCA-YWCA secretaries, established a doctrinal core for practicing Protestants that reaffirmed the inerrancy of the Bible. Written by a group of recognized American and British religious scholars, "The Fundamentals" offered a conservative defense against the inroads of modernism, yet it avoided, for purposes of unity,

some of the controversial positions later associated with fundamentalism.⁴⁶

As a religious movement, fundamentalism's focus was on doctrine and not on social or political conditions. Premillennialists, who constituted a major segment of the fundamentalist movement, believed that the world was beyond salvation until the Second Coming of Christ; hence, they were hesitant about engaging in reform causes. Decline in morals or the appearance of false, modernist prophets could be, and often were, read as a sign of Christ's coming; but the path to salvation lay in personal, rather than social, regeneration.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Stewart G. Cole, The History of Fundamentalism (New York: R.R. Smith, Inc., 1971), pp. 188-207. The pamphlets soon became a symbolic point of reference for identifying a "fundamentalist" movement. When in 1920 the term "fundamentalist" was coined, it called to mind the broad united front of the kind of opposition to modernism that characterized these widely known, if little studied, volumes. In retrospect, the volumes retain some usefulness in tracing the outlines of the emerging movement. They represent the movement at a moderate and transitional stage before it was reshaped and pushed to extremes by the intense heat of controversy. R.A. Torrey and A.C. Dixon, The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., 1910-1915).

⁴⁷As a result, premillennialists, as reflected in their leading journals, Our Hope and the King's Business, had initially opposed American entry into World War I.

Our Hope was out-and-out pacifist at the beginning of the war. Its reasoning, however, was not that of Bryan or the humanitarians who opposed war because they favored peace. Rather, this thoroughly anti-political attitude consistently emphasized the hopelessness of all efforts to solve the world's problems through political efforts, whether pacifist or military. Bryan, they thought, was chasing illusions. The editor, Arno C. Gaebelin, saw the war as important in that it provided some more pieces to be

After World War I, the association of the Higher Criticism with moral collapse became the explanation for America's problems. Now the war against modernism could be interpreted as a defense of a bastion of Christian civilization. William Bell Riley, a Minneapolis Baptist preacher and premillennialist, organized the World's Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919 to stand against the wave. "The enemy had come in like a flood," its resolutions committee wrote, "and the Spirit of Jehovah had lifted up a standard against him."⁴⁸ Instead of awaiting

fit into the prophetic puzzle.

The King's Business was published by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and was a continuation of the work of The Fundamentals. During the two years preceding America's entry into the war, its editors firmly and repeatedly announced their total opposition to the war. According to the editors, T.C. Horton and Keith L. Brooks, prophecy had made it clear that war was inevitable, even though this war would not be the last. See: Marsden, pp. 141-153.

Modernists, however launched an attack, especially through the University of Chicago's School of Divinity, on premillennialism as unpatriotic. They identified the Higher Criticism with German militarism and advanced an interpretation that "corrupt German Biblical scholarship was at the root of the astounding moral collapse of German civilization." Faced with the threat of being labeled anti-American, the premillennialists were finally persuaded to support the war. Marsden, p. 126.

⁴⁸Nelson Hodges Hart, "The True and the False: The Worlds of an Emerging Evangelical Protestant Fundamentalism in America, 1890-1920," Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1976, p. 218.

Armageddon as inevitable, Riley urged an attack on the "Great Apostasy."⁴⁹

Thus, religious fundamentalism did promote a feeling that American society was in crisis. The solution to the crisis was a return to the Bible. The focus, however, was more on denominational struggles over doctrine than over redemption of the moral order.

This is why Werly's interpretation of Pelley is faulty. To call Pelley a premillennialist is to put him in the fundamentalist camp. Pelley doesn't belong there. Pelley was a millennialist, but only in the broadest sense. He, like other millennialists, believed in Armageddon and the thousand-year reign of Christ. But he also believed that redemption could be brought about by action.

Although sounding like a premillennialist, Pelley was more concerned with changing the secular moral order. His

⁴⁹There was nothing inherent in Riley's theology, however, that would lead his followers to focus on immorality in the nation's cities, or on the goal of "cleaning up the town." Hart, p. 218. Although Riley had argued in his early years in Minneapolis that "the Church of God is especially charged with civic reform," premillennialism seems to have put a damper on these sentiments; thus, he avoided the subject in most of his works after 1910. Only one of the more prominent premillennialist preachers, John Roach Straton, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in New York, played upon the theme of urban corruption. In a book, The Menace of Immorality on Church and State and a published sermon, "Will New York Be Destroyed If It Does Not Repent?," Straton compared the corruption exhibited in New York's hotels and cabarets to that of Nineveh, Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah; he called for a return to the Bible as the only means of salvation. Marsden, pp. 128, 162-163.

plans for the Commonwealth, the stress on the role of the "Great Souls," his conception of the Silver Legion as "warriors of Christ" were directed at changing the here and now. His rhetoric about the fiery literal Armageddon, the vivid descriptions of the Antichrist and the assertion of the millennium, were rhetorical devices directed at giving a rationale for changing society. What Pelley wanted was that change:

The World has a Book and a Candle that are waiting for my vision. It has a Staff and a Compass that would aid me in my voyagings through many dark caverns of Spirit where great lecheries are but phantoms. 'I will rise and go to my Father,' is more than a line in a spiritual fable.⁵⁰

He was not prepared to wait for salvation as a good premillennialist would have been.

Action was more of a theme associated with Protestant pietism than fundamentalism. Pietism, is a long held pattern of American Protestantism with roots in New England and appealing to Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ and Scandinavian Lutherans. These groups saw themselves as "their brother's keeper."⁵¹ Pietists believed that they had a responsibility to inculcate their moral code -- a universal imperative for all

⁵⁰William Dudley Pelley, "Thou Little Valiant!" Liberation, vol. 7 (May 6, 1936), p. 7.

⁵¹Clifford S. Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960), pp. ix-xv.

citizens. They usually did not challenge the principal of freedom of religion, but they did believe that their moral insights represented what was best for America. Through revivals they sought the perfection of individual moral habits; by the late nineteenth century, they had designated control of the desire to smoke, drink, or dance and the willingness to spend all day Sunday in a prayerful fashion as the hallmarks of Christian character and a sound democracy. Pietists were not content, however, with revivals as a means to spread personal holiness; they turned also to the passage of prohibitory legislation.⁵² In the

⁵²Sidney E. Mead, "American Protestantism since the Civil War: From Denominationism to Americanism," The Journal of Religion, vol. 36 (January 1956), pp. 2-3. The importance of pietist Protestantism to American politics was best described by Richard Jensen, The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) and Paul Kleppner, The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900 (New York: Free Press, 1970). Both historians have concluded that pietist Protestants had always involved themselves in Midwestern politics as a way to impose their moral code on society. See also Martin Marty, Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America (New York: Dial Press, 1970). Marty did not appreciate that there was a difference between pietists and evangelicals. Thus he lumped all theological differences under the heading of "evangelical." He contended that it was evangelicals who established a Protestant culture within American society. This led him to conclude that religious political activity belonged to evangelicalism. What he failed to realize was that it was actually the pietist Protestants who were the social activists. Evangelicals were closer to the fundamentalists strain which called for social rejuvenation through Biblical teachings alone.

The idea of pietist involvement in politics has also led to a reinterpretation of the post-Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan. The most recent work, William D. Jenkins, Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990), argues

that the Klan was made up of pietist Protestants. These members were interested in using the political potential of the Klan to enforce the Protestant moral code. The desire to develop a "national culture" led the Klan to see itself as a law enforcement agency to purge personal immorality. Other studies of the Klan support this theme.

In recent studies of the Utah and El Paso Klans, Larry Gerlach and Shawn Lay have discovered that the ability of opponents to mimic the Klan's focus on morality and vice-law enforcement limited the Klan's appeal and its success politically. In Utah, Gerlach uncovered a multivariate level of causation of Klan activity, but he readily admits that "mobilization for war against crime and immorality was perhaps the principal common denominator among Klansmen in the Beehive State." Larry Gerlach, Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1982), p. 139. In El Paso, Shawn Lay concluded that Klan growth depended on religious revivals, which swelled the ranks of the local Protestant churches. The key issues were moral order and law enforcement, with attention focused on the Mexican community as the prime offender. Shawn Lay, War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan: A Study of Intolerance in a Border City (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1985), pp. 14-15.

The most important indicator, though, of the strength of moral reform and law enforcement as significant Klan issues can be found in Charles Alexander, The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966). Although immigrant and black populations were small, the Klan flourished there. According to Alexander, a "passion for reform" and a desire to impose conservative moral values on any offenders provoked an extralegal response by Klan members. Thus, the Klan grew in spite of the smallness of the non-Anglo-Saxon population. Recent studies of Tillamook, Oregon and Macon, Georgia, with low immigrant and black populations, draw similar conclusions. See Roger Hux, "The Ku Klux Klan in Macon, 1919-1925," Georgia Historical Quarterly, vol. 62 (Summer 1978); William Toll, "Progress and Piety: The Ku Klux Klan in Tillamook, Oregon," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, vol. 69 (April 1978); Eckard Toy, "The Ku Klux Klan in Oregon," G. Thomas Edwards and Carol A. Schwantes (eds.), Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986); David A. Horowitz, "Social Morality and Personal Revitalization: Oregon's Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s," Oregon Historical Quarterly, vol. 90 (Winter 1989) and "The Klansman as Outsider: Thnocultural Solidarity and Antielitism in the Oregon Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, vol. 80 (January 1989).

1870s, pietists formed the Prohibition party, which advocated federal action to outlaw liquor, as well as legislation to promote a Christian Sabbath, the Bible in public schools, and abolition of prostitution. The blue laws were another example of Protestant cultural domination; Sunday was the Lord's Day, and many states permitted only prayer and church-related activities away from home. By the late nineteenth century, Baptists and Methodists were also uniting against the evils of intemperance by urging prohibition as an essential addition to the prevailing moral code.

In the twentieth century the national conventions or assemblies of pietist sects continued their support for the legal imposition of their moral codes on American citizens. The Methodists, for instance, established a Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals. According to a 1924 report

Strenuous effort has been made to arouse sentiment against the return of prize-fighting, to protect our public schools from the demoralizing influence of dancing, to promote the safety of the Christian Sabbath while avoiding a fanaticism, to secure the suppression of gambling and commercialized indecency.⁵³

In their conventions the Presbyterians (divided by the 1920s into two denominations, the United Presbyterian Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church of the United

⁵³Oliver S. Baketel, ed., The Methodist Yearbook (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1924), p. 181.

States of America) indicated as wholehearted a desire as the Methodists to secure proper enforcement of legislation regulating morality. The United Presbyterian General Assembly of 1918 worried in particular about the encroachments on the Sabbath

by the movies, the baseball parks, the ever-defiant saloon, theaters and dance halls, the varied forms of business, the Sunday newspaper, Sunday joyriding, Sunday labor-enslaving, and Sunday golf playing, responsible, it is alleged, for 150,000 caddies being employed on the Sabbath.⁵⁴

In 1920 its Special Committee on Reform lamented the post-war "loosening up in the morals of our people."⁵⁵ It cited "a wave of gambling, thieving and profiteering," "immodesty in dress," and "uncleanness of life" as threatening the moral life of the nation.⁵⁶ As a means of protecting boys and girls from degradation, it recommended keeping every community as free as possible of these vices. It also applauded the Prohibition Amendment; the issue, the committee suggested, was no longer political but rather "one

⁵⁴United Presbyterian Church of North America, Minutes of the 60th General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1918), p. 446.

⁵⁵United Presbyterian Church of North America, Minutes of the 62nd General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1920), pp. 22-23.

⁵⁶Ibid.

of respect for and the enforcement of the law."⁵⁷ The Board of Temperance and Moral Welfare of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America expressed similar concerns, as well as an additional interest in the need for state regulation of drugs, cigarettes, and motion pictures.⁵⁸

At their 1920 convention the Northern Baptists worried about the "time of unrest and change."⁵⁹ Of particular concern were "the forces of reaction and greed . . . trying to restore the old order of things and defeat beneficent measures."⁶⁰ The Committee on Social Service concluded that Northern Baptists should unite "all the forces of good will on behalf of a better and more Christian world."⁶¹ It suggested in particular that Baptists must avoid relaxing after passage of the Prohibition amendment; their new goals were to influence legislative assemblies to retain Prohibition and to inspire other Baptists to comply with the

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America: 1920 (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1920), p. 392; Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America: 1922, pp. 62-63, 182-184.

⁵⁹Northern Baptist Convention, Thirteenth Annual of the Northern Baptist Convention: 1920 (N.P.: American Baptist Publication Society, 1920), p. 243.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 244.

⁶¹Ibid.

law.⁶² At the 1921 convention the Northern Baptists passed resolutions to support passage of laws to control drug traffic, to censor motion pictures, and to create a national system of divorce. The report further condemned what Sabbath desecration and "decadence of moral standards in the dress and behavior of women and girls" were doing to the country.⁶³

The Disciples of Christ, although less well-known and much smaller than other denominations, also exhibited a pietistic proclivity. Founded in western Pennsylvania in 1832, the Disciples downplayed doctrine and emphasized instead the practices of a Christian life. In 1917, President C.B. Reynolds spoke to the annual convention on their obligation to "hunger and thirst after justice and to make justice prevail in the world."⁶⁴ Thus, they were "to

⁶²Ibid., p. 245.

⁶³Northern Baptist Convention, Fourteenth Annual of the Northern Baptist Convention: 1921 (N.P.: American Baptist Publication Society, 1921), pp. 296-298. The Northern Baptists, unlike the other denominations, tied their concerns about a deteriorating moral climate to the rise of a new type of immigrant. Such newcomers, the Committee on Social Service contended, came from unfortunate circumstances. They were uneducated, illiterate, and prone to interpret liberty as license; some were criminals. America could not afford the existence of such traits, nursed as they were by the formation of protective neighborhoods and perpetuation of native language. The committee suggested the need for efforts both to Christianize and to Americanize these new immigrants. Northern Baptist Convention, Thirteenth Annual, pp. 249-52.

⁶⁴Disciples of Christ, Yearbook and Annual Reports: Organizations of the Disciples of Christ (St. Louis: United Christian Missionary Society, 1957), p. 4.

build their intelligence, their conscience, their religion and their faith into social sentiments, community regulations, social institutions and national policies."⁶⁵ Their Board of Temperance and Social Welfare was to lead them in such efforts. Thus, the major pietistic denominations appeared to agree on the need for a moral cleansing of the nation through evangelization and law enforcement.

Indeed it was pietism, not premillennialism, that was the key to understanding not only Pelley's thought, but more importantly, what his followers saw in Pelley. Pelley's organization was intended as the savior of morality and a positive contributor to American social order. Pelley saw the "Christian mission," as he had as a child, as representing the "cornerstone of world statesmanship -- the salvation of nations."⁶⁶ Pelley felt obligated, as a good pietist Methodist, to root out evil and take action to cleanse the entire nation. The organization he created would carry out this deed.

The Christian party, and the Silver Legion, were to be "a group of men who feel themselves accountable first of all to the Carpenter of Galilee" and "would aspire to the helm of State in order to bring succor to a hundred million

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 19-20.

⁶⁶William Dudley Pelley, "Lo, the Poor Cynic!" World Outlook, vol. 5 (February-March 1919), p. 25.

people."⁶⁷ The Legion was to be the new "agent" to cleanse the nation of moral degeneration.

We are more interested in your souls
than in your bodies. But by prescribing
for the welfare of your bodies we know
to a certainty that your souls find
ennoblement.⁶⁸

Pelley was clear that regeneration would be heralded by a "different sort of man" from the type pietists had called for in the 1920s. That man would not only have special connections to "Host of Just Men" but would also be a man of action. Christian ministers, Pelley noted, were no longer able to "Stand up to the Crisis" without the aid of the psychic:

No minister should have the effrontery
to go into his pulpit and expound
spiritual matters, who is not a
clairaudient [sic.] adept and able to
make contact consciously at will, with
the great Host of Just Men Made
Perfect.⁶⁹

Pelley, of course, had that special contact. He promised that

The times are ripe for action. Men who
know how to initiate action have offered
it to you. Will you be so blind, so
stupid, so inhibited, that your hands
keep tight clutch of the goat of the
moment while your greater grasp is

⁶⁷William Dudley Pelley, "There is a Mighty Call for Treasure that the Lord's Work May Prosper!" Liberation, vol. 7 (May 1936), p. 2.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹William Dudley Pelley, "Every Clergyman Should be a Psychic," Liberation, vol. 3 (February 1932), p. 9.

loosed on the treasure of your
destiny?⁷⁰

The Silver Legion would provide the "arm of the Lord" to
direct the action of "Just Men":

The Commander comes riding in with
the Dawn, and behind are His Legions
resplendent in silver!

Yea, the Silver Shirts are
marching!

Christ men, grim men, men of
stamina, men of mettle, old men, young
men, Lords of High Courage, Chamberlains
of Valor --

The Silver Shirts are marching!⁷¹

It was almost the essence of what Pelley saw as the
definition of all that was desirable or noble in America --
action and moral purity. Some citizens were ready for such
a savior.

Pelley's thought was a strange blending of pietism,
Christian spiritualism, metaphysics, and clairvoyance. It
was pietist in that he established the Silver Legion to act
as the agent of moral change. It was Christian in that he
constantly referred to a nondenominational belief in Jesus
Christ. It was metaphysical or esoteric in the belief that
world civilizations, such as Atlantis, preceded the present
one. It was clairvoyant in that Pelley claimed to have

⁷⁰Pelley, "There is a Mighty Call for Treasure that the
Lord's Work May Prosper!" Liberation, vol. 7 (May 1936), p.
2.

⁷¹Liberation, vol. 4 (February 18, 1933), p. 2.

received his philosophy through psychic powers. His doctrinal interpretation was to replace the formalist divisions of sects, which he called the declining "Churchianity," with a nondenominational Christianity in a much purer form. In language not far removed from the Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, he argued that his "Liberation Doctrine" was not a cult but "nothing beyond a sane and beautiful philosophy of life."⁷² This "philosophy of life" was, he continued, universal and would lead to salvation "wherein each has opportunity to contribute to universal culture."⁷³ The only hindrance to salvation was secular politics. In fact, Pelley argued that "no crisis ever arose between two countries" which could not be settled at the international bargaining table, "if those countries could but muzzle their eagle screamers and rampant opportunists."⁷⁴ The real salvation would come, Pelley argued, when all "Christ people" adopted the "Liberation Doctrine." Then, in a reaffirmation of the universal nature of the cause, all would see their struggle as one being experienced by people all over the globe: "America is by no

⁷²Liberation, vol. 1 (May 1930), p. 18; Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (January 29, 1936), p. 1; Reality, vol. 2 (December 1937, p. 9); vol. 3 (April 1938), inside front cover.

⁷³William Dudley Pelley, Nations In Law: An Unconventional Analysis of Civics (Asheville: Pelley Publishers, 1939), p. 2.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 13.

means standing alone in this imminent conflict between Christ and Anti-Christ. On other continents of the globe the contest is precipitated and the factions are at grips."⁷⁵ The struggle was the necessary precursor to the return of Christ.

The problem was to determine who, or what, made up the Anti-Christ. For Pelley, the combination of FDR, the communists, and Jews encapsulated the Anti-Christ figure. Pelley's goal, then, was to teach "100% Americans" how to fight against this evil trinity. The fight, in and of itself, would help usher in the millennium. The cost of the battle was simple -- materialism. The spiritual realm, he argued, was the real essence of life. He appealed to those who were "facing losses in moneys and properties, in self-esteem and prestige," to seek a higher spiritual law.⁷⁶ Man's destiny was to try to transcend his mere material world and physical being for his spiritual self or soul. That destiny would lead to salvation and a purer form of Christianity. If Americans joined the Christian Party, and later the Silvershirt Legion, they would be assured of being on the side of Christ at the Second Coming.

The vague millenarian theme is undoubtedly present in Pelley's rhetoric. The difference between his theology and those of other millennialists, however, was that he saw the

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 185.

⁷⁶Liberation, vol. 1 (May 1930), pp. 8, 20-25.

need to bring about the millennium by means of an active organization: the Silver Legion. The combination of millennialism and social action was a complex attraction based on more than one theme. Even though Pelley attracted members by proclaiming that the Legion was established to preserve Christianity (albeit according to his own vision), he also stressed the building of a political machine oriented around enforcement of that vision -- a "Christianity" based on the traditional Protestant moral code in America. It is Pelley's version of "Christian action" which was reflected in his 1936 presidential campaign.

CHAPTER 6

**THE SILVERSHIRT LEGION IN WASHINGTON STATE:
THE BEGINNING OF INVOLVEMENT**

The Silvershirt Legion of America in Washington State gave Pelley his great opportunity to reach a larger audience than those who read his publications. Washington was the only state that allowed his party to offer a slate of candidates for the 1936 election¹ and the only state that allowed Pelley himself to run for the Presidency.²

¹The Christian Party Candidates were:

John E. (Jack) Shields:	First Congressional District
Fred G. Widner	: Second Congressional District
Orville W. Roundtree	: Third Congressional District
Frank H. Tousley	: Fourth Congressional District
Walter L. Morgan	: Fifth Congressional District
W.F. Jurisch	: Sixth Congressional District
Malcolm M. Moore	: Governor
Harry G. Picot	: Lieutenant Governor
Dr. Dwight D. Clarke	: Secretary of State
Ole J. Lien	: State Treasurer
T.W.L. Osborne	: State Auditor
Floyd Hatfield	: Attorney General
Rubie S. Johnson	: Superintendent of Public Instruction
John A. Wilson	: Commissioner of Public Lands
E.E. Peterson	: State Insurance Commissioner

State of Washington, Department of State, Abstract of Votes
Polled at General Election (November 3, 1936), p. 42.

²Washington had few restrictions on the establishment of political parties after the 1935 legislature passed the "blanket" or "open" primary law. This law permitted crossover voting.

On one level, observing Pelley's campaign is an exercise in seeing how Pelley tried to appeal to the electorate; on another level, it is an opportunity to see what his program represented to the people who gave him their votes.

To put forth their program, the Silvershirts organized into a political arm known as the Christian Party. It began in Washington State, in late 1935, and had been set up especially for this election.³ Pelley described the Christian Party as "the poor man's party" and the "forgotten man's party."⁴ In late February 1936, the Christian Party State Convention convened in Redmond. Pelley and the "long-legged, hard-headed buckaroo"⁵ from San Diego, Willard Kemp, were duly nominated for President and Vice-President.⁶ The

³The following 26 cities had Silvershirt membership: Bellingham, Bremerton, Centralia, Chehalis, Clinton, Colville, Dayton, Everett, Grandview, Ilwaco, Langley, Manette, Monroe, Mount Vernon, North Bend, Olympia, Port Orchard, Puyallup, Redmond, Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, Vancouver, Walla Walla and Yakima. Together, they totalled about 1,600 actively enrolled members.

⁴"Sacrifices Mean Utmost Economy," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (March 11, 1936), p. 2.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Other candidates for the election slate on the Christian Party ticket were people of little influence and experience in politics -- one farmer, two printers, two housewives, a paper hanger, a health store proprietress, and a man who classified himself as a laborer. While most of the candidates were not influential people, Pelley did convince Harvey Hurd, the Lewis County Superintendent of Schools, to seek the office of Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction under the Christian Party banner. At the last minute, however, Hurd withdrew

No More Hunger program was adopted as the party platform.

Pelley immediately began to put out the campaign literature. In addition to campaign coverage in Liberation and Silver Ranger, he published thirty-six "Master Councilors' Addresses" to be discussed by the Councils of Safety. Titles included: "The Challenge to Disaster," "The Splendors of Tomorrow," "Machine Gun Government," "The Promised Land," "Sorcery from Sinai," and "The Pendulum of Cosmos."

In actuality, the "campaign" consisted of mass meetings in various cities around the state. Pelley claimed 1,000 cheering supporters on June 29 in Seattle's Moose Hall. After several verses of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," his newspaper reported, he "brought round after round of prolonged applause as he issued tocsin for support of the Christian Party principles."⁷ The slogan "From Washington to Washington" was adopted and the party leader announced to the throng: "This night I know of the Battle-Cry, One with God is a majority!"⁸ The police were in evidence outside

from the campaign. He was replaced by Rubie S. Johnson from Redmond. Roy Zachary to Honorable Secretary of State, State of Washington, Olympia, Washington (September 8, 1936), "Silvershirt Legion of America," Roundtree Collection, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. (Hereinafter, Roundtree Collection.) In this official letter, Zachary formally listed the candidates selected at the Convention.

⁷Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (July 8, 1936), p. 1.

⁸Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (July 15, 1936), p. 1.

the meeting to "preserve order."

The battle cry was taken to Tacoma on July 7, where Pelley spoke in the Hotel Winthrop ballroom to a claimed 1,000 attendees who, according to Pelley's Weekly, chanted: "Down with the Reds and Out with the Jews!"⁹ In Aberdeen, the next month, a meeting scheduled for the hall of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, was shifted to the Boxing Arena at the last minute when the Eagles cancelled the rental. The Boxing Arena turned out to be an appropriate choice because, as Pelley described the scene, "a mob of 500 Communists, led by diminutive Heinie Huss, radical Jewish labor agitator descended" on the Christ Hoard and broke up the meeting.¹⁰

Another, more peaceful, gathering was held in Seattle on October 11. Echoing classic pietist rhetoric, Pelley explained to those who came that, "We are a Christian Party!"¹¹ He went on: "What does that mean? It means that we follow the Christ, and are not ashamed of the Christ."¹² This was the reason, Pelley continued, that America's hope rested with the Christian Party. Both major parties were simply dupes of the Jewish Sovietist conspiracy. Only the

⁹Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (July 22, 1936), p. 1.

¹⁰Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (August 19, 1936), p. 1.

¹¹Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (October 14, 1936), p. 5.

¹²Ibid.

Christian Party, Pelley's candidate for Secretary of State revealed, would throw the conspirators out of government.¹³

Pelley made a special effort to appeal to German-Americans. Their only avenue of escape from the "Jewish plot," he warned, was to put their moral and financial resources behind him because he had "proven himself through Jewish persecution to be outstandingly pro-German."¹⁴ He promised that, if his party were in control, rapport would be established with Adolf Hitler, whereby the United States and Germany would perform "in complete understanding on the Jewish question" and promote Nordic-Aryan culture so that it would "overwhelmingly dominate the political situation of the world."¹⁵ Pelley distributed his pamphlet, German Americans Should Support Christian Party, throughout German communities in the Seattle area.

Along with anti-semitic tirades, Pelley and other Christian Party candidates warned of a communist conspiracy to seize the government. Speaking in Portland, Oregon, Pelley declared that "a well-defined plot was started in the United States 30 years ago to take our country from us."¹⁶

¹³Notes taken by Ruth Bauer, Spokane Secretary of the Christian Party (October 11, 1936), Roundtree Collection.

