

## The Fable of the Forget-Me-Not

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The story goes that when Hitler came to power, he persecuted the Freemasons, who in response went underground to fight Nazism, wearing a blue, forget-me-not pin as a secret recognition symbol. Unfortunately, the truth to this story is a little more complicated.

At the beginning of 1930, there were some 75,000 Masons in nine regular grand lodges in Germany. About two-thirds of the brethren belonged to the three oldest grand lodges, founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which were called "Old Prussian." These grand lodges were strongly nationalistic, and "non-Christians" (then code for Jews) were prohibited from joining. The remaining six were collectively called the "humanitarian" grand lodges as they initiated men of any religious denomination. Among these "humanitarian" lodges was an irregular grand body known as the Masonic Union of the Rising Sun, which included among its members Carl von Ossietzky, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1935.

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1930, in Hamburg, some 600 Masons left the Masonic Union and founded the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Germany. This new grand body was recognized by the Grand Lodge of France, but not by the Old Prussian grand lodges of Germany. Its first Grand Master was Leo Müffelmann. From October 1930 to March 1933, the Symbolic Grand Lodge published a monthly magazine, *Die alten Pflichten* (The Old Charges). Grand Master Müffelmann wrote in its November 1931 issue: "The present aim of true Freemasonry is to fight against Bolshevism, Fascism and National Socialism. In spite of all contradictions, Freemasonry stays here side by side with the Roman Catholic church as fighter for individual freedom, for humanity and mankind [...] The fight has begun. The common defense of the Western civilization is at stake." After the Nazis seized power in 1933, Bro. Müffelmann was arrested by the Gestapo and brutally interrogated and detained in the concentration camp of Sonnenburg. Although later released, he died the following year as a result of his injuries.

The Old Prussian grand lodges subsequently published resolutions expressing their faithful support for the Third Reich and ultimately dropped all Masonic characteristics and rituals, becoming the National Christian Order of Frederick the Great and the German-Christian Order of Friendship. The remaining grand lodges disbanded.

In summary, it is true that the Nazis oppressed Freemasonry, ultimately outlawing all Masonic organizations. But by that time, most German freemasons had already morphed into something more palatable to the Nazi state. Although the Nazis murdered tens of thousands of freemasons rounded up in the occupied territories, in Germany, the number of freemasons who publicly stood against Nazism was relatively small. Most, while maybe not Nazis, none the less tacitly supported the regime and kept their heads down in an effort to survive during those dark times. They may not have been villains, but neither were they heroes. What would you have stood had you been there?

*"Masonic lodges are... associations of men who, closely bound together in a union employing symbolical usages, represent a supra-national spiritual movement, the idea of Humanity... a general association of mankind, without distinction of races, peoples, religions, social and political convictions."*

*—from Nazi propaganda against Freemasonry*

See:

<http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/bernheim12.html>

<http://bessel.org/naziartl.htm>

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10007187>