

## CHAPTER SIX

### Henry Ford and the Nazis

I would like to outline the importance attached by high [Nazi] officials to respect the desire and maintain the good will of "Ford," and by "Ford" I mean your father, yourself, and the Ford Motor Company, Dearborn. (Josiah E. Dubois, Jr, *Generals in Grey Suits*, London: The Bodley Head, 1953, p. 250.)

Henry Ford is often seen to be something of an enigma among the Wall Street elite. For many years in the 20s and 30s Ford was popularly known as an enemy of the financial establishment. Ford accused Morgan and others of using war and revolution as a road to profit and their influence in social systems as a means of personal advancement. By 1938 Henry Ford, in his public statements, had divided financiers into two classes: those who profited from war and used their influence to bring about war for profit, and the "constructive" financiers. Among the latter group he now included the House of Morgan. During a 1938 *New York Times* interview<sup>1</sup> Ford averred that:

Somebody once said that sixty families have directed the destinies of the nation. It might well be said that if somebody would focus the spotlight on twenty-five persons who handle the nation's finances, the world's real war makers would be brought into bold relief.

The *Times* reporter asked Ford how he equated this assessment with his long-standing criticism of the House of Morgan, to which Ford replied:

There is a constructive and a destructive Wall Street. The House of Morgan represents the constructive. I have known Mr. Morgan for many years. He backed and supported Thomas Edison, who was also my good friend ....

After expounding on the evils of limited agricultural production — allegedly brought about by Wall Street

— Ford continued,

... if these financiers had their way we'd be in a war now. They want war because they make money out of such conflict — out of the human misery that wars bring.

On the other hand, when we probe behind these public statements we find that Henry Ford and son Edsel Ford have been in the forefront of American businessmen who try to walk both sides of every ideological fence in search of profit. Using Ford's own criteria, the Fords are among the "destructive" elements.

It was Henry Ford who in the 1930s built the Soviet Union's first modern automobile plant (located at Gorki) and which in the 50s and 60s produced the trucks used by the North Vietnamese to carry weapons and munitions for use against Americans.<sup>2</sup> At about the same time, Henry Ford was also the most famous of Hitler's foreign backers, and he was rewarded in the 1930s for this long-lasting support with the highest Nazi decoration for foreigners.

This Nazi favor aroused a storm of controversy in the United States and ultimately degenerated into an exchange of diplomatic notes between the German Government and the State Department. While Ford publicly protested that he did not like totalitarian governments, we find in practice that Ford knowingly profited from both sides of World War II — from French and German plants producing vehicles at a profit for the Wehrmacht, and from U.S. plants building vehicles at a profit for the U.S. Army. Henry Ford's protestations of innocence suggest, as we shall see in this chapter, that he did not approve of Jewish financiers profiting from war (as some have), but if anti-Semitic Morgan<sup>3</sup> and Ford profited from war that was acceptable, moral and "constructive."

## Henry Ford: Hitler's First Foreign Backer

On December 20, 1922 the *New York Times* reported<sup>4</sup> that automobile manufacturer Henry Ford was financing Adolph Hitler's nationalist and anti-Semitic movements in Munich. Simultaneously, the Berlin

newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt* appealed to the American Ambassador in Berlin to investigate and halt Henry Ford's intervention into German domestic affairs. It was reported that Hitler's foreign backers had furnished a "spacious headquarters" with a "host of highly paid lieutenants and officials." Henry Ford's portrait was prominently displayed on the walls of Hitler's personal office:

The wall behind his desk in Hitler's private office is decorated with a large picture of Henry Ford. In the antechamber there is a large table covered with books, nearly all of which are a translation of a book written and published by Henry Ford.<sup>5</sup>



The same *New York Times* report commented that the previous Sunday Hitler had reviewed,

The so-called Storming Battalion., 1,000 young men in brand new uniforms and armed with revolvers and blackjacks, while Hitler and his henchmen drove around in two powerful brand-new autos.