¹⁴William Dudley Pelley, German-Americans Should Support Christian Party (Asheville: Pelley Publishers, 1936), p. 1.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁶The Oregonian (August 16, 1936).

The American people, he said, "should be cognizant of existing conditions with truthful information of what is happening behind the scenes."¹⁷ Addressing Christian Party members on the same platform, Roy Zachary charged that the communists were engaged in "an insidious movement to eliminate Christianity in the United States."¹⁸ Pelley insisted that the communists were trying to suppress the Christian Party because they feared it would do the same thing "here that Hitler did in Germany."¹⁹ In an article entitled, "Dictator for America Looms," Pelley told his readers that "if Communists should stage a revolution in the United States, the Christian Party would form a Protectorate."²⁰

How well Pelley was able to convince the masses is reflected in his showing at the polling booths. The official tally shows the following:²¹

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹"Editorial - Are You a Kulak?" Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (February 19, 1936), p. 8.

²⁰William Dudley Pelley, "Dictator for America Looms," Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (April 15, 1936), p. 1.

²¹State of Washington, Department of State, Abstract of Votes Polled at General Election (November 3, 1936), p. 42. See Appendix B for a county-by-county breakdown of the vote.

Table 1

1936 Presidential Election Results, Washington State

Democratic Party, Franklin D. Roosevelt	459,579
Republican Party, Alfred M. Landon	206,892
Socialist Party, Norman Thomas	3,496
Prohibition Party, D. Leigh Colvin	1,041
Socialist Labor, John W. Alken	362
Union Party, William Lemke	17,463
Communist Party, Earl Browder	1,907
Christian Party, William D. Pelley	1,598

Things looked grim for the Christian Party: out of 692,340 people who voted, only 1,598 voted for the Party. On average, Pelley received only about two-tenths of one percent of the vote -- that was one-twentieth of the votes the Liberty party had garnered in 1932. Other Christian party candidates fared no better. William Lemke, whose Union party received 17,463 votes, apparently attracted many of the former Liberty party voters.²² To add to the embarrassment, Pelley finished nearly 300 votes behind Earl Browder of the Communist party and only 550 ahead of

²²Analysis indicates that the Union Party was the recipient of the protest vote always reserved in any major election for a strong but peripheral political organization. Nationally, Lemke polled 892,378 votes or 2% of the total. His best showing was to capture 13% of the presidential totals in North Dakota. His next strongest showing were in Minnesota, Massachusetts and Rhode Island with 6.5%; in Oregon 5.5%; and Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Michigan, where he won between 4 and 4.8% of the total. See David H. Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party, 1932-1936 (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969); Alan Brinkley, Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

D. Leigh Colvin of the Prohibition party.²³ Pelley's reaction was a call to the future: "This Red-Jewish antagonist has become too strongly entrenched in American institutions to be turned out in a day or a night."²⁴

No matter how Pelley tried to rationalize it, there was no doubt that his political philosophy was greeted with ignominious rejection. Those who did vote for Pelley, did so because of their attraction to the metaphysical, millennialist message. As one voter noted, "God was with

²³During the campaign, Pelley only attacked the major parties and totally ignored all other third party candidates. Therefore, comments on the Union Party campaign were nonexistent as if the Union Party never existed. From time to time, however, Pelley did write of Townsend and Coughlin individually. He opposed the Townsend Plan for the same reasons he had opposed Long's proposal, claiming that "the Townsend Plan means mulcting the pay envelopes of 42 million people of 34 cents out of every dollar, to benefit the aged." Pelley wrote often of Father Coughlin's Social Justice and agreed "that the nation was adroitly being taken over from its bottom to its top by what Father Coughlin calls 'the international bankers.'" After Coughlin's 1936 Union Party defeat, the radio priest became increasingly anti-semitic and pro-fascist. With the seeming agreement on a "Jewish-Communist plot," Pelley began to cooperate with Coughlin. The cooperation, however, was limited to such occasional comments about the radio priest in Liberation and to the exchange of literature. Pelley never formally tied the Silvershirts, or himself, to Coughlin. See: Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (February 26, 1936), p. 1; (July 15, 1936), p. 1; Liberation, vol. 8 (July 21, 1937), p. 2; vol. 9 (November 14, 1938); vol. 10 (January 7, 1939); (June 28, 1939), p. 5; I.R. Crow to Roundtree, March 11, 1939, Roundtree Collection; Donnell B. Portzline, "William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Shirt Legion of America," Ed.D. Dissertation, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 1965, p. 267; Morris Schonbach, "Native Fascism During the 1930's and 1940's: A Study of its Roots, its Growth, and its Decline," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, California, 1958, pp. 286-302; Bennett, p. 278.

²⁴Pelley's Weekly, vol. 3 (November 18, 1936), p. 4.

Pelley, and I voted with God."²⁵ Another voter stressed the millennial dream by recalling: "I knew the end was near. The Christian Party was the only way to secure a sure path toward Armageddon."²⁶ This early period of Silvershirt activity through the Christian Party carefully tapped into the millennialist wishes of selected voters. However, the Party's defeat did not mean the end of the fight.

Still Pelley and his supporters found consolation. The campaign gave the state its organizational structure, identified the state's leadership and provided, in effect, a training ground for the Legion's leadership. These lessons provided the basis for 1936-1942 Silver Legion activity in the state. But also, the Washington organization showed the distinction between Pelley's vision of the Legion and the impact of local issues to the development of a unit.

Orville Roundtree was the moving force behind Washington's Silvershirt strength. An insurance salesman, he was a long-time resident in Chehalis. An interview with Life magazine in 1939, described him as "jovial and popular

²⁵Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 81, March 19, 1982. Of the 1,600 members of the Washington Legion, 82 individuals were interviewed for this study. Most of those interviewed agreed to talk about their involvement with the Legion only if their names were not identified. In order to maintain their privacy, all members not identified in existing document collections have been given a number for reference only.

²⁶Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 58, September 9, 1979.

with other Chehalis businessmen."²⁷ Roundtree was also active in the Methodist church and in many community organizations. As his wife Bernice expressed it, "he saw [community] participation as the activity of a real citizen."²⁸ It was this "community spirit" that eventually led Roundtree to the Silvershirts.

In 1932, he ran for Congress as a Democrat. After losing the election, he changed his political affiliation to the Townsend movement.²⁹ Roundtree helped to organize Townsend clubs in the Chehalis-Centralia area and stayed with the movement for three years. He was a delegate to the National Townsend Convention held in Chicago and Cleveland in 1934 and 1935. He later claimed that he helped to organize more Townsendites for his district than anyone else had in any other district in the state -- over 66,000.³⁰ However, Roundtree was not completely pleased with the

²⁷"Fascism in America," Life, vol. 6 (May 6, 1939), p. 62.

²⁸Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

²⁹In 1932, Dr. Francis E. Townsend, an elderly physician from California, proposed a plan to obtain a federal pension of \$200 per month for everyone over sixty. The plan, Townsend argued, would end the Depression because of the "velocity of money" placed into circulation by the retired pensioners. The movement raised nearly a million dollars in two years and commanded a formidable bloc of votes. Townsend attracted some five million followers. Abraham Holtzman, The Townsend Movement (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1963).

³⁰Roundtree Lecture (October 31, 1938), Roundtree Collection.

Townsend movement because he claimed that there were "too many Jews" in the organization. Roundtree even told Townsend directly to clear his membership ranks of Jews. As Roundtree related:

When I went to Cleveland I was sitting in the lobby of the hotel. Mr. Townsend came over and put his hand on my shoulder and drew me over into a corner to talk. [I] said he had to get rid of the Jews I had named.

'Tell me how you know these things,' he asked.

I said, 'I have told you before.'

'That is not right,' he answered. 'This plan is for everybody.'

'But the Jews don't consider you anybody,' I replied. 'If you will read the Talmud which says that the nations of the earth are not human beings but beasts and only the Jews are human beings, you will find the category in which you are placed. You will never get your plan, because anything with idealism in it these birds are going to break.'³¹

Roundtree's anti-semitism paralleled Pelley's. He believed in the Jewish-Sovietist conspiracy and argued that the Jews did indeed control the political arena in America. But, as one member noted, "Roundtree felt that there was a way around the Jewish power. All he had to do was create a Jewish free political group that could challenge Jewish

³¹Ibid.

power at the local level."³² And that is exactly what he did.

In 1934, Roundtree again ran for public office. Since the Townsend Movement had no political arm, Roundtree entered a Congressional race under the banner of the Liberty Party. After losing again, he was given a copy of No More Hunger by his good friend, Roy Zachary. Reading Pelley's description of a Christian Commonwealth convinced Roundtree to become a Silvershirter, which he did in 1935.

Roundtree had a special reason for joining the Silver Legion. He saw himself as more a colleague than a follower of Pelley's. He believed his ideas paralleled those of Pelley's, but only selectively. As Roundtree explained it:

[Pelley's] monetary ideas were mine, and his exposé of political skulduggery were mine and his solution of the problems were mine also. I went into his organization fully aware of the consequences. I did not follow him, I did more than that. I walked abreast with him. I appreciated and loved him as a God fearing man trying to do good in this world regardless of what befell him, which is more than I can say about his opposition.³³

What was missing was the esoterica. Roundtree rejected the metaphysical component of Pelley's thought. Metaphysics was, as his wife reported, "not part of our beliefs."³⁴ For

³²Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 48.

³³Quoted in Portzline, "Pelley and Silver Legion," p. 162.

³⁴Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

Roundtree there was no contradiction in accepting some ideas and rejecting others because the value of the Silver-shirts for him was its community involvement.³⁵

Roundtree, an indefatigable worker, coordinated all Washington Silver-shirt activity from his home. As State Liaison Officer, Roundtree was responsible for raising funds and for keeping the members enthusiastic. He was in constant contact with Pelley, via Roy Zachary, on the progress of the organization. Pelley wrote him:

Orville, you bear the reputation of being able to sell anything to Washington people from Fuller brushes to Townsend schemes, and occasionally insurance and Silver Legion memberships.³⁶

The philosophical differences between the men did not seem to matter to Pelley as long as Roundtree brought in the membership. Practicality was important to Pelley.

The most important task was to raise money for the national headquarters. Zachary wrote Roundtree in mid-1937 of how he was "immensely impressed with the great need of funds" and encouraged Roundtree to collect bills from 28 state residents listed in his letter.³⁷ Roundtree was

³⁵Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980; Interview with Gerald Nedgwalt, June 14, 1980; Notes of Ruth Bauer, March 19, 1935, Roundtree Collection.

³⁶Pelley to Roundtree, June 19, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

³⁷Zachary to Roundtree, June 11, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

apparently quite successful in getting the members to "pay-up." In the fall of 1937, Pelley expressed "heartfelt appreciation" for the "war-chest pledges which you've been sending in."³⁸ Monies were used to defray general state and national expenses, but they were also put to work against the LaFollette and Dies Committees and, of course, the expenses of court trials. Pelley wrote, in mid-1939, that "scarcely had the smoke of the LaFollette rumpus cleared away, however, before the Dies Committee appeared."³⁹ Roundtree, it appears, was always able to generate monies from his district. In fact, the Chehalis-Centralia group was "leading the country for size and constancy of pledges."⁴⁰ Zachary wrote that he would like to see Roundtree use his fund-raising talents to "lead a movement out there to concentrate on the raising of funds for the national office."⁴¹

The amount sent to headquarters is somewhat of a mystery. It appears that in some months donations went as high as \$1,500. However, on the average, Roundtree sent to headquarters several hundred dollars each month. The fund

³⁸Pelley to Roundtree, October 26, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

³⁹Pelley to Dear Friend, June 5, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁴⁰Pelley to Roundtree, December 7, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

⁴¹Zachary to Roundtree, June 11, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

raising was exceptional, especially since Lewis County was deemed by the State to be in a "serious financial condition."⁴² Roundtree's fundraising methods stressed local issues. He told the membership that funds were needed to fight the Communist menace in the State. Reminding members of the activities of the I.W.W. and the "disaster of communist inspired activities" generated revenues.⁴³

Facing special investigations by the House Un-American Activities Committee, claiming that he was "hammered by attorneys, besides having the burden of taking the initiative in the fight,"⁴⁴ Pelley pleaded with Roundtree to "please make a supreme effort to come to assistance" by making sure everyone in Washington state paid their bills and made special donations to the war-chest.⁴⁵

Roundtree also met with considerable success in organizing post meetings. In 1937, Zachary approved the state leader's intention "to organize first in your home section," of Chehalis and Centralia and throughout Lewis

⁴²Joseph P. Harris, County Finances in the State of Washington, University of Washington Publications in the Social Sciences, vol. 5, no. 4 (Seattle: University of Washington, 1935), p. 275.

⁴³Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 33, June 14, 1979.

⁴⁴Pelley to Roundtree, [no date, 1938?], Roundtree Collection.

⁴⁵Ibid.

County "and then spread out" to the rest of the state.⁴⁶ Pelley wrote Roundtree in December 1937 about glowing reports he had received of Roundtree's Chehalis meetings: "They tell me you are developing into a real leader and public speaker, able to hold an audience for three hours at a stretch. Good work, Orville!"⁴⁷ Pelley praised Roundtree's "personality and . . . contacts, plus the natural ability that comes of vim, courage, and intelligence."⁴⁸ Pelley also noted that, "On top of this you have the gift of gab that enables you to present your ideas as pictures plain of discernment."⁴⁹

Roundtree's personality and recruitment style were appealing. Between 1935 and 1939, he increased membership from 150 to 1,600 members -- an 1,100 percent increase. In comparison, at the national level, membership rolls during these same years decreased from 15,000 in 1935 to 5,000 in 1939, or a 66 percent decline. Washington was the one location where the Silver Legion continued to expand

⁴⁶Zachary to Roundtree, December 2, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

⁴⁷Pelley to Roundtree, December 11, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

⁴⁸Pelley to Roundtree, December 2, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

⁴⁹Ibid.

membership until 1939. Pelley considered "Washington as the banner territory for promotion" of the Silver Legion.⁵⁰

By late 1938, Roundtree was encouraged to expand his leadership activities. As Zachary wrote, "My advice to you is to hold yourself in readiness to cross state boundaries in widening the scope of your efforts in the very near future."⁵¹ Roundtree was assured that when the time came, he would be "able to move without restrictions as to finances."⁵²

Roundtree began organizing the Chehalis-Centralia area in 1936 as part of the Christian Party campaign. Organizing the community went quite well.⁵³ As one resident, John Steelman, testified, Roundtree held meetings every two weeks regularly attended by 150 members. These meetings were "patriotic meetings in our locality and we would salute the flag and we had no secret meetings at any time."⁵⁴

⁵⁰Zachary to Roundtree, August 17, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Great support and publicity for the Silver-shirts in Lewis County came from the owner/manager of the Centralia Tribune, Jean Gass. Gass attended several Silver-shirt meetings with Roundtree and then serialized No More Hunger in her newspaper. This free advertisement was central to expanding participation in the Lewis County area.

⁵⁴U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Outline of Evidence: The Silver-shirt Legion of America (The Silver-shirts) (December 23, 1942), p. 29.

Following procedures established by Pelley, members met to read and discuss various Liberation publications. However, as they became fully versed in Silvershirt theory, they turned their meetings into discussions on issues directly affecting the unit and the state. Most important was recruitment, locating sufficient facilities and coordinating state-wide Silvershirt efforts.

Seeing recruitment as paramount, Roundtree, and his group, began to make suggestions to Pelley which, they felt, would streamline and improve the Silver Legion's national membership drives. Specifically, Roundtree suggested a "recruiting headquarters" with membership the only function. This new headquarters would speed up the application verification process and increase information exchanges between the State Liaison Officers and Silver Legion headquarters. Pelley and Zachary wrote that Roundtree's ideas were being put into operation.⁵⁵ However, in actuality, Roundtree's ideas were never implemented. Zachary, following conspiracy theories, claimed that Jewish pressure smashed the development of a recruiting headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Roundtree's ideas included targeting specific types of people or groups whom he considered likely to join the Legion. On the local level, Roundtree sought to recruit

⁵⁵Zachary to Roundtree, June 23, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

ministers. Roundtree believed that if he could coordinate the various churches in Lewis County, the ministers would help with recruiting members. While it is unclear how many ministers responded to the invitation, Zachary wrote to Roundtree, "I must congratulate you on the progress you are making among ministers out there."⁵⁶ One minister, Reverend W. E. Monbeck, attended a local meeting in 1938. Writing to Roundtree, Monbeck made it clear that he "entirely agreed with the opposition expressed against communism" but he was upset by a Nazi flag he saw on the platform.⁵⁷ Monbeck warned that Roundtree had "better throw out the Nazi flag and put the Christian flag in its place."⁵⁸ Roundtree immediately replied to Monbeck:

If people would only pay closer attention to things, and in this you are not alone, when it comes to the flags on the stage, they would gain a more comprehensive grasp of the facts. You accuse us of having a Nazi flag and others say we give the Nazi salute when we salute the flag. Is it possible that people cannot recognize a flag or a salute when they see one? Why can't people be fair?⁵⁹

⁵⁶Zachary to Roundtree, July 5, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

⁵⁷Reverend W. E. Monbeck to Roundtree, July 14, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁵⁸ibid.

⁵⁹Roundtree to Monbeck, July 16, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

Furthermore, Roundtree assured Monbeck that the purpose of the Silver Legion was a decidedly Christian one -- even though it was anti-semitic:

Our whole fight is in defense of Christianity . . . Reverend Monbeck, if God ever let me tell you the truth, I am telling it to you now. We are not Jew haters as reported, we are only against their system.⁶⁰

Roundtree was convinced that all Christian people, and ministers in particular, would join in this fight against Jewish power in America. Once the battle was won, Roundtree predicted that

there will be no more Methodists as Methodists. No Baptists as such and no Christian Scientist, Catholics, etc., as such as they are today, but all will be in the great common Brotherhood with only one church and that the Church of Christ - a Christ's Kingdom, and that great Divine principle will rule the whole of the earth.⁶¹

In a sense, Roundtree agreed with the nondenominational millennialist message of Pelley. But Roundtree's millennialist concept was not the same as Pelley's. He believed, as part of pietist Methodist liturgy, that the battle for the millenium was in the present -- before the return of Christ. However, in contrast to Pelley, that battle would be won by "holy-living," not by physical

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

confrontation.⁶² Roundtree's commitment to the Legion was based upon what he saw as a demonstration of faith through civic action. He did not see the Legion as "valiant soldiers" ready to strike the opponents dead. Instead, he believed that constructive action -- holy living and civic commitment -- would win the battle for Christ.⁶³

Roundtree's doctrinal deviations did not trouble Pelley, as is evident by Roundtree's continued association with the Silver Legion. However, this difference does tell us that Pelley's millennialism was an important factor in his appeal to members, but it was not exclusively so. Members, like Roundtree, could accept the Silver Legion as a "Christian" group despite the doctrinal disputes. Roundtree could easily "walk abreast" with Pelley regardless of the nature of the battle for Armageddon. Roundtree stayed away from the dispute when communicating with ministers. He did not want the "battle" to deteriorate into "Christians battling each other."⁶⁴ Instead, Roundtree stressed what he felt was a less divisive topic -- the "Jewish conspiracy."

C.K. Mahoney, pastor of the Central Methodist Church, wrote Roundtree that he had a "keen appreciation of your [Roundtree's] viewpoint and recognize the fact that there is

⁶²Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

such a thing as a real Jewish problem in this country."⁶⁵
 Noting that they probably differ as to methods of dealing with the Jewish problem, Mahoney added that "we might not differ as much as might be suspected."⁶⁶

Roundtree's success in recruiting ministers and their congregations was not great. Of the ministers in the membership, few were employed by a congregation.

Roundtree carried his religious discussions to other forums. Carefully reading newspapers from around Washington state, Roundtree wrote replies on a regular basis. Each reply contained religious "proofs" on the "Jewish conspiracy." In one letter, Roundtree wrote to Dr. Mark A. Andrews:

if we believe in Christ, we must believe what he said. The book of Acts is one account after another of the persecution of the Apostles and the early Church by the Jews. And yet, we find Christian believers actually aiding and protecting and encouraging a group of people who are trained from childhood (not in Old Testament scriptures as is commonly believed, but) in Talmudic teachings which produce in them the hatred of Christ and all His followers, even to the complete destruction of Christianity and its followers. No wonder communism is working tirelessly to destroy the work of God from off the face of the earth.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Pastor C.K. Mahoney to Roundtree, January 11, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Roundtree to Dr. Mark Andrews, May 1, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

Other sources of membership were business owners and, surprisingly, labor unions. Roundtree went door-to-door in the Chehalis-Centralia area inviting local business owners to meetings.⁶⁸ In early 1939, a series of special meetings were held with small shopkeepers, lumbermill operators and a few independent contractors. As Roundtree noted, "There is a good field today among the executives of all types."⁶⁹ Roundtree argued that business owners adversely affected by the depression "are willing to go to bat in any contest that is constructive."⁷⁰ The Silvershirts would provide that "constructive" group for the "contest." Headquarters, in praising Roundtree for his initiative, reminded him

don't forget the banks. They are the fellows who have had to absorb Government paper and for many of them, the outlook is not too rosy. How many cheerful and happy looking clerks do you find today in the average bank?⁷¹

Roundtree's success in recruiting entrepreneurs appeared to be slim. Apparently, businessmen interested in esoterica or in the Silvershirts joined outside these

⁶⁸Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

⁶⁹Roundtree to Pelley, May 10, 1939, in possession of Mrs. Bernice Roundtree.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹A.H.E. Talpay to Roundtree, May 31, 1939, Roundtree Collection. Talpay was Pelley's treasurer.

special meetings. Exceptions were two lumber company owners and three small restaurateurs.⁷²

In an interesting shift from Pelley's vision, Roundtree also sought members from organized labor. Pelley had repeatedly proclaimed that the Congress of Industrial Organizations was controlled by Communists and that the Roosevelt Administration "aided and abetted the communistic revolutionaries who were the prime movers" in union activity.⁷³ For many members, this anti-union position was

⁷²Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

⁷³William Dudley Pelley, They Make Up Your Mind (Indianapolis: Fellowship Press, no date), p. 57; Henry Ford Swims the Red Sea (Indianapolis: Fellowship Press, no date), p. 21; The President Said (Indianapolis: Fellowship Press, no date), p. 45. Pelley anti-union stance was not dissimilar from other critics. Naturally, Pelley reprinted articles criticizing unions from more "mainstream" sources in an attempt to substantiate his views. For example, in a 1933 issue of Liberation, Pelley quoted Dr. Gus W. Dyer, a professor of economics at Vanderbilt University, as saying "that constitutional rights have been abolished, a dictatorship setup in Washington, and property is being conviscated [sic]." Dyer's remarks were allegedly made in an address to the Tennessee Manufacturers' Association on November 9, 1933. See William Dudley Pelley, "Heard Above the Din of the Wailing Wall," Liberation, vol. 5 (November 25, 1933), p. 7. During the 1920s Dyer was a paid lecturer for the National Association of Manufacturers and a frequent speaker at that organization's conventions. In one of these convention speeches, he was quoted as saying: "There is but one way to produce a man and that is to pitch him out and give him the reins and let him make himself." A staunch critic of the "closed shop" he said: "You can hardly conceive of a more un-American, a more anti-American institution than the closed shop. It is really very remarkable that it is allowed to exist by the sanction of law under the American flag. It tramples under foot the most sacred rights and privileges of the American citizen and sets itself openly and a defiantly against the freedom for which the Anglo-Saxon has been struggling and fighting for centuries." For a discussion of Dyer's union views and

reason for Legion affiliation. As Paul R. Schimanski of Spokane testified, he joined the Silver Legion because of "shipyard labor troubles on the west coast."⁷⁴ With the history of I.W.W. activity in Washington State (especially in Lewis County) and the series of strikes in the state, Roundtree's decision to recruit from the ranks of labor shows an independence of thought.⁷⁵ Roundtree believed that

his relationship with the National Association of Manufacturers, see: James W. Prothro, The Dollar Decade: Business Ideas in the 1920's (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 1954), pp. 26, 151. The opposition of certain business groups to the labor movement was, of course, very intense during the 1930s. In March 1936, the New York Board of Trade launched a campaign to make strikes illegal. This organization, which functioned as a local chamber of commerce and was affiliated with the United States Chamber of Commerce, claimed that the "unions are rackets, the shame of our cities." See: Evelyn Seeley, "Our Number One Fascists," Nation, vol. 142 (April 15, 1936), p. 473. Testifying before a congressional committee in 1937, Thomas M. Girdler, chairman of the board of Republic Steel, said he would never sign a contract with an "irresponsible, racketeering [sic], violent, communist body like the C.I.O." unless forced to by law. See: George Seldes, Witch Hunt: The Techniques and Profits of Redbaiting (New York: Modern Age Books, 1940), p. 56.

⁷⁴Indianapolis News (July 29, 1942), p. 9.

⁷⁵Actually there had been very little activity on the part of organized labor during the 1920s, partly because the I.W.W. have given labor a bad name, and partly because there was peace on the waterfront after a fair wage had been established. But in the 1930s, there was a resurgence of labor, determined now to win a larger share of the profits of industry. In 1935 alone, fifty-one thousand Northwest workers went on strike and lost 1.6 million man-hours of work. The Washington National Guard intervened in strikes in Aberdeen and Tacoma. The longshoremen's strike of 1934 won its demands for a fifty-hour week, a six-hour day, and a basic wage rate of ninety-five cents per hour after a four month strike. And the strike at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer in 1936, ended in recognition of the American Newspaper Guild.

The ranks of organized workers expanded rapidly as a result of federal pro-labor legislation, but the nearly uncontrolled growth was complicated by friction between advocates of craft and industrial unions. The rivalry between the AFL and the newly formed CIO was especially bitter in the Pacific Northwest, where the aggressive CIO in some ways embodied both the fiery militancy of the Industrial Workers of the World and the idealism of the Knights of Labor. The CIO's strength in the region was in the timber and mining industries, in the fish canneries and on the waterfront. The International Woodworkers of America, formed in 1937, battled for the CIO in the Northwest's woods and mills. The membership of the conservative craft-oriented AFL was less concentrated, but under the leadership of Dave Beck, a fast-rising star in the Teamster's Union, it vigorously opposed the CIO and labor radicalism.

Capitalizing upon the revolution in motor transport, Dave Beck had moved rapidly through Teamster ranks -- from organizing laundry drives in Seattle to being elected national head of the union (1952-1962). In the mid-1930s, Beck was easily the Teamsters' most powerful regional leader and the dominant personality in Northwest labor. When the forces of Harry Bridges, an alleged Communist who headed the Longshoremen's Union of the CIO attempted to "march inland" from the docks to organize the warehouses, Beck countered with club-swinging squads of hired thugs.

