

Nazis on the State Payroll in 1930s Ireland

DAVID O'DONOGHUE*

Nacisté v irských státních službách ve třicátých letech

Abstract: The Austro-German population of Ireland in 1936 was 529. Approximately 25% of the adult male cohort were, or became, members of Hitler's Nazi Party (NSDAP). A small cadre of senior figures in the party were active in recruiting new members as Nazi Germany's fortunes rose from 1933 to 1939. Some 32 Germans and Austrians resident in pre-war Ireland have been identified as Nazi Party members, although a small number of these were exchange students rather than full-time residents. This paper examines the six NSDAP members who held senior positions in the Irish public service. As Irish state employees they were in a contradictory position: swearing loyalty to Adolf Hitler's Third Reich while attempting to hold down important jobs on the Irish state payroll. Dr. David O'Donoghue's article scrutinises the activities of these six men, as well as explaining how they tried, by varying degrees, to serve two masters. The paper also examines their wartime and post-war lives.

Keywords: Germany; Third Reich; Ireland; Nazi party; public service

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Some 75 years after the outbreak of World War II, the living links with that fraught period are beginning to fade. It may come as a surprise to a younger generation, untouched by global conflict – not to mention many older people – to learn that there was a thriving local branch of the German Nazi Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or NSDAP) in Ireland in the 1930s.¹

Even more unusual is the fact that six members of that party held senior positions in various sections of the Irish public service. But the country was never awash with Nazis, so to speak. In fact, the Austro-German colony in pre-war Ireland was quite small. At its height in 1936 it numbered 529, but by late 1939 this figure had fallen to 400. *Neutral Ireland and the Third Reich* [Duggan 1985: 58] puts the German population at 529 in 1936, and 460 in 1946, while Carroll's *Ireland in the War Years* [Carroll 1975: 36] estimates it at approximately 400 in 1939. This decline was due in part to the fact that many Germans and Austrians – who for the most part had made good lives for themselves in Ireland – chose to rally to the Swastika flag when the Third Reich went to war. Others, however, found themselves trapped in Germany when war broke out at the start of September 1939 and never returned.

A week after the outbreak of war, around 50 Germans opted to avail of a one-off opportunity to return to the Fatherland. Ireland's wartime Taoiseach, Éamon de Valera,

* Dr. David O'Donoghue works in the Irish Parliament in Dublin. E-mail: odonoghue9@gmail.com.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all references to the six NSDAP members on the Irish state payroll in the 1930s are from Irish Military Archive files, as follows: G2/0360 (Fritz Brase); G2/0130 (Adolf Mahr) and G2/130 (Mahr's intercepted letters file); G2/0078 (Friedrich Herkner); G2/0245 (Otto Reinhard); G2/0235 (Friedrich Weckler); and G2/0143 (Heinz Mecking).

negotiated a special deal with the British government granting the Germans safe passage through Britain. Referred to by Irish officials as the 'repatriation party', they sailed from Dún Laoghaire aboard the mailboat *Cambria* on Monday, 11 September 1939. With hindsight, those Germans sailing home might have been better advised to stay in Ireland, both for their own safety and to better serve the Third Reich. But fear of a British invasion and/or internment, led them to leave. The departure of so many Germans with a detailed knowledge of Ireland, meant that German military intelligence had to send no fewer than 13 agents to Ireland, by submarine and parachute, from 1939 to 1943, [O'Halpin 1999]. This detailed list omits Abwehr agent Oscar Pfau who visited Dublin in February 1939 to establish links with IRA leaders following the start of the S-plan bombing campaign in England on 16 January 1939. Pfau arrived in Dublin on 3 February 1939 but did not meet the IRA leadership (Seán Russell, Jim O'Donovan and Moss Twomey) until 13 February. He left for Germany, via London, the following day [Hull 2004].

In 1930s Ireland, Germans had enjoyed something of a golden age. The Nazi party's membership – numbering from 50 to 75, depending on whether exchange students are included – pledged loyalty to Adolf Hitler. Their Christmas parties were held at the Gresham Hotel, while other social events took place at the Red Bank restaurant in D'Olier Street and at Kilmacurra Park Hotel in County Wicklow.

