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# Useful idiots: the Hohenzollerns and Hitler\*

Karina Urbach

*Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton*

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## Abstract

Hitler needed the support of the Hohenzollern family on a national and an international level. While the national level has been researched in some detail, we do not have much information about the international aspect. This article shows what foreign connections the Hohenzollerns had and why they made them available to Hitler. Private correspondence in the papers of three Americans offers new insights. Resumption of the throne was a driving force for the Hohenzollerns who hoped to copy Mussolini's arrangement with the Italian monarchy. But the family were not just opportunists. They shared many beliefs with the National Socialists: anti-Semitism, anti-parliamentarism and anti-communism. They also greatly admired Hitler's wars of conquest. For the National Socialists, the Hohenzollerns' eagerness to support them was welcome propaganda.

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Anyone trying to decipher the Hohenzollern family and their relationship to National Socialism will sometimes feel as if they have been transposed into Kurosawa's classic film, *Rashomon*. The film narrates an event from multiple perspectives. Everyone concerned has their own version of events and, in the end, all these versions contradict one another. It is a hotchpotch of defensive lies and 'alternative facts'. The situation is not made any easier by the fact that the Hohenzollerns *dramatis personae* is larger than that in *Rashomon*. The group of individuals under consideration here covers three generations. Most prominent in the first generation are the ex-Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941), and his second wife Hermine (1887–1947). In the second generation, the focus is on Crown Prince Wilhelm (1882–1951), his wife Cecilie (1886–1954), and his sister Viktoria Luise, duchess of Braunschweig (1892–1980). The third generation, which is also relevant to this enquiry, is represented here by Louis Ferdinand (1907–94).

Some of the individuals involved wrote memoirs describing their actions after the fall of the monarchy. As will be seen, these recollections are selective and misleading.<sup>1</sup> Many new sources and photographs, however, are currently emerging which help clarify the strength of support for the National Socialists by the Hohenzollerns.

Although historians are not lawyers, this question is central to the restitution case brought by Louis Ferdinand, Prince of Prussia after German reunification. Thirty years later, the case remains unresolved and it recently triggered a public debate following new revelations. In July 2019, the political magazine *Der Spiegel* revealed that the German

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm, prince of Prussia also wrote a dissertation about his family for which he used a collection of documents entitled Archiv der Generalverwaltung des vormals regierenden preußischen Königshauses in Bremen. See Friedrich Wilhelm, prince of Prussia: 'Gott helfe unserem Vaterland'. *Das Haus Hohenzollern 1918–45* (Munich, 1985).



Figure 1. Hitler, the Crown Prince and Göring at Potsdam, 21 March 1933. Bundesarchiv, Bild 102–14437 / Georg Pahl / CC-BY-SA 3.0.

government had been in secret negotiations with the Hohenzollern family for several years and that the family's demands had increased considerably.<sup>2</sup> Up to 120 historians, politicians and journalists who commented on these demands received cease and desist letters from the lawyer of the Hohenzollern family, Markus Henning.<sup>3</sup>

In 2015 Stephan Malinowski wrote an unfavourable expert report about Crown Prince Wilhelm's involvement with the National Socialists. Malinowski's report might be

<sup>2</sup> See K. Wiegriefe, 'Vom Stamme Nimm' [Out for everything they can get], *Der Spiegel*, 12 July 2019, no. 29; S. Malinowski, 'Die Selbstversenkung' [Self destruction], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, 22 July 2019 and *Wir Stauffenbergs [We are Stauffenbergs]*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)*, 7 Aug. 2019; N. Frei, 'Die Hohenzollern deuten ihre Geschichte brachial um' [The Hohenzollerns' unscrupulous interpretation of their history], *SZ*, 18 Aug. 2019 and A. Kilb, 'Die Hohenzollern wollen in eines ihrer Schlösser zurück' [The Hohenzollerns want to return to one of their palaces], *FAZ*, 24 July 2019. See also the interview with Winfried Süß, 'Historiker: Entschädigung für die Preußen-Familie wäre moralisch schwer begründbar' [Historian: there is little moral justification for compensating the Hohenzollern], Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland (RND), 12 Aug. 2019; P. Avril, 'Les Hohenzollern reclaiment leurs chateaux', *Le Figaro*, 3 Oct. 2019; A. Fanizadeh, 'Noch Platz auf dem Sofa' [Space left on the sofa], *Die Tageszeitung, Berlin (TAZ)*, 5 Oct. 2019 <<https://taz.de/Hohenzollern-und-Nationalsozialismus!/5628218/>> [accessed 12 May 2020]. In Sept. 2019, the German Green Party raised a question in parliament about the secret negotiations between the CDU and the Hohenzollern. See <<http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/135/1913545.pdf>> [accessed 1 May 2020].

<sup>3</sup> See for this number, S. Gaschke, 'Die Familie mit ihrem Licht und Schatten' [The Family – light and shadow], in *Welt am Sonntag*, 2 Feb. 2020, p. 5. I also received a cease and desist letter after giving an interview to the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (see <<https://www.fr.de/kultur/hohenzollern-fuer-deutschland-adolf-hitler-12872086.html>> [accessed 1 May 2020]). I had to retract my statement that the Hohenzollern family had closed its private archive in Hechingen for proper research. I was invited to visit Hechingen but the Hohenzollern family lawyer, Markus Hennig, told me on 7 Aug. 2019 not to expect much: 'You would only be disappointed by how little remains after the turmoil of the war'. On the status of the archive, see also J. Röhl, 'Dieser Röhl durfte nicht mehr rein' [They wouldn't let this historian in], *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 Aug. 2019 <<https://www.fr.de/kultur/hohenzollern-dieser-roehl-durfte-nicht-mehr-rein-12952622.html>> [accessed 28 Aug. 2020]. In the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin are fragments of the files pertaining to the former ruling royal house, which cannot be viewed without the family's approval. See, for this, A. Kilb, 'Ein Streit um Preußens Bart' [Arguing about the Prussian beard], *FAZ*, 25 Jan. 2020, p. 5.

inconvenient for the Hohenzollern family because, according to the law on restitution payments, compensation is excluded in those cases where the beneficiary or their heirs ‘gave substantial assistance [*erheblichen Vorschub*] to the National Socialist system or to the communist system in the Soviet zone of occupation or in the German Democratic Republic’.

For lawyers, what matters most are the actions of the head of the family, in this case Crown Prince Wilhelm. His work for the regime will be addressed in the later part of this article. But the involvement of other family members also merits consideration. Studies of the aristocracy have shown that, although outwardly it is the head of the family who takes the decisions, within the family – behind the scenes – the spheres of influence can be more complex. Siblings or wives can also push for decisions or block them, even though they have no official authority.<sup>4</sup> Within the house of Hohenzollern a number of different, competing ‘courts’ existed, and therefore a wider aperture is needed to achieve a clearer vision.

There was a long tradition of father-son rivalry among the Hohenzollerns. Emperor Friedrich III had a notoriously poor relationship with his son, the future Kaiser Wilhelm II.<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm repeated the pattern with his eldest son, Crown Prince Wilhelm, who in turn continued this into the third generation. Within the family, therefore, a pattern of behaviour existed which was further aggravated by the loss of power in 1918. In the 1920s the family did not act in solidarity. Their competitive mentality made it much easier for the National Socialists to win them over.