In time, both the strikes and labor's internecine warfare diminished, and Beck even came to be regarded as a respectable citizen of Washington; he served on numerous state boards and committees and was elected in 1946 to the Board of Regents of the University of Washington. Beck stood at the pinnacle of his career in 1962, when he was convicted of income tax evasion, lost his union post, and spent the next 30 months behind bars at the McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary.

See Harold M. Hyman, Soldiers and Spruce: Origins of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen (Los Angeles: University of California Institute of Industrial Relations, 1963); Donald Garnel, The Rise of Teamster Power in the West (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Vernon H. Jensen, Lumber and Labor (New York: Farrar and Reinhardt, 1945); Hugh Lovin, "The CIO and that 'Damnable Bickering' in the Pacific Northwest, 1937-1941," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, vol. 76 (1985); Jonathon Dembo, "Dave Beck and the Transportation Revolution in the Pacific Northwest, 1917-41," in G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes, Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986); Jonathon Dembos, "The Pacific

he could tell the difference, between "communist union men" and "non-communist union men."⁷⁶ Roundtree knew that the "communist unions" were the two largest unions in the area, the International Longshoreman's Union and the International Union of Timber Workers. These unions' traditional left-wing activities were well known. Not to be intimidated, he saw the "non-communist unions" as the former members of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen. Founded during World War I, the Four-L was a government-sponsored union for all persons involved in the lumber industry: employers and workers. Its purpose was to destroy I.W.W. power in the lumber industry, improve morale through patriotic exercises, and provide serious efforts to better working and living conditions in Washington forests. Although disbanded in the early 1920s, remnants of the Four-L could be found in the lumber industry until 1935. It was these members that Roundtree pursued.

Roundtree wrote to Zachary explaining his "union" recruitment plan. Zachary was quite pleased, replying that the work among "the members of organized labor is to be most highly commended. The great rank and file of union men are struggling for constructive expression. They are being

Northwest Lumber Industry during the Great Depression," Journal of the West, vol. 24 (October 1985), and William E. Ames and Roger A. Simpson, Unionism or Hearst: The Seattle Post-Intelligencer Strike of 1936 (Seattle: Pacific Northwest Labor History Association, 1978).

⁷⁶Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

victimized by the agents of Yiddish interests."⁷⁷

Furthermore, Zachary felt that Roundtree was especially suited for pursuing the union men: "I know of no one better qualified to crash the gate into the union ranks than the big Crusader who wears a #19 shirt."⁷⁸

Roundtree was not successful in his attempt to "crash the gate" of the union. No union members appeared to have join the Silver Legion. Writing to Zachary, Roundtree explained his failure by noting that union members "couldn't pay alliegence to both [material] happiness and their Christian duty to fight communism."⁷⁹

Roundtree's membership drives were not without restrictions. Even though former Ku Klux Klan members had joined the Silver Legion in a variety of states,⁸⁰ and even

⁷⁷Zachary to Roundtree, December 2, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Roundtree to Zachary, March 19, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁸⁰The close connection of the various Klans to the Silver Legion was previously noted in this paper. Donald Strong noted this close relationship in his study by looking at the number of leaders who claimed Klan memberships. "'Major' Powell was formerly a Klan official. The Silver Shirt organizer in Baldwin Park, California, was at one time the Exhalted Cyclops of the local Klan. The Philadelphia post of the Silver Shirts contained two ex-Klansmen; one of them had been an official of the Eastern Pennsylvania district of the Klan. The woman who conducted the meeting of the women's auxiliary in Indianapolis was formerly associated with the Klan." Donald Strong, Organized Anti-Semitism in America (Washington D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), p. 52.

though Pelley placed former KKK leaders in leadership positions, Roundtree was concerned about accepting former Klansmen in the Washington Legion. One state resident, knowledgeable of the Klan and the Silver-shirts, noted that, in Bellingham and Mount Vernon, Silver-shirt recruits were almost exclusively old Klansmen. In fact, he said, "the Klan never did disband in Skagit and Whitcomb counties."⁸¹ Roundtree was concerned not only about these old Klansmen's loyalty to the Silver Legion, but was worried that they would be competitive in recruiting members away from the Legion. Writing to Pelley about his concerns brought this reply:

I wouldn't worry over the activities of the KKK for they have no economic program and will never live down the inherent resentment of the Catholics. All the same, I'm glad that they're making themselves felt, as it only strengthens the inherent support of our own position, to have these other organizations moving in similar line.⁸²

Analysis of membership shows a relatively moderate Klan participation in the state Legion. Roundtree's concerns were apparently expressed in recruitment practices.

Another group which Roundtree approached gingerly were Japanese-Americans. Pelley, in his autobiography, had positive views of the Japanese nation and encouraged

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Pelley to Roundtree, December 11, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

continued involvement with the Japanese.⁸³ The strong Japanese communities in the valley between Vancouver and Seattle were a potential source of membership. They were also a source of trouble. Anti-Japanese feelings were a standard theme of Pacific Coast politics. Washington was no exception. During the 1920s, the state legislature prohibited alien ownership of land in a law explicitly directed against Japanese farmers. Roundtree, reflecting the local perception of the Japanese, wanted to "keep the Silvershirts Aryan."⁸⁴ As a result, he wrote Pelley for instructions on the recruitment of Japanese. Pelley responded

these Japs can help us tremendously in the financial way just now, not [with] a contribution that might get them in a mess or inhibit us, but by placing large orders for Liberation to go to their own people.⁸⁵

Zachary urged Roundtree to continue contacts with Japanese-Americans in order to encourage subscriptions to Liberation. In essence, Roundtree was asked to keep "the closest rapport . . . between our several organizations,"⁸⁶ but, in an appeasement of the Washington Legion's feelings,

⁸³William Dudley Pelley, The Door to Revelation (Asheville, North Carolina: Pelley Publishers, 1939), pp. 93-94, 103.

⁸⁴Zachary to Roundtree, December 18, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

not to make the Japanese members of the Legion. Roundtree followed his instructions and kept the membership ranks Aryan.

Roundtree saw his task as to search "high and low" for the right type of person to become a Silvershirter. The fact that he found recruits can be seen in a steadily growing membership.

Roundtree also turned his attention to finding and funding a permanent location for state-wide Silver Legion meetings. The problem was solved when Rubie S. Johnson, a member from Redmond, donated a lodge in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains near Redmond. The lodge, a cabin with plenty of floor space and a telephone, was part of Johnson's inheritance. It was her parents' first homestead before they moved into Redmond. It was christened the Silver Lodge, and, after 1936, was used for Silvershirt Calvacades.⁸⁷

Roundtree, concerned about the security of the building, hired a caretaker.⁸⁸ The caretaker was given free

⁸⁷"Silver Shirt Legion Hall," Inventory Sheet, file 0842, King County, Washington, Historic Sites Survey, Parks, Planning and Resources Department, Seattle. The Johnsons remained active in conservative political movements and held meetings in the building into the 1950s. In the mid-1980s, the building was used as a storage facility by a construction company.

⁸⁸The issue of security was based on both external and internal concerns. Roundtree was not only concerned about the Silver Lodge being vandalized by outsiders bent on the destruction of the Silver Legion, but he was also concerned about potential misuse of the lodge. The reason for his

housing and grocery money in exchange for keeping the building and grounds in good repair. The money to pay for the caretaker was taken out of monthly collections from the state units. Title to the lodge was never relinquished to Roundtree or the Silver Legion, nor was a lease signed with Johnson. The only financial understanding between Johnson and Roundtree was that all telephone bills were to be paid by the Washington Legion.⁸⁹

Meetings at the lodge were held on a regular basis. These meetings consisted of state-wide Cavalcades (during which time, Silvershirters camped on the grounds); special "strategy" meetings between Roundtree and other unit leaders, or between Zachary, Pelley and Roundtree; and special "musters" with several of the state units.

concern was because he had learned that the San Diego Silvershirt unit's ranch had suffered in just this way. Willard Kemp, while he was leader of the San Diego unit, convinced the membership that a ranch was needed as a refuge during the period of chaos that Kemp claimed was approaching. The ranch was provisioned by members' money and served as Kemp's living quarters. After Kemp ran as the Vice-Presidential candidate for the Christian Party, he returned to the ranch to resume leadership of the San Diego unit. However, in March 1937, he moved out in the middle of the night. The members discovered that he had used up the provisions during the 1936 Silver Legion Calvacade and had taken everything else of value. Roundtree, wanting to make sure that nothing like this could happen in Washington state, made sure that a caretaker was at the lodge at all times.

⁸⁹Zachary to Roundtree, June 19, 1937, Roundtree Collection.

With recruitment drives established, and a sufficient facility arranged, Roundtree began to concentrate on expanding the Silver Legion throughout the state.⁹⁰

⁹⁰In connection with his activities as Liaison Officer, Roundtree was asked to be a problem-solver on issues other than Silvershirt expansion. For example, Pelley asked Roundtree to help sell Roy Zachary's restaurant in Seattle. He was also asked to help provide for Silvershirt members in financial trouble as well as emotional difficulty. However, Roundtree also acted on his own accord. In 1938, a Silver Legion member in Chehalis, George Hanson, died. Roundtree performed the first Silver Legion Funeral Service for a departed member. Pelley thanked Roundtree for this service and noted that "perhaps it would be a good idea for me to make an outline and send it along to you as a suggested mode of procedure when one of our members receives his diploma to the higher life." Pelley to Roundtree, August 8, 1938, Roundtree Collection. See: Pelley to Roundtree, June 19, 1937; August 23, 1938; Zachary to Roundtree, August 17, 1938.

CHAPTER 7

**THE SILVERSHIRT LEGION IN WASHINGTON STATE:
EXPANDING THE BASE**

The crucial organizational issue was expanding the Legion's popular support. Buoyed by the momentum of the state-wide campaign, 1936 saw a flurry of activity that resulted in the formation of 10 Silvershirt units.¹ In western Washington, units were established in Centralia, Chehalis, Clinton, Langley, North Bend, Olympia, Poulsbo, and Tacoma.² Most of these units arose in cities that had Christian Party affiliations and, in many ways, were an outgrowth of that Party's activities.³ The only exception was the eastern Washington unit in Spokane.

First contact in the Spokane area came from Isaac R. Crow. Crow, a retired journalist and partner in several

¹See Appendix C.

²See Appendix D for a map of Washington State Silver Legion Units.

³The Washington Silvershirts arose from the Christian Party network established throughout the state. This was unique, because in other states, the Silvershirt units sponsored Christian Party affiliation. This reversal is because the Christian Party was on the ballot. The necessity of establishing Party affiliations outweighed the development of Silvershirt units. See Karen E. Hoppes, "The Nazi-Fascist Spectrum in the Pacific Northwest, 1924-1941," M.A.T. thesis, Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, Oregon, 1983.

small town newspapers in Idaho and Montana, was heavily involved in monetary reform organizations. Writing to Asheville in 1934, as Secretary of the American Monetary Reform Association,⁴ he requested more copies of Liberation for a newsstand in Spokane. This newsstand had been selling Liberation for several months when "the same 'invisible power' [which] crowded the Dearborn Independent off the newsstands" in Spokane had succeeded in stopping the sale.⁵ Noting that Crow was not a member of the Silver Legion, headquarters sent a few copies of Liberation and a membership application. Within a few weeks, Crow returned the application and became a member.

Crow was attracted to Pelley's esoterics -- but only in a limited sense. The metaphysical components did not set

⁴The American Monetary Reform Association was created in 1932 and paralleled the Populists' monetary program. The Association, operating under the slogan "Money Is the Issue," had a branch in Chicago and in Spokane. In Spokane, the local chairman was S.H. Tweedell, president of the Nabob Silver Lead Mining Company. The Association operated out of Tweedell's office and consisted of himself and Crow as the only members. Together, Tweedell and Crow wrote letters to the editor of the local newspaper, the Spokesman-Review, demanding that Congress use its power to regulate the currency. For the Association, regulation meant shifting to silver based currency. Of course, Tweedell and his company would benefit by such a move. The Association was never a force in the country and died when Crow became active in the Silvershirts. Tweedell did not join the Silver Legion at first. Instead, he supported Coughlin's Union Party. After the 1936 election defeat, Tweedell changed his support to the Silver Legion.

⁵Crow to Liberation Editors, March 21, 1934, "Silvershirt Legion of America," Roundtree Collection, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. (Hereinafter, "Roundtree Collection.")

well. He was more committed to the "Christian" image of Pelley and the Silver Legion. That image, and particularly the fellowship offered in the meetings, justified anti-Semitism because "the Jews killed Christ."⁶ Politically, Crow maintained conspiratorial perceptions. He knew "there were powers that controlled the common man. The only solution was to unite and fight the anti-Christian forces."⁷ But Crow, like Roundtree, was not willing to "fight" an all out battle.

In 1935, Crow organized a core of 25 Spokane residents to form a Spokane County unit of the Christian Party. The organizational meeting, held in the Sun Life Building, was conducted by Roy Zachary. Robert Wills was elected Chair, Ruth Bauer, Secretary, Mrs. Gloria Wilson, Chairman of Finance Committee, Mrs. Erma Binge, Representative at Large, and John Wilson, Chairman of the Literature Committee. Zachary guided the group in meeting protocol, as well as in developing ways to attract more members and financial support. Zachary told Crow and his group to establish a meeting schedule and invite people to attend. Then,

take a list of various names secured through the various meetings and compile a roster of people who have heard this message and say, 'How much will you invest?' You don't need to hit a man the first time for money, but after a half-dozen trips. Leave literature

⁶Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

⁷Ibid.

during trips for him to study the problem.⁸

Monies were to be collected from donations as well as membership dues. All the money was to be sent to the State Chairman of the Christian Party. Seventy-five cents of every dollar would go to Asheville, with twenty-five cents staying in the state. If the Spokane County Christian Party needed additional campaign funds, the county chairman only needed to contact the State Chairman.

The newly formed Spokane Christian Party was not officially a Council of Safety of the Silver Legion. However, Zachary, Crow and the rest of the members saw no separation between their activities as campaign workers for the Christian Party and their work as members of the Silver Legion. Consequently, the Party decided to send "missionaries" into the Spokane area to recruit new members for the Silver Legion.

We want people with constructive vision, people who have the courage and integrity to go on with the program we have outlined. Also sincerity and unselfishness in purpose. We want people to understand what is at stake. We want to get our message directly into the heart and mind of patriotic men and women before they are led astray toward some concealed trap which will appear in the guise of patriotism and justice.⁹

⁸Notes of Ruth Bauer, March 17, 1935, Roundtree Collection.

⁹Ibid.

Crow's influence was apparent. He was not interested in finding the "Christian warrior" to bring forth the millennium that Pelley dreamed of. Instead, Crow wanted a good worker, someone who knew "what's in a common man's heart," and "was a real Christian ready to help the country find morality."¹⁰ While Zachary agreed with the group's definition of a good member, he warned them to

keep always in mind that you are striving to keep out of any controversial issues that don't amount to anything. Keep factions from entering into the organization by keeping your vision centered upon the supreme goal and letting nothing swerve you aside.¹¹

Before Zachary left the Spokane group to their own devices, he made one final comment. He warned that Christian Party members might be fired from their jobs if their employers knew about their activity. According to Ruth Bauer, Party Secretary, members had to carefully re-think their dedication to the cause.¹² She noted that, in spite of the risk, the Party members "proclaimed their allegiance."¹³

Crow's first contact was with Ernst Alborn, manager of the Colville Electric Shop in Colville, 70 miles north of

¹⁰Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

¹¹Notes of Ruth Bauer, March 17, 1935, Roundtree Collection.

¹²Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

¹³Ibid.

Spokane, bordering the Colville Indian Reservation. Alborn had attended a Christian Party rally in Spokane and voiced an interest in the Party's platform. A unit, with a membership of ten, was established shortly after Crow's visit with Alborn.¹⁴ Outside of this initial organizing in Colville, the unit did not maintain an active program.

A more important contact was with the Spokane chapter of the Paul Reveres.¹⁵ In an open letter to his group, the

¹⁴Crow to Alborn, September 5, 1935, Roundtree Collection.

¹⁵The Paul Reveres, were formed in 1931 by Mrs. Albert W. Dilling. Mrs. Dilling gained fame among red-baiters as the author of the Red Network and The Roosevelt Red Record and its Background. On November 21, 1932, the Paul Reveres obtained a Certificate of Incorporation from the State of Illinois. Colonel Edwin Marshall Hadley was named President, Mrs. Dilling as Vice President, and Kenneth E. Shephard as Secretary. The purpose of the organization was to promote patriotism, advance Americanism, and combat radicalism. Unlike many organizations of this type during the Depression, the Paul Reveres consisted of well-educated, native born Americans, primarily from upper-income groups. The directors included a former President-General of the Daughters of the American Revolution, three men bearing the title of "Judge", a past commander of the American Legion, three college presidents, a Congressman, a former Governor of Kentucky, and the President of the American Legion Auxiliary. Of the eighteen directors residing in Chicago, eleven were listed in Who's Who in Chicago, eight held an A.B. degree, and six had a degree from some professional school.

The Paul Reveres operated until 1937 when Mrs. Dilling finally resigned from the organization. She was upset about the one-man rule which Hadley had established.

Dilling was the director of the Patriotic Research Bureau, which was a leading producer of hate-literature during the Depression. The Research Bureau published booklets and pamphlets which attempted to prove communist affiliations of important New Deal administrators. Although not openly anti-semitic, the Bureau's publications indicated a clear connection between Jewish and Communist organizations. In 1942, Dilling was one of those named in a

leader of the Paul Reveres, H.J. Eiler told them that "it will be the purpose of the Spokane Chapter of the Paul Reveres to diligently aid in furtherance of the aims and purposes of this great vigilant Pelley movement."¹⁶ Paul Revere members were encouraged to join the Spokane Christian Party and Silver Legion. Almost 50 people maintained dual membership.¹⁷

After the 1936 election, the Spokane Christian Party officially became a unit of the Silver Shirt Legion of America. Membership began to drop because, as Ruth Bauer noted, "they faced their first defeat, and were too weak-kneed to stay."¹⁸ To regain Party strength, Crow proposed a

Federal Indictment, charged with conspiracy to undermine the morale of the armed forces. The case ended in a mistrial and, on June 30, 1947, the case was dismissed by the United States Court of Appeals.

For more information, see: Elizabeth Dilling, The Red Network: A "Who's Who and Handbook of Radicalism for Patriots (Kenilworth, Illinois: Elizabeth Dilling, 1934); The Roosevelt Red Record and Its Background (Kenilworth, Illinois: Elizabeth Dilling, 1936); Donald Strong, Organized Anti-Semitism in America (Washington D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), pp. 118-123; John Roy Carlson, The Plotters (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1946), pp. 77-79, 142-144.

¹⁶H.J. Eiler to Paul Reveres, March 26, 1935, Roundtree Collection.

¹⁷This number was claimed by Ruth Bauer. However, there is no evidence that more than 5 members of the Paul Reveres joined the Silver Legion in Spokane. Bauer, in a follow-up interview, contradicted herself about the dual membership by claiming that she knew of no one who joined the Legion from the Reveres. Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

¹⁸Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

new membership campaign in 1937. Roundtree suggested that the Spokane Legion invite a guest speaker who could attract the community. The speaker Crow invited was Elwood A. Towner from Portland, Oregon.¹⁹

Towner, born of mixed White and Indian blood, raised on the Siletz Reservation in Oregon, was an attorney in Portland.²⁰ Calling himself, Chief Red Cloud, Towner attended Silvershirt meetings throughout the west dressed in

¹⁹Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

²⁰Towner claimed that he was the hereditary chief of the Rogue River Indians, and that he was the great-grandson of Chief Selski. He attended Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon, where he showed great promise. With the financial support of a Salem attorney, he attended Willamette University, where he met with racial discrimination. He dropped out of school and volunteered for the army during World War I. Returning to Oregon after being discharged from the army, he resumed his studies and finished his undergraduate degree and law school. He set up a local practice in Salem, but acquired a bad reputation for being moody, overly sensitive, drinking too much, and causing problems on the Warm Springs Reservation. To find other legal employment, Towner applied for a position as a lawyer with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but was rejected. He began to take an active part in the Indian Defense Association by fighting the policies of the BIA. When John Collier, the head of the Association, became Commissioner of the Bureau, Towner again applied for a legal position, and again was rejected. Towner took these rejections as a clear indication of discrimination. Using his legal background, he began to fight any and all policies established by Collier and the BIA, especially the Wheeler-Howard Act. See: Arthur Whitten, "Subversive Activities: Their Extent and Meaning in Portland," Senior Thesis, Reed College, Portland, Oregon, 1939, pp. 113-122; "Fascism in America," Life vol. 6 (March 6, 1939); "David Robinson Files," Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Collection, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. (Hereinafter, ADL Collection.)

full Indian costume. One observer described him as showing up in a:

beautiful headdress of white, green and lavender feathers, a Thunderbird design in center of headband with a Swastika on each side; [he also wore] pants of buckskin trimmed with fringe and beads, a beaded vest and arm bands beaded in Swastika and Thunderbird design and beaded moccasins.²¹

His flamboyance was a draw in itself, but he was more than just a sideshow.

At every meeting Towner attended, he presented one of two lectures: both of which drew a connection between North American Indians and Nazi ideology. One lecture showed the importance of the Indians to America's development; the other, the destruction of the Indians by the Jewish-controlled American government. His most popular speech was about the "truths" of the American Revolution. Towner

told how during the Revolutionary War the help of the Indians was sought by George Washington. He said the Chiefs of the tribes in the East, headed by the Iroquois, had a pow-wow with Washington and consented to help under the condition that, if victorious, the new government would adopt the Indian tribal custom of government. Washington thereupon sent Franklin and Jefferson to

²¹Newsletter, Jewish Community Committee Report to the Dies Committee, Urban Archives, California State University, Northridge, 1936-1940. (Hereinafter, JCC Collection.) Towner's use of the war bonnet and costume, as well as his name of Chief Red Cloud, come from the Plains Indians, not the Indians from which Towner originated. His use of the Plains Indians regalia allowed him to appear to non-Indian audiences as a true representative of Indian nations in America.

the Indian tribes to make a study of their government and their report was that it was the most remarkable system ever devised. Washington consented to the condition and the Constitution of the United States was patterned after the tribal system of the Indians. The Chiefs, however, made another condition, and that was that the Jews should forever be barred from this country. Washington and Franklin had fought for a clause to that effect in the Constitution, but were defeated through the efforts of Alexander Hamilton.²²

Since that betrayal, Towner noted, "every North American Indian has known for sometime what the whole set-up is about."²³ The price the Indians paid for that knowledge, so the listener was to conclude, was the wholesale destruction of Indian societies by conspirators within the American government. But this strategy backfired because, according to Towner, the North American Indian Federation had been formed by the Indians to lead the organized battle against the Jews. The battle would be easy to conduct, Towner argued, because Indian reservations were located near railroad, shipping and airline terminals. Thus, he said, "Indians are occupying positions so strategic," as to make them a powerful force.²⁴

²²Lecture of Mr. E.A. Towner, Notes of Ruth Bauer, Secretary of the Spokane Silver Legion, August 4, 1937, Roundtree Collection. Towner gave this same speech at German-American Bund meetings in Portland, Seattle and Los Angeles. See Hoppes, pp. 33-34.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

Finally, Towner always returned to a Indian-Nazi connection with a promise of action:

There are Nazis and Fascists here in the United States of America and all those Nazis and Fascists, I am proud to say, are the North American Indians, and they are going to be wearing their war bonnets!²⁵

Towner carried this connection one step further during a German-American Bund meeting in 1939. Towner remarked that

President Roosevelt would be impeached at [the present] session of Congress and the Jew deal squelched. He said that the only thing that could stop the move would be for the Jews, Reds, Pinks and their friends to get together and start armed control of the whites and Indians. He said [that] when it was all over the Jews, etc., would be in concentration camps surrounded by barbed wire and with Indians on guard. He said the Indians would then find an excuse to see that all Jews were killed and this country, and the world would be a lot cleaner.²⁶

Whether it was because of the content or his flamboyant presentation, Towner's speeches were always popular. The first time he spoke for the Spokane unit, he drew 200 listeners. Each time he returned, he drew audiences of 350 to 400.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶German-American Bund Meeting, February 3, 1939, "Right-wing Extremists," Rennar Collection, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon. (Hereinafter, "Rennar Collection.")

Towner relished the attention the Spokane unit gave him. His mixed-blood heritage left him constantly struggling for acceptance between the Indian and white-man's worlds.²⁷ He was convinced, in classic megalomania, that he would be chosen as the great Indian leader in the Western Hemisphere; the speeches were just a vehicle to attract white support for Indian causes. Claiming that he was a personal friend of John Dillinger, a "kindly fellow who only robbed from Jewish banks and then distributed his money to the poor people of Chicago,"²⁸ Towner desperately wanted to be a power to be reckoned with.

Pelley had made it clear that there would be a special place for Indians in the Legion. Writing in Liberation, Pelley promised that when he came to power, he would emancipate

the North American Indian residing within the United States from such present classifications and creating a specific Cabinet office for an Indian representative in the Federal Executive Government -- who shall be of Indian blood and Indian selection -- and generally empowered to execute the welfare of this people throughout the nation.²⁹

²⁷Interview between Elwood A. Towner and David Robinson, ADL Collection; Telephone interview with William Towner, April 10, 1979.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Liberation, vol. 9 (December 7, 1938), p. 4.

Towner was convinced that he would be that man. However, Pelley's support of Indians was confined to the pages of Liberation.

Although a useful speaker for Silvershirt meetings, Towner complained that the Silver Legion did not accept him as an equal. No record shows that Pelley or Roundtree considered Towner inferior, but they did not trust Towner because of his "vivid imagination" and his constant requests for money. As Bernice Roundtree noted, Towner was "as questionable a Christian as one could get. Orville never really knew if [Towner] properly understood the Christian message of the Legion."³⁰ Since Pelley was unable or unwilling to give the financial backing that Towner wanted, Towner began to court the patronage of the Bund.³¹ His popularity at Silver Legion meetings had more to do with romantic enthusiasm for an Indian in buckskins than real support for his program.

³⁰Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

³¹After racial mythologists in the Third Reich identified American Indians as true Aryans, the German-American Bund took the position that Nazism respected Indian rights, and distributed Bund literature to Indian sympathizers. The Bund began to feature Indian speakers at rallies: a Cherokee, Chief New Moon, who spoke at Camp Nordland, the Bund camp in New Jersey; and, after impressing the Los Angeles unit of the Bund, Elwood Towner, who spoke at numerous Bund gatherings on the West Coast, New York City, and at Nordland. After 1938, Towner spoke almost exclusively at Bund meetings. See: "Red Indians in Brown Shirts," New Republic, vol. 149 (May 17, 1939), p. 31; Olive Bryce, "Fritz Kuhn Verbatim," Ken vol. 4 (May 18, 1939), pp. 9-11.