But who were these Germans and Austrians who rallied to the Nazi party colours in pre-war Ireland? The first Ortsgruppenleiter, or local branch leader, of the party in Dublin was a Prussian band-master called Fritz Brase who, in 1923, became the first director of the Irish Army's new school of music, with the rank of colonel. He was a somewhat odd choice to head up the new army's musical output, but the Cumann na nGaedheal government was anxious to avoid appointing any British personnel to top jobs (it was only two years since the end of the Anglo-Irish war) and, presumably, they couldn't find a suitable Irish candidate. The army has sought an 'expert military musician' in France from the ranks of the Garde Republicane, but without success [The Irish Times 1939].

Fritz Wilhelm Brase was born in Hanover on 4 May 1875 and arrived in Ireland on 1 March 1923, when the civil war was still going on. He was accompanied by his wife Else, aged 35, who was 12 years his junior. After living initially in an army barracks, the Brases established their family home at Wilfield House, Sandymount Avenue, Dublin – a large building with French windows looking onto extensive gardens. Their daughter Mona was born in 1924.

Colonel Brase rearranged many traditional Irish jigs and reels to sound like thundering Prussian martial airs, with the aid of his assistant, another German military musician, Christian Sauerzweig, who also held the rank of colonel. From 1924 to 1936, both men managed to establish no fewer than three army bands under the umbrella of the Irish Army's school of music.

While Sauerzweig chose not to follow his boss into NSDAP membership, Brase got into hot water in the mid-1930s when he wrote to the army's chief of staff, Major General Michael Brennan, seeking permission to set up a branch of the Nazi party in Dublin. Brase was either unaware of, or chose to ignore, the obvious conflict of interest that his request implied – an Irish army colonel swearing loyalty to the Third Reich. But Brennan saw the point, telling the German in no uncertain terms that he would have to choose between the party and the army. Brase wanted the best of both worlds, however, and

opted for a compromise: retaining NSDAP membership while relinquishing his job as party group leader.²

In May 1940, Sauerzweig was voicing concerns about Brase's activities to an army colleague, Captain Connery. The latter informed his superior officer, Captain O'Sullivan, who passed the German's comments on to Col. Dan Bryan the head of army intelligence, G2. Sauerzweig revealed that immediately after the outbreak of war (i.e. in early September 1939) 'Col. Brase burned a large number of documents in a boiler house attached to the school of music. This was repeated at a later date and on each occasion the attendant who was looking after the boiler was ordered to leave by Col. Brase.'

Sauerzweig added that he and Brase attended the funeral (at Dean's Grange cemetery, Dublin, on 8 April 1940) of a consular secretary at the German legation Robert Wenzel (another NSDAP member) wearing their Irish army uniforms. But after the ceremony 'Col. Brase approached the grave and gave the official Nazi salute'.³

Records held in Berlin show that Brase joined the Nazis on 1 April 1932, just a month before his 57th birthday. Brase appears to have been indiscreet in not bothering to keep his party membership a secret from his employers. For instance, on 26 April 1939, he sent a brief telegraph message to Adolf Hitler at the Reich Chancellery in Berlin, as follows: 'Hertzlichste glueckwuensche dem Fuehrer' (Heartiest good wishes to the Führer). Hitler's 50th birthday was on 20 April. By this time, military intelligence was keeping a secret file on Brase's activities, including his birthday greetings to Hitler. Brase retained the rank of colonel and ran the army school of music until his death, aged 65, on 2 December 1940 (while still a serving officer). Pressure from the military's top brass is the most likely reason that Brase relinquished his post as local Nazi leader in 1934 although, as mentioned earlier, he remained an ordinary rank and file NSDAP member.

Brase's successor as local party branch leader was another Irish state employee, Dr Adolf Mahr, an Austrian archaeologist who had arrived in Dublin in 1927 to join the staff of the National Museum in Kildare Street (he was promoted to the top post of museum director in 1934 by Éamon de Valera's cabinet). Mahr scoured the country buying artefacts for the museum but, like other party members, he had a hidden agenda. After taking over as party leader in Ireland, Mahr set about building up the NSDAP's membership and was quite successful in doing so. At least 23 Germans were recruited to the party during Mahr's 1934–39 term in charge. And Mahr's efforts on behalf of the Nazi party were not restricted to German citizens. According to Irish military intelligence files, he 'made many efforts to convert Irish graduates and other persons with whom he had associations, to Nazi doctrines and beliefs'.