In the early 1930s the support of the Hohenzollerns was important to the National Socialists at both the national and international level. While Stephan Malinowski has conducted excellent research into the national level,<sup>6</sup> until now there has been no information about the support they gave internationally. This article will show what international contacts the Hohenzollerns had, and *why* they put these contacts at the disposal of the National Socialists. The papers of Poultney Bigelow (1855–1954), Henry Ford (1863–1947) and Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) provide new insights.<sup>7</sup> All three collections give a better understanding of the Hohenzollerns’ ideological orientation. Key points of convergence between the family and the National Socialists are revealed first by Poultney Bigelow’s papers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See K. Urbach, *Go-Betweens for Hitler* (Oxford, 2015), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> See F. Lorenz Müller, *Our Fritz. Emperor Frederick III and the Political Culture of Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011).

<sup>6</sup> See the award-winning study by S. Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer. Sozialer Niedergang und politische Radikalisierung im deutschen Adel zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Staat* (Berlin, 2003), and the standard works on Wilhelm II by J. Röhl: *Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile 1900–1941*, III (Cambridge, 2014) and ‘The Unicorn in Winter: Kaiser Wilhelm II in Exile in the Netherlands, 1918–1941’, in *Monarchy and Exile: the Politics of Legitimacy from Marie de Medici to Wilhelm II*, ed. P. Mansel and T. Riotte (London, 2011). On August Wilhelm, see L. Machtan, *Der Kaisersohn bei Hitler* (Hamburg, 2006), J. Luh and A. N. Bauer, ‘Cecilie und die Dynastie während der Weimarer Republik und dem Dritten Reich’, in *Cecilie. Deutschlands letzte Kronprinzessin*, ed. Generaldirektion der Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten (Potsdam, 2004), pp. 47–61, and in the same volume, J. Kirschstein, ‘Kronprinzessin Cecilie von Preußen – eine Biographie’, pp. 9–25.

<sup>7</sup> Bigelow’s papers are in the New York Public Library, Henry Ford’s at the Benson Ford Research Center in Dearborn, while F.D.R.’s papers are in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter F.D.R. Libr.).

<sup>8</sup> The following members of the Hohenzollern family corresponded with Bigelow: Wilhelm II, Wilhelm’s wife Hermine, Wilhelm’s daughter-in-law Cecilie, and his grandsons Louis Ferdinand and Friedrich. The crown prince had no contact with Bigelow. As a loyal friend of the Kaiser, Bigelow refused to have anything to do with his son. The letters to Bigelow are in English and were not translated for this article.

Bigelow came from one of the best families in the U.S.A. His affluent father was a diplomat and co-owner of the *New York Evening Post*.<sup>9</sup> From 1870 Poultney attended a school in Potsdam where he met the future Kaiser Wilhelm II and his brother, Heinrich. Although Bigelow was four years older than Wilhelm, the two became friends. After studying at Yale, Bigelow travelled the world, became a journalist and published a flattering biography of his childhood friend Wilhelm II. Although the two men fell out during the First World War, they made up again after the fall of the monarchy. One reason for this was the ideological convictions they had in common. After 1918 Bigelow and the ex-Kaiser feared three things: Bolshevism, the Jews and the 'black race'.

Bigelow was a staunch anti-Semite, who raised his children and grandchildren in the same spirit. In 1933 his friend, Ernst Hanfstaengel congratulated him in a letter: 'I had such a lovely time ... with your two grandsons Tom and Peter. Peter is just a marvel and a model anti-semiter'.<sup>10</sup> The Kaiser's views were no less fervent. As John Röhl, the authority on the Kaiser, has shown, Wilhelm II turned into a fanatical Jew-hater after fleeing Germany.<sup>11</sup> In 1920 he argued that Germany would never find peace until 'all the Jews had been slaughtered'. Among other measures he was in favour of pogroms, and in 1927 he had a particularly prophetic idea: 'Jews and mosquitoes are pests which humanity must eliminate one way or another. I think gas would be the best way'.<sup>12</sup> (It is, therefore, surprising that on 22 March 1982 an obelisk was erected in Haifa for Wilhelm II, with the assistance of the Hohenzollern family. At the unveiling ceremony, his grandson Louis Ferdinand said, 'Israel is the only country in the world that has put up a monument to my grandfather, who has been so badly misunderstood and unfairly treated'.)<sup>13</sup> As Klaus Wiegrefe uncovered in 2020, the 'misunderstood' Kaiser Wilhelm II also benefited from the 'aryanization' of a Jewish firm in 1940.<sup>14</sup>

Not even when the first concentration camps were built did Wilhelm II's attitude towards the Jews change: 'Parliamentarism has ruined us, it was a mine which Bismarck himself was forced to place under the newly created Reich. It was exploded by Jewish

<sup>9</sup> His father, John Bigelow (1817–1911), was appointed ambassador in Paris in 1865. In the 1870s he became a friend of Otto von Bismarck and from time to time stayed with his family in Potsdam. Later John Bigelow was one of the founders of the New York Public Library, and the plaza in front of it is named after him.

<sup>10</sup> New York Public Library, Bigelow Papers (hereafter Bigelow Papers), Box 34A, Ernst Hanfstaengel to Poultney Bigelow, 27 Sept. 1933.

<sup>11</sup> Röhl, *Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss*, and 'Unicorn in Winter', p. 337.

<sup>12</sup> J. Röhl, 'Wilhelm II: "Das Beste wäre Gas!" [Gas would be the best!]', *Die Zeit*, 25 Nov. 1994 (no. 48). Röhl shows how over the decades the Kaiser developed from an armchair anti-Semite into a man advocating the annihilation of the Jews (Röhl, 'Unicorn in Winter'). See also Röhl's latest *FAZ* article: 'Des Kaisers Kreuzzug gegen die Juden' [The Kaisers crusade against the Jews], *FAZ*, 1 Oct. 2019 <<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/der-antisemitismus-wilhelms-ii-hatte-system-16410631.html>> [accessed 1 May 2020] and <<https://video.ias.edu/impact/2020/0205-KarinaUrbach>> [accessed 1 May 2020].

Historians such as Benjamin Hasselhorn try to downplay Wilhelm's anti-Semitism as an understandable 'reactive act' following the loss of his throne in 1918. However, we have countless anti-Semitic statements by the Kaiser from well before the First World War. In the 1880s he wrote about 'fat Jewesses who disgusted him', expressed the wish that the 'Mauschels' would vanish to Palestine and when he visited Jerusalem in 1898 wrote about the Jewish population: 'schmierig, erbärmlich, kriechend und verkommen ... Lauter Shylocks allesamt' [greasy, wretched, creepy and depraved ... all of them Shylocks]. See for further examples, J. Röhl, 'Kaiser Wilhelm II. und der deutsche Antisemitismus', in *Vorurteil und Völkermord. Entwicklungslinien des Antisemitismus*, ed. W. Benz and W. Bergmann (Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 1997), pp. 252–85.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte* (Munich, 1987), p. 465.