By 1938, with Towner's help, Crow had succeeded in rebuilding Silvershirt strength in Spokane to a consistent membership of 350. Crow's next task was to move the group to active programs. Adopting a Roundtree strategy, Crow began a letter writing campaign. The strategy was quite simple: the local newspapers were carefully read each day, any article disagreeable to the Silvershirts specifically, or opposing a Silvershirt program, or supporting Roosevelt and the Jews, was noted and a response was immediately written. This task was assumed by Crow and the unit's secretary, Ruth Bauer.

The letters by Crow or Bauer followed the same pattern: a thinly veiled threat against the writer of the offensive article, a claim of oppression, and a description of Silvershirt purpose. As an archetypical example, Bauer submitted an open letter to the Spokesman-Review "Forum" section defending the Silver Legion.³² In her letter, she queried the editor of the "Forum" section, "Are you able to go into court and prove your charges?"³³ Then she claimed that the Jewish controlled press was misconstruing the true intentions of the Silvershirts. She argued that the Silvershirts were a fighting Christian organization intent

³²Bauer to Spokesman-Review, August 4, 1938, Roundtree Collection. Bauer's letters to the Editor were seldom published by the Spokesman-Review. Copies of the letters were always sent to Roundtree for his records.

³³Ibid.

on stopping Communism in America. The Silvershirts, she continued, would succeed in this battle because

the Silvershirts and other patriotic men and organizations in this country have a most powerful and invincible weapon -- the TRUTH! Every charge we make against Jewry we have absolute documental evidence to prove it, and that is the reason why Jews won't face the music in open and fair trial.³⁴

Bauer continued to argue that the Silvershirts were not fascists just because they were not fighting for democracy. Instead, the Silvershirts were the embodiment of true Americanism and it was they who were fighting for the Republic as established in the United States Constitution.

The letter writing campaign was not limited to newspapers. Crow wrote an interesting letter to Senator James F. Pope of Idaho on the occasion of Pope's loss of his re-election bid in 1938:

I extend hearty congratulations to you because of your defeat for renomination to succeed yourself in the United States Senate on the alleged Democratic ticket in the Idaho primary. I wish to emphasize the word 'congratulations,' because you have escaped another six-year period of persecution by having to abrogate and sacrifice every trace of patriotism that once coursed through your veins by having to associate with and do the bidding of an aggregation of aliens.³⁵

Pope did not reply.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Bauer to Spokesman-Review, August 11, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

In 1938, the Spokane post's public meetings were notably more virulent in expressions of anti-semitism and denunciations of the New Deal and Roosevelt's foreign policy. In July, Zachary visited the post during his tour of western Legion posts. At a public meeting, Zachary's speech was picketed by the Communist Party and the left-wing League for Peace and Democracy. Eleven members of the Communist Party were arrested because they "refused to 'clear the street' in front of the meeting hall."³⁶ The newspaper reported that

many in the crowd of 700 which blocked the streets carried banners attacking the Silver Shirts, Fascism and Hitlerism. Slogan banners said: 'We Don't Want Fascism We Don't Want Silvershirts' and 'This is Spokane Not Berlin.'³⁷

In response, Zachary charged that the American government was "in the hands of the Jews" and that "President Roosevelt was leading us to an American Communist revolution."³⁸ Furthermore, Zachary warned the demonstrators that when the Silvershirts

eliminate Communism and Jews from the United States it will not be with ballots, but with guns, wading in blood. Communism had been stopped in Germany,

³⁶"Pickets Outnumber Silvershirts at Spokane meeting," Jewish Transcript, vol. 15 (July 22, 1938), p. 1.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

Italy and Spain, but not with ballots.
I can't help but admire Hitler.³⁹

Shortly after the meeting, Crow wrote the Spokesman-Review thanking the Police Chief, Ira Martin, for "the prompt action taken in maintaining peace" at the meeting.⁴⁰ Crow went on to assure the Police Chief that the Silver Legion was dedicated to keeping meetings peaceful and legal. "If at any time the Silver Shirts are guilty of breach of peace in disturbing any meeting," Crow continued, "we should be as promptly dealt with by the authorities."⁴¹ Crow then promised that "no member of this organization will appear before the court to ask that his sentence be suspended."⁴² Pelley happily wrote of the incident in Liberation: "If you are a Red Jew, and set out to disturb a Silvershirt meeting in the eastern half of the state of Washington, you land in jail!"⁴³

After the demonstration, owners of meeting halls were leery of adverse publicity and refused to rent to the Silver Legion. Crow was able to arrange meetings just once a month, instead of every other week. Arrangements were finally made

³⁹Spokesman-Review (July 19, 1938); Seattle Times (July 19, 1938).

⁴⁰Crow to Editor of Spokesman-Review, August 30, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Liberation (July 28, 1938), p. 11.

with the Gospel Tabernacle for rental of their hall. This arrangement lasted until 1939, when a new minister, less favorable to Silver Legion positions, refused to allow the Legion to use the hall.⁴⁴

To bolster the "power" of the meetings Crow could arrange, Roundtree was invited to lecture. Making the trip to Spokane every other month, Roundtree spoke on the international setting, the New Deal, and the Silver Legion program. Roundtree's speeches followed the isolationist line. At the October 31 meeting, several weeks after the Munich crisis, he told the unit that the Czechoslovak question was none of the business of the United States: "We have more things to worry about in the United States. Germany and Czechoslovakia can take care of themselves."⁴⁵ He attacked the Roosevelt administration's policy of "permitting thousands of undesirable aliens to enter the US as refugees from Europe's political and civil war strife."⁴⁶ The problem with this policy, Roundtree continued, was that

there have been hundreds of aliens a day admitted to this country merely because they said they were refugees. Some of them are now holding federal and state

⁴⁴Crow to Roundtree, April 1, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁴⁵Roundtree lecture, Notes of Ruth Bauer, October 31, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁴⁶"Charges Aliens Get Good Jobs," Spokesman Review (October 1, 1938).

jobs, while we of American birth, are unable to get those same jobs.⁴⁷

In January 1939, Crow decided that his life was in danger. Believing the Communist Revolution imminent, he wrote Roundtree that he was in

close touch with all peace officers in this section at this time on the Communist uprising that is to take place on the 28th of this month. Chief Cole of the Highway Patrol is trying to protect my safety from the mob until then.⁴⁸

According to the Washington State Highway Patrol, the Spokane City Police, and the Spokane County Sheriff's Patrol, Crow was never officially protected by any agency. The threat against his safety was apparently a paranoiac apparition.⁴⁹ What caused this sudden apparition is unclear.

Crow's fears disappeared as quickly as they appeared. By February, he was requesting that Roundtree hold a protest meeting "against this Jewish administration drawing this country into a foreign war."⁵⁰ Impressed that the time was

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Crow to Roundtree, January 10, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁴⁹Interview, Neil W. Moloney's office (Washington State Highway Patrol), Larry V. Erickson's office (Spokane County Sheriff's Patrol), Robert Panther's office (Spokane City Police), March 22-23, 1981.

⁵⁰Crow to Roundtree, February 23, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

opportune "to get big crowds out and bring our program before the people,"⁵¹ Crow arranged for a meeting hall.

Before an audience of 250, in February 1939, Roundtree denounced Jewish control of the administration:

He claimed that the Jews have entrenched themselves so well in the life of the nation that when President Roosevelt leaves for a fishing trip he doesn't leave the vice-president in charge, as provided by the Constitution, but Barney Baruch takes the President's chair.⁵²

By April, Crow became concerned about Roundtree's attacks against Jews. Reflecting local politics, and the religious make-up of the community, Crow believed the anti-semitism and Pelley's esoterics would alienate Catholics and make it impossible to rent their halls. He suggested that Roundtree

stress the economic situation, laying much emphasis upon the fact that the International Bankers hold the key by controlling the gold -- but avoid the mention of Jew. Naturally, when you speak of Mr. Morgenthau, Baruch, Sasoon or Rothchild -- or even that Chronic Smile in Washington [Roosevelt] -- a large percentage of your audience will be suspicious that you have reference to the Jew. I am sure you grasp the idea. Avoid, also, reference to Pelley's esoterics, which subject, as you know, is not acceptable to the average Catholic, so we want to avoid anything that will stand in the way of breaking the ice to break into their halls

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²"Anti-Jew Talk Wins Forum Ire," Spokesman-Review. (February 6, 1939).

wherever they have one. We are making fine headway and are confident that you will strengthen our position in this city.⁵³

Roundtree refused to comply with Crow's wishes. For Roundtree, attacking the Jewish-Sovietist conspiracy in the country was one way to show "holy living" at its best. Being quiet about the real problems in the country would be to give up the fight.⁵⁴

Crow remained busy with the Legion through 1939. However, the meeting frequency dropped even more. Crow made several more suggestions to Roundtree. First, he suggested that the Washington Legion sponsor a convention for teachers "who are red or pink, due to the Jewish-communistic instructions they have been getting in a subtle way, though unaware of the fact they were being poisoned."⁵⁵ The result, Crow claimed, would be to spread Legion ideas through the schools. Crow also advised Roundtree to contact Reverend Ernest and Ruth Hillis in Dayton, a community 200 miles south of Spokane in eastern Washington.⁵⁶ Shortly after these letters, Crow slowed his participation in the Legion. It is unclear from the remaining letters why, but

⁵³Crow to Roundtree, April 11, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁵⁴Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

⁵⁵Crow to Roundtree, July 5, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁵⁶Crow to Roundtree, July 5, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

Bernice Roundtree suggested that "Crow just became too old for the fight."⁵⁷

By the end of 1939, official meetings of the Legion ended in Spokane. According to Paul Schimanski, a longtime member, informal groups continued to study Pelley's spiritual writings through 1942, but "there was no politics discussed at [those] meeting[s]."⁵⁸

While the Spokane Legion was the largest unit established in 1936, other areas of the state were also organized. In western Washington, units in Clinton, Langley, North Bend, Olympia, Poulsbo, and Tacoma were organized for Pelley as part of the Christian Party ticket. Most of these units were small and inactive during the campaign. The only units with a degree of activity were in Langley and Tacoma.

The Langley unit, organized by John Metcalf who, unable to separate ideology from metaphysics, was attracted to Pelley's visionary millennialism and conspiracy theories.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

⁵⁸Transcript of Record, United States v. William Dudley Pelley, et. al., No. Criminal 7391, In the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of Indiana, Indianapolis Division, May term (1942), pp. 333, 335-336, 342.

⁵⁹Metcalf later noted that "naturally we were misunderstood, for mention was continuously made of zionist-jewish top-heavy influence and pressure driving this nation toward dictatorship of LEFTIST tendency. . . . Pelley was perhaps the first national figure to name the arch conspirators and at the same time suggest a wholly American and Christian solution to the nation's distress." Quoted in

Under Metcalf's leadership, a unit of approximately 35 members, "were first FOR AMERICA and our Constitution, Flag and our free way of life!"⁶⁰ The unit helped to distribute literature and drum up support for the Christian Party ticket.

After the election defeat, Metcalf's only activity for the Legion was the arrangement of a radio interview for Roundtree. As Metcalf explained it to Roundtree, he got the idea for the radio appearance after hearing an interview with Harold Laski by Frank James of KOL radio from Seattle. Metcalf wrote James asking if "'Free Speech' was for Reds and Jews only and suggesting that by way of antidote he get in touch with you and allow you to be questioned over the air, as was Laski."⁶¹ James asked that Metcalf make arrangements for Roundtree to be interviewed. Roundtree

Donnell Portzline, "William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Shirt Legion of America," Ed.D. dissertation, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 1965, p. 162. Metcalf continued his quest for a "Christian solution" long after Pelley's death. In 1986, retired from commercial fishing, he joined the Christian Identity movement, a faith linked with the racial nationalism of Richard G. Butler and his Church of Jesus Christ Christian of the Aryan Nations in Hayden Lake, Idaho. Christian Identity doctrine asserts that Adam was the sole progenitor of the white race, Anglo-Saxons are the true descendants of the Israelites, and Jesus was not a Jew. For more information on the Christian Identity movement, see: Leonard Zeskind, The "Christian Identity" Movement: A Theological Justification for Racist and Anti-Semitic Violence (Atlanta: National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1986).

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 32.

⁶¹Metcalf to Roundtree, March 20, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

contacted James, and an interview was arranged. The interview, unfortunately, was not recorded.

In Tacoma, the Silver Legion was organized by Frank W. Clark. Clark, a house painter by trade, had helped to organize the Washington contingent of the Bonus March.⁶² Clark, however, was not a reliable member. He felt that Pelley was "too soft" on the Jewish question in America, and wanted to develop a "militant army" to attack the Jews, both physically and politically.⁶³ He resigned from the Legion

⁶²"Fascism in America," Life, p. 61.

⁶³Clark was representative of a number of Silvershirters throughout the country who advocated direct action against the Jews. Pelley was constantly forced to keep units in line with his timetable for action. The most difficult units for Pelley to control were in San Diego and Los Angeles.

A Silvershirt office had been open in Los Angeles in 1933, and Southern California boasted the largest and most militant apparatus. Los Angeles had six posts, the highest concentration in the country. The largest Silvershirt meeting up to 1936 had been in Los Angeles; it drew about 600 people and the Los Angeles Silvershirts were quite proud of it.

Unlike the Washington state posts, the posts in Los Angeles were more or less specialized according to the type of member. There was a post of occultists, for example. The most important local Silvershirt was "Captain" Eugene Case, Chaplain of the Metropolitan Post, Los Angeles' only military post. Case was thirty-three years old and had been educated in three military academies. His rank came from service with the Sixth Cantonese National Army in 1922. He held the same title in Mexico under General Manzas. Later, he filibustered in Latin America. He held the rank of First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve, but had seen service only with the Illinois National Guard on strike duty. His military academy in California had gone bankrupt during the Depression. Case was one of the few military men the Silvershirts attracted.

The San Diego Post was a world unto itself. It was led by a former salesman, Willard Kemp, who never went unarmed and who had been working to turn his post into a private

army. His assistant, Donald Nisswander, was a dedicated Nazi who kept a death list. The two hundred members of the post were armed, mostly with U.S. Springfield rifles which Kemp claimed were bought illegally from armory attendants at a naval base. Kemp told an associate that he had 12,000 rounds of ammunition in four caches near San Diego. He kept his men well drilled for the coming Communist revolution and hired two U.S. Marine Corps instructors who taught "tactics, maneuvers, drills, riots in and about cities . . . [and] rifle qualifications." The Silvershirts had also rented a ranch in the hills near San Diego and stocked it with supplies as a refuge during the period of chaos. Unfortunately for Kemp, both Marine instructors were acting as Naval Intelligence agents.

In 1934, shortly after incorporating the Silvershirts in Delaware, Pelley faced a revolt in the ranks. The revolt occurred in California and was spearheaded, on behalf of the "direct actionists," by none other than Chaplain Eugene Case. His expressed motives were somewhat obscure, but in private they were simple. Case was after what he felt was a comfortable sum which he could squeeze out of what he termed "the suckers."

Attempting to place the California Silvershirts beyond Pelley's reach, Case and a few others incorporated as the Silver Legion of America, Inc., alleging this was to thwart a Communist plot to take over the Legion. The newly incorporated California unit began putting out their own insurgent Silver Ranger IX Division publication. The paper attacked Pelley for his associating with the Friends of New Germany. Case made special appeals to the Silvershirt actionists to join in his cause.

With his vital California establishment grinding to a halt over Case's insistence that California Silvershirts were legally subordinate to Case, Pelley rushed to California. He immediately contacted Kemp, who had stayed loyal. Pelley finally met Case, and they apparently came to some sort of arrangement, at least part of which was Case's agreement to disband the Metropolitan Post if Pelley would assume its \$200 indebtedness. Whatever issues were still outstanding suddenly became academic when Case landed in jail for disorderly conduct and carrying a gun.

Pelley took the opportunity to reconstitute the California apparatus. A comptroller was appointed, and California Silvershirts were put under the command of a triumvirate headed by Kemp. Public meetings were once again held in Los Angeles. The Silver Ranger was reinstituted, and editor James Craig was given his job back even though he had been earlier fired for having absconded with some of Pelley's money. The paper at this time had 1,300 subscribers and the usual press run was 10,000. From an

after a power struggle with Pelley. Clark wanted complete control over his unit's finances, policies and actions. In essence, he wanted no interference from Pelley or, for that matter, Roundtree. As Clark explained, he resigned because Pelley "did not appreciate his efforts."⁶⁴ With Clark's resignation, the Tacoma unit disappeared from the Silver Legion ranks.

Clark, taking the former Tacoma Silvershirts with him, formed his own group, the National Liberty Party. The Party, under Clark's personal supervision, would develop a

eight-page newspaper, it had shrunk to a four-page tabloid that was about two hundred dollars behind in paying its printer.

However, the reinstituted California Silvershirts continued to cause Pelley difficulty. Wild rumors about Pelley's alleged misappropriation of Silvershirt funds, and dissatisfaction with his leadership in general, provoked another defection in 1935. James Craig -- who once again had been fired as Silver Ranger editor, this time over policy differences -- and Silvershirt Comptroller, Frederick Beutel, pilfered the Silver Ranger's mailing list and were soon trying to build their own Constitutional Legion of America by raiding Pelley's ranks. It failed to attract enough monied members from Silvershirt ranks. Of somewhat more potential were the American White Guards, a group formed of several veterans of the Case revolt and some other Silvershirts and former Silvershirts. It held a few public meetings, but disbanded a few months later when one leader died and another lost his eyesight. See: New Masses (April 10, 1934); McCormack Committee, (California), pp. 8-11, 586, 602; New York Times (August 5, 1934); Zachary to Roundtree, June 19, 1937, Roundtree Collection; Silver Ranger IX Division, vol. 2 (April 6, 1934); Dies Committee (1940), p. 4194; William Dudley Pelley, The Door to Revelation (Asheville, N.C.: Pelley Publishers, 1939), pp. 434, 445; Pelley's Weekly, vol. 2 (October 3, 1934).

⁶⁴Frank W. Clark to Roundtree, March 17, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

very strong and determined militant army of native born Americans that will stand as a united front in opposition to the subversive controlled intimidation Press, and all subversive forces who would contemplate to interfere with and obstruct American free speech.⁶⁵

Clark wanted to expand membership in the National Liberty Party from the ranks of other Silvershirt units in Washington state. Sending literature to Roundtree, Clark emphasized that the National Party was espousing the "No More Hunger" plan of Pelley and that once Roundtree

read and annalized [sic.] the material at hand dealing with the National Liberty Party, you will decide to cast in your efforts with those of the Party
⁶⁶

The appeal was unsuccessful. On hearing of the offer, Zachary wrote Roundtree that Clark was a "great and notorious young buffalo who aspires to national prominence and international recognition as the Hitler of America."⁶⁷ Furthermore, "Frank has a lot wrong with him besides his yellow streak."⁶⁸ He was also a "four-flusher and natural born liar."⁶⁹ In another letter it was suggested that "a

⁶⁵Clark to Roundtree, March 17, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁶⁶Clark to Roundtree, March 19, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁶⁷Zachary to Roundtree, April 18, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

committee of husky boys . . . call on him some dark and foggy night and suggest to him various healthy ways" of staying out of Legion affairs.⁷⁰ However, Zachary saw a certain benefit to Clark's activities, because the newly formed National Liberty Party would "provide a proper sewer for some of the rubbish we would like to discard."⁷¹

The units established in 1936 varied considerably in their commitment to Silver Legion ideology. From the Spokane unit, which was tightly organized and well led, to the Tacoma unit, which was organized for self-serving purposes, Roundtree still managed to expand Silver Legion activity. The momentum of Silver Legion organizing in 1936 apparently carried over to 1937 with 9 more units created in the state.

Starting with Seattle, the largest city in the western section, Roundtree contacted Harry Picot in December 1937. Picot organized several Councils of Safety in the Seattle area. In the beginning, Picot maintained solid control of the councils making up the Seattle post of 400 members. Roundtree soon came to dislike Picot. The feeling was mutual. Picot, according to Zachary, distrusted Roundtree's

⁷⁰Zachary to Roundtree, August 17, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁷¹Zachary to Roundtree, April 18, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

sincerity and abilities as State Liaison Officer.⁷²

Roundtree, afraid that Picot was going to build a personal empire ala Frank Clark, "wanted to get rid of Picot -- he simply didn't trust him."⁷³

Picot turned over the organizing of post meetings to Charles Lubiens. Lubiens, described as a "splendid, honest and conscientious old man who does the very best he can in his local sphere," lacked some qualifications for leadership that Zachary considered were "vitally essential."⁷⁴ Zachary noted that "[Lubiens] is apt to become over-enthusiastic [and] . . . too presuming as to his position or authority in sponsoring speakers for Legion meetings."⁷⁵ Consequently, many meetings were unruly. One member of the post, Mrs. C.E. Brown, finally wrote to Zachary complaining about the poor quality of the meetings. She stated that at the January 8, 1938 meeting, Lubiens had arranged for a guest speaker, a Mr. Emerson, who spoke on the topic, "Are Jews God's Chosen People?" Mr. Emerson was unable to maintain order or answer the simplest questions from a hostile

⁷²Zachary to Roundtree, January 10, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁷³Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

⁷⁴Zachary to Roundtree, January 10, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁷⁵Ibid.

audience.⁷⁶ His inability to lead the meeting convinced Mrs. Brown that Emerson must be one of the conspirators in disguise:

As to Mr. Emerson, after he returned to his seat I watched him very closely. Well, if there wasn't one of 'our friends' went through his backyard, at least I am very much mistaken.

The shape of his head, his profile, his language, everything expresses it. His English was terrible and threw me off so many times that I am sure I cannot transcribe all my notes. He was strong for another meeting and proposed to talk on No More Hunger. I say, let some good Silvershirt talk on that at least.⁷⁷

Zachary forwarded the complaint to Roundtree, assuring him that Mrs. Brown was "very reliable and unbiased and I think you should accept her disclosures as sufficient cause for a little investigation of this man Emerson."⁷⁸ Roundtree was told to solve the problems of the post by arranging a meeting between himself, Picot, Lubiens and the rest of the King County Liaison Committee. Zachary was confident that a face-to-face meeting where Roundtree could "sit down with the boys in Seattle and talk things over

⁷⁶Mrs. Clarence E. Brown to Zachary, January 8, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Zachary to Roundtree, January 14, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

frankly and without restraint," would solve any difficulties.⁷⁹ Zachary wrote Roundtree,

I am sure that you will find them your ardent allies . . . I desire to leave it strictly up to you fellows to get together and iron out these wrinkles so that the enemy will see nothing but a smooth front.⁸⁰

The meeting took place but the problems were not ironed out. Roundtree told his wife, "Picot and his men are all a bunch of idiots. I'm going to get rid of them."⁸¹

The feud continued throughout 1938. Finally, Zachary realized that local control would not solve the problem of the unit. He drove out to Seattle to try to solve the difficulties by demanding the unit's loyalty to the national organization. A muster of Western Washington Silver-shirts was called at the Silver Lodge. In attendance were all the local leaders and most of the Seattle members. As Zachary left the meeting, he told Roundtree, "Don't pass this on but the Seattle folks have got to change. We need to make it clear, they are either with the Chief or are against him."⁸² As far as Zachary was concerned, any in-fighting was a direct attack on Pelley. Zachary left the problem for

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

⁸²Interview with Mrs. Clarence E. Brown, December 19, 1981.

Roundtree to solve, telling him, "I don't envy you the Seattle headache."⁸³

The factious nature of the post continued into 1939. In January, when Zachary again returned to Western Washington, Picot told him not to hold a meeting because of the great difficulty in renting a hall. As Zachary noted, "It made me hot under the collar and I went ahead on my own and had all arrangements set up before the objectors knew anything about it."⁸⁴ The meeting, set for January 25th at the Swedish Club, was attended by 307 members and covered by Life reporters. Zachary's speech was standard Silvershirt faire. He attacked President Roosevelt, Frances Perkins, the Panay incident,⁸⁵ and confidently ended with the prediction that in "twenty-four months things will be different."⁸⁶

Roundtree began to bring the Seattle post under control by exposing Picot's assistants. Picot did not carefully check out the men who worked with him. One assistant, W.W. McDonald, had been active in the Christian Party during the 1936 presidential elections. Consequently, Picot never

⁸³Zachary to Roundtree, June 2, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁸⁴Zachary to Roundtree, January 18, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁸⁵On the Panay incident, see Manny T. Koginos, The Panay Incident: Prelude to War (Lafayette, Indiana: , 1967).

⁸⁶"Fascism in America," Life, pp. 62-63.

questioned his loyalty or abilities. McDonald was described as

'Twitcher McDonald' because of a nervous disorder which caused him to tremble and shake, especially when frightened. McDonald had one arm. His appearance was slovenly and he earned a precarious living peddling newspapers. As a campaign manager of the Christian Party his most profound -- and only recorded remark was: 'Jews gotta be wiped out!'⁸⁷

McDonald was responsible for finding halls for post meetings. Most of the time, he rented the Loyal Order of Moose Hall. However, it soon appeared that McDonald was over-charging the post for the rent of the hall and pocketing the difference. In any event, shortly after Roundtree found out, he forced Picot to remove McDonald from the post.⁸⁸

Another of Picot's assistants was Dr. Howard Merrill. Dr. Merrill, a physician who never set up a practice, directed Silvershirt operations from the Olympia Hotel in Seattle. Not only was he evicted for failing to pay the rent, but his reputation was further tarnished by his liaison with a local procuress who operated several brothels

⁸⁷John Roy Carlson, Undercover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underworld (Philadelphia: Blakiston Company, 1943), p. 151; "Who's Who in the Christian Party," Jewish Transcript, vol. 13 (July 14, 1936), p. 6.

⁸⁸Interview with Mrs. Clarence E. Brown, December 19, 1981.

in neighboring Bremerton. According to Merrill, she was his secretary while he remained at the hotel.⁸⁹

The complaints against Picot grew until May 1939 when he finally resigned as leader of the Liaison Committee of King County. He requested that Roundtree appoint an appropriate successor.⁹⁰ After he resigned, he left Seattle for most of the summer, but assured Roundtree of "my cooperation in anyway I can help."⁹¹ Roundtree reported Picot's resignation to headquarters. The reply, by Legion treasurer Alfred Talpey, noted that "perhaps time will iron out the difficulties . . . of course, one is apt to find petty jealousies in any organization."⁹²

When Picot left, the Seattle post fell apart. The unit was riddled with power seekers, several tried to take control of the unit, but Roundtree refused to sanction their efforts.⁹³ Roundtree found one person, James Dupen, who he was willing to sponsor as leader of the post. However, ever

⁸⁹David Strong, p. 48; Geoffrey Smith, To Save a Nation: American Countersubversives, the New Deal, and the Coming of World War II (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 72. It was widely known that she was also training her two teenage daughters as prostitutes.