The *Times* made a clear distinction between the German monarchist parties and Hitler's anti-Semitic fascist party. Henry Ford, it was noted, ignored the Hohenzollern monarchists and put his money into the Hitlerite revolutionary movement.

These Ford funds were used by Hitler to foment the Bavarian rebellion. The rebellion failed, and Hitler was captured and subsequently brought to trial. In February 1923 at the trial, vice president Auer of the Bavarian Diet testified:

The Bavarian Diet has long had the information that the Hitler movement was partly financed by an American anti-Semitic chief, who is Henry Ford. Mr. Ford's interest in the Bavarian anti-Semitic movement began a year ago when one of Mr. Ford's agents, seeking to sell tractors, came in contact with Diedrich Eichart, the notorious Pan-German. Shortly after, Herr Eichart asked Mr. Ford's agent for financial aid. The agent returned to America and immediately Mr. Ford's money began coming to Munich.

Herr Hitler openly boasts of Mr. Ford's support and praises Mr. Ford as a great individualist and a great anti-Semite. A photograph of Mr. Ford hangs in Herr Hitler's quarters, which is the center of monarchist movement.<sup>6</sup>

Hitler received a mild and comfortable prison sentence for his Bavarian revolutionary activities. The rest from more active pursuits enabled him to write *Mein Kampf*. Henry Ford's book, *The International Jew*, earlier circulated by the Nazis, was translated by them into a dozen languages, and Hitler utilized sections of the book verbatim in writing *Mein Kampf*.<sup>7</sup>

We shall see later that Hitler's backing in the late 20s and early 30s came from the chemical, steel, and electrical industry cartels, rather than directly from individual industrialists. In 1928 Henry Ford merged his German assets with those of the I.G. Farben chemical cartel. A substantial holding, 40 percent of Ford Motor A.G. of Germany, was transferred to I.G. Farben; Carl Bosch of I.G. Farben became head of Ford A.G. Motor in Germany. Simultaneously, in the United States Edsel Ford joined the board of American I.G. Farben. (See Chapter Two.)

## Henry Ford Receives a Nazi Medal

A decade later, in August 1938 — after Hitler had achieved power with the aid of the cartels — Henry Ford received the Grand Cross of the German Eagle, a Nazi decoration for distinguished foreigners. The *New York Times* reported it was the first time the Grand Cross had been awarded in the United States and was to celebrate Henry Ford's 75th birthday.<sup>8</sup>

The decoration raised a storm of criticism within Zionist circles in the U.S. Ford backed off to the extent of publicly meeting with Rabbi Leo Franklin of Detroit to express his sympathy for the plight of German Jews:

My acceptance of a medal from the German people [said Ford] does not, as some people seem to think, involve any sympathy on my part with nazism. Those who have known me for many years realize that anything that breeds hate is repulsive to me.<sup>9</sup>

The Nazi medal issue was picked up in a Cleveland speech by Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes. Ickes criticized both Henry Ford and Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh for accepting Nazi medals. The curious part of the Ickes speech, made at a Cleveland Zionist Society banquet, was his criticism of "wealthy Jews" and *their* acquisition and use of wealth:

A mistake made by a non-Jewish millionaire reflects upon him alone, but a false step made by a Jewish man of wealth reflects upon his whole race. This is harsh and unjust, but it is a fact that must be faced.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps Ickes was tangentially referring to the roles of the Warburgs in the I.G. Farben cartel: Warburgs were on the board of I.G. Farben in the U.S. and Germany. In 1938 the Warburgs were being ejected by the Nazis from Germany. Other German Jews, such as the Oppenheim bankers, made their peace with the Nazis and were granted "honorary Aryan status."