Adolf Mahr's recruitment methods have been described by a leading expert on Irish German relations in the 1933–45 period, Lt. Col. John P. Duggan, as 'bully boy tactics'.⁴ Prospective party members appear to have been given the choice of joining the NSDAP or leaving Ireland. Visiting Germans had to report first to Mahr or face a reprimand. Using his virtually unlimited power within the small German colony, Mahr was able to get two diplomats (Georg von Dehn Schmidt in 1934 and Erich Schroetter in 1937) packed home

² The details of Brase's brush with the army top brass were confirmed to the author by Cmdt. Peter Young, director of military archives, as interviewed on 29 January 1991.

³ O'Sullivan memo to Bryan, 17 May 1940, in file G2/0360.

⁴ Author's interview with J. P. Duggan, 8 June 1991.

to Berlin for not toeing the party line [Duggan 1985]. Perhaps understandably, from then on, the German legation was staffed by loyal party members. They included: Schroeter's successor, Dr Eduard Hempel; Hans Boden; and an SS officer, Henning Thomsen, who was transferred to Dublin from Oslo early in 1939. Mahr's heavy-handed tactics may also explain why a Malahide-based Lutheran minister, Wilhelm Tanne, felt obliged to join the party (in October 1934), even though the German Protestant churches, for the most part, opposed Hitler – as did the Catholic Church.

From 1934 to 1939, Mahr was Germany's *de facto* top representative in Ireland. Dr Mahr even represented the Irish branch of the Nazi party at the May 1937 coronation of George VI in London where he was joined by Ribbentrop, then Hitler's ambassador to the Court of St. James.⁵ In the circumstances, it can hardly be considered a coincidence that Mahr secured a post as head of the Irish desk at the wartime Foreign Office in Berlin when Ribbentrop was Foreign Minister. Mahr also directed radio propaganda broadcasts to neutral Ireland from 1941–45.

In pre-war Dublin, the German legation at 58 Northumberland Road supplied Mahr with regular reports on the comings and goings of German and Austrian nationals, including Jews whose Irish addresses and movements were recorded in ominous detail. Yanky Fachler, a leading historian on Jewish affairs, links these lists of Jews' arrivals and addresses to the accurate total of 4,000 Irish Jews earmarked for extermination that appears in the 1942 Wannsee Conference minutes. Fachler describes the German legation's activities as 'The clearest evidence yet that the Nazis intended to round up Jews in Ireland'.⁶

Meanwhile, the German legation's radio transmitter was being used to send secret political, economic and military information to Berlin. Éamon de Valera eventually ordered the seizure of the transmitter in December 1943 following pressure from the US ambassador, David Gray. (The American diplomat was an uncle of Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, the US President's wife.)

Nazi party members like Adolf Mahr and Fritz Brase found themselves in an awkward position as state employees in the 1930s because, essentially, they could not serve two masters without a conflict of interest arising. Nor were they the only NSDAP members who tried simultaneously to serve the Irish state and Nazi Germany. Four others were in the same predicament.

Friedrich Herkner was born on 25 October 1902 in Brüx, Bohemia. He was appointed professor of sculpture at the National College of Art in Dublin on 18 March 1938. He was accompanied by his wife Lydia (born 7 April 1906). Before coming to Ireland, he had studied sculpture for eight years at the Vienna Academy of Arts, following which he taught at a private school for graphic arts in Aussig, Czechoslovakia. Despite Herkner's wide experience, civil servants at the Department of Education in Dublin seemed more concerned about his linguistic abilities. A letter dated 14 January 1938, noted that the Czechoslovakian teacher 'does not speak Irish and his English is still rather weak'.⁷

⁵ Author's interview with Mahr's daughter, Mrs. Ingrid Reusswig, 28 July 1994.

⁶ Fachler to author, 26 August 2014.

⁷ Correspondence between the Civil Service Commission and the Department of Education is contained in Herkner's Department of Education file T. 361.

Despite the Irish functionaries' misgivings, however, Herkner got the job at an annual salary of £350. He stayed initially at the Grosvenor Hotel before moving to 25 Palmerston Road, Rathgar.