<sup>14</sup> K. Wiegrefe, 'Des Kaisers Geschäfte. Restitution. Die Hohenzollern haben von der Arisierung des Wolf-Konzerns profitiert' [The Kaiser's business. Restitution. The Hohenzollern profited from aryanising the Wolf-firm], *Der Spiegel*, 25 Jan. 2020 (no. 5), p. 50.



radicalism during the World War behind the backs of the army ...<sup>15</sup> The ex-Kaiser also predicted that the world would soon be shaken by a race war. In summer 1935, he wrote to his American friend: 'The whole of the coloured world – yellow, black – have been aroused and are forming against White'.<sup>16</sup>

When Mussolini invaded Abyssinia in October 1935, Wilhelm II saw the war as proof of his prognosis:

News has reached us here that about 1500 American Negroes have arrived secretly in Abyssinia. They have diplomas as surgeons, doctors, engineers, chemists, flyers etc. from their Universities and are occupied in organizing hospitals, homes for sick and convalescents, road building, drug stores, flying camps and do their work quickly and well. All the coloured people are sympathetic with Abyssinia. In the harbours of the South African Republic the Negro workmen have refused to load the steamers destined to bring provisions to the Italian army ... The whole of the population of Africa is in commotion and openly showing their sympathy for the Black Empire which they all are proud of.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that Mussolini was waging a proxy 'race war' in Abyssinia was not the only reason why the Duce captured the Hohenzollerns' attention. They were also interested in the co-operation between Mussolini and the Italian monarchy. The Italian king, Vittorio Emanuele III, had played a key role in helping Mussolini seize power in 1922 (in 1936 Mussolini made him emperor of Abyssinia and in 1939 king of Albania). In the eyes of the Crown Prince this accommodation between a monarch and a dictator appeared beneficial.<sup>18</sup> In 1928 the Viennese *Neue Freie Presse* published a report on the Crown Prince's Italian contacts under the headline: 'German Crown Prince admires Mussolini. He doesn't care about the South Tyrol'.<sup>19</sup> In fact the Crown Prince paid regular visits to Mussolini and believed that 'only a dictator [could] sort out the mess'.<sup>20</sup> In summer 1933 Louis Ferdinand was present at one of these meetings too, although in his memoirs he does not venture beyond the anecdotal: 'As I knew that my father [Crown Prince Wilhelm] always went to visit Mussolini when he was in Rome, I asked him to take me and my brother Hubertus along to an audience'.<sup>21</sup>

Louis Ferdinand failed to mention that his father had already described Italian fascism as a 'fantastic outfit' in May 1928: 'Socialism, communism, democracy and Freemasonry have been destroyed root and branch by a brilliant brutality'.<sup>22</sup> Mussolini's brutality

<sup>15</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, letter from Wilhelm II to Bigelow, 18 Nov. 1935.

<sup>16</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, letter to Bigelow, 10 Aug. 1935. This view was shared by Wilhelm's grandson Friedrich von Hohenzollern. After a visit to America in 1933 he wrote to Bigelow: 'Aren't the black and coloured people lying in wait for the moment when they can take revenge on the white race they hate so much?' Friedrich also saw America as a 'hotbed of communism' (Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, letter from Friedrich von Hohenzollern to Bigelow, 18 Oct. 1933).

<sup>17</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, letter to Bigelow, 18 Nov. 1935. Bigelow was also aware of 'this danger' and wrote to his friend Franklin D. Roosevelt: 'Is it not odd that our papers appear to copy those of England in saying unfriendly things about Mussolini and encouraging negro hopes of ultimate success? I hope that Italy may annex all of that Black nation much as England has taken successively Basuto and Zululand and Rhodesia and made them fit for white habitation. Should the Negroes win, it would be the first victory of black over white on a large scale' (F.D.R. Libr., PSF Poultney Bigelow, letter from Bigelow to President Roosevelt, 2 Dec. 1935).

<sup>18</sup> The crown prince was a member of the *Gesellschaft des Studiums des Faschismus* (Society for the Study of Fascism), an association chaired by the duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and which undertook regular study trips to Italy. Relatives of the Hohenzollern, the houses of Coburg and Hessen recognized early on the potential of Italian fascism and they helped Hitler establish contacts with Mussolini. See Urbach, *Go-Betweens for Hitler*, p. 172.

<sup>19</sup> *Der deutsche Kronprinz bewundert Mussolini: Südtirol ist ihm gleichgültig* (*Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna, 3 Sept. 1928).

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Malinowski, *Vom König*, p. 508.

<sup>21</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 262.

<sup>22</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm to his father Wilhelm II, Rome, 7 May 1928, cited in W. Gutsche, *Ein Kaiser im Exil: Der letzte deutsche Kaiser Wilhelm II. in Holland* (Marburg, 1991), p. 100. The Kaiser agreed with his son and expressed his own admiration for Mussolini in an interview with the *London Evening Standard*. See Urbach, *Go Betweens for Hitler*, p. 172.

was also of interest to Bigelow and Wilhelm II because they regarded the communist danger as an *international* threat. For them the developments in Spain were proof of this threat.

In spite of their religious differences the Hohenzollerns had a close relationship with the Spanish royal house.<sup>23</sup> Like the Italian monarch, the Spanish king was able to hold onto power with the help of an authoritarian leader. He had reigned since 1923 with Miguel Primo de Rivera, whose motto was: 'Country, religion, monarchy'. These values chimed with those of the Hohenzollerns. The symbiosis of a monarch with an authoritarian leader seemed to be advantageous for the institution of the monarchy in both Italy and Spain.

In 1925 ex-Kaiser Wilhelm II paid for his grandson Louis Ferdinand to go on a trip to Spain after he had finished his schooling so he could make a closer study of this arrangement. In his autobiography Louis Ferdinand expresses a remarkably lenient opinion of Miguel Primo di Rivera:

His friendly blue eyes showed that he had a good sense of humour ... [King Alfons] would jokingly give a political slant to our conversation, but the general kept bringing it back to the personal level. Primo di Rivera, who his critics call Primo di Mussolini – a play on words that means something like 'Mussolini's fool' – could nowadays barely be classified as a dictator.<sup>24</sup>

This interpretation is difficult to accept. Primo di Rivera's son continued along the same lines as his father and founded the Spanish fascist party. Without the spadework done by the two Primo de Riveras, Franco's movement would not have been possible.

According to Louis Ferdinand's memoirs, King Alfons explained his support for Miguel Primo de Rivera thus: 'I had the choice between Primo de Rivera and chaos. Chaos would have meant civil war ... But here you can see the actual achievement of Primo de Rivera'. During this conversation Louis Ferdinand and the king were driving along a new Spanish motorway and the Kaiser's grandson acknowledged: 'We drove ninety kilometres. The road was magnificent'.<sup>25</sup>

After Miguel Primo de Rivera's death in 1930 King Alfons was unable to hold onto power for long and fled into exile in 1932. This came as a shock to monarchists. When the Spanish civil war broke out, Wilhelm II wrote to his friend Bigelow: 'The Bolshevik system in Spain will I hope soon be smashed and arson and wholesale murder punished by the army and loyal Spaniards. May this be an eye opener to all so-called statesmen who up to now underrated the danger of Moscow inspired vandalism, and help to combine the powers for a common action for the destruction of this World Pest!'<sup>26</sup>

In the 1930s dictators such as Franco and Mussolini fulfilled the foreign policy aims of Wilhelm II and Bigelow. Hermine, Kaiser Wilhelm II's second wife, who married him in 1922, also took an active part in the political discussions between the men. She had been

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm II was a friend of the Spanish king, Alfons XIII, and in the First World War hoped for a peace initiative from Spain. See Urbach, *Go-Betweens for Hitler*, p. 72. Alfons was also godfather to Wilhelm's grandson, Louis Ferdinand.