## **Ford Motor Company Assists the German War Effort**

A post-war Congressional subcommittee investigating American support for the Nazi military effort described the manner in which the Nazis succeeded in obtaining U.S. technical and financial assistance as "quite fantastic."<sup>11</sup> Among other evidence the Committee was shown a memorandum prepared in the offices of Ford-Werke A.G. on November 25, 1941, written by Dr. H. F. Albert to R. H. Schmidt, then president of the board of Ford-Werke A.G. The memo cited the advantages of having a majority of the German firm held by Ford Motor Company in Detroit. German Ford had been able to exchange Ford parts for rubber and critical war materials needed in 1938 and 1939 "and they would not have been able to do that if Ford had not been owned by the United States." Further, with a majority American interest German Ford would "more easily be able to step in and dominate the Ford holdings throughout Europe." It was even reported to the Committee that two top German Ford officials had been in a bitter personal feud about who was to control Ford of England, such "that one of them finally got up and left the room in disgust."

According to evidence presented to the Committee, Ford-Werke A.G. was technically transformed in the late 1930s into a German company. All vehicles and their parts were produced in Germany, by German workers using German materials under German direction and exported to European and overseas territories of the United States and Great Britain. Any needed foreign raw materials, rubber and nonferrous metals, were obtained through the American Ford Company. American influence had been more or less converted into a supporting position (*Hilfsstellung*) for the German Ford plants.

At the outbreak of the war Ford-Werke placed itself at the disposal of the Wehrmacht for armament production. It was assumed by the Nazis that as long as Ford-Werke A.G. had an American majority, it



would be possible to bring the remaining European Ford companies under German influence — i.e., that of Ford-Werke A.G. — and so execute Nazi "Greater European" policies in the Ford plants in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Paris, Budapest, Bucharest, and Copenhagen:

A majority, even if only a small one, of Americans is essential for the transmittal of the newest American models, as well as American production and sales methods. With the abolition of the American majority, this advantage, as well as the intervention of the Ford Motor Company to obtain raw materials and exports, would be lost, and the German plant would practically only be worth its machine capacity.<sup>12</sup>

And, of course, this kind of strict neutrality, taking an international rather than a national viewpoint, had earlier paid off for Ford Motor Company in the Soviet Union, where Ford was held in high regard as the ultimate of technical and economic efficiency to be achieved by the Stak-hanovites.

In July 1942 word filtered back to Washington from Ford of France about Ford's activities on behalf of the German war effort in Europe. The incriminating information was promptly buried and even today only part of the known documentation can be traced in Washington.

We do know, however, that the U.S. Consul General in Algeria had possession of a letter from Maurice Dollfuss of French Ford — who claimed to be the first Frenchman to go to Berlin after the fall of France — to Edsel Ford about a plan by which Ford Motor could contribute to the Nazi war effort. French Ford was able to produce 20 trucks a day for the Wehrmacht, which [wrote Dollfuss] is better than,

... our less fortunate French competitors are doing. The reason is that our trucks are in very large demand by the German authorities and I believe that as long as the war goes on and at least for some period of time, all that we shall produce will be taken by the German authorities .... I will satisfy myself by telling you that... the attitude you have taken, together with your father, of strict neutrality, has been an invaluable asset for the production of your companies in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

Dollfuss disclosed that profits from this German business were already 1.6 million francs, and net profits for 1941 were no less than 58,000,000 francs — because the Germans paid promptly for Ford's output. On receipt of this news Edsel Ford cabled:

*Delighted to hear you are making progress. Your letters most interesting. Fully realize great handicap you are working under. Hope you and family well. Regards.*

*s/ Edsel Ford<sup>14</sup>*

Although there is evidence that European plants owned by Wall Street interests were not bombed by the U.S. Air Force in World War II, this restriction apparently did not reach the British Bombing Command. In March 1942 the Royal Air Force bombed the Ford plant at Poissy, France. A subsequent letter from Edsel Ford to Ford General Manager Sorenson about this RAFraid commented, "*Photographs of the plant on fire were published in American newspapers but fortunately no reference was made to the Ford Motor Company.*<sup>15</sup> In any event, the Vichy government paid Ford Motor Company 38 million francs as compensation for damage done to the Poissy plant. This was not reported in the U.S. press and would hardly be appreciated by those Americans at war with Nazism. Dubois asserts that these *private* messages from Ford in Europe were passed to Edsel Ford by Assistant Secretary of State Breckenridge Long. This was the same Secretary Long who one year later suppressed *private* messages through the State Department concerning the extermination of Jews in Europe. <sup>16</sup> Disclosure of those messages conceivably could have been used to assist those desperate people.