Herkner had only been in his new job for 18 months when he decided to join about 50 Germans and Austrians leaving (as previously outlined) for Germany following the outbreak of war. As he was about to board the mailboat for Holyhead, Herkner told an *Irish Times* reporter that 'several of the party were of military age and were returning to Germany to join the colours. They had all been advised by their Legation to leave. One never knew how long the trouble would last and several of them had to return for economic reasons' [*Irish Times* 1939]. Herkner subsequently fought with the German army at Stalingrad and Novogrod before ending up as a prisoner of war. In the immediate post-war period he did restoration work on war-damaged monuments in Germany and Austria [*Turpin* 1995].

Herkner's case is unusual in that he was the only Nazi on the Irish state payroll to be reinstated after the war. The College of Art had used temporary teachers from 1939 to fill not only Herkner's role but also that of his assistant, Wilfried Dudeney, a British national who had left Dublin on 26 September 1939 to join the British army. While Dudeney was unable to be demobilised in 1946, the first that officials in Dublin heard of Herkner was in a letter smuggled out of Germany (where he was in a POW camp in Heidelberg) in January 1946. The brief note stated: 'Now the war is over, I am able to return.' But since all postal communications with Germany, apart from military and diplomatic ones, were suspended, the officials could not send a reply. Herkner wrote again, this time from Vienna, on 21 February 1946 explaining that: 'When the war broke out I was ordered to leave Ireland for Germany, from the German Minister (Hempel), because I got in the meantime German nationality through the occupation of Austria.' This is an odd statement, given that Herkner was Czechoslovakian, unless he is referring to the fact that Bohemia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1902, the year of his birth.

Despite the fact that Herkner was stuck in occupied Vienna without a passport, by July 1946, his return to Ireland was being backed by the Departments of Education, Finance, Justice, Industry and Commerce, and External Affairs. They also wanted Dudeney back, but the latter wrote to make it clear that he would not return if Herkner resumed his old job (both men had fought on opposite sides in the war). Dudeney was willing to take Herkner's job if the latter did not return, however. After much toing and froing, Herkner was able to leave Austria and resumed his old post on 23 May 1947 with a salary of £600 per annum.

Herkner was due to retire when he turned 65 on 25 October 1967, but the Catholic archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, intervened (not in writing, but by phone) to seek a contract extension 'on grounds of hardship'. Herkner was by then a widower with two young adult children to support: Kaethe (24) a ballet dancer; and Hans (20) a student laboratory assistant. But McQuaid, who would retire in three years himself, was no longer the all-powerful figure of the 1940s and 1950s. The Department of Education told the ageing archbishop that a plea of hardship could not be sustained since Herkner's annual pension would be £563, not to mention a tax-free lump sum of £1,503. But an olive branch was offered to McQuaid since the professor was allowed 42 extra days' work in order to complete a further year of pensionable service. Herkner eventually retired from state service on 6 December 1967 with 22 years of pensionable service under his belt.

Herkner's other son, Reinhardt, is not listed as a dependant in the DoE file. In view of McQuaid's intervention on behalf of Herkner in 1967, it is possible that the archbishop also helped the sculptor to get his job back 20 years earlier, although there is no such written evidence in Herkner's Department of Education file. It is known, however, that McQuaid sometimes lobbied senior civil servants by phone or face to face, rather than by letter. For example, DoE file T.361 contains nothing in writing from McQuaid. Yet DoE memos refer to the archbishop's phone calls, presumably made via his private secretary. (Herkner initially retired to Switzerland but continued to exhibit regularly at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin. He became an academy member in 1979. He died in Dublin on 27 June 1986, aged 83. Herkner's public sculptures include a bronze Madonna and Child in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.)