<sup>24</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 114. *Primo* has two meanings: cousin and fool. Both were appropriate, for Louis Ferdinand fails to explain the context of this pun. Mussolini's 'cousin' (and fool), Miguel Primo di Rivera had come to power in 1923 in a coup based on the example of Italian fascism.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, letter to Bigelow, 5 Aug. 1936. On the fear of Bolshevism in the interwar era, see the forthcoming book by Jonathan Haslam, *The Spectre of War. International Communism and the Origins of World War II* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

interested in the N.S.D.A.P. since 1926.<sup>27</sup> At the time the Führer had spoken out against the ‘Expropriation of the princes’ (Fürstenenteignung) for tactical reasons.<sup>28</sup>

Hermine shared her enthusiasm for the N.S.D.A.P. with Bigelow. In 1935 she wrote to her American friend:

I know of only one statesman who I can be sure really wants peace, without sacrificing the honour of his Fatherland, and that is Hitler! I know that in addition to all his other virtues he is also a shrewd statesman – perhaps one has to know him personally to really appreciate him. His situation is incredibly difficult; it is the German way, unfortunately, to not always make things easy for the nation’s leaders, as the poor Kaiser found out only too well. In heartfelt friendship, Hermine.<sup>29</sup>

Hermine courted Bigelow because she knew how useful a well-connected publicist could be for her husband’s attempts at restoration. Bigelow, who had often visited the Kaiser in exile, was indeed prepared to do all he could to enhance his old friend’s reputation. Since 1929, moreover, he had made Wilhelm II’s favourite grandson, Louis Ferdinand, his personal ‘project’. The aim of this project was, with the help of Louis Ferdinand, to paint a positive picture of the Hohenzollerns to influential Americans. To this end, Bigelow, the great networker, activated two of his most important contacts, who could not have been more opposite: Henry Ford and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Bigelow had high regard for Henry Ford as an anti-Semite and anti-communist. In 1929, he told Ford why he absolutely had to meet the Kaiser’s grandson, Louis Ferdinand. It was the express wish of Wilhelm II: ‘The Kaiser attaches more importance to Henry Ford than to anyone else in America’.<sup>30</sup> He also explained the family relationships: ‘This young Hohenzollern [Louis Ferdinand] is 21 years old ... His father [the Crown Prince] I have had nothing to do with, but the Kaiser has been a trusted friend since 1870. The Jew press hates the House of Hohenzollern and persistently retails defamatory tales about him. Emil Ludwig (whose name is Cohen) is at it all the time’.<sup>31</sup> This shrewd appeal to Ford’s anti-Semitism worked – Louis Ferdinand was given an invitation. The invitation developed into employment and later friendship between Henry Ford and the Hohenzollern prince, who was almost forty years younger.

To date Louis Ferdinand has been regarded as the member of the Hohenzollern family with a clean record. This is down to his friendship with Otto John,<sup>32</sup> the hagiographic

<sup>27</sup> ‘At the end of the 1920s in Doorn, Munich and Berlin Hermine had already tried to act as a bridge between Wilhelm II and the National Socialists’ (Malinowski, *Vom König*, p. 507).

<sup>28</sup> At the time Hitler said ‘We will not tolerate what belongs to them being taken away, because we stand by the rule of law and will not give the Jewish system of exploitation any legal pretence to plunder our people to the very last’ (cited in Machtan, *Der Kaisersohn*, p. 149).

<sup>29</sup> Letter from the ex-empress Hermine to Bigelow in German, 18 Apr. 1935. Hermine was hoping for a meeting between Hitler and Bigelow. In 1934 she wrote to the American: ‘It is such a shame that it was not possible for you to meet the great Führer, whose personality would have given you the right impression of him, which nobody else could bring you’ (Bigelow Papers, Box 34, Hermine to Bigelow, 27 June 1934).

<sup>30</sup> Dearborn, Archives and Library, Benson Ford Research Center, Acc. 285, Box 1011 (hereafter Ford Archives), Bigelow to Henry Ford, 22 March 1929.

<sup>31</sup> Ford Archives, Acc. 285, Box 1011, Bigelow to Ford, 15 March 1929. Emil Ludwig had published the biography *Wilhelm der Zweite* (Hamburg, 1926), the tone of which was very different from Bigelow’s hagiography of the Kaiser. Emil Ludwig’s father had changed the family surname from Cohn to Ludwig.

<sup>32</sup> Otto John co-operated with monarchist resistance circles. But he is a questionable witness who often gets tied up in contradictions. In his autobiography John mentions several meetings that Louis Ferdinand had with resistance circles. On the advice of his father, however, Louis Ferdinand ultimately decided against an active role in the resistance, something John fails to mention (O. John, *Falsch und zu spät. Der 20. Juli 1944* (Berlin, 1984), p. 150). On Otto John’s erratic life between east and west, see B. Carter Hett and M. Wala, *Otto John. Patriot oder Verräter. Eine deutsche Biographie* (Hamburg, 2019), pp. 19ff and 22.



dissertation of his son<sup>33</sup> and his own autobiography, which he reworked and reissued several times.<sup>34</sup> The German and American versions differ on several important points. The final German version is entitled *Im Strom der Geschichte* (In the Current of History), which is to be understood as a motto. In it Louis Ferdinand describes himself as passive, a naïve swimmer always being surprised by dangerous rapids.

To emphasize this image, he adopts the strategy of omission, and distracts the reader with an amusing flow of anecdotes. This permanent stream, however, obscures the fact that in the beginning, Louis Ferdinand – just like his father, Crown Prince Wilhelm – had no concerns about cosying up to National Socialism. On the contrary, in 1933 he told Roosevelt of his enthusiasm for the new movement and also hoped he could do business deals with the National Socialists for his mentor Ford.

As the second son of Crown Prince Wilhelm, Louis Ferdinand did not play an important role initially in his family's restoration plans. Until 1933 his parents' hopes rested with his older brother Wilhelm.<sup>35</sup> Louis Ferdinand was able, therefore, to work in North and South America after gaining his Ph.D. During this time Bigelow became his 'American grandfather', to whom he related all the events in the life of his 'German' grandfather, Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Among other things, he gave Bigelow a letter he had received from Wilhelm II in 1932. In it the Kaiser outlined to Louis Ferdinand his view of the National Socialists:

You ask me for my opinion on the events in the Far East and about Hitler ... He is the leader of a strong national movement, irrespective of whether or not we like all aspects of it. The movement he leads embodies national energy. We do not know what will become of it, but we do know that only national energy will take us Germans forward again. That is also the reason why I gave your uncles Auwi and Oskar free rein to join the national movement – the National Socialists or the German National Party – and why just for once I departed from the principle of members of our family keeping their distance from political affairs. Special times and circumstances warrant special measures.<sup>36</sup>

After the war Louis Ferdinand no longer recalled these special measures. In 1993, he described his situation differently: 'None of us took him [his uncle Auwi, an ardent Nazi] particularly seriously, he was an artistic type who painted pretty pictures. He was always subdued by his brothers. My grandfather ordered him to leave the Nazi Party, the party of murderers'.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Wilhelm, *Gott helfe unserem Vaterland*. Free of any critical analysis of the sources is the chapter on Louis Ferdinand in F. Millard, *The Palace and the Bunker: Royal Resistance to Hitler* (London, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Louis Ferdinand's memoirs initially appeared in Germany with the title *Als Kaiserenkel durch die Welt* (Berlin, 1952). In the U.S.A. they were published as *The Rebel Prince: Memoirs of Louis Ferdinand of Prussia* (Chicago, Ill., 1952). The American version contains an enthusiastic foreword by the American Associated Press journalist Louis Lochner, who had been campaigning for a Hohenzollern restoration since the 1930s. Another German edition appeared in 1969, entitled *Louis Ferdinand: Die Geschichte meines Lebens*, and then in 1983 with the new title *Im Strom der Geschichte*. This last title is almost identical to the very successful memoirs of Louis Ferdinand's aunt, the Kaiser's daughter Viktoria Luise, *Im Strom der Zeit* (Göttingen, 1977).