A U.S. Air Force bombing intelligence report written in 1943 noted that,

Principal wartime activities [of the Ford plant] are probably manufacture of light trucks and of spare parts for all the Ford trucks and cars in service in Axis Europe (including captured Russian Molotovs).<sup>16</sup>

The Russian Molotovs were of course manufactured by the Ford-built works at Gorki, Russia. In France during the war, passenger automobile production was entirely replaced by military vehicles and for this



purpose three large additional buildings were added to the Poissy factory. The main building contained about 500 machine tools, "all imported from the United States and including a fair sprinkling of the more complex types, such as Gleason gear cutters, Bullard automatics and Ingersoll borers."<sup>17</sup>

Ford also extended its wartime activities into North Africa. In December 1941 a new Ford Company, Ford-Afrique, was registered in France and granted all the rights of the former Ford Motor Company, Ltd. of England in Algeria, Tunisia, French Morocco, French Equatorial, and French West Africa. North Africa was not accessible to British Ford so this new Ford Company — registered in German-occupied France — was organized to fill the gap. The directors were pro-Nazi and included Maurice Dollfuss (Edsel Ford's correspondent) and Roger Messis (described by the U.S. Algiers Consul General as "known to this office by repute as unscrupulous, is stated to be a 100 percent pro-German")<sup>18</sup>

The U.S. Consul General also reported that propaganda was common in Algiers about

... the collaboration of French-German-American capital and the questionable sincerity of the American war effort, [there] is already pointing an accusing finger at a transaction which has been for long a subject of discussion in commercial circles.<sup>19</sup>

In brief, there is documentary evidence that Ford Motor Company worked on both sides of World War II. If the Nazi industrialists brought to trial at Nuremberg were guilty of crimes against mankind, then so must be their fellow collaborators in the Ford family, Henry and Edsel Ford. However, the Ford story was concealed by Washington — apparently like almost everything else that could touch upon the name and sustenance of the Wall Street financial elite.

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#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>June 4, 1938, 2:2.

<sup>2</sup>A list of these Gorki vehicles and their model numbers is in Antony G. Sutton, *National*

*Suicide: Military Aid to the Soviet Union*, (New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1973), Table 7-2, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup>The House of Morgan was known for its anti-Semitic views.

<sup>4</sup>Page 2, Column 8.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Jonathan Leonard, *The Tragedy of Henry Ford*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), p. 208. Also see U.S. State Department Decimal File, National Archives Microcopy M 336, Roll 80, Document 862.00S/6, "Money sources of Hitler," a report from the U.S. Embassy in Berlin.

<sup>7</sup>On this see Keith Sward, *The Legend of Henry Ford*, (New York: Rinehart & Co, 1948), p. 139.

<sup>8</sup>*New York Times*, August 1, 1938.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, December 1, 1938, 12:2.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, December 19, 1938, 5:3.

<sup>11</sup>*Elimination of German Resources*, p. 656.

<sup>12</sup>*Elimination of German Resources*, pp. 657-8.

<sup>13</sup>Josiah E. Dubois, Jr., *Generals in Grey Suits*, (London: The Bodley Head, 1958), p. 248.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>15</sup>ibid., p. 251.

<sup>16</sup>ibid.

<sup>17</sup>U.S. Army Air Force, *Aiming point report No I.E.2*, May 29, 1943.

<sup>18</sup>U.S. State Department Decimal File, 800/61o.1.

<sup>19</sup>ibid.

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