Otto Reinhard was appointed director of forestry in the Department of Lands in 1935, having beaten 69 other candidates to get the job. By 1938, the German forestry expert had an annual salary of £1,500 (approx. €124,000 in current values) and had bought a large Victorian house in its own grounds, with a private tennis court, at Silchester Road, Glenageary. Reinhard applied to join the Nazi party on 30 June 1939 and was admitted on 1 September 1939. His contribution to Irish forestry from 1935 to 1939 is generally seen as positive. But his contacts with the small NSDAP group had attracted the attention of G2's Col. Dan Bryan who noted that Reinhard 'frequents Kilmacurra Park Hotel'. The County Wicklow hotel was a regular meeting place for Nazi party members. In a secret memo, Col. Bryan added: 'Reinhard very shrew customer. Has thorough topographical knowledge of eastern seaboard.'⁸

On 18 August 1939, Reinhard left Dublin with his wife Gertrud and their two children for a month's holiday in Kassel, Germany. The family were stranded there following the outbreak of war and, despite Reinhard's request for Irish diplomatic assistance to return through Britain, he was unable to get back. The German was subsequently called up for army service with the rank of captain. He then offered his forestry expertise to the authorities in Berlin who put him in charge of timber production in the Carpathian Mountains in Romania, where he remained until being recalled to work in forests surrounding Berlin in February 1942.

In stark contrast to Herkner's case – and despite both men being employed on temporary annual contracts – Reinhard's employers in Dublin moved swiftly to terminate his contract when he didn't resume work in September 1939. Reinhard survived the war but died of an untreated kidney infection in February 1947, aged 49.

Friedrich Weckler was born in Stuttgart on 16 February 1892. He arrived in Ireland in 1926 to work for Siemens-Schuckert on the Shannon hydroelectric scheme. In 1931, he was appointed chief accountant for the Electricity Supply Board (ESB). He joined the NSDAP on 1 June 1934. According to his military intelligence file, Weckler was being monitored by Garda special branch detectives who noted his attendance at German functions in Kilmacurra Park Hotel in County Wicklow in May 1939. The police file remarked that the German was unmarried and his hobbies were golf and gardening.

His file contains voluminous correspondence about alleged signalling activities in late 1940 from Weckler's home 'Santa Maria', Vico Road, Dalkey – he had moved there

⁸ From the Irish Military Archives file G2/0245, undated memo initialled by Dan Bryan.

six months earlier from a flat in nearby Sorrento Terrace. (Of the six Nazis in Irish state employment, only Weckler and Brase remained in Ireland when war broke out.) The house, on Dublin's south coast, was put under surveillance by a detective and an army signals expert from 28 October to 25 November 1940 during which time they noticed lights being switched on in the early hours and a signalling lamp being used in the garden to send codes, including VE-VE-VE-T/O.⁹

But the authorities were unable to link Weckler to the signalling activity. It is worth noting that the owner of another house on the same road, 'Pine Hill', regularly left the lights on all night to guide German bombers to UK targets [*O'Donoghue 1998*].

Weckler was later promoted to the post of company secretary, while retaining the position of chief accountant, making him part of the ESB's top management team. He became a naturalised Irish citizen but died prematurely, aged 51, in 1943. According to his military intelligence file he 'became a Catholic in his final days'.

Heinz Mecking was born in Klein-Reken, Germany on 22 September 1902. An expert in German boglands, he first worked for the Heseper Torfwerk company in Meppen. On the recommendation of George Klasmann (boss of the Klasmann turf company where Mecking later worked and to whom he was related by marriage), Mecking joined the Turf Development Board (the forerunner of Bord na Móna) as an adviser in late February 1936. He arrived in Ireland on 24 February 1936 with his wife Hertha and their one-year-old daughter. His annual salary was £900.

Mecking had joined the NSDAP on 1 June 1931 and, as such, was the only German on the Irish state payroll to have joined the Nazi party before being hired as a public servant. According to the TDB's managing director, Todd Andrews, Mecking's 'one genuinely important contribution to bog work [was] the introduction of piece rates', thus greatly reducing development costs¹⁰. But his advice on drainage was 'disastrous', since Irish bogs need to drain for seven years before production, compared to only two years in Germany.¹¹

Mecking was actively involved in Nazi party activities, according to a military intelligence profile dated 9 April 1945 (in his G2 file). He was leader of the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*) in Ireland and attended a Nazi party conference in London in December 1938. In January 1939, a leading NSDAP official, Admiral H.E. Menche, visited Dublin to install Mecking as Ortsgruppenleiter in succession to Adolf Mahr (a post Mecking held from June to September 1939). The Garda special branch also noted that Mecking's home at 'Nanville', 13 Beechwood Road, Ranelagh, was used for meetings (one lasted over seven hours) of Nazi party members, including Karl Künstler, Karl Krause, Dr. Robert Stumpf and Dr. Adolf Mahr.