<sup>35</sup> After Wilhelm made amorganatic marriage in 1933, he lost his place in the line of succession and Louis Ferdinand moved up. According to Louis Ferdinand his older brother refused to acknowledge the new situation. 'Shortly after his wedding the family announced in a press conference that he had forfeited all his inheritance rights. My brother, on the other hand, always stuck to the view that he had only renounced his inheritance with regard to the family fortune' (Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 291).

<sup>36</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, copy of a letter from Wilhelm II to his grandson Louis Ferdinand, 23 Jan. 1932.

<sup>37</sup> See the *Der Spiegel* interview from 1993 <<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/spiegelspecial/d-52535769.html>> [accessed 5 May 2020]. In truth, Wilhelm II's attitude towards the National Socialists changed several times, depending on whether his chances of a restoration had risen or sunk. After a high point in 1933 and a phase of disappointment in 1934 he was then placated by the fact that Hitler's wars were fulfilling his own foreign policy dreams.

It wasn't just Wilhelm II who Louis Ferdinand portrayed in a sympathetic light after the war but Henry Ford too. Today, the letters that Prince Louis Ferdinand wrote to Ford and his closest circle can be found in the Henry Ford Archive in Dearborn.<sup>38</sup> They range from their first meeting in 1929 to the prince's plea in 1946 for Ford to employ him again.<sup>39</sup> The letters show Louis Ferdinand eager to please Ford at any price and therefore keen to learn about the car industry 'from scratch'. In his rather idiosyncratic English, Louis Ferdinand wrote:<sup>40</sup>

I am not exaggerating if I dare say that I never in my whole life will be able to forget these five days in Dearborn-Detroit. I had a rather rough youth-time, and I am sorry to say that its characteristic is a lack of love and kindness. Therefore, it seemed almost impossible that I could be so exceedingly nice treated as you did it with me ... I hope at least I shall be able later on to do something which would please you. I dared say in a conversation that the world would be a wonderful place if only the other important men would be like Mr Henry Ford.<sup>41</sup>

In Henry Ford, Louis Ferdinand hoped to find a substitute father and source of money, so he could free himself from the Hohenzollern family.<sup>42</sup> Ironically, twenty years later he would himself become a strict head of the house of Hohenzollern.

E. G. Liebold, Henry Ford's influential private secretary, would not have been able to predict this turn of events. In 1929, he told a Ford colleague about Louis Ferdinand's problems with his family:

[Louis Ferdinand] is receiving an income of about \$5000 per year from the former German Emperor. With this payment, however, they have been expecting Dr Ferdinand to conform with certain traditional practices laid down by the Imperial Family, with which the young man is not in sympathy. He has asked us to employ him and stated his willingness to commence from the bottom ... For the purpose of pursuing his own ideas and to isolate himself from his family, he has requested that we assume this annuity, so that he might not be in need.<sup>43</sup>

As time went on Louis Ferdinand became friends with Liebold and entered into an intensive correspondence with him. Liebold was a fervent anti-Semite who welcomed the rise of the National Socialists.<sup>44</sup> In his autobiography Louis Ferdinand does not mention his close relationship with Liebold. But, as post-war readers may recall Henry Ford's anti-Semitism, Louis Ferdinand explains right at the beginning that it was all a

<sup>38</sup> Henry Ford's replies to Louis Ferdinand are so far unknown.

<sup>39</sup> 'I have been discussing future plans with my wife, and we thought that possibly the Ford Motor Company may be looking for people with a good knowledge of Germany and its economy to reorganise the Ford business over here. Perhaps I could be of some assistance to the Ford Motor Company, either in all of Germany or in the American Zone ... All through these years I have kept a very happy and grateful recollection of the time I was connected with the Ford Motor Company' (Ford Archives, Acc. 1, Box 56, Louis Ferdinand to Henry Ford, 6 May 1946).

<sup>40</sup> It is uncertain whether he was very successful in this. J. Griffith told Ford's private secretary, E. G. Liebold, about Louis Ferdinand's abilities: 'While I cannot say that he was the best workman we had in the plant, due to the work accomplished, I will say that he was studious and tried to the best of his ability, while working in the factory, to hold up his end' (Ford Archives, Acc. 285, Box 1346, J. Griffith to E. G. Liebold, 22 Aug. 1930).

<sup>41</sup> Ford Archives, Acc. 1, Box 56, undated letter, c. 1929, Louis Ferdinand to Henry Ford. As the years went on Louis Ferdinand wrote much better English.

<sup>42</sup> From the outset Ford was very generous to Louis Ferdinand. In 1930, he dictated to his secretary Liebold: '[Louis Ferdinand] will possibly be in Germany two or three months and it is Mr Ford's wish that during his stay at home, you place a Ford car at his disposal' (Ford Archives, Acc. 285, Box 1346, E. G. Liebold to Mr Heine, Ford Motor Company, Berlin, 28 Nov. 1930).

<sup>43</sup> Ford Archives, Acc. 1, Box 56, E. G. Liebold to Mr F. F. Griffith, Ford Motor Company Buenos Aires, 2 Oct. 1929.

<sup>44</sup> Not only Louis Ferdinand, but Bigelow also sought social contact with Liebold.

misunderstanding. He quotes Ben Donaldson, a Ford employee,<sup>45</sup> who explained the real background to it. Apparently, Donaldson told him, ‘Although it’s said that Henry Ford waged a campaign against the Jews, in fact [Ford] personally had nothing against the Jews and employed many Jewish workers’.<sup>46</sup>

The problem, according to Donaldson, was all down to Ford’s loyalty towards William J. Cameron. Cameron kept publishing articles about the Jews in the *Dearborn Independent*. This resulted in a trial, at which Henry Ford had to appear in person. But – as Louis Ferdinand cites Donaldson again – ‘Mr Ford didn’t hold the matter against Cameron. Cameron is his closest propagandist and most important advisor’.<sup>47</sup>

The story is as illogical as it is improbable. Cameron publicized his anti-Semitic articles in a newspaper financed by Ford, placing them on what was entitled ‘Mr Ford’s Page’. Moreover, Henry Ford later published Cameron’s articles, together with contributions from other anti-Semitic authors – altogether four volumes entitled *The International Jew*. These volumes became bestsellers in the U.S.A. and Germany, and had a clear influence on the National Socialist leadership. After reading Ford’s work in 1923, Rudolf Hess came up with the idea of ‘distributing an excerpt from [Ford’s] book amongst [German] workers’.<sup>48</sup> Baldur von Schirach claimed it was through reading this book as a seventeen-year-old that he became an anti-Semite.<sup>49</sup>

Ford also showed himself to be a committed anti-Semite in his memoirs, *My Life and Work*.<sup>50</sup> After the war Louis Ferdinand did not mention how well he knew Ford’s publications. But in 1930 he enthusiastically told Bigelow: ‘I just finished reading Mr Ford’s books ... I am deeply impressed by these great ideas, which not only have been pronounced, but also carried out by this wonderful old gentleman’.<sup>51</sup>

The anti-Semitism of the National Socialists was therefore not a problem for Louis Ferdinand, but what did he think about the takeover of power in 1933? In a television interview in 1987 he answered the question ‘Did the House of the Hohenzollern enter into a pact with the Nazis?’ with the following: ‘I can’t really judge that because I was in America at the time’.<sup>52</sup> In fact, after an extended stay in America, Louis Ferdinand came back to Germany in the winter of 1932–3 and took an active part in events.