⁹⁰Picot to Roundtree, May 5, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Talpey to Roundtree, May 31, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

⁹³Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

cautious, Roundtree asked Zachary for information about Dupen. The reply was positive:

there is no question of the man's sincerity and he has demonstrated considerable leadership in handling the affairs of various improvement clubs. If he is thoroughly sold on the idea of giving us the major portion of his time and interest, he should otherwise be well qualified to do the job."⁹⁴

Dupen, however, was not interested in devoting that much time to the Silver Legion. As a result, the Seattle unit of the Silver Legion was essentially moribund after Picot's resignation. Roundtree did not, or could not, find an appropriate replacement.

Also organized in 1937, were western Washington units in Bremerton, Ilawco, Marietta, Monroe, Mt. Vernon, Port Orchard, Redmond, and Vancouver. All of these units were short lived, but two of them, Vancouver and Bremerton, show that the Seattle unit's problems were not unique.

The Bremerton unit, organized by Bill Moore, an ambulance driver at the Naval Hospital, was important to the Washington Legion because of the creation of the American Publishing Society by the unit's members. The Society published and circulated Silvershirt literature throughout the Pacific Northwest. The Society was run by three Silvershirt members: Roger W. Williams, William O. Creighton, and Captain G.E. Hansen. Williams, a former

⁹⁴Zachary to Roundtree, July 5, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

journalist for the Bremerton Sun, was responsible for the publication of materials. Hansen, owner of the Bremerton Marine Service at Anderson Cove, helped finance the publication. Creighton was responsible for distribution to Silvershirt posts in the state.⁹⁵

However, this working relationship between the American Publishing Society and the Silver Legion did not last. By 1938, Zachary considered Williams a "self-centered double-crossing wrecker par excellence."⁹⁶ Apparently, Williams "left rather suddenly, taking Bill [Moore's] entire stock of The Protocols, along with Bill's wife."⁹⁷ At that time, the American Publishing Society broke all ties with the Silver Legion. Bill Moore lost all interest in continuing his activities in the Legion as well, and the Bremerton post disintegrated.

In Vancouver, a unit formed by Gerald Nedgwalt offered a considerable contrast to Bremerton and Seattle. The unit, consisting of 35 members, was less interested in conducting political activity than in organizing social events, such as picnics at the Clark County fairgrounds.⁹⁸ Most of the meetings held by the Vancouver unit were organized by

⁹⁵Carlson, Undercover, p. 314.

⁹⁶Zachary to Roundtree, April 18, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Report by C.B., August 29, 1939, Rennar Collection.

Roundtree. Roundtree would contact the Silvershirt organization in Portland, led by S.H. Labbe, and the Portland unit of the German-American Bund, led by Paul Armbruster and Hans Scheurer, requesting a joint meeting with the Vancouver unit.⁹⁹ Roundtree would then drive to Vancouver to speak at this joint meeting. Usually 80 people attended these Roundtree organized meetings. When Roundtree was needed elsewhere, the Vancouver unit returned to social activities and infrequent meetings.¹⁰⁰

The units established in 1937, were either self-destructive or lacked the political drive to carry out the Silver Legion platform. The election momentum of 1936 wore thin. In all 1938, only 6 additional units were created -- the last ever formed in the state. Three were in eastern Washington in the cities of Walla Walla, Yakima and Dayton. In western Washington, units were founded in Bellingham, Puyallup and Everett. The most active were in Dayton and Everett.

The Everett post was more successful than the Dayton unit. The Everett unit met weekly at the home of its leader, Roy Chappelle, a millwright for the local lumbermill. These meetings were described as "very informal; anything is discussed at any time on any subject

⁹⁹Roundtree to Scheurer, July 15, 1939, Rennar Collection.

¹⁰⁰Interview with Gerald Nedgwalt, June 14, 1980.

at pleasure, with an occasional risqué story thrown in."¹⁰¹
 The most capable member seemed to be Everett Baker: "his long history as a Klansman would indicate a previous trend and activity along similar lines."¹⁰²

The Everett post, however, had some difficulties keeping the unit pure. As reported to Roundtree, an attorney, Gideon M. LeCocq, joined the unit and "aroused suspicion, [since] there is reason to believe that he is a French Sephardic Jew."¹⁰³ The unit soon kicked LeCocq out. However, this did not end the difficulty of "Jewish infiltration." After a meeting, which Roundtree attended, the unit discovered that "a half Jew by the name of George Bowler was given the floor to make the opening speech."¹⁰⁴ While this caused quite a stir in the unit, it was decided that no "irreparable damage has been done by putting the Jew on the program, altho [sic.] there has been some criticism voiced against the action, and one lady got up and went out before the speaker had finished, as a protest."¹⁰⁵

The Dayton unit was organized by Reverend Ernest Ward Hillis and his wife, Ruth Coffee Hillis. Reverend Hillis,

¹⁰¹Peter Husby to Roundtree, September 22, 1938, Roundtree Collection.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

minister of the First Baptist Church, became interested in the Silver Legion after reading several copies of Liberation. Attracted to Pelley's millennialism and pietist tendencies, and curious about the Legion, Hillis attended several large meetings in Spokane. After listening to Roundtree and Zachary speak on the Jewish conspiracy, Hillis asked Crow for more information. Crow encouraged Roundtree to give the Hillis' special attention, because "these folks might develop into valuable lecturers for the Silvershirt Legion."¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Crow saw in Hillis "a man who could help out here on the east side after you [Roundtree] had given him a few lessons and some coaching."¹⁰⁷

Roundtree was at first highly impressed with the Hillises and convinced that they would be strong organizers. As Roundtree saw it, "they were straight arrows."¹⁰⁸ But he was soon disappointed by the Hillises. Though Hillis gave sermons recommending membership, he only got three people to join. Several other parishioners, while reading the literature, refused to join for unknown reasons. One man claimed that "he does not dare join because the Jews would

¹⁰⁶Crow to Roundtree, March 4, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

¹⁰⁷Crow to Roundtree, March 11, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

¹⁰⁸Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

put him out of business and he is sure they would find out."¹⁰⁹

The Dayton unit grew to a membership of twenty-five by the end of the year. The unit spent most of its energy writing letters to the Spokesman-Review and other local papers. Ruth Hillis wrote several letters castigating Dorothy Thompson and Frances Perkins. Following the Silvershirt formula established by Ruth Bauer of Spokane, Hillis first condemned the obviously biased nature of Thompson's journalism and suggested that Thompson was hiding something:

As a Nom de plume, Dorothy Thompson is an innocent name. Looking into the Journalist's background a bit, we find that her first husband was possessed of a name that should it be mentioned would undoubtedly stir up racial animosity in some circles.¹¹⁰

In another letter, she condemned the biased reporting of the local newspaper:

The American people are waking up to the fact that all the news they get is as mixed with propaganda as to be little better -- if any -- than no news at all. For instance, on the front page of yesterday's Spokesman-Review was a picture of a child sitting amid the debris of a bombed dwelling. The caption was 'This is What Happen When a Nazi Bomb Hits Your Home!' Funny, isn't it that the British and French bombs

¹⁰⁹Ruth Coffee Hillis to Roundtree, September 19, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

¹¹⁰Ruth Hillis to Editor of the Spokesman-Review, September 22, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

don't do those things? Your efforts to inspire hate are too obvious!"¹¹¹

The Dayton unit's activities never expanded much beyond the letter writing campaign of Ruth Hillis. In essence, the unit was Ruth Hillis and, by the end of the year when she stopped, the unit had lost its voice.

With the addition of only 105 members statewide in 1938, it was obvious that the rate of expansion was negligible. Silvershirt activity continued in Washington throughout 1939. When Pelley dismantled the Silver Legion in January 1940, the Washington state apparatus remained intact. Roundtree, at first, did not believe Pelley was ending the battle. As Bernice Roundtree saw her husband's disappointment, she noted, "Orville was a good fighter. He knew the battles that needed to be fought and he was willing to dedicate his life to victory."¹¹² Bernice seemed to believe that it appeared to Roundtree as though the conspirators had won.

Many of the Washington state units continued to meet even after Pelley claimed the organization was finished. However, after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, most of the units disbanded. As one member expressed it, "We weren't un-American. [Disbanding] was a patriotic thing to

¹¹¹Ruth Hillis to Editor of the Spokesman-Review, October 13, 1939, Roundtree Collection.

¹¹²Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

do."¹¹³ The only units which continued to meet were the Spokane post and the remnants of the Seattle post. At these meetings, esoterics was the only topic on the agenda. However, even these units disbanded when Pelley faced his trials in Indianapolis. By mid-1942, the Silver Legion in Washington state was non-existent.

Pelley, grateful to the end, wrote one last letter to his "Friends and Colleagues of Washington State."¹¹⁴ He recalled the "ups and downs, good fortunes and . . . discouragements" of the six years the organization operated, reminded them that they had done "the best . . . with the resources at [their] command," and complimented them for not "relaxing in [their] effort or following the wandering fires of enticing distractions."¹¹⁵

These "Friends and Colleagues" were not distracted because each believed that they had a prophetic mission to spread "the word" even when no one would listen. As they saw it, time was on their side. Crow reflected this perception when he wrote to Roundtree that "Someday they'll all understand."¹¹⁶ It was just a matter of getting the word out. The favorite forum was the local newspaper. From

¹¹³Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

¹¹⁴Pelley to Washington State Silver Legion, [1942?], Roundtree Collection.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Crow to Roundtree, no date, Roundtree Collection.

Centralia, where the owner of the paper reprinted No More Hunger, to Spokane where the Spokesman-Review's editor was inundated with letters from Legion members, the local newspaper was seen as a powerful medium for the Legion message.¹¹⁷ Whether this message was expressed offensively, as with Ruth Bauer's and the Hillises' threats of law suits, defensively, as with Crow's pleas for fair treatment of Silvershirt ideas, or pseudo-rationally, as with Roundtree's somewhat calm discussions of Silvershirt concepts; the news media were seen by almost every one of the Silvershirt leaders as a powerful tool to be exploited.

Another way of getting "the word" out was the public meeting. Silver Legion meetings throughout the state were of two patterns: the closed membership-only meeting, and the open public meeting. At almost every membership-only meeting, practical matters of membership dues, distribution of literature, morale building, recruitment of new members and Pelley's esoterics were discussed. The emphasis on any

¹¹⁷The only newspaper in the state which, as an editorial policy, excluded Silvershirt advocacy was the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. The Seattle P.I., the largest newspaper in the state, was concerned that giving favorable publicity to the Silvershirts would encourage membership expansion. Consequently, they refused to send reporters to cover Silvershirt meetings and events. In fact, the only articles in the paper even mentioning the Silvershirts, focused on Pelley's trials. Telephone interview with Harry Whitten, August 4, 1981.

The lack of this newspaper's coverage of Silvershirt activities and meetings and its refusal to print their letters-to-the-editor concerned Roundtree, but he explained it away as "just another Jewish controlled press." Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

one of these topics was reflective of the particular leader. For example, Roundtree, Hillis and Chappelle (from Chehalis, Dayton, and Everett), saw meetings as necessary "safe-havens" for members -- a way to maintain good morale through constant study of Pelley's esoterics. Crow, Moore, Metcalf (from Spokane, Bremerton, and Langley) saw membership meetings for "problem-solving," such as how to get Silver Legion literature distributed throughout the county; whereas, Nedgwalt and Hurd (from Vancouver and Walla Walla), saw meetings as more social "get-togethers" for like-minded people. In all cases, however, the purpose of membership-only meetings was to build a group dynamic that would sustain members through possible persecution.

At the open meetings, the issues most focused on by the leadership were the economy, foreign policy and the Silvershirt program. Unlike the membership-only meetings, Pelley's esoterics and anti-Semitism were not highlighted. In Spokane, Crow saw the public meeting as an important device for recruiting members concerned by the "economic situation." These meetings, reflecting Crow's plan, were careful not to offend anyone in the audience with anti-semitic rhetoric. In Vancouver, Nedgwalt saw the public meeting as a way of building consensus between the Portland unit of the German-American Bund and the Silver Legion. In a sense, Vancouver hosted rallies for like-minded groups. In Olympia, Dwight Clarke's open meetings were dedicated to

Silver Legion interpretations of United States foreign policy. At all public meetings, the leadership tried to present an image of a group of concerned Americans seeking answers to the troubles of the country.

Even though the techniques were consistent throughout the state, the particular success of each unit was dependent on the motivation of the leader. An individual leaders' personality could provoke internal bickering which ended with the unit's destruction, or cement the basis for holding a unit together. Some folks, like Frank Clark of the Tacoma unit, saw the Legion as a way to gain importance. As a result, he diverted energy that could have been used to strengthen the Legion into fighting with Pelley about how much direct action there should be against the Jews, and the unit was in constant turmoil. Dwight Clark of Olympia, saw the Legion as an educational organization which would teach Americans the true causes of the Depression and the communistic nature of the New Deal. Isaac Crow saw the Legion as providing a support network to individuals, so that they could become better people. "Better people make a better country," he noted.¹¹⁸

The fact that the success or failure of each local unit was dependent on the ability or motivations of the local leader, that each local unit was managed in a different way, that each local unit used different tactics, that most local

¹¹⁸Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

units had trouble working with other local units, and that each unit appeared to stress different issues, was reflective of a group trait that simultaneously revealed one of the organization's greatest weaknesses and one of its greatest strengths -- its independent nature. This was an independence of attitude, action and philosophy that transcended the seemingly common esoteric base, loyalty to the national organization's goals and reverence for Pelley as their leader. This was an independence that was reflected in every relationship formed -- be it the national leadership to the various state organizations; the state leadership to the various local units; or even the local unit leadership to the units' individual members.

The national Silvershirt organization, both by philosophical bent and by practical realities, adopted a stance that made itself the clearinghouse of ideology, fiscal determinations and literary output. Pelley consciously left decisions to the state leadership. The only time the national leadership would involve itself was when conflicts developed that needed a greater perspective than any one local leader could see or when philosophical indoctrination, explanation or inspiration was to be provided. Thus, Zachary's trip to Seattle, aside from its inspiration intent, was an attempt to settle the conflicts that had developed between Roundtree and the Seattle unit.

The Washington State organization, left to find its own way, adopted the management style of its leader. Roundtree, though more involved with his units than Pelley was with the States, still was not a micro-manager. Apparently seeing his role as keeping the local leaders honest and philosophically pure, he, like Zachary on the national level, was more concerned with a "big picture" than the particular actions local members took. Rather than impose methodology on local themes, he let most of the units proceed in their own way. When Crow wanted to continue to invite Towner, because of his drawing power, to speak at meetings, Roundtree, despite his disdain and distrust of Towner, allowed Crow to do as he wished. Like Zachary, Roundtree saw himself above the day-to-day operations. Only when a crisis of large proportions loomed, as in Seattle, or when philosophical renewal was needed, did Roundtree involve himself.

Each local unit rarely pressed its membership to proceed in set ways. Members were left to their own devices and whether members wrote letters, submitted editorials, threatened lawsuits or held socials depended upon the willingness or abilities of volunteers. With no coordinated activities, with little guidance for organizational matters and with little central direction, it is little wonder that groups were dependent upon the ability of individual creativity. Each activity depended on one personality --

without that personality the group failed. However, ultimate failure does not indicate why the Washington State Silver Legion had the longest lasting state organization in the country. Apparently, independence was not only a weakness -- it was also a source of strength.

In many ways, the units continued to function because of the type of leadership Roundtree had nurtured, trained and encouraged after the 1936 election defeat. With few exceptions, most of these local leaders were not in the organization for personal gain. The local members were committed to political action that would solve their community's perceived problems. Without the necessity of involvement with big-picture issues, each state could concentrate on local concerns. Thus, unlike other states which, following Pelley's suggestions, tried to actively involve former Klansmen, Washington units rejected the ideas based not only on what they saw was happening in Oregon or California, but also on what they perceived were the problems in their community. Day-to-day meetings dealt with ways of cleaning up, via Christian activism, the evils created by not supporting local businesses or making local purchases. Freed from ideological constraints, they could devote their involvement impulses to local problem cleansing.

"What made us successful," Ruth Bauer explained, "was our dedication to our cause -- to the Chief, to God, and

to ourselves."¹¹⁹ In many ways, what Bauer was describing was the appeal that the Washington Legion had to its members. The Washington Legion, as its leaders intuitively seemed to understand, was as much concerned with its members' hopes, desires and yearnings as it was to Pelley's esoteric theories -- and therein lay its success and appeal with certain types of people. But who were these people? By knowing who they were, the hopes and desires that gave the leadership in Washington state its distinctive style and success may be understood.

¹¹⁹Ibid. Emphasis added.

CHAPTER 8

**THE SILVERSHIRT LEGION IN WASHINGTON STATE:
A MEMBERSHIP PROFILE**

Roundtree's expansion effort met with various levels of success. In spite of spectacular failures, the Washington Silvershirt membership rosters increased 1,100 percent between 1936 and 1938. Posts were established in both western and eastern sections of the state (the Cascade Mountains are the dividing line). Twenty units were set up in the west and six units in the east,¹ with a total membership of 1,060 and 520, respectively.²

What kind of people joined the Silver Legion? Generally, contemporary critics agreed that Silvershirters displayed personal idiosyncrasies as eccentric as those of Pelley himself. Dr. Birkhead made much of Roy Zachary's revelation that he had been attracted by the "power" of Pelley's "clairaudient ear," which enabled him "to hear voices that no one else hears."³ "It's wonderful the way he

¹See Appendix D for a map of Washington State with the location of the posts.

²See Appendix C.

³Donald Strong, Organized Anti-Semitism in America: The Rise of Group Prejudice During the Decade 1930-1940 (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs,

can get in touch with God," Zachary continued, "it only takes him a few minutes to get in touch with the divine power."⁴ The Asheville Times reported on a woman who had once dated Bob Summerville, Pelley's second-in-command. She plainly thought Summerville crazed: "Everything he said was just a lot of high-sounding words meaning nothing," she commented. "I figure that anyone who could keep up a conversation for two hours and not say one coherent sentence must have a screw loose somewhere."⁵

Such astute commentators as Eric Severeid noted the eccentricity of Silver Legion members when he investigated a Minneapolis unit. He left with the feeling that he had been at a circus freak show. One man informed him that the NRA symbol, the "Blue Eagle," was really the "mark of the beast" mentioned in the Book of Revelations. Inasmuch as the Biblical text indicated that the "beast" would be known only by a number (six hundred, threescore, and six -- 666), the individual told Severeid:

Now look at the emblem. Count the teeth in the cog-wheel. It's fifteen. Five and one. Get it? Five and one is six. Count the tail feathers on the bird. Six. That's six and six. Now how many bolts of lightning are there? Six! And

1941), p. 47; George Britt, The Fifth Column is Here (New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc., 1940), p. 113.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Asheville Times (February 8, 1940); Strong, p. 47.

that makes 666 -- the 'mark of the beast.'⁶

The leader of the Minneapolis unit showed Severeid goods he had hoarded while awaiting revolution that the Great Pyramid of Gizah predicted for the Jewish New Year. "If it be God's will that I fall as a martyr to the cause at the hands of these beasts," he announced, "I shall die here in my Christian home, defending my dear wife to the end."⁷

According to Severeid, another local Silver Legionnaire felt certain that the "beastly imprimatur" had been placed on American coins by Henry Morgenthau, while another accused Governor Floyd Olson of fomenting a communist plot and designated his wizened chauffeur, Maurice Rose, a dangerous international banker. Severeid dismissed the Silvershirts as "quite mad."⁸

Across the continent in California, while preparing a book on the threat of American fascism, John L. Spivak interviewed "Captain" Eugene Case, a renegade Los Angeles section leader. In a revealing comment, Case informed Spivak that Silvershirt posts were

divided to play for different types.
One plays for the riff-raff; you know,
what communists call the proletarians.
Another post plays for the nuts -- the
kind that go to fortune tellers and

⁶Eric Severeid, Not So Wild a Dream (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1946), p. 70.

⁷Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁸Ibid.

séances. This class is our mainstay . .
 . . You know, there are more nuts in
 this part of the world than any place
 you can name outside of an asylum.⁹

One deranged person encountered by Spivak was a retired Nebraska farmer who spoke admiringly of Pelley's "God-given" organization, and of the "Christ Government" that existed in Atlantis 300,000 years before. "You never would have suspected that this nice old gent was stark, staring, raving mad," Spivak concluded, "and he's loose -- and there are thousands of them throughout the country."¹⁰

Such examples convinced many that the Silver Legion constituted a group of mental cases -- the product of twisted minds. However, not all observers focused on the eccentricities. Donald Strong, in his 1941 study of anti-semitic groups in America, argued that the Silver Legion was strongest among urban, middle class, average-educated, Protestant, Anglo-Saxons.¹¹ However, in his research, Strong quoted a study by an Asheville lawyer who supposedly sampled Pelley's filed correspondence of several thousand letters while they were under subpoena in 1934. The lawyer concluded that Silvershirt members:

were uneducated (judging from the
 grammatical errors); poor (many had
 suffered recent economic reverses); few

⁹John L. Spivak, America Faces the Barricades (New York: Covici Friede, 1935), p. 224.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 229-230.

¹¹Donald Strong, pp. 172-175.

professional people; a high proportion of neurotics (to judge from the language they employed); practically all elderly; a high proportion were females; they were seldom prominent in their community, or if prominent, they wrote either because of their metaphysical interests or because they were interested in opposing the liberal trends of the administration. They came from small communities in general, mostly from the Middle West and the West Coast.¹²

This quotation was never documented by Strong and further inquiries by Portzline suggest that this survey was never done.¹³ However, documented or not, this analysis is similar to how historians have described those who joined the Legion. For example, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. argued that membership came from the

old lower-middle classes, now in an unprecedented stage of frustration and fear, menaced by humiliation, dispossession, and poverty. They came from provincial and traditionally nonpolitical groups in the population, jolted from apathy into near-hysteria by the shock of economic collapse. They came, in the main, from the ranks of the self-employed, who, as farmers or shopkeepers or artisans, felt threatened by organized economic power, whether from above, as in banks and large corporations, or from below, as in trade unions. To a considerable degree, they came from the evangelical denominations; years of Bible reading and fundamentalist revivalism had accustomed them to millennial solutions. They were

¹²Ibid., p. 54.

¹³Donnell B. Portzline, "William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Shirt Legion of America," Ed.D. dissertation, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 1965, pp. 220-221.

mostly men and women of native-born old-immigrant (Anglo-Saxon and German) stock.¹⁴

Preliminary analysis of membership focuses on a general theme: that members came from the lower middle-class, were disaffected from their society, frightened by the economic difficulties, and backed by a fundamentalist faith. The lack of statistical data, however, taints such observations.

More recent examinations of the Silver Legion, the dissertations of Portzline and Werly, do not differ from this traditional view. Portzline bypassed the issue by quoting Pelley's contemporary critics and a passage from a letter of one former member trying to explain why he had joined the Legion. The man could only conclude:

It is doubtful that there will be in this question any understanding of William Dudley Pelley's attempts to stem the tides of perfidy by means of the dramatic gesture that was known as the Silver Legion, nor will it be understood why certain of us who were attracted to him in those days were so attracted, or how it was possible for us to recognize his genius.¹⁵

Noting that more work needs to be done on the demographic make-up of the Legion's membership, Portzline simply left the issue at that.

¹⁴Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), pp. 69-70.

¹⁵Portzline, pp. 31-32.

Werly, however, did attempt a membership analysis. By culling newspaper articles and collections, he compiled a list of Silver Legion members from different posts throughout the country. His conclusions were based on 671 Silver Legion members, leaders or sympathizers:

nearly every member's ethnic origin was northern European . . . of the total number, 123 (18%) were women and 548 (82%) were men. . . . The most numerous income group was at the lower end of the income scale with 147 members . . . 134 could be classified as middle-income types . . . only 46 could be classified as high income producers. . . .¹⁶

How valuable are these conclusions in creating a demographic profile of Silver Legion? Since Silver Legion units existed in states where the majority of the population could trace their ethnicity to northern Europe, how does ethnic origin help determine the reason for membership? How does income grouping, without more detail, show who these people were? Are 671 names, out of 15,000, a significant enough sample to make a generalization? Werly leaves us with more questions than answers.

Because of the hesitancy of the Silver Legion to publish rosters, few accurate studies exist which classify them into socio-economic groupings. Studies have yet to focus on self-expressed motivations, characteristics and

¹⁶John M. Werly, "The Millenarian Right: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America," Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, 1972, pp. 221-222.

demographics of members of the Silver Shirt Legion. But the records of the Washington Silver Legion now make it possible to attempt that focus. When Orville Roundtree died, his wife donated to the University of Washington a collection of his State Liaison papers, speeches and letters. Though a membership roster was missing, 103 names of members, post leaders and sympathizers were located in the papers. A careful checking of telephone books located 65 members still living in the same communities as they lived during their Legion activity. Through interviews, additional names were added to the list. 420 names (306 males and 114 females) were identified, representing approximately 25% of the total membership for the state. 82 people (35 males and 47 females) were interviewed.¹⁷

The traditional view of Silvershirt membership, as seen by Schlesinger, Portzline and Werly, parallels two sociological frameworks: massification and education theories of extremism. These theories were initially developed in studies of American right-wing extremism during the 1950s and 1960s, but are still in vogue today.¹⁸

¹⁷The majority of the people interviewed agreed to talk about their participation only with the understanding that their names be withheld from publication. The predominance of female interviewees is probably the result of life expectancy demographics.

¹⁸The literature produced during the early 1960s is quite extensive. These works try to explain reasons for the rise of McCarthyism and end with an analysis of the populist push by George Wallace. See: Daniel Bell, The Radical Right (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1963); Arnold

The mass theory holds that what makes individuals prone to mobilization by extremist groups is their "massification" -- their estrangement from the local community, their isolation from ordinary channels of belonging.¹⁹ Theorists of massification examine age and marital status, geographical mobility, religious affiliation, conventional political participation and occupations of the membership in order to prove marginality. According to the theory, freelance writers and artists are susceptible to extremist propaganda because of their alienation from ordinary associations. By the same token, illiterate peasants, safely ensconced in a local parish, family, and manorial life, are supposedly immune to mobilization by outside agitators.²⁰ Robert Nisbet proposed that "where there is

Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, Danger on the Right (New York: Random House, 1964); Harry and Bonaro Overstreet, The Strange Tactics of Extremism (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1964). Although published in the 1970s, Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, The Politics of Unreason (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) and Gary K. Clabaugh, Thunder on the Right: The Protestant Fundamentalists (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Company, 1974) also follow this same approach.

¹⁹William Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society (New York: Free Press, 1959), p. 188.

²⁰The massification theory was originally used by conservative French historians of the early 19th century. Shuddering at the Jacobin reign of terror which followed in the footsteps of the Revolution of 1789, they asked how seemingly civil and intelligent people could be rendered into a frenzied mass of violent beasts. The question was inappropriately posed, but the answer, they agreed, was that the participants in the Terror were those whose ties to community and tradition status had recently been severed by urbanization, industrialization, and democratization. Isolated and lonely, their lives made meaningless by the

widespread conviction that community has been lost, there will be a conscious quest for community in the form of association that seems to provide the greatest moral refuge. . . ."²¹ This desire for refuge, Nisbet continues, explains the "almost eager acceptance of the fantastic doctrines of the Nazis by millions of otherwise intelligent Germans," which would be "inexplicable were it not for the accompanying proffer of moral community to the . . . alienated German."²²

dislocations of modernization, they presumably yearned for an alternative social organism with which to merge -- a leader, a party, a cause to give them direction and boundaries. Turned by social change into an undifferentiated mass of objects, they sought respite from homogeneity, greed and chaos by fleeing into the protective womb of pseudocommunity. For early statements of this theory, see: Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses (New York: W.W. Norton, 1932), and Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Avon Books, 1965 [1941]). For an unmatched history and critique of this theory, see: Anthony Oberschall, Social Conflict and Social Movements (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1973), pp. 102-145.

²¹Robert Nisbet, The Quest for Community (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), p. 34.

²²Ibid. The most convincing refutation of the massification theory as applied to Germany is the analysis by Richard Hamilton's Who Voted for Hitler? Hamilton examined the voting support for the Nazi Party in the pivotal elections of 1932. He showed that a large part of Nazi electoral support came from the Protestant countryside. In the rural precincts of Schleswig-Holstein, for example, 63.8 percent voted for the Nazi Party slate; in the urban districts the comparable figures was 44.8 percent. But it was in the rural districts that Germans were most integrated socially and religiously into the ordinary channels of community belonging. According to the massification theory, those should have been the districts least susceptible to Nazi agitation. Nonetheless, the massification theory still is used to describe extremism in the United States. Richard Hamilton, Who Voted for Hitler? (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

An analysis of Silver Legion membership challenges the massification theory.²³ Data regarding average age and marital status suggest that the Legion was broadly representative of the population in Washington. The age of Silver Legion members is located in Table 2 by five year and ten year cohorts and compared with figures from the 1930 Census.²⁴ Although there are variations in the age

University Press, 1982), pp. 40-41.

²³The mass theory of political extremism has been applied to countless cases of revolutionary unrest: from labor activism to student unrest in the 1960s, from fluoridation disputes and medieval peasant revolts to European fascism, from Third World insurgency to prison riots. See: Elton Mayo, The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilization (Boston: Harvard School of Business Administration, 1945); Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Seymour Martin Lipset and Philip Altbach, "The Quest for Community on Campus," in The Quest for Community in Modern America, ed., E. Digby Baltzell (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 123-147; James Coleman, Community Conflict (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957); Mancur Olson, Jr., "Socioeconomic Change and Third World Instability," in When Men Revolt and Why, ed., James Davis (New York: Free Press, 1971), pp. 213-227; Talcott Parsons, "Some Sociological Aspects of the Fascist Movement," Social Forces, vol. 21 (1942), pp. 138-147; Mark Colvin, "The New Mexico Prison Riot," Social Problems, vol. 29 (June 1982), pp. 449-463.

²⁴Bureau of Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States 1930, Population, Vol. 11, "Characteristics of Population," Part 7, Reports by State (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930), p. 1210. The 1930 Census was used as a base for analyzing membership data. Even though the Census does not reflect the full impact of the social or economic changes brought by the Depression, it was used because of the consistency with earlier census enumerating native white population statistics. In the 1940 Census, groups once classified as "other races" were incorporated into native white statistics thus making direct comparisons with the previously isolated native white population, impossible.

spectrum, especially in the under 20 and 35-54 year age brackets, the comparisons for most brackets are close. The mean age for Silvershirters was 38.3 while for the Washington native white population it was 39.3 -- a 12 month difference. The comparative figures for marital status shows that Silvershirters were more likely to be married than the state as a whole -- 78.09 percent to 68.95 percent.²⁵

Table 2
Comparison of Silver Legion Members Ages with State Average Ages

Age	Native White Population	NWP%	SL Members	SL%
Under 20	271,998	31.17%	2	.47%
20-29	144,965	16.61%	63	15.00%
30-34	60,842	6.97%	48	11.42%
35-44	115,742	13.26%	187	44.52%
45-54	91,352	10.47%	92	21.90%
55-64	56,321	6.45%	21	5.00%
65-74	17,906	2.05%	7	1.66%

Theorists of massification argue that physical mobility tends to loosen local group affiliations and render migrants available to extremist appeals. However, Legion members were more likely to have been born in Washington -- 61.90

²⁵Ibid., "Composition and Characteristics," p. 1215

percent to 43.91 percent.²⁶ Those Legion members who moved to Washington followed the predominant migratory pattern for newcomers: they came from Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Oregon. The places from which they came in those states were predominantly urban communities.²⁷ They tended to settle in communities of comparable size to those they left behind.²⁸ Only 18 Legion members immigrated to the United States; and with three exceptions (one from Canada and two [a husband and a wife] from Russia), they came from western Europe. For all intents and purposes, Silvershirters in Washington believed that they were "just like everybody else. We had the same background and the same perspectives. The only thing that separated us from the rest of the state, was that we knew what to do."²⁹

Another variable that relates to marginality is home ownership: one would expect a marginal population to be

²⁶Abstract of the Census, 1930, Population, pp. 118, 120-123.

²⁷For a discussion of migration patterns into Washington during the 1930s, see Gerald B. Nash, The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 9. Seattle's migratory pattern is in Clark Kerr, Migration to the Seattle Labor Market Area, 1940-1942, University of Washington Publications in the Social Sciences, vol. 11, No. 3 (1942), p.160.

²⁸For example, most people moving from Chicago, settled in Seattle; one typical person, from Roberts, Wisconsin (a town of under 1,000) moved to Dayton (also a town of under 1,000), etc.

²⁹Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

less likely to own homes. According to the 1930 Census, 53.6 percent of all Washington residents owned their homes and 44.3 percent rented.³⁰ In comparison, 70.4 percent of Silver Legion members owned their homes and 29.07 percent rented. Even more significant, however, is that throughout the 1930s, these percentages did not change. One might have expected the depression years to see a loss of home ownership, but this was not the case with Silver Legion members.

Religious affiliation, as another variable that relates to marginality, shows that Silvershirt members paralleled the state averages.³¹ Table 3 shows the religious breakdown of the larger denominations of the Legion and compares it to the religious affiliations of the state's general population. The total number or percentage of Legion members that did belong to churches is unavailable because

³⁰Fifteenth Census, p. 418. It is also important to note that renters should not automatically be considered as marginal.

³¹The 1936 Department of Commerce study of religious affiliation provides a structure to examine the type and percentages of church citizens in the state. The data indicates that there were 367,361 members in 2,145 churches in the state. This represents 23.49 percent of the population. The difficulty with this data, is that the Washington statistics are well below the national norms of 46 percent as reported in Michael Argyle and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, The Social Psychology of Religion (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 16. The Washington statistics are incomplete because they are based upon volunteer reporting by the churches of their membership.

not all churches retained their records, some records were

Table 3

Comparison of Silver Legion Members' Religious Affiliation with State Averages

	SL Members	SL %	WA Members	WA %
Assembly of God	4	1.19	6,059	1.65
Baptist	59	17.56	19,726	5.37
Catholic	20	5.95	101,287	27.58
Congregational	8	2.38	15,003	4.09
Disciples of Christ	1	.30	17,622	4.80
Evangelical Lutheran	6	1.79	7,621	2.08
Lutheran	54	16.07	5,201	1.42
Methodist	107	31.85	40,978	11.16
Nazarene	20	5.95	3,317	.90
Presbyterian	33	9.82	33,983	9.25

incomplete or poorly kept, and some churches no longer existed. Only one church refused to open its records. At least 80 percent of the sample, however, did belong, and it can be legitimately argued that the percentage would be much higher were more records available. Of the Legion membership, 336 names were found in various church rosters between 1930 and 1940. In total, members belonged to 22

different denominations, a figure not unlike the general population as a whole.³²

As compiled from interviews and biographical data, the Methodists constituted 31.85 percent of the Washington Legion; the Presbyterians (especially from United Presbyterian churches), 9.82 percent; Disciples of Christ, .30 percent; pietistic Lutherans, 16.07 percent; and Baptists, 17.56 percent. The pietist sects represented 75.60 percent of the identified Legion members, as contrasted to 31.09 percent of the total Washington churched population.

Not only were Silvershirters more likely married, home owners and native-born residents than the majority of Washingtonians, they were also more likely to have been regular participants in the conventional political arena. The massification theory implies that extremists are extreme because they are voluntarily or compulsorily excluded from standard political activity. Because they are excluded, so the theory goes, they turn to the only available avenue -- extremism. However, Silvershirters were as deeply involved in conventional politicking as they were with the Silver Legion. Of the 117 Silver Legion members whose conventional

³²The other denominations were: Christian Reformed, Church of God, Dutch Reform, Episcopal, Evangelical, Foursquare Gospel, Latter Day Saints, Pentecostal, Reformed, Russian Evangelical, Russian Orthodox, and Unitarian. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Religious Bodies, 1936 (Washington, D.C., 1936), pp. 300-305.

political involvement could be identified, 63.23 percent claimed to have either run for office at one time or to have actively campaigned for a candidate. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the type of pre-Silver Legion involvement claimed by members.

Table 4
Pre-Silver Legion Political Involvement

	SL Members	SL%
National Office	0	0.00%
State Office	15	12.82%
Local Office	11	9.40%
School Board	21	17.94%
Campaign Activity	27	23.07%

Members interviewed noted that they were preeminently political animals: "Political activity is the only way to really change America," "It [politics] was the proper action for a concerned citizen," and "Politics . . . it makes my blood boil. That's a good thing."³³ They were ready to employ any vehicle of influence that promised an end to America's problems. This included canvassing for candidates

³³Interview with Silvershirt Member number 58, September 9, 1979; Interview with George Thiessen, March 22, 1979; Interview with Silvershirt Member number 64, June 21, 1980.

and holding political office themselves.³⁴ "I would do whatever I needed to do," proclaimed Ruth Bauer, "to get a Christian power in government."³⁵ For Bauer, that meant running for a school board position in Spokane. She lost the race, but noted, "I told them, 'I'll be back,' and I did."³⁶

The Silver Legion, and the Christian Party, provided a new form of political involvement. There is little evidence that voluntary or imposed exclusion from regular political channels drove Silvershirters to extreme politics. Indeed, the opposite is more likely true. Their desire to make the Silver Legion into a political force may be a sign that regular channels of influence did not work for Silvershirters to the degree they might have preferred. The theory of rising expectations adds a new dimension to the massification argument. Rising expectations makes a rather paradoxical prediction that inflation of expectations precipitated by too much citizen participation aggravates

³⁴Members who participated in more than one area were counted more than once. Of the 71 members who entered conventional politics, 43 took part more than once. The greatest cross-over in participation was in running for school board positions and in campaigning for other state candidates.

³⁵Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

³⁶Ibid.

dissatisfaction and unrest when demands are not met.³⁷ To be sure, there were cases where, once branded troublemakers by public officials or newspaper editors, Silvershirters were denied conventional political forums. This was taken as "proof" by Silvershirters of persecution by the "satanic conspirators."³⁸ However, it does not corroborate the massification theory, in which exclusion is said to precede and thus cause extremism. What is clear is that Silvershirters became convinced that "their only real political option was the Silver Legion."³⁹ "America moved too far from the 'right' path," one member noted, "the Legion would put us back on track."⁴⁰

Because occupation is a determinant of social class and essential to massification, it is the most important variable in evaluating whether Silvershirters represented the economically marginal. Alba M. Edward's, A Social-Economic Grouping of the Gainful Workers of the United States: 1930, provides a listing of occupations grouped by

³⁷Alexis De Tocqueville used this hypothesis to account for the French Revolution. For a classic statement of the theory of rising expectations, see: James C. Davis, ed., When Men Revolt and Why (New York: Free Press, 1971), pp. 92-98.

³⁸Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Interview with Silvershirt Member number 7, December 28, 1979.

Washington occupational statistics,⁴¹ compares the status.⁴² Table 5, obtained from the 1930 census, compares number and percentages of 420 Legion members in each of Edward's six categories with the number and percentages of all Washington native white citizens in these same categories. Categories 1, 2, and 4 represent the highest

⁴¹Fifteenth Census, p. 1234. It would be misleading to compare Washington with national statistics because the country was still largely agrarian, whereas the state of Washington was predominantly urban. The Federal Census of 1920 revealed that over half the American people lived in urban areas (i.e., which were defined as places with a population of more than 2,500). The United States had evolved from its rural heritage to become an urban nation. For the state of Washington, the transition had come a decade earlier. In 1910, 53 percent of the state's 1.1 million residents lived in urban areas; by 1930, the percentage had increased to 56.6 percent. This growth rate remained fairly constant during the next half-century. See Robert E. Ficken and Charles P. LeWarne, Washington: A Centennial History (Seattle: University of Washington, 1989), p. 96; Bureau of Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910); Bureau of Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920).

Studies on regionalism note that during the Depression, Americans were preoccupied with regional themes. Interviews show that the public was yearning for the places of their past. For those who had moved to the urban landscapes in the 1920s, the yearning for their past was to return to the rural communities that they left. In Washington, however, urban migration had existed for a decade longer than the rest of the country. By the 1930s, those who had moved to the cities had been there for over 20 years. Their yearning for the past did not seem to include a return to a rural America. Rather, as will be seen later in this paper, they yearned for a past in an urban or small town community. See Michael C. Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression," The Geographical Review, vol. 73 (October 1983).

⁴²Alba M. Edward, A Social-Economic Grouping of the Gainful Workers of the United States: 1930 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938). See Appendix E for a breakdown of occupations and categories.

socioeconomic levels. The fact that Silvershirt statistics approximate the state statistics in these areas suggest that

Table 5

Comparison of Silver Legion Members' Socio-economic Levels with State Averages

	Native White Population	NWP%	SL Members	SL%
High Nonmanual	52,865	8.41%	93	22.14%
Middle Nonmanual	182,268	29.00%	52	12.38%
Low Nonmanual	57,226	9.10%	55	13.09%
High Manual	111,580	17.75%	80	19.04%
Middle Manual	104,101	16.56%	85	21.42%
Low Manual	156,773	24.95%	37	8.80%

at least 53.5 percent of the Legion members were not economically marginal. Obviously, the percentage could be even higher depending on what number from category 3 could be classified as economically secure, such as advertising and real estate agents, insurance salesmen, credit agents and accountants. Adding these selected occupations contributes an additional 7.5 percent, bringing the total to 61.05 percent. Marginality, of course, is a quality not open to easy assessment, especially during the Great

Depression. Data are unavailable regarding the financial condition of members, as well as their mental and psychological attitudes toward status, but it is reasonable to conclude that they were better off than the state as a whole.

Another significant variable in evaluating economic marginality is the degree of occupational change experienced by Silver Legion members between 1930 and 1940. Table 6 shows the percentage of members who changed occupations. Most members retained their occupational status regardless of the Depression's unemployment trends.⁴³ In contrast, the general population suffered massive occupational dislocation. Over 26 percent of the country's population was unemployed by 1933. While Washington was not hit as hard, unemployment still reached 18.3 percent. However, among Washington Silver Legion members, only .95 percent were unemployed by 1933 and only 2.86 percent of them were unemployed by 1940. None of the other categories changed more than 1.67 percent. This indicates a stable, consistent, economically secure group.

⁴³A direct comparison between the 1930 Census and the 1940 Census is not possible because the people included in each category changed. In 1940, the Census combined Mexicans into the Native White Population group. Inclusion of this group radically changed the base numbers and prevents true comparison until such time as the block data are available and surnames can be isolated.

Table 6

Percentage of Silver Legion Members' Socio-economic Changes, 1930-1940

	SL Members (1930)	SL % (1930)	SL Members (1940)	SL % (1940)	% Change
High Non- manual	93	22.14%	87	20.71%	-1.43%
Middle Non- manual	52	12.38%	51	12.14%	- .24%
Low Non- manual	55	13.09%	62	14.76%	+ 1.67%
High Manual	80	19.04%	77	18.33%	- .71%
Middle Manual	85	21.42%	80	19.05%	- 1.19%
Low Manual	37	8.80%	38	9.05%	+ .24%
Retired	6	1.43%	7	1.67%	+ .24%
Un- employ/ Assist	4	.95%	16	3.81%	+2.86%
Un- known	4	.95%	2	.48%	- .48%

Another significant variable in evaluating economic and psychological sense of well-being is the extent to which a younger generation believes it will have a better life than

its parents had. If they believe they cannot improve themselves, or if they perceive that they are worse off, it would be natural to expect that they would seek extremist explanations. However, Table 7 reveals the extent of occupational mobility members achieved vis-a-vis their parents.⁴⁴ Most members (68 out of 117 - 58.12%) either remained in the same status grouping or improved. Only 49

Table 7
Occupational Mobility of Silver Legion Members

	Same Status	Improved Status	Declined Status
Males	37	20	13
Females	9	2	36
Total	46 (39.32%)	22 (18.80%)	49 (41.88%)

moved down in status from what their parents had achieved. Of these 49, 36 were female. Assuming that women in the 1930's were not expected to improve their status other than through marriage, this leaves only 13 actual male status decreases. Thus, fear of, or actual, status loss does not appear to be a significant factor to explain Silvershirt membership.

⁴⁴The occupational status categories are the same as those used in Tables 4 and 5. Each member was cross-referenced to their father's occupation and if the member's occupation was in a different category than their father's they were considered to be improved or decreased in status. The categories are not based on income but, instead, on status groupings as identified by Alba Edward.

A final variable regarding massification and marginality, and a key to the traditional views on the makeup of the Silvershirts, is fear of economic collapse. Psychological data, however, aside from inferring what the effect of status changes might indicate about a person's sense of well-being, are hard to come by. People could live in an economically sound condition and still fear the loss of that security. Others could be "economically marginal" and not be concerned about their economic future. Focus upon economic factors as primary indicators of why someone would join the Silver Legion fails to note the interrelationship between middle class status and the values of the Legion. Of the 82 people interviewed, only three designated personal economic "fear" as a major factor in joining the Legion. Of course, most interviewees were rather young when they joined, and not as settled, or even worried about their personal economic survivability. Table 8 compares the differences between women and men identifying

Table 8

Silver Legion Members' Reasons for Joining Legion

	Economic Crisis		Patriotism		Metaphysics		Civic Reform		Other	
Male	2	5.71%	13	37.14	5	14.2%	11	31.42%	4	11.42%
Female	1	2.12%	8	17.02%	17	36.17%	12	25.53%	12	25.53%
Total	3		21		22		23		16	

reasons for joining the Legion.⁴⁵ What Legion members cited was not the economic crisis of the nation, but the participatory role that the Legion offered them, including an ill-defined sense of patriotism, metaphysics, and civic reform.

The justifications for membership varied between men and women.⁴⁶ Men tended to cite patriotism and civic reform as the main causes for their participation. For Orville Roundtree, patriotism was the same as civic reform -- as long as reform changed America into a community dedicated to "holy living." Other men interviewed saw patriotism as more than Roundtree's conception. They hailed a rather ambiguous sense of patriotism as "making America strong."⁴⁷ This call

⁴⁵During the interviews, each participant was asked why they had joined the Legion. The categories were not specifically asked, but each answer was categorized. In this manner, the interviewees were not presented with a "suggested" list of possible reasons. Instead, the interview process encouraged the interviewees to clarify, for themselves, the reason(s) for their participation. Consequently, these interviews did not follow traditional polling techniques. The results, therefore, lack a certain degree of scientific reliability, but they have the advantage of avoiding the interviewer's contamination of their responses. Non-directive, open-ended questioning had the advantage of interviewee spontaneity and unlimited possibilities, yet, the responses were similar enough to be categorized into definite, identifiable patterns.

⁴⁶More women than men were interviewed and represented a disproportionate percentage of members. Total results are, therefore, skewed. This discrepancy was taken into account and compensated for by calculating ratios only on the basis of interviewees or available membership data; not on total membership.

⁴⁷Interview with Gerald Nedgwald, June 14, 1980.

for strength was not a yearning for an imperialist America, but rather an America of "community and character."⁴⁸ For many members, reform would help the country return to its "patriotic golden past."⁴⁹ Noting that "in the past, America was more moral" and "we needed to turn this country back to its godly ways," members searched for a way to reclaim a civic ethic -- in their eyes a "Protestant patriotic America, the America founded by God for his chosen people."⁵⁰

The lure for a "golden past" was not unique to these members. Pelley had recalled a golden past in numerous publications and speeches. Most of his writings concentrated on patriotic heroes of the past, or on his memories of boyhood in small town New England.⁵¹ However, those interviewed did not have as clear a vision of the golden past as Pelley. Neither did they accept Pelley's vision -- "it was only the way he [Pelley] saw it. What I wanted was a future."⁵² That future was one where

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 5, November 26, 1981; Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 13, October 24, 1980.

⁵⁰Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 77, October 10, 1981.

⁵¹For more detail on Pelley's longing for a golden past as expressed in his fiction, see Werly, pp. 156-165.

⁵²Interview with Reverend Edward Radcliffe, August 9, 1981.

Protestant civic virtue would triumph. Pelley's golden past was definitely in the past; for many of the members, the "golden past" was yet to be made.

Women members usually noted the metaphysical aspects of the Legion as the attraction for their participation.⁵³

Noting that "Pelley spoke to me -- not in the physical sense -- but through the heart," women saw Pelley as more than just a leader of a political movement.⁵⁴ Pelley, in their eyes, was a spiritual leader who dabbled in politics.

"Politics was just the way to let the metaphysical take hold."⁵⁵

⁵³The distinction between men and women is noticeable in letters sent to Pelley. Of the hundreds of letters confiscated by the Special House Un-American Activities Committee, those written by women tended to focus on the metaphysical teachings of the Legion, while those written by men tended to focus on the administrative tasks of Legion organization. See: "Records relating to W.D. Pelley," Special House Committee on Un-American Activities Authorized to Investigate Nazi Propaganda and Certain Other Propaganda Activities, House of Representatives, Record Group 233 (HR 73-F30.1). (Hereinafter SHUAC.)

⁵⁴Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 59, August 3, 1979. Some women also noted a more personal reason for joining the Legion. Two women talked about their own physical attraction to Pelley; three other women joined in the hope of "finding a good man." These women noted that any male who would join the Legion was obviously a patriotic, godly American and, naturally, would make a good husband. One woman was apparently satisfied -- she married a Legion member in 1938, six months after joining the Legion. Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980; Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 54, March 16, 1981; and Member Number 67, March 18, 1981.

⁵⁵Ibid.

The distinction between Washington residents and Silvershirters is remarkable. If it were possible to compose a model of the "ideal" member, using the greatest percentage from each socioeconomic characteristic, this person would be a married, white male, native born Washingtonian, 38.3 years old, living in his own urban home and working at a secure, high non-manual job. This compares with the typical Washington resident who might be a married, as likely male as female, non-native Washingtonian, 39.3 years old, who might be living in his own urban home, but working in an insecure, manual job. Thus, it can be safely concluded that the majority of Legion members were not marginal in their socioeconomic status.⁵⁶ This lack of

⁵⁶James Q. Wilson, in his work Political Organizations, has offered another model to use in understanding the economic identification of those who joined the Legion. He contended that such organizations -- described more appropriately as pressure groups -- seldom represent the lower classes. According to a variety of studies, the economic, social and psychological pressures placed upon the lower classes, force them to emphasize the present moment rather than future goals. Thus, they seldom join such organizations as readily as the classes above them. When they do, however, they expect immediate gains, usually of a material kind, or they undergo a personality transformation "so that the members, though lower class on recruitment, soon become middle class, at least expressively if not economically." James Q. Wilson, Political Organizations (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 64. Wilson cites Pentecostals and the Black Muslims as examples of such transformations, wherein self-control and hard work become the compelling norms of the transformed member. The Legion, however, did not seek to transform its members but to transform the society; to create reforms of the political structure and, thereby, to impose middle-class Protestant moral standards. It was assumed that those joining were already converted.

marginality challenges the massification theory of extremism.

The second sociological framework, the education theory, holds that right-wing extremism is due largely to an absence of formal education or to the schools' failure to inculcate in the individual an intellectual commitment to democratic principles. Preeminent among these principles is tolerance for opposing viewpoints. Political sociologist, Seymour Martin Lipset, concluded that those who occupy the lowest social ranks in modern society are the most likely to be anti-democratic.⁵⁷ Lipset went on to say that several characteristics of lower-class life produce this result: perpetual economic insecurity and its concomitant frustration (which encourage its sufferers to search for scapegoats); lack of work-related self-esteem (which inclines them to bully outsiders); abusive child-rearing practices (which increase their authoritarian or fascist tendencies); and higher rates of mental illness (which make them less able to fend off demagogic appeals). But the most important factor, he claimed, is their low level of educational attainment.

⁵⁷Seymour Martin Lipset, "Working Class Authoritarianism," in Political Man, p. 97-126.

Samuel Stouffer came to the same conclusion.⁵⁸ Using data from the Gallup organization and the National Opinion Research Center on a cross-section of 4,922 Americans, Stouffer found that the lower the level of education his respondents reported, the less tolerant they were as indicated by their willingness to allow unpopular views to be expressed in their communities. College graduates were about four times more tolerant than those who had dropped out of school in the eighth grade.⁵⁹ This relationship held across race, age, sex, community status, place of residence (urban or rural), and across different degrees of religious piety. On the other hand, none of the associations between different amounts of intolerance and these same variables persisted when the educational level of the respondents was held constant. Stouffer's findings were confirmed twelve years later in another nationwide survey by Herbert McCloskey.⁶⁰ By 1975, the consensus among authorities was that years of formal education explained more of the

⁵⁸Although published in 1966, Stouffer had formed this theory in 1952. Samuel Stouffer, Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties (New York: John Wiley, 1966).

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 90.

⁶⁰Herbert McCloskey, "Personality and Attitude Correlates of Foreign Policy Orientation," Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp.51-110.

variation in political attitudes, anti-Semitism, and bigotry than any other single variable.⁶¹

An analysis of Silver Legion members challenges the educational theory. Table 9 compares the educational backgrounds of Silver Legion members with those of the

Table 9

Educational Levels Attained by Silver Legion Members

	SL%	State %
Elementary	32.85%	47.5%
Secondary	44.07%	39.9%
College	18.33%	8.0%
Graduate School	8.65%	5.5%

general population.⁶² On the whole, Silvershirters attained greater levels of formal education than their Washingtonian counterparts. The most dramatic difference is illustrated in the completion of higher education: 26.98 percent to 13.5 percent. Of the 95 Silvershirters who had college or

⁶¹Monica Blumenthal, Robert Kahn, Frank Andrews, and Kendra Head, Justifying Violence (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972).

⁶²County Basic Data Sheets (Olympia, Washington, 1940). Data did not exist in the 1930 Census to compare education rates between the Legion and the state as a whole. As a result, the 1940 Census materials were used. The Legion statistics were based on the highest grade attained. For example, college was counted only if the member finished college with a degree. If no degree were awarded, then only secondary education was counted. Only six members did not finish a designated educational level.

post-Graduate degrees, there were 8 lawyers, 7 medical doctors, 9 accountants, 10 ministers, and 26 teachers.⁶³

By all objective measurements, Legion members do not fit into traditional explanations. Statistical support for the massification theory among Silvershirters is weak. Nor do demographic indicators support the education theory of extremism. This, of course, does not disprove the theories. It may be that the indicators selected to test each theory are invalid or that the information gathered was not truly representative of the typical Silvershirt. (The 420 members represent a sample of convenience not a pure random sample.) But the preponderance of evidence from so many independent variables makes this somewhat less than likely.

Still, it is important to acknowledge that while the theory of massification may not in a mechanical sense accurately portray the reality of Silvershirt membership, it may be valid if understood as part of a dynamic process. In other words, if Silvershirters did not necessarily start out socially isolated, they certainly ended up that way. It is possible that once labeled "Nazi," "criminal," or "crazy" by authorities, they were expelled from the larger community and its consensual restraints. Common sense and deviancy

⁶³The remaining occupational breakdown of Silvershirt members with college or post-college degrees included: 8 Students; 4 Journalists; 4 Business Owners; 3 Auditors; 3 Optometrists; 2 Dentists; 2 Pharmacists; 2 State Workers; and 1 each of the following: Court Clerk, Naturopathic Physician, Civil Engineer, Housewife, Stenographer, Librarian, and Mortician.

theory alike tell us that this explanation should encourage their radical propensities.

CHAPTER 9

**THE SILVERSHIRT MEMBER:
THE MEANING OF INVOLVEMENT**

Trying to explain why people joined the Legion is fraught with danger. Not only was there no sociologist or George Gallup to develop and administer a scientific questionnaire to members of the Legion, but it was also difficult to get Silvershirters to discuss their participation once the Legion fell apart. Even those who were still alive some fifty-five years later and willing to talk might have rationalized, intentionally misled, or simply forgotten. And, yet, some patterns were culled that indicated what made participation in an outcast political movement comfortable to the individual member.

It is impossible to find a single motivating factor to explain why someone would join the Legion. James Q. Wilson, in his book Political Organizations, noted that four incentives usually attracted members to political organizations or pressure groups: material benefits (money, business and business connections), specific solidarity (offices, honors, or deference), collective solidarity (exclusivity, conviviality, or group esteem), and purposive activity ("community projects", specific program and

meaningful activities).¹ The Washington Silver Shirt Legion offered incentives in each area. To the organizers, it initially offered the possibility of material rewards: for every member brought into the Legion, organizers received a percentage of the dues. This lasted until 1936 when Pelley discontinued the commissions in order to avoid charges of running a membership racket. The turnover of organizers paralleled the end of the commissions. After 1936, a new type of organizer appeared -- men who, like Orville Roundtree, were interested in other incentives.

For status-seekers, the Legion created a bedazzling array of offices with intriguing titles, such as Liaison Officer, Adjunct, Scribe, Almoner and Advocate. Unit leaders like Frank W. Clark (Tacoma unit) and Harry Picot (Seattle unit) were interested in the status of the positions they held. Clark later admitted to political ambition as his overriding motive in joining and then leading the Tacoma unit.² Their interest waned, however, when other organizations offered higher offices. But the material and deferential rewards of office were limited to a handful. Members who were attracted by status and failed to obtain real status positions left the Legion within one year

¹James Q. Wilson, Political Organizations (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 32-36. Wilson consistently used the term "solidary" instead of "solidarity" to describe collective incentives. This paper employs the latter term for purposes of clarity.

²Interview with Frank Clark, January 5, 1981.

of joining. Usually, their participation dropped off within six months. "The short-timers, never understood what the Legion was all about," explained Ruth Bauer, "they were just looking for the wrong kind of glory."³

It is necessary to look to the last two incentives for an explanation of the appeal the organization had to its broader membership.

The collective solidarity incentive consists of two, somewhat disparate, categories: exclusivity and conviviality. The Legion appealed to those who sought either. For those people who were motivated by the former, the Silver Legion had the appeal of being the only "Christian Liberation" opportunity for native-born white Americans. It appealed to those wanting to protect American culture from the unseen enemy -- the Jewish Communist conspiracy. For those people who were motivated by the latter, the Legion offered opportunities for fraternal sociability.

The desire to build an exclusive organization was noticeable in Washington. Roundtree wanted to create an organization that provided mutual interdependence against a hostile and critical world. To do that, the organization had to have members with similar goals, understandings of the problems, and solutions to those problems. As a group of like-minded people, "action" could be done in common.

³Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

To establish a group with common goals, Roundtree emphasized Pelley's call for a membership limited to native white Americans. In addition, Roundtree took pains to make sure that all members pledged loyalty to the Legion. His membership drives targeted specific groups in each community -- ministers, business owners, organized labor. These groups, Roundtree asserted, "had our kind of people in them."⁴ The measuring rod was simple: loyalty to the cause, a willingness to work, and a tradition of participation.

His desire to keep the ranks of the Legion clear of former Klan members shows his fear of what a lack of loyalty could do to the organization. Several members agreed with Roundtree's attitude by proclaiming that "if these guys [former Klansmen] wanted to join the Legion they would have to prove their allegiance. I don't think they could do that."⁵ Another simply stated, "I didn't trust them [Klansmen] then, and I [still] wouldn't trust them now."⁶ The fear was that former Klansmen might not have the appropriate moral rigor to sustain their membership in the Legion. Roundtree knew that the destruction of the Portland, Oregon unit of the Silver Legion was a result of the internal feuding among former Klan members who joined

⁴Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

⁵Interview with George Thiessen, March 22, 1979.

⁶Interview with Gerald Nedgwalt, June 14, 1980.

the unit.⁷ Roundtree's vision of the Legion, as the

⁷In Oregon, the Silver Legion unit in Portland initially saw the Legion as a revival of the state Klan. The State Liaison Officer, Anchor Gregor, specifically recruited former Klansmen and worked to reorganize the Legion to fit Oregon Klan goals. However, the infusion of Klansmen in the Portland Legion ultimately led to the destruction of the unit. The bickering between Legion members was a carry-over from the internal bickering of the Klan. The fight within the Oregon Klan, and the fight within the Legion, were personal fights between Lem Dever and Frank L. Gifford.

Dever was the ex-Publicity Director of the Oregon Klan. In 1924, Dever left the Klan and wrote a book, Confessions of an Imperial Klansman, detailing the Un-American nature of the Klan. Actually, Dever had no complaint about the philosophy of the Klan; he objected to the backward nature of the Klan. Dever wanted the Klan to modernize, to start health insurance programs and to become a social organization. Dever was described as an "early-day Gordon Liddy, and may have been responsible for the first political bugging in U. S. history. He used a dictaphone and a microphone lowered from a skylight." Malcolm Clark, Jr., "The Bigot Disclosed: 90 Years of Nativism," Oregon Historical Quarterly, vol. 75 (June 1974), p. 190.

Gifford, another Klansman, also joined the Silvershirts in 1933. Gifford was the former Exalted Cyclops for Portland from 1921 until 1925. He was accused by Dever of being a detective for the Jewish Committee. Gifford, in turn, accused Dever of being a Jewish agent.

Both men left the Silvershirts when they were unsuccessful in changing the organization into their personal vision of a revived Klan. Each man went on to form their own organizations. Dever founded the National Brotherhood which consisted of ex-Klansmen. In 1937, he dropped out of the Brotherhood and went on to write and publish two newspapers, the Oregon Liberal and We, the People. Gifford founded the National Crusaders, which was to be a social organization. In 1937, he reinstated the Klan in Oregon.

The disintegration of the Oregon Silver Legion due to old Klan rivalries impressed Roundtree. Keeping the Legion clean of Klansmen, Roundtree reasoned, might save the organization from the destructive tendencies found in the Oregon unit.

See Lem Dever, Confessions of an Imperial Klansman, (Portland: Lem Dever, 1924); Lem Dever file "Right-Wing Extremists," Rennar Collection, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon (hereinafter, Rennar Collection); "Knights of Klan will Ride Again," Oregonian (November 25, 1937), p.

exclusive moral agent to fight the destruction of a Christian America, could not risk having members whose allegiance was questionable. As a result, only eight Legion members could be found on Klan rolls.⁸

"Loyalty," however, was a difficult quality to predict when pursuing potential unit leaders or members. The disintegration of the Seattle, Tacoma, and Bremerton units were due to the leaders' adoption of other agendas. In Seattle, Harry Picot, failed to keep the unit focused on the goals desired by Roundtree. In Tacoma and Bremerton, Frank

7; Waldo Roberts, "The Ku-Kluxing of Oregon," Outlook, vol. 133 (1923), pp. 490-491; Lawrence J. Saafeld, Forces of Prejudice: The Ku Klux Klan in Oregon, 1920-1925 (Portland, OR: University of Portland Press, 1984); and Eckard V. Toy "The Ku Klux Klan in Oregon," Experiences in a Promised Land, G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes, eds. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), pp. 269-286.

⁸In spite of Roundtree's precautions about recruiting Klansmen, Donald Strong proclaimed that the Bellingham and Mount Vernon units were exclusively Klansmen. However, locating Klan members in Washington is extremely difficult. There appears to be no public collection of state Klan materials. Nonetheless, for this paper, Klan members were identified in several ways: if an interviewee admitted membership, if three other Legion interviewees identified someone as a Klansman, or if a member's name was located in a newspaper as a Klansman. While this method has its noticeable flaws, of the 420 Legion members, it appears that few were former Klansmen. The eight members whose Klan membership was identified belonged to the Bellingham or Mount Vernon Silver Legion units. Of course, it is also possible that the interviewees did not know, or care to remember, if other members were once associated with the Klan. As one member noted, "it is my Christian duty to forgive, and forget, another's sins." Apparently, membership in the Klan was a forgivable sin for purposes of joining the Legion unless the former Klansman was vocal about their affiliations and activities. Interview with Legion member number 32, December 4, 1982.

Clark and Bill Moore used the Legion to develop their own rival organizations for personal aggrandizement.

An exclusive mission could not afford to let just anyone join. To find good workers, Roundtree sought people already employed. Membership analysis makes it clear that unemployed people were not part of the Legion. Roundtree stayed away from the Hoovervilles of Seattle. An unemployed person, he feared, was more concerned with "himself first and his ability to feed himself and his family. Second, he might be able to focus on the issue."⁹ Furthermore, the unemployed were susceptible to the Communist message -- "when you can't feed yourself you look for easy answers. The communists offer easy answers. Anyone who is attracted to easy answers, isn't patriotic enough to be a Silvershirter."¹⁰ The irony of this perception is that the Legion also offered easy answers, though members did not see it this way. Roundtree needed to be sure that the members felt no attraction to "the scourge." Only the employed had the drive and the time to work for the Legion. And only the employed could donate the money necessary to keep the Legion functioning.

⁹Bernice Roundtree, notes of Orville, in her collection.

¹⁰Notes of Ruth Bauer, March 17, 1935, Roundtree Collection.

Roundtree believed that the best member was one who demonstrated a capacity for participation in other groups. "People who know how to belong to a group," Bernice Roundtree explained, "understand how much work it takes to be successful."¹¹ Not only did most members participate in conventional politics, but they also joined a variety of organizations. Of the 139 members on whom data could be found, 74 belonged to at least one other type of organization. Table 10 shows the number of Legion members with other associations.¹² On average, the typical

Table 10

Dual Memberships of Silver Legion Members

	SL Memberships	SL %
Civic	19	8.30
Fraternal	106	46.29
Professional	8	3.49
Traditional Political	8	3.49
Other Extremist Political	88	38.42

Silvershirter belonged to 3.09 groups. Roundtree apparently attracted the activist types of members he desired, although

¹¹Interview with Bernice Roundtree,

¹²The total is more than 74 because several members belonged to more than one group.

simultaneous fraternal activism was more prevalent than simultaneous political activism.

Of the fraternal organizations, the Masonic Lodges (and their affiliates) and Elks Lodges were popular choices for Silvershirters. Both organizations offered members exclusivity and conviviality. For many Silvershirters, they felt just as comfortable in the Masonic meetings as Silver Legion meetings.

While an analysis of political participation indicates that 65 Silvershirters belonged to one or more political extremist groups, most of the involvement occurred either before (36 memberships) or after (34 memberships) their Silvershirt involvement. Table 11 breaks down other memberships in extremist organizations into pre, concurrent and post-Silvershirt involvement.

Of the groups joined before Silvershirt membership, the most popular was the Townsend Movement. It also was the source of the most converts from other groups to the Silver Legion. Roundtree and others like him left the Townsend movement for a variety of reasons, including concerns that it was not being active enough (Bauer), that it needed a stronger local forum and activities (Nedgvalt), or that it was infiltrated by Jews (Roundtree).¹³ All the eleven

¹³Interestingly, the Townsend plan was probably based on the ideas of C. Stewart McCord, a Seattle businessman. McCord discussed his idea in a 1931 pamphlet entitled "A Lecture -- Mercy Death for Surplus Labor." His pamphlet employed ideas and terminology very similar to the original

Table 11
Pre, Concurrent and Post-Silver Legion Memberships

Group	Pre	Concurrent	Post
Anti-Communist League		1	
America First Committee		6	
American Defenders		3	
American Indian Federation			3
American Monetary Reform	2		
Christian Mobilizers		1	
German American Bund	7		
Ku Klux Klan	8		
National Liberty Party			12
Paul Reveres	5	2	
Taxpayers Union	3	2	6
Tomahawks		3	
Townsend Club	11		
United American Patriots			13
Total	36	18	34

identified members quit the Townsend Clubs to join the Silvershirts. They were looking for a different answer to the problems of the country.

While Silvershirt members, Legionnaires did not join other groups in large numbers. Although "involved" people

Townsend Plan. Bernice Roundtree admitted that her husband, Orville, knew Stewart McCord. Although Roundtree proclaimed he left the Townsend movement because Jews were members, Bernice confided that when Orville learned that McCord's ideas had been "taken" by Townsend, he left the movement feeling that Townsend had lied about the origin of his plan. As Bernice noted, "Orville didn't trust the movement after that. He just couldn't accept being misled." Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980. For more on C. Stewart McCord see, Abraham Holtzman, The Townsend Movement: A Political Study (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1963), pp. 34-35; Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating Old Age Pension Organizations pursuant to H. Res. 443, U.S. House of Representatives, 74th Cong., 2nd Session (Washington, 1936), vol. 1, pp. 758-764.

were sought, the involvement was hopefully directed exclusively to Legion activities. The America First Committee did attract some dual memberships, but the reasons for joining both were consistently the same -- to join any organization that would keep America out of any European conflict.¹⁴

Post-Legion memberships were usually the result of following a former Silvershirt leader into a new organization. Frank Clark (Tacoma) formed the National Liberty Party and Archibald MacDonald (Portland/Vancouver) formed the United American Patriots as efforts to break away from Pelley's and Roundtree's control. Each took the local Silvershirt membership with them into their new group.¹⁵ Apparently, loyalty to individual local leaders surpassed loyalty to the national leadership or national cause.

¹⁴Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 36, June 15, 1979.

¹⁵The United American Patriots was started by a Portland Silvershirter, Archibald MacDonald. The Patriots were an almost identical replication of the Silvershirts. MacDonald sponsored three general meetings of the Patriots. At the second meeting, 140 people attended. This number declined to 50 supporters by the third meeting. Thirteen of those supporters came from the Vancouver Silvershirt unit. By the end of July 1939, the United American Patriots disappeared as an organization. MacDonald's failure to provide a political/social platform led to its demise. The lack of uniqueness and MacDonald's poor organizational skills also contributed to the Patriots downfall. Karen E. Hoppes, "An Investigation of the Nazi-Fascist Spectrum in the Pacific Northwest, 1924-1941," M.A.T. thesis, Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, Oregon, 1983, pp. 65-67; United American Patriots file, Rennar Collection, 1939.

Assured of an activist membership, Roundtree had to ensure that all members shared his conception of the problems and the solutions. This was achieved by providing a common language and interpretation. The language was anti-semitism; the interpretation was metaphysical. Those who truly understood that Jews were the problem, that a world conspiracy existed, that Jews were infiltrating every level of government, that Jews controlled the world's money supply, and that Jews were the devil incarnate, were united by the special bond of knowing that only they had the ultimate truth.¹⁶

¹⁶The importance of anti-semitism is noticeable in the Silver Legion. At times it appears that all that members talked about were Jews -- so much so that most serious historians dismiss the Legionnaires as a group of raving mental cases with twisted minds, unworthy of serious consideration.

However, to simply dismiss them is to fail to recognize the possibility that, within the irrational, rhetorical bigotry of the Silvershirt movement, there existed important clues to the nature of actual social conflict during the 1930s. The movement itself was not a static, unchanging monolith of pat imagery, as most historians treat it, but a dynamic, shifting series of short-term changes that internally resulted in a varied level of prejudice intensity that was reflective of forces indigenous to American life. On the one hand, direct economic confrontation, usually an urban phenomenon -- where Jews were sometimes encountered as, but always perceived to be, the shopkeeper or landlord who survived, or even prospered, while the other classes suffered -- explained some specific ethnic stereotyping during the social and economic upheavals of the 1930s. The Depression hit hard in these areas and, as Sir Ernest Jones claimed, the human "unconscious mind" has a tendency "to generalize wildly whenever any strong emotion is felt." Sir Ernest Jones, "The Psychology of the 'Jewish Question,'" in Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis: Vol. 1, Miscellaneous Essays (London: International Universities Press, 1964), p. 289.

The membership followed the anti-Semitic paradigm of their leadership. The mythical "Jewish-Communist" menace expressed Pelley's accumulated anxieties and those of many of his followers. The central theme was that anti-Semitism was a normal reaction to the so-called collective guilt of the Jewish people for the crucifixion of Christ. Members could hate the Jews, the "unrepentant parricides," without fear of Divine retribution. In fact, they would get Divine praise for being the only ones to exclusively know, and proselytize, the "truth." Only they could affirm this truth

There were other underlying forces reflected here. Ideological anti-semitism -- a hatred based mostly on intellectual fallacies, falsehoods and created stereotypes -- took root in rural areas inhabited by few Jews. The Silver Legion was numerically strongest in these types of small communities of the Midwest and Pacific Coast -- the areas found to be the most pronouncedly anti-Semitic by Fortune magazine -- and this suggests that the members were part of a collective force that was not unique to them. "Jews in America," Fortune, vol. 35 (February 1936), p. 130. Oscar Handlin explained this as a result of Populist nationalism by noting a correlation of anti-Semitism and sentiment for William Jennings Bryan. Oscar Handlin, "How United States Anti-Semitism Really Began," Commentary, vol. 11 (1951), pp. 541-548; Omer C. Stewart, "Rural Anti-Semitism," Frontier, vol. 2 (August 1951), pp. 14-15. The anti-semitism of populists is discussed by Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New York: Knopf, 1955), pp. 60-93; and John Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, vol. 43 (1957), pp. 559-578.

What is important for this paper's purpose is that the Silver Legion's ebbs and flows of rhetoric, as well as where it expressed itself, followed the general American pattern of rural ideology of the time. The greatest difference between the Silver Legion memberships' anti-semitism and other Americans' anti-semitism, was, not so much a qualitative one, but one of intensity which reduced members' inhibitions about publicly and aggressively expressing their feelings.

against a naive general population which let itself be duped because they did not see what was happening around them.

The Legion, however, was more than a political group. Huge picnics, with speeches, initiation rites, even a wedding, were typical occurrences. Roundtree's concern with establishing procedures for funerals, initiations, and unit meetings was more than a frivolous attention to social minutiae: it was an attempt at generating a sense of identification with one's own kind. Wilson classified this type of activity as "conviviality" -- the second feature of his "collective solidarity."

Roundtree wanted to make the Legion into a "family program, where the men and the women felt that they were a part of something bigger than themselves."¹⁷ As a result, women were expected to play a significant role within the organization. Although only 27.1 percent of the membership, women obtained significant organizational roles within local units. In Dayton, Ruth Coffee Hillis virtually ran the unit, even though her husband was the official leader. In Spokane, Ruth Bauer was instrumental in establishing the letter-writing campaigns and fund-raising ventures for Isaac Crow, the official leader of the unit. The women in the Vancouver unit organized the luncheons, business and

¹⁷Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

metaphysical meetings. As Roy Zachary understood, "You can't do this without the women."¹⁸

Traditionally, women joined male-dominated fraternal and political organizations less out of desire for participation than out of deference to their husbands. However, many Legion women, 78.09 percent of whom were married, joined independently of their husbands. As one female member noted, "I didn't need my husband to join the Legion with me. I knew what I had to do. [My husband] was never one to join Christian-type groups."¹⁹

However, women were typically expected to take care of organizational details and, as Bernice Roundtree noted,

¹⁸Zachary to Roundtree, June 16, 1938, Roundtree Collection. An interesting comparison can be drawn between the women of the Legion and the women of the Ku Klux Klan. Legion women did not form auxiliary organizations. Instead, they attended and participated in the same meetings as the men. They were full members, not associates, and were expected to be fully participating contributors. This contrasted with the Klan, where women formed separate, associated units. One organization, the Women of the Ku Klux Klan, established branches everywhere, from farming villages to metropolitan areas. These W.K.K.K. groups organized a vast network of communal activities among people who saw themselves as decent Americans. Like their male counterparts, Klanswomen held reactionary views on race, nationality, and religion. But, unlike their male counterparts, their perspectives on gender roles were often progressive. The W.K.K.K. asserted that it could safeguard white women's suffrage and expand their other legal rights while, at the same time, working to preserve white Protestant supremacy. For an interesting study of the W.K.K.K., see Kathleen M. Blee, Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁹Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 47, March 18, 1982.

Orville, "like most men, turned the psychic matters over to the women."²⁰ Men were responsible for the larger political issues -- organizing large rallies, attending Cavalcades, and arranging for the meeting halls.

Both female and male members exhibited familial independence. Just as most women joined without their husbands, so, too, most men joined without their wives. Of the 420 identified members, 88.80 percent joined without spouses; only 11.20 percent joined together. Apparently, "conviviality" for the members meant a twist of the old cliché that one is able to choose one's friends but not one's family, because they opted to choose both, separately.

The last incentive for joining a political group, according to Wilson, is that of "purposive activity." This type of activity takes an organization beyond fraternal goals. Seeking to reform society as a whole, its members are willing to defer immediate benefits in the interest of what one member called "the good feeling of being associated with a noble cause."²¹ For Legion members, that noble cause was the salvation of America: a salvation dependent on the development of a more Christian America. Many Silvershirts saw the Legion as interlaced with Protestantism and, therefore, democratic ideals; for others it represented a universal morality for all Americans.

²⁰Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

²¹Ibid., pp. 34-36.

What led some Methodists -- as well as some Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and Disciples of Christ -- into the Legion was the campaign to demand Christian morals for the community; what Roundtree called "holy living." Most pietistic Protestant denominations endorsed the use of laws and political action to enforce morality. For members, the Silvershirt Legion of America represented pietist political purpose, smoothing the way for the millennium.²²

However, emphasis on lofty goals -- religious or political -- and national issues was only one side of the coin. Roundtree made sure that the local scene was given first attention. All national issues were given a local focus. "What happened to the rest of the country, would sooner or later, happen to us," Bernice Roundtree explained, "and that's what Orville taught us."²³ It was important to build an organization that would protect, and prepare, its members at home for the coming national fight.

The problem's in the state. The problem's in the country. It was really a case of us against them -- Jews, Communists, anti-Christians, the whole lot of them. Orville showed us how we could fight 'em if, and only if, we stuck together. And, boy, we gave 'em one hell of a fight.²⁴

²²It is important to note, however, that many pietists did not join the Legion because of its potential for divisiveness.

²³Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

²⁴Interview with George Thiessen, March 22, 1979.

Silvershirters noted that they "liked to join positive, active organizations" that made a difference to their community.²⁵ Some saw "positive" as "Jew free" or "Christian action" but most others saw "positive" as locally active. As one noted, "It gave me something to work for and to talk to my neighbors about." In a sense, "it got me involved."²⁶

Most members saw their prior involvement as part of a pattern of political independence that rejected the corruption of the major parties. As one member explained:

I always saw the necessity of being politically involved in organizations that were not controlled by the big political powers. It is important for the people to voice their concerns so that the government will hear them I joined the Paul Reveres, the Townsend Club and the Taxpayers Union in order to be involved and heard.²⁷

This distrust of the traditional parties permeated the Washington membership. Only eight members belonged to party organizations. But this distrust of mainstream political parties did not mean that Silvershirt members had abandoned political activities. One member noted that Legion members recognized the necessity of involvement in "any organization

²⁵Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 64, June 21, 1980.

²⁶Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 78, March 21, 1978.

²⁷Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 63, August 7, 1979. Also in attendance at that interview were Silvershirt Member Number 65 and Member Number 58.

-- traditional Republican or Democratic parties, or more active [extremist, if necessary] organizations -- which fought for a Christian America."²⁸ Members would join and use any organizations that, they believed, could contribute to their individual, long-range, albeit local goals.

This "use" of parties to foster such goals was a consistent component of Washington state politics. Washington had always been characterized by traditions of political independence and direct democratic action: cross-filing, recall, referendum, initiative, direct primary, non-partisan local elections. The strong party organizations, buttressed by tradition and prestige, to be found in Eastern states were not common in Washington. Greater social mobility and less conventional attitudes gave Washington a political environment conducive to independent popular political action at the grass roots level. Such disparate movements as the anti-Chinese movement in Tacoma, the utopian societies on the Puget Sound, the I.W.W. activism in western Washington, and the progressive-prohibitionist-feminist movement that resulted in the election of Bertha Knight Landes as Mayor of Seattle in 1926, were reflective of this independent political tradition.²⁹

²⁸Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 27, June 9, 1980.

²⁹Washington grass roots politics were nationally recognized for their non-traditional leanings. The anti-Chinese movement is recounted in Robert E. Wynne, Reaction to the Chinese in the Northwest and British Columbia, 1885-

Though it is easy to prove the existence of different motivations among Legion members, determining the percentages of each category of reasons is virtually impossible. The majority of members probably joined for exclusiveness, conviviality, moral purpose, or possibly, some combination of the three. The primary focus of these

1917 (New York: Arno Press, 1978), while Murray Morgan presents an extensive discussion of its Tacoma phase in Puget's Sound: A Narrative of Early Tacoma and the Southern Sound (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979); see also Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, vol. 39 (April 1948).

On Washington socialism, see Carlos A. Schwantes, Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979). Much of the history may be found in Paul B. Bushue, "Dr. Harmon F. Titus and Socialism in Washington State," Masters thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1967; and Barbara Winslow, "The Decline of Socialism in Washington, 1910-1925," Masters thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1969.

The history of Mayor Landes can be found in Florence J. Deacon, "Why Wasn't Bertha Knight Landes Re-elected?" Masters thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1978; and Doris H. Pieroth, "Bertha Knight Landes: The Woman Who Was Mayor," in G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes, editors, Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), pp. 304-322.

Little has been published on populism in Washington. There is Thomas Wayne Riddle's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "The Old Radicalism in America: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington," (Washington State University, 1976), and David B. Griffiths, "Far-western Populist Thought: A Comparative Study of John R. Rogers and Davis H. Waite," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, vol. 60 (October 1969), pp. 183-192. On utopian endeavors, see Charles P. LeWarne, Utopias on Puget Sound, 1885-1915 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), and "'And Be Ye Separate': The Lopez Island Colony of Thomas Gourley," in James W. Scott, editor, Pacific Northwest Themes: Historical Essays in Honor of Keith A. Murray (Bellingham: Western Washington University, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, 1978), pp. 83-97.

reasons, though, was religious and cultural; not a contest for scarce economic resources, as argued by the traditional view. Silvershirt literature and speeches do not refer to the loss of jobs, fear of further economic collapse, or loss of housing. Rather, there was a constant sense of distress over the moral directions of the country and a fear that American democracy, as buttressed by Protestant morality, might be on the decline.

In short, the Legion was indeed a Christian defense league; a nativist organization that defined America as a conservative Protestant culture. Its appeal cut across class lines and attempted to produce a unified front, a stiffened resistance, to a politically corrupt society. Ethnic prejudices intensified feelings, thereby provoking a cultural clash. Unfortunately, Legion members suffered from an inability to see moral grayness, or to tolerate different moral values within an increasingly pluralistic society.

In the end, Pelley failed to achieve his goal of a Christian Commonwealth, and his presidential candidacy was little more than a brief episode in a long struggle to gain national recognition. For several years in the 1930s however, he had tapped a reservoir of middle-class political discontent. The leaders of the Silvershirts and the Christian party in Washington were small businessmen, self-employed, professionals, and skilled laborers. Although disillusioned by the economic depression and susceptible to

racial and religious prejudice, they were not alienated from the political process or all social institutions. They were essentially people who had lost faith in major party politics and, like religious seekers, were forever shifting their allegiance. Pelley's conspiracy theories suggested reasons for the nation's economic ills, and his metaphysical ideas and social theories, for a time, offered a utopian alternative to the realities of social chaos and cultural conflict.

POSTSCRIPT

LIFE AFTER THE LEGION

After World War II started, when Pelley was embroiled in his many legal battles and decided to disband the Silver Legion, Washington members went their own ways. Most members who had joined after 1938 and who did not take major roles in any of the units, disappeared into anonymity, preferring to no longer be on the "front line" of the battle. Others, consisting of most of the former leaders, who were worried about being associated with a group that had previously hailed the policies of Nazi Germany, supported the war effort, joined various patriotic societies or volunteered for war-related organizations.

Still others, proud of their Silver Legion membership, saw no contradiction between what they had previously advocated and their full-fledged support for the war effort. Their loyalty to Pelley took second stage to their loyalty to the country. In their eyes, they were the ones who had always been the true patriots. They believed that only the means by which they expressed their patriotism changed. Their goal was now focused on winning World War II.

Although shaken by the knowledge that the Silver Legion failed to bring about the Christian Commonwealth, or capture

control of the government, or rid America of Jews, the most committed Silvershirters, not only did not disavow their Legion membership, but became even more committed to "the fight."¹ The most heavily involved Silvershirters became the most heavily involved "patriots." Ruth Bauer, secretary of the Spokane unit, served the war years as a Red Cross volunteer, fund-raising library volunteer (sending books to G.I.s), and ration coupon inspector. For Bauer, these activities showed that, above all, she was a patriot.²

Bernice Roundtree also did her patriotic best to help the country win the war. She knitted blankets and sweaters for prisoners of war. In fact, she organized most of the women members of the Chehalis unit into a "knitting club," and encouraged a competition between the women to see who could knit the most.³

Even Reverend Hillis tried his best to help. Hillis used his pulpit to prove the "godliness of America's

¹This reaffirmation of activity parallels the study of Leon Festinger, When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 5-23, 208-215. Festinger discovered that the most committed members of an organization that was based upon prophetic tendencies, when the prophecy failed to materialize, increased their proselytizing activities in order to eliminate the cognitive dissonance of failure. Superficially, at least, Silvershirters fit this same pattern.

²Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

³Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

cause."⁴ He also volunteered time to minister to families who had lost a loved one or whose son had left for the war. Hillis wrote, printed and distributed a card with a special prayer for his congregation. It praised God for creating America and reminding the prayerful that "God is smiling on the United States in this conflict -- our moral righteousness will be our salvation."⁵

Several Silvershirters became enmeshed in war-related measures. The Civil Control Commission of the Western Defense Command was the military body in charge of relocating Japanese to internment camps in the interior of the country. For the claimed reason of national security, several members of the German American Bund were also interned under Executive Order 9066.⁶ Because of their German connections, several Silvershirt leaders, such as Zachary and two other Washington state Silvershirters were likewise exiled.⁷ Orville Roundtree was not. He staunchly maintained that nothing subversive was at all applicable to

⁴Interview with Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

⁵In collection of Ruth Bauer, July 19, 1980.

⁶Leland V. Bell, In Hitler's Shadow (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1973), pp. 105-106; Gustavus Myers, History of Bigotry in the United States (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 340-342.

⁷George Rennar, "The Silvershirts," Senior thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1965, p. 85.

him and he refused to even fill out the Commission's questionnaire.⁸

After the war, former members participated in a variety of organizations; from the John Birch Society to the American Legion. Members, fearful of a Communist takeover, had now found a broader community of like-minded citizens. The Cold War fears which permeated the country melded perfectly with the political message the Silvershirts had been trying to put forth all along. Members could feel vindicated, believing that others, outstandingly typified by Senator Joseph McCarthy, were finally beginning to understand the threat of Communism.⁹

The Cold War ethos helped get Pelley out of prison. As early as 1946, his daughter and son-in-law, Adelaide and Melford Pearson, lobbied Congress and circulated pamphlets purporting to show that he was being persecuted for exposing

⁸Ibid. Surprisingly, nothing seemed to happen to Roundtree for this refusal. However, since Civil Control Commission records are not available to the public as of the date of this study, there is no way to verify that Roundtree was ever questioned. The only citation by Rennar is that Roundtree told him so.

⁹The records of Senator McCarthy's Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, as of the date of this paper, are still sealed, but it would be interesting to see if former Silvershirt members wrote to the Committee and what they said. If such letters do exist, it might be speculated that they contain messages of support, letters telling him that they would be at his service to help root out the Communist menace and indicating to him that his presence made the revival of the Silver Legion less critical.

the Communist menace.¹⁰ On their own initiative, Orville Roundtree and another former Silvershirter, made a nationwide tour to try and get a Presidential pardon for Pelley.¹¹ Even mainstream conservative presses, such as the Washington Times Herald, the Chicago Tribune and the New York Daily News, argued that Pelley deserved his freedom.¹² Columnist John O'Donnell, who wrote for the Herald and Daily News, stated, in October 1947, that Pelley "is in fact a political prisoner" and that the Supreme Court should decide "whether in cold legal fact this Republic of ours is going through the ancient French double-crossing judicial trickery which made the Dreyfus case one for the books."¹³ The Tribune considered the "judicial run around" Pelley was given to be scandalous. When the Truman Administration defended the granting of an atomic energy commission fellowship to Hans Freistadt, whom the newspaper called "an avowed Communist," and at the same time denying parole to Pelley, the avowed anti-Communist, the editors asked: "How

¹⁰Melford Pearson, Life Imprisonment for Exposing Communists!, (Noblesville, Indiana: n. publisher, 1947), pp. 3, 12.

¹¹Rennar, p. 85; Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980.

¹²Leo Ribuffo, The Old Christian Right (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), p. 229; John Werly, "The Millenarian Right: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America," Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, 1972, pp. 83-87.

¹³Washington Times Herald, October 2, 1947.

Communist is the Truman administration?"¹⁴ Finally, in November 1949, the Tribune stated that Pelley "was convicted on questionable evidence in a case in which the smear artists of the New Deal unquestionably hoped to establish precedents by which they could take reprisals against their reputable critics."¹⁵

Holding that Pelley was no longer a threat to America, the federal parole board suddenly granted his release on February 14, 1950. Upon his release, Pelley, who had served half of his fifteen year sentence, commented that he felt "no such animus for the current Truman Administration that I held for the Roosevelt Administration."¹⁶ He further praised the treatment he had received in prison, stating that "even the Jewish inmates of the prison gradually became my friends."¹⁷

With his release from the federal penitentiary and a final ruling by Indiana Judge, Tom R. White, refusing to extradite Pelley to North Carolina to face a new hearing for his unserved 3 year state sentence, the Justice for Pelley Committee folded its doors and Pelley went back to publishing metaphysics, sans anti-semitism. However, he lost more than his animus -- he also lost most of his

¹⁴Chicago Tribune, October 19, 23, 1947.

¹⁵Chicago Tribune, November 9, 1949.

¹⁶Jewish Weekly Times, March 16, 1950.

¹⁷Ibid.

followers. Few former Washington Silvershirters bought the new Pelley literature. As one member noted, "it [Pelley's publications] no longer was what we needed."¹⁸

While most members found anti-Communist or patriotic solace in the American Legion or the John Birch Society, a select few maintained a staunch outspoken anti-semitism unacceptable even to these groups. Those members left for more fervent groups. In 1960, claiming the mantle of successor to the Silvershirts, the National Party of America (NPA) was founded by an un-named Silvershirter from Portland.¹⁹ Consisting of a dozen members, the NPA attacked the traditional enemies of the Legion -- Jews, Communists, and non-believers. A unit of the NPA was started in Chehalis and Roundtree participated in the preliminary meetings.²⁰

¹⁸Interview with Gerald Nedgwaht, June 14, 1980.

¹⁹Rennar, p. 85.

²⁰Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980. The NPA's only activity, outside of member meetings, was in 1964 when it protested public schools which invited "Jews, Communists or undesirables" to speak with classes. Roundtree helped to organize a protest at a Portland, Oregon high school which had invited Oregon Senator Wayne Morse to speak. Senator Morse, the NPA reasoned, was teaching children to be disrespectful of America when he objected to President Johnson's desire to expand U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The members distributed literature at the assembly and, after the principal called the police, they left. The materials were confiscated by the school administration and placed in a "Confidential -- Controversial Materials" file in the school's library. The NPA disbanded shortly after this incident. Interview with Bernice Roundtree, July 7, 1980; Cleveland High School, "Confidential -- Controversial Materials" file, Portland Public Schools, Portland, Oregon.

Several former Washington State Silvershirters joined the Posse Comitatus, formed in 1968 by Henry (Mike) L. Beach. The Posse was organized to provide a ready reserve force to assist county sheriffs in the preservation of law-and-order. They steadfastly believed that there was no legitimate authority above the county level, but, on that level, they believed in participation and activism.²¹ A few

²¹Adherents argued that Federal and State law was meaningless. The highest authority was county law and the county sheriff was the most authoritative official. But, the sheriff was not considered all-powerful; if he did not follow the will of the people, the people's Posse was obligated to hang him at high noon in the center of town. The emblem of the Posse was a Golden Hangman's Noose. See David Bennett, The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 352-356.

Posse activity became violent at times and, in 1974, there was a confrontation just outside of Pendleton, Oregon. Far from a noble defense of political orthodoxy, seven Posse members armed with handguns, rifles, molotov cocktails and a "trunkful of baseball bats," took over a potato packing plant in Umatilla County. The Posse claimed they were confiscating the property in order to return it to the proper owners. After an 11 hour standoff, the Posse surrendered to Oregon State Police and Umatilla County Sheriff's Deputies. The triviality of the cause in no way lessened the potential deadliness of the confrontation. Citizens Law Enforcement and Research Committee, Sheriff's Posse Comitatus (Portland, OR: n.p., 1972); Mark Christianson, "Posse Comitatus: The New Vigilantes," Oregon Times Magazine, vol. 6 (June 1974), pp. 23-27; The Oregonian (August 28, 1974).

After the standoff, the Posse disappeared from the Pacific Northwest. It re-formed in the Midwest with farmers upset at paying taxes and distressed over U.S. farm policies of the 1970s. The revived Posse adopted, as a matter of religious faith, the principle that no citizen is bound to obey any authority higher than that of the county sheriff. Paying income taxes, making social security payments, even purchasing license plates and acquiring a driver's license violate this principle. Many, but not all, Posse followers take matters even further and hold that the Posse doctrine was divinely revealed by God and, therefore, to pay taxes is

former Washington State Legion members joined, but did not take an active role in the group.

Other former Silvershirters, although they dropped their political activism, maintained connections to religiously-oriented extremist groups. In the 1960s, two organizations were popular with former Silvershirters -- the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade and the Christian Crusade.

Following the Silvershirt example, the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, founded by Dr. Fred Schwarz, created "schools" of anticommunism, to teach followers the deceptive practices of Communism. These study groups met regularly to discuss Communist activities in the country.²² The Christian Crusade spread the political gospel of Billy James

not only illegal but sinful. See James Coates, Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), pp. 104-122.

The Posse again figured in a violent confrontation in 1983 when Posse leader, Gordon Kahl, killed two federal marshals who tried to arrest him on tax charges in Medina, North Dakota. For four months, Kahl had eluded his pursuers with the help of Posse members scattered throughout the midwest. Kahl was finally found in the home of a Posse member in Arkansas. He was killed in a gun battle with federal marshals. Coates, pp. 104-108; James Corcoran, Bitter Harvest: Gordon Kahl and the Posse Comitatus, Murder in the Heartland (New York: Viking, 1990), pp. 91-251.

²²Dr. Fred Schwarz, You Can Trust the Communists (To Be Communists) (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1960), pp. 164-182; Raymond E. Wolfinger, Barbara Kaye Wolfinger, Kenneth Prewitt, Sheila Rosenhack, "America's Radical Right: Politics and Ideology," in David E. Apter, ed., Ideology and Discontent (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1964), pp. 262-293; Sheila R. Koeppen, "The Radical Right and the Politics of Consensus," in Robert A. Schoenberger, ed., American Right Wing (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1969), pp. 72-82.

Hargis. Hargis' message was that the United Nations was a traitorous organization, communism was taking root and the only salvation was, ala William Dudley Pelley, an immediate return to pietist Christianity.²³ Former Silvershirters found these organizations comforting, "like being home, at last."²⁴

Taking a more extreme religious interpretation than the Legion, two members went on to join the Christian Identity movement in the 1980s. Christian Identity doctrine asserts that Adam was the sole progenitor of the white race, Anglo-Saxons are the true descendants of the Israelites, Jesus was not a Jew, and the United States may be the promised land but only if Jews are eliminated and non-Christian Aryans subjugated by the true "white races."²⁵

²³Billy James Hargis, Communist America -- Must It Be? (Butler, Ind.: Highley Huffman Press, 1960), pp. 21-39, 96-97; John H. Redekop, The American Far Right: A Case Study of Billy James Hargis and the Christian Crusade (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 1968), pp. 3-220; Harry Overstreet and Bonaro Overstreet, The Strange Tactics of Extremism (New York: Norton, 1964), pp. 189-203; Erling Jorstad, The Politics of Doomsday: Fundamentalists of the Far Right (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), pp. 72-134; Arnold Forster and Benjamin Epstein, Danger on the Right (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 68-86; Ira S. Rohrer, "Social and Psychological Determinants of Radical Rightism," in Schoenberger, American Right Wing, pp. 208, 225-237.

²⁴Interview with Silvershirt Member Number 26, March 17, 1981.

²⁵Bennett, p. 350; Phillip Finch, God, Guts and Guns: A Close Look at the Radical Right (New York: Seaview, 1983), pp. 66-81; Coates, pp. 77-103. The only local study of Identity Christianity is found in James A. Aho, The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990). Christian

While these activities were sought by some of the more fervent Silver Legion loyalists, most former members, however, were content to sit back, secure in their belief that they knew the truth and that they had fought a noble fight to keep America pure and godly. While still committed to the ideas of action, religious piety and anti-communism, they were getting old. They were now ready to turn over the mantle to the younger generation. As one member noted, "We were getting too old for the fight . . . the young must carry on."²⁶

Their dissolution into the anonymity of the average populace who, as Henry David Thoreau observed, "lead lives of quiet desperation," does not mean that studying them no longer could provide historians with valuable information. Indeed, there is fertile ground for future researchers to probe. For example, was the Washington State experience unique? Would a local membership analysis of other states (if they could be found) reveal similar or disparate patterns of involvement? Regardless of the answer, what conclusions could be drawn regarding why some people were attracted to these groups? Is the concentration on grass-

Identity has become the philosophical basis of many of the most violent current radical right organizations. The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA), Jesus Christ Christians of Aryan Nations, the revived Ku Klux Klan, and The Order all claim adherence to the Christian Identity movement.

²⁶Interview with Mrs. Clarence Brown, December 19, 1981.

roots membership analysis, rather than on top-down leadership studies, revealing of true political motivations that can explain with more precision, how politics works in America, or is this type of study only best applied when studying extremist groups?

Perhaps motivational studies may be pursued by practitioners in other social science fields. Troubling to this author, was the nagging sense that most Silvershirters interviewed seemed average and "perfectly normal" political and religious participants. Yet something was wrong. To paraphrase the U.S. Supreme Court justice's comment on pornography, "I may not be able to precisely describe a political deviant, but I know one when I see one." The Silvershirts never attracted many members. They were never seen as viable by an overwhelming majority of people from all political spectrums. They were obviously thinking differently, perceived to be different and were always treated as a fringe portion of society. Yet, this paper has attempted to illustrate that their traits were not as outwardly bizarre as their typical stereotype would have indicated. Most of them were fully functional members of their communities. What was it, therefore that instinctively kept others away and characterized them? What inner needs or traits resulted in, or caused, the political/religious expressions identified herein? This study reported what the members said but, perhaps, there

were inner motivations of which even they were not consciously aware. Even if few Silvershirters are still alive, other extremist group members of a similar mold, are. Approaching a study from the perspective of what membership meant to them, instead of from the traditional polemic-inspired perspective intellectual historians have always assumed, might provide some insights into dealing with these manifested political expressions.

The intent of this study was to examine the Silvershirters only during their period of active membership. Except for this postscript's brief, surface follow-up of former Legionnaires, it was not the intent of this study to do an in-depth follow-up of former members' post-Silvershirt lives. Could an in-depth follow-up of some of these people give additional insight into what the attraction was? It certainly could provide knowledge about what happens to "true believers" who lose the organization that offered them something to believe in. What happens to believers in prophecy when the prophecy fails to materialize?²⁷ What happens to their faith, trust, belief in their ability to change things and their willingness to

²⁷While Festinger poses an answer to this question, his answer is incomplete. Cognitive dissonance, while it may play a role, only provides an answer to the immediate result of disconfirmation. To understand the impact of disconfirmation on a member of a prophetic group, one must look beyond the immediate concern and see if a pattern emerges in distant post-disconfirmation behavior. Festinger's work was not directed to that end. Festinger, pp. 27-30.

follow others who promise solutions? Do they become cynical nay-sayers who drop out of all participation or do they become even more committed to change? Are some likely to choose one of these courses than another and, if so, why? Are they ashamed of, or embarrassed by, what they did, or proud? Are these people "salvageable" in the sense of being amenable to seeing their errors and being brought back into the "mainstream"? Should they be?

From the historical perspective of a limited study, in a limited area, within a limited time frame, what emerges is the conclusion that studying groups from a micro-perspective yields information that seems to defy conventional scholarship about Silvershirters. They were not always motivated by the ideals espoused on the national, or even state, level by their affiliated party's nominal leadership. Membership derived from all strata of society and many members' motivations were more than ideological. Granted that they were fringe and, granted that they began with a distorted premise, within that framework, they operated logically and within the American political tradition. Perhaps that is what makes them so intractable.

Silver Legion of America: Administrative Districts

<u>DIVISION</u>	<u>HEADQUARTERS</u>	<u>STATES</u>
New England	Boston	Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island
Manhattan	New York	Connecticut, New York, New Jersey
Capitol	Washington	Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia
Southern	Atlanta	North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee
Great Lakes	Chicago	Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan
Prairie	Omaha	Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska
Gulf	Oklahoma City	Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas
Mountain	Pueblo	Montana, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado
Pacific	San Francisco	Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, California

APPENDIX B

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RESULTS OF THE 1936 GENERAL ELECTION,
BREAKDOWN BY COUNTY

COUNTY	DEM	REP	SOC	PR	SL	UN	CP	CH
ADAMS	1,944	657	2	1	1	54	1	1
ASOTIN	2,261	916	13	12	0	235	1	5
BENTON	2,402	1,610	7	7	0	497	1	3
CLELAN	8,030	4,975	25	22	1	401	6	26
CLALLAM	5,586	2,404	15	6	1	360	42	4
CLARK	12,714	4,868	81	34	17	795	33	12
COLUMBIA	1,391	807	4	8	1	193	8	0
COWITZ	10,147	3,617	19	10	8	463	28	8
DOUGLAS	2,290	1,025	20	2	0	101	0	7
FERRY	1,130	320	6	0	1	59	0	0
FRANKLIN	1,784	622	13	5	1	158	11	0
GARFIELD	983	652	3	12	0	28	0	1
GRANT	4,560	694	7	4	0	57	3	3
GRAYS HBR	15,851	5,053	41	16	3	576	69	13
ISLAND	1,687	921	15	12	1	129	5	43
JEFFERSON	2,279	1,063	12	3	0	59	7	2
KING	138,597	66,544	1,631	217	90	1,857	774	335
KITSAP	12,414	3,440	57	21	12	242	32	129
KITTITAS	5,044	1,941	20	10	0	195	2	6
KLICKITAT	2,545	1,190	3	7	15	136	1	1
LEWIS	9,619	5,885	25	23	4	932	44	173
LINCOLN	3,627	1,325	4	3	0	107	1	2
MASON	3,087	1,015	13	3	4	250	18	8
OKANOGAN	5,622	2,367	15	15	4	639	4	1
PACIFIC	4,395	1,732	8	4	1	264	19	24
PEND OREILLE	1,903	813	18	5	0	133	1	2
PIERCE	48,988	18,331	282	154	82	1,433	260	361
SAN JUAN	775	690	1	1	2	117	3	6
SKAGIT	9,639	5,222	24	48	5	538	62	77
SKAMANIA	1,863	406	10	0	1	26	3	1
SNOHOMISH	25,081	8,882	207	67	38	1,041	169	84
SPOKANE	48,117	19,951	347	82	41	1,310	106	171
STEVENS	4,536	1,981	30	18	2	352	9	7
THURSTON	10,647	4,425	50	32	7	539	53	22
WAHKIAKUM	1,098	419	6	1	2	52	5	0
WALLA WALLA	6,562	4,584	19	10	3	487	4	1
WHATCOM	15,428	9,035	300	67	10	796	105	15
WHITMAN	7,753	3,955	47	27	0	182	1	8
YAKIMA	17,200	12,555	96	72	4	1,670	24	36
TOTAL	459579	206892	3496	1041	362	17463	1907	1598

Dem = Democratic
Rep = Republican
Soc = Socialist
Pr = Prohibition

SL = Socialist Labor
UN = Union
CP = Communist Party
CH = Christian Party

APPENDIX C

Silver Legion Units in Washington State

WESTERN WASHINGTON:

City	Year Formed	Leader	Number of Members
Centralia	1936	George Thieson	125
Chehalis	1936	Orville Roundtree	120
Clinton	1936	*	22
Langley	1936	John Metcalf	35
North Bend	1936	*	12
Olympia	1936	Dwight Clarke	85
Poulsbo	1936	*	14
Seattle	1936	Henry Picot	415
Tacoma	1936	Frank Clark	115
Bremerton	1937	Bill Moore	30
Ilawco	1937	*	10
Marietta	1937	*	13
Monroe	1937	*	12
Mt. Vernon	1937	William Shoos	24
Port Orchard	1937	*	16
Redmond	1937	*	30
Vancouver	1937	Gerald Nedgwalt	35
Bellingham	1938	George Ryckman	18
Everett	1938	Roy Chappelle	45
Puyallup	1938	*	15

EASTERN WASHINGTON:

Spokane	1935	Isaac Crow	350
Colville	1936	Edward Alborn	10
Dayton	1937	Ernest Hillis	25
Grandview	1937	*	5
Walla Walla	1938	Harvey Hurd	10
Yakima	1938	*	25

Total 1,616

*Name could not be verified by independent sources.

[illegible]

APPENDIX E

Breakdown of Occupation Categories

HIGH NONMANUAL	MIDDLE NON-MANUAL	LOW NONMANUAL
Architects	Wholesale and retail dealers	Baggagemen and freight agents
Artists	Building	Ticket and station agents
Chemists	contractors	Clerks
Clergymen	Manufacturers	Mail carriers
College Professors	Farmers	Radio operators
Dentists	Postmasters	Inspectors
Designers	Bankers	Insurance and real estate agents
Lawyers	Undertakers	Salesmen
Engineers	Officials and inspectors, government	Professional apprentices
Musicians	Conductors, steam railroad	Lodge officials
Physicians	Garage owners	Dental assistants
Teachers	Managers	Credit men
Nurses	Officials	Bookkeepers
	Superintendents	Accountants
	Restaurant and hotel keepers	Stenographers
HIGH MANUAL	MIDDLE MANUAL	LOW MANUAL
Blacksmiths	Apprentices, building and hand trades	Factory laborers
Boilermakers	Apprentices, manufacturing	Furnace men
Cabinetmakers	Polishers	Heaters
Electricians	Oilers	Coal mine operatives
Stationary engineers	Operatives, manufacturing	Longshoremen
Puddlers	Chauffeurs	Garage laborers
Jewelers	Truck drivers	Servants
Machinists	Linemen	Janitors
Millwrights	Delivery men	
Molders	Guards	
Painters	Ushers	
Plumbers	Barbers	
Rollers		
Tailors		
RR engineers		
RR firemen		
Foremen		
Firemen		
Policemen		

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