On 11 September 1939, Mecking joined the so-called 'repatriation party' aboard the mailboat sailing for Holyhead and then Germany via London. He joined the German army and after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, was sent to oversee turf production for the winter campaigns of 1941–42 and 1942–43. He was eventually taken prisoner by

⁹ VE-VE-VE is a standard calling up signal in morse code. The author is grateful to Lt. Col. Ted Shine of the Defence Forces' Ordnance Office for this information. Weckler's file does not mention what messages were being sent or to what recipient.

¹⁰ David Andrews to author, 12 October 2013

¹¹ P. Rowland and T. McKenna to author, 12 February 2013.

the Red Army and died – of oedema (dropsy) and starvation – in a POW camp at Tiraspol, Soviet Moldova, on 18 December 1945.¹²

Adolf Mahr was assisted in his Nazi party duties by a Dublin-based Siemens director, Oswald Müller Dubrow, who operated as Mahr's deputy in the Nazi party's Auslands-Organisation which kept an eye on Germans living abroad, enforced discipline among party members, and produced regular reports for Berlin.

Other party members living in Ireland included: Heinrich Greiner who had come here in 1935 to help start up the Solus lightbulb factory in Bray; Hans Hartmann, based at UCD from 1937 to 1939, where he studied Irish language and folklore. During the war, Hartmann broadcast Nazi propaganda in Irish from Berlin and later from Luxembourg and Apen; Hilde Poepping, an exchange student at University College, Galway; Karl Künstler, an engineer with Siemens; and Robert Stumpf, a radiologist at Baggot Street Hospital. In 1939, Stumpf and his wife – who was also a medical practitioner – invited some Irish doctors and their wives on a tour of the Third Reich.

According to Irish military intelligence, Adolf Mahr and Otto Reinhard were both employed during the war in 'one of the German intelligence sections which dealt with matters concerning a landing in Ireland'. This may be a case of mistaken identity by G2 concerning Reinhard. At least one G2 file mentions the fact that an Abwehr agent, Jupp Hoven (who was based in Ireland pre-war) occasionally used the cover name 'Otto Reinhard'. The German army had drawn up detailed documents for an invasion of Ireland to coincide with the invasion of England in 1940. In mid-August that year, IRA men Seán Russell and Frank Ryan were to be landed on the Dingle peninsula by U-boat. The plan was aborted when Russell died of a perforated ulcer aboard the vessel. He was buried at sea. Ryan returned to Germany where he died in 1944.

In July 1939, a letter was delivered to Mahr's Dublin home from an SS war-maps office in Prague thanking him for his 'efforts'. A short time previously, the museum director had left Dublin, officially for his annual holidays in Austria and to attend the sixth international congress of archaeology in Berlin that August. Unofficially, however, Mahr had planned to attend the Nazis' annual rally at Nuremburg in September (which was cancelled on the outbreak of war).

Since early 1939, Mahr had been feeling the pressure from top Irish officials over his Nazi party role, and had been shadowed both by the Garda special branch and the army's military intelligence section. But, in the 1930s, were de Valera and his ministers aware that Nazi party members were on the state payroll? The answer would appear to be that a few top civil servants were but the Taoiseach only became aware of what was happening in February 1939. For example, Todd Andrews, who was managing director of the Turf Development Board in the 1930s, recalled in his 1982 memoirs that: 'As German triumph followed German triumph in Europe, he (Heinz Mecking) became increasingly uninvolved in his assignment (for the TDB). He set himself up as a Nazi intelligence agent photographing railway stations, river bridges, sign posts and reservoirs (...) When war broke out he had to return to Germany – with reluctance. He thought that he would be more useful to his country acting as an intelligence agent in Ireland' [*Andrews 2001: 162*].

¹² Additional material on Mecking supplied to author by Mr. Hans Heinz Mecking, Friesoythe, Germany, in letter dated 22 July 1991.

Todd Andrews' son, David (a former Irish foreign minister) insists that his father only became aware of Mecking's Nazi activities after the war.