On 30 January 1933, he attended the wedding of S.A. man Prince Wilhelm von Hessen. According to his memoirs he was shocked when, in the midst of the celebrations,

<sup>45</sup> Ben Donaldson joined Ford in 1919 and rapidly worked his way up. When he met Louis Ferdinand in 1929 he was already head of Ford’s advertising and sales department. Donaldson occasionally worked for the *Dearborn Independent*, a newspaper financed by Ford.

<sup>46</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 158.

<sup>47</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 158.

<sup>48</sup> Rudolf Hess to Ilse Pröhl, 19 Sept. 23, in *Rudolf Heß. Briefe 1908–1933*, ed. W. Rüdiger Heß (Munich, 1987), p. 305.

<sup>49</sup> See J. Reiling, ‘Eine transatlantische Irrfahrt: Zur deutschen Geschichte der Unternehmungen Henry Fords von 1924 bis zum Ende des zweiten Weltkrieges’, in *Gesellschaft und Diplomatie im transatlantischen Kontext*, ed. M. Wala (Stuttgart 1999), p. 150. Also, S. Link, ‘Rethinking the Ford–Nazi Connection’, *Bulletin of the GHI Washington*, xlix (2011).

<sup>50</sup> H. Ford (with S. Crowther), *My Life and Work* (Garden City, N.Y., 1923). See also C. Eifert, ‘Antisemit und Autokönig. Henry Fords Autobiographie und ihre deutsche Rezeption in den 1920er-Jahren’, *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, ii (2009), 209–29.

<sup>51</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, Louis Ferdinand to Bigelow, 14 Jan. 30. He did not only say this to Bigelow, but also wrote to Liebold in 1930: ‘I read Mr Ford’s book *My Life and Work* ... I got a Spanish translation of *The International Jew* but I prefer to read it in English’. (Louis Ferdinand was now living in Buenos Aires.) Ford Archives, Acc. 285, Box 1346, 2 Jan. 1930.

<sup>52</sup> Television interview ‘Zeugen des Jahrhunderts: Louis Ferdinand von Preußen im Gespräch mit Friedrich Müller’, 18 Nov. 1987 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5jeveUVrOgM>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

he heard of Hitler's appointment as Reich chancellor: 'Nobody had anticipated this sudden development. We were all aghast, apart from the Brownshirts outside who started shouting "Heil" wildly'.<sup>53</sup>

There might have been some 'Heils' inside as well. Louis Ferdinand's enthusiasm seems to have been greater than he would admit in retrospect. A clue to this can be found in Roosevelt's papers. Right after his return to the U.S.A. in the summer of 1933, Louis Ferdinand wrote to the president:

I just got to Germany in time to watch as a close spectator the great developments which have inaugurated a new era in the Fatherland. Germany is also having her New Deal. It was one of the greatest satisfactions of my whole life, when I witnessed the historical speech of Hitler in the Reichstag, when he could grasp the powerful hand which Your Excellency in the name of your great Nation had stretched out in order to help restore the confidence and peace of the world.<sup>54</sup>

Shortly before writing this letter Louis Ferdinand had secured a private audience with Hitler. The meeting was arranged by his friend Ernst Hanfstaengel. A proud Hanfstaengel wrote to Bigelow: 'It was entirely due to my intervention that Herr Hitler received [Louis Ferdinand] on the eve of his departure for Detroit ... I hope the day is not far away when we all sit around the table again and empty our glasses to Adolf Hitler and all who love him'.<sup>55</sup>

Louis Ferdinand knew that Henry Ford and his closest colleagues were interested in Hitler (already in 1931, he had organized an N.S.D.A.P. programme for Ford's influential secretary Liebold),<sup>56</sup> and that a conversation with the Führer was career-enhancing. At the time, however, he did not know about Hitler's aversion to buying an American car. The Führer had an attachment to Mercedes Benz, a company which had supported him during his early years in Munich.<sup>57</sup>

Louis Ferdinand mentioned the conversation with Hitler in his autobiography, conceding, 'It would be insincere of me if I did not admit that from this one and only "talk", albeit a very one-sided affair, I came away with a not unfavourable impression'. The Führer had a message for Ford: 'Tell Mr Ford that I admire him. I will do all I can to turn his ideas into practice in Germany too, where motorisation is still far behind'.<sup>58</sup> This rapprochement did not escape the notice of the foreign press. In the summer of 1933 American newspapers wrote that Louis Ferdinand was playing a key role in Ford's relations with the National Socialists. They reported that he had handed over Ford money to support the N.S.D.A.P., a claim that has yet to be proven.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 242.

<sup>54</sup> F.D.R. Libr., PSF Germany 1933–38, Louis Ferdinand to Roosevelt, 13 Aug. 33.

<sup>55</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 35A, Ernst Hanfstaengel to Bigelow, Auslandspresseamt, Verbindungsstab der NSDAP, 27 Sept. 1933. This group of Hitler-lovers included the American mother of Baldur von Schirach. In 1941, after her son had been appointed Gauleiter of the 'Ostmark' she wrote to Bigelow: 'My son was so charmed with your theory regarding Pharaoh and the Jews ... Yes, I am mighty proud of my boy, and he has his head and hands full ... a huge amount he has to do. He wants to make Vienna the leading city in culture, music etc. etc. and it seems to have started well' (Bigelow Papers, Box 35A, Emma Middleton von Schirach, 27 Apr. 1941). Baldur von Schirach's most important 'cultural measure' was to deport Viennese Jews. Unlike Pharaoh, however, he sent them to death camps rather than into the desert.

<sup>56</sup> Ford Archives, Acc. 385, Box 1346, Louis Ferdinand to Mr Liebold.

<sup>57</sup> Hitler was not able to drive, but he kept himself informed about new car models and their technical specifications. In 1942, he said that he had cars to thank for the happiest moments in his life. See V. Ullrich, *Adolf Hitler. Biographie. Die Jahre des Aufstiegs 1889–1939* (Frankfurt am Main, 2013), p. 450.

<sup>58</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 267.

<sup>59</sup> J. Steele, 'Charges Name Finance Kings', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 July 1933 and *LA Times*, 23 July 1933. The author was surprisingly well informed about certain details. For example, he knew about Louis Ferdinand's recreational trip around America with his younger brother, financed in part by Henry Ford. The author concludes that Louis Ferdinand and Schacht, who knew each other well, raised American money for Hitler. This has not yet been proved.

In his autobiography Louis Ferdinand fails to mention that he kept working for Ford after returning again to Germany in 1934. He became Ford representative in Germany and hoped to expand his role. In a letter to Bigelow he explained how influential he had now become in the Ford empire: 'Our Generalmanager for Germany ... will do anything I tell him, because he knows that I am the only person willing and able to save his skin against the brutal procedures of his British masters, who would kill me if they could, because I told Henry Ford the truth about their beastly machinations'.<sup>60</sup> This private letter was signed off with a rousing 'Heil Hitler'. Louis Ferdinand hoped he could continue to make use of his Nazi contacts for Ford and he also wrote an article about Henry Ford, which appeared in the Nazi press.<sup>61</sup>

After Hitler had refused to allow an expansion of the Ford factory in Cologne,<sup>62</sup> Louis Ferdinand tried to make the case for Hamburg as a new site. To this end he intrigued against Ford's supervisory board chairman in Germany, Heinrich F. Albert. In the Weimar Republic Albert had been an under-secretary in the Social Democrat government, and so in 1934 Louis Ferdinand wrote to a Ford colleague: '[Albert] belongs to the past regime ... His system will certainly not return'.<sup>63</sup>

The intrigue failed. Albert obtained the support of Ford's head of foreign operations and was able to keep his position. After this Louis Ferdinand moved to Lufthansa.<sup>64</sup> As Lutz Budrass has shown in his history of the company, by then Lufthansa was no longer just a harmless commercial airline. It supported the rise of the Nazi regime and had close personal connections to Göring.<sup>65</sup> Göring was a friend of the crown prince and also helped Louis Ferdinand out. In 1937 the *Detroit Free Press* reported: '[In 1936] Louis Ferdinand was enlisted by ... Goering as a liaison officer of the German air force with foreign diplomats in Berlin. Last December at Athens he assisted in the opening ceremony of a commercial airline between Germany and Greece'.<sup>66</sup>

The *Detroit Free Press* was well informed because Louis Ferdinand maintained contact with Ford and his closest circle in Detroit. In late 1934 Ford's confidant Liebold wrote to Louis Ferdinand, 'I hope everything is going well with you and that Mr Hitler is continuing the good work he seems to have started'.<sup>67</sup> In 1935, at the request of Louis Ferdinand, Henry Ford donated ten cars to the ex-Kaiser. Wilhelm intended to use them for an African expedition undertaken by his favourite scientist Leo Frobenius.<sup>68</sup> Louis

<sup>60</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, Louis Ferdinand to Bigelow, 26 Jan. 1934.

<sup>61</sup> See Bigelow to Henry Ford: 'I read with much pleasure Prince Louis Ferdinand's article about you in a German magazine' (Ford Archives, Acc. 285, Box 1528, letter from Bigelow to Ford, 27 March 1934).

<sup>62</sup> The Cologne plant remained important, however, as it distributed parts to Japan and Latin America. After the war broke out Ford supplied the Wehrmacht with lorries. In 1942 one third of the lorries deployed by the National Socialists were Ford manufacture.

<sup>63</sup> Louis Ferdinand to Sorenson, 26 Apr. 1934. Cited in Reiling, 'Eine transatlantische Irrfahrt: Zur deutschen Geschichte der Unternehmungen Henry Fords', p. 152.

<sup>64</sup> It is unclear exactly when this move took place. A Detroit newspaper reported that Louis Ferdinand was still working for the Ford branch in Berlin in Aug. 1934 (*Detroit Free Press*, 25 Dec. 1937).

<sup>65</sup> Later Lufthansa organized slave labour on its own initiative. See L. Budrass, *Adler und Kranich. Die Lufthansa und ihre Geschichte 1926–1955* (Munich, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, 25 Dec. 1937, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Ford Archives, Acc. 285, Box 1640, Liebold to Louis Ferdinand, 10 Dec. 1934.

<sup>68</sup> Telegram from the German ex-Kaiser, received by Ford Motor – Cologne Branch: 'Thanks for the ten autos placed gratis at the disposal through intermediary of his grandson – Louis Ferdinand and passed on by him to the Frobenius Expedition in Africa' (Ford Archives, Acc. 285, Box 1800 File: Louis Ferdinand, Dr E. Diestel, Ford Motor – Cologne, 18 Sept. 1935).



Ferdinand also visited Detroit in 1936 for discussions, the content of which has not been made known.<sup>69</sup>

Henry Ford himself went to Germany in 1938 to visit the Cologne factory. He continued to display his usual generosity when Louis Ferdinand came to America at the end of May 1938 for his honeymoon.<sup>70</sup> Once again Bigelow helped with the travel plans.<sup>71</sup> As it was feared that so soon after the ‘Anschluss’ of Austria, Louis Ferdinand might be ‘pestered’ by Jewish journalists when his boat docked in New York, Bigelow told Ford’s secretary Liebold to provide a car and chauffeur to pick them up: ‘Prince Louis is trying to dodge a hundred hostile Hebrew reporters barking at his heels’.<sup>72</sup> Henry Ford went one further and provided a car for the honeymooners at every stage of their trip.<sup>73</sup>

Ford too received a generous gift in the summer of 1938. On his seventy-fifth birthday, he was the first American to be awarded the *Grand Cross of the German Eagle*, the highest National Socialist honour for foreigners (which had just been invented by Hitler), presented to him by the German consul. Two years later Louis Ferdinand also paid a very personal tribute to his friend Ford, making him godfather to his second son.<sup>74</sup>

On his America trip in 1938, Louis Ferdinand not only saw Henry Ford again, but Roosevelt too. As ever, the meeting was initiated by Bigelow. As a long-time neighbour of the Roosevelts in Hyde Park, New York, Bigelow was an old friend of Sara Roosevelt, the president’s mother. Both shared an interest in Germany. Sara spoke German and prior to the First World War had often visited Heidelberg and Baden-Baden with her son. Although Bigelow was close to the influential mother, his relationship with F.D.R. was never altogether free from tension. The age difference of thirty years played a role here, although not the decisive one. In his letters to the president Bigelow frequently adopted a mocking, superior tone. For his part, F.D.R. took Bigelow’s ‘patronising advice’ with good humour. He also ignored Bigelow’s closeness to Henry Ford, who was an avowed opponent of Roosevelt and who had instructed his workers during the election campaign of 1932 to wear Hoover badges.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> For a summary of his travels, see *Detroit Free Press*, 25 Dec. 1937, pp. 1 and 3.

<sup>70</sup> On 4 May 1938 Louis Ferdinand married Grand Duchess Kyra of Russia in Doorn. He was given a world trip as a wedding present from his grandfather. Also at the wedding was Hitler’s earliest admirer among the former ruling houses, Duke Carl Eduard of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. For the guest list, see J. A. Wonschik-Steege and W. Stribny, *Ein Vermächtnis. Prinz Louis Ferdinand von Preussen* (Remagen, 2007), p. 264.

<sup>71</sup> Bigelow asked Mrs. Ford to be patient with the poorly organized honeymooners and told her what he had arranged socially: ‘Enclosed is my annual gathering to which no Jews need apply’ (Ford Archives, Acc. 1, Box 56, Bigelow to Mrs Ford, 26/5/1938).

<sup>72</sup> Ford Archives, Acc. 1, Box 56, Bigelow to Liebold, 26 May 1938.

<sup>73</sup> ‘But we know one thing for certain – that the whole voyage would have been half as nice, or less, if you had not helped us in such a perfect way everywhere we went ... In China, Philippine Islands, Sumatra and India we were met by the Ford organization, who helped us in every way possible’ (Ford Archives, Acc. 1, Box 56, letter of thanks from Louis Ferdinand to Ford, 25 Nov. 1938).

<sup>74</sup> ‘On May ninth, our little baby shall be christened Wilhelm Heinrich. We therefore would be delighted if you would accept to be *Godfather*’ (Ford Archives, Acc. 285, Box 2345, letter from Louis Ferdinand to Ford, 28 Apr. 1940). The American press reported on this too; see the article ‘Prince Asks Henry Ford to be Godfather to Child’, in *Detroit Free Press*, 10 May 1940, p. 1. Louis Ferdinand’s son never used his second name Heinrich. He called himself Prince Michael of Prussia.

<sup>75</sup> According to Kyra, Bigelow and F.D.R. were old friends who nonetheless were rude to each other the whole time: ‘Poultney Bigelow ... and F.D.R. said rude things to each other and were very hearty in their greetings, two good friends of old standing’ (cited in Louis Ferdinand, *The Rebel Prince*, p. 146).

After his trips to Germany Bigelow was regularly invited over by Roosevelt and questioned.<sup>76</sup> It was Bigelow who had introduced Louis Ferdinand to the Roosevelts at the end of the 1920s. F.D.R. showed an interest in the young Hohenzollern from the outset. He arranged to be photographed with Louis Ferdinand to appeal to the voters of German heritage, and whenever Louis Ferdinand came to visit wanted to hear news from Germany. This was in line with F.D.R.'s method of soliciting the opinions of well-connected private individuals from all camps. It was a method that he often used, very much to the irritation of his secretary of state, Cordell Hull.<sup>77</sup>

The Sudeten Crisis had been smouldering since May 1938.<sup>78</sup> On the basis of Bigelow's reports the president appears to have come to the view that Louis Ferdinand had good contacts in Nazi circles. According to Louis Ferdinand's memoirs, the president approached him in the summer of 1938 and asked him to: 'make a discreet and personal enquiry to Ribbentrop as to how they would view a meeting between the American president, the Führer, the Duce and the British prime minister. Ribbentrop would speak to Hitler and then we would see whether it would be sensible to proceed with the plan down the usual diplomatic route'. But the collaboration with Ribbentrop came to nothing and the entire story remains vague. On 26 September 1938 Roosevelt approached Hitler directly about the Sudeten question and received a reply the following day.<sup>79</sup>

Wilhelm II knew about Louis Ferdinand's visit to F.D.R. In March 1939 – shortly before the German invasion of Prague – Bigelow was a guest of Wilhelm II and wrote to the American president from Doorn:

His Majesty of Doorn sends you ... his warm thanks for your kind reception of his grandson Louis Ferdinand ... Germany is in good fighting trim, for while our 10 millions, of unemployed are highly paid for doing little more than smoking cigarettes, every German is converted into a useful citizen and soldier who handles pick and shovel alternately with 'School of the Soldier', at scarce any expense to the tax payer. It is now 'manifest destiny' for Germany to include Warsaw and St. Petersburg no less than Prague and Vienna, as interesting provincial capitals. In ten years Europe will be grateful for that act, much as the world accepted our absorption of California and Texas in 1848 – or Alaska in 1867.<sup>80</sup>

As will be shown, Bigelow's enthusiasm for the plans of expansion by Hitler was definitely shared by the Hohenzollerns.

<sup>76</sup> See several notes from Roosevelt to Bigelow after his visits to Germany: 'I am glad you had such a successful trip and I want much to hear about it in more detail' (18 March 1934). And a few months later: 'Do come to Hyde Park and bring Louis Ferdinand' (21 March 1934). Bigelow recurrently expressed his opinions to the president. After the 1938 'Anschluss' of Austria he wrote to Roosevelt: 'At the dock in New York some 20 reporters asked me to tell them what the Kaiser thought of Hitler. My answer was obvious. If I answered such a question I would soon have no friend. I offered them Lindbergh's opinion of reporters – but they did not regard that as news' (F.D.R. Libr., PSF Poultney Bigelow, Bigelow to Roosevelt, 29 Apr. 38).

<sup>77</sup> See S. Turner, *Burn Before Reading* (New York, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> As so often, Roosevelt's behaviour at this time is contradictory. It is not for nothing that his biographer Warren Kimball called him 'the juggler': 'When Neville Chamberlain opted for appeasement, Roosevelt went along, also he commented privately that "if a police chief makes a deal with gangsters that prevents a crime, he will be called a great man." But if the gangsters break their word, "the chief of police will go to jail"' (W. F. Kimball, *The Juggler. Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), p. 12. See also B. Rearden Farnham, *Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis* (Princeton, N.J., 1997)).

<sup>79</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 322. F.D.R. to Hitler, 26 Sept. 1938, in *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Germany and Czechoslovakia, Series D, 1937, II* (Washington, D.C., 1950), p. 958.

<sup>80</sup> F.D.R. Libr., PSF Poultney Bigelow, House Doorn, 11 March 1939, Poultney Bigelow to Roosevelt. In another letter to the president in 1940 he said: 'Germany is invulnerable and irresistible. She is relatively as capable of a long struggle as she was under Frederic the Great' (F.D.R. Libr., PSF Bigelow, Bigelow to F.D.R., 17 March 1940).

Whereas the role of Louis Ferdinand prior to the outbreak of war has hitherto been neglected, historians have paid more attention to his father, the crown prince Wilhelm. Wilhelm is the key figure in the current restitution debate. In 2014–15 Christopher Clark and Wolfram Pyta wrote confidential expert reports for the Hohenzollern family, while Stephan Malinowski and Peter Brandt wrote two opposing reports for the state of Brandenburg.<sup>81</sup> All four reports had been kept secret until the German comedian Jan Böhmermann, uploaded them on the website <http://www.hohenzollern.lol/> in November 2019. The reports revealed that Stephan Malinowski and Peter Brandt were convinced of the crown prince's guilt. Christopher Clark also described Wilhelm as a reactionary, yet came to the conclusion that he was an unimportant player in the 1930s and simply 'a twit'. (In 2019 Clark made a point of publicly distancing himself from the Hohenzollern's legal crusade against fellow historians.)<sup>82</sup> Only one expert paid by the Hohenzollerns completely differed from all the other reports – Wolfram Pyta. He disagreed with Christopher Clark that the crown prince had been of no importance and, on the contrary, portrayed him as a key player *against* Hitler. Pyta argued that in 1932–3 the crown prince, in conjunction with Kurt von Schleicher and Gregor Strasser, was intent on preventing Hitler's appointment as chancellor. Pyta's thesis is based, among other things, on the fact that Schleicher and the crown prince were old friends and that the crown prince passed information to Schleicher about Papen's secret negotiations with Hitler.<sup>83</sup>

Interestingly Louis Ferdinand never mentioned that his father was planning a front 'against Hitler', which would have helped to exonerate the crown prince after the war. In his autobiography Louis Ferdinand describes how he himself visited Reich President Hindenburg shortly before Hitler was appointed chancellor: '[Hindenburg] must have known that there was no need for this disastrous decision ... As in 1918, a smart and determined individual could have definitely averted the catastrophe'.<sup>84</sup> Here Louis Ferdinand makes no mention that his father, the crown prince, was one such 'determined individual'.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> For coverage of these reports in 2014 and 2015, see K. Wiegrefe, 'Prinz