In February 1939, the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Joseph Walshe, reported to de Valera on his meeting with the newly arrived German diplomat Henning Thomsen: 'I suggested to him, as I have frequently done to his Minister (Hempel) and his Minister's predecessor (Schroetter) that the existence of a Nazi organisation in Dublin (...) having as its chief member and organiser an employee of our State (Mahr) was not calculated to improve relations between our two Governments.' The formal memo reveals that Walshe had been aware of what he called 'the Nazi cell in Dublin' since 1936, yet nothing had been done about it, apart from monitoring party members' movements and intercepting their mail [*de Valera 1939*].

In fact, when it came to dealing with Nazi party members in Ireland, the Dublin Government's hands were tied because, according to the rules, civil servants like Mahr were barred only from membership of Irish political parties, not foreign ones. In addition, spies such as Jupp Hoven (who studied at Trinity College and, during the war, together with Helmut Clissmann and IRA man Frank Ryan, tried to set up an Irish brigade of the German army) and Professor Ludwig Mühlhausen (who had taken hundreds of photographs of Sligo and Donegal in 1937, some of which later ended up in a German Army invasion handbook) could not be touched because they had not broken any law. In 1937, a senior civil servant, Leon Ó Broin, reported Mühlhausen's spying activities to a senior army officer, only to be told that it was not illegal to take holiday snapshots [*O'Donoghue 1998*].

Very few NSDAP members of the German colony returned to live in Ireland after the war. Helmut Clissmann was flown back in 1949 with the help of the then Irish Foreign Minister, Seán MacBride, who provided a visa as a favour to the German's Sligo-born wife Elizabeth 'Budge' Clissmann (née Mulcahy). MacBride and Mulcahy had been close associates in the republican movement in the 1930s. In 1947, as we have seen, Professor Herkner got his old teaching job back at the National College of Art.

But Adolf Mahr was never to set foot on Irish soil again. On his release from Falling Būrstal internment camp in Germany in April 1946, Mahr sought reinstatement as director of the National Museum. But, under pressure from opposition T.D., James Dillon, de Valera heeded the advice of his military intelligence chief, Colonel Dan Bryan, that allowing the return of such a 'blatant Nazi' would be 'unwise'.

Conclusion

The six Nazi party members on the Irish state payroll in the 1930s were attempting a difficult if not impossible balancing act – earning their livelihoods from the Irish state, while swearing loyalty to the Third Reich. And as the Second World War drew nearer, the position of these Nazis became increasingly untenable. Some, including Otto Reinhard and Adolf Mahr, were stranded in Germany when war broke out. Others, as we have seen, opted to avail of safe passage – negotiated by de Valera with London – through Britain on 11/12 September 1939, eight days after the declaration of war. Some may well have returned to Ireland if that had been an option, but when the chips were down they did not refuse to aid Hitler's war effort.

What remains a mystery, however, is how people like Otto Reinhard (who ran the Irish forestry service from 1935 to 1939) and many of his NSDAP colleagues could turn their backs on a country that had provided them with top jobs, an enviable standard of living, good career prospects, and security for them and their families. The alternative – which they might have worked out had they bothered to consider it – was to risk losing all in a conflict provoked by a fascist tyrant who had turned Germany into a police state.

Members of the German colony in Ireland can hardly have been in any doubt about the direction Germany had taken since Hitler became chancellor on 30 January 1933. So why did they favour Nazi Germany over their host country? Was it a case of dangerously divided loyalties, misguided feelings of obligation and/or duty, coercion by Adolf Mahr, or a somewhat naive belief that the war would be quickly won by Germany and they could thus resume their former activities in Dublin? It may have been a combination of some or all of these factors. But those who opted to join the Nazi party had, in doing so, sworn allegiance to the Third Reich and may therefore have felt beholden to the Führer above all else. Others may simply have wanted to help their country in time of war. Whatever the reason, however, most of them paid a heavy personal price for their dubious political beliefs.

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Dr. David O’Donoghue is an author and historian specialising in Irish-German relations in the 1933–1945 period of national socialist rule in Germany. His books include: Hitler’s Irish Voices: the Story of German Radio’s Wartime Irish Service (Somerville Press, 2014); and The Devil’s Deal: the IRA, Nazi Germany and the double life of Jim O’Donovan (New Island, 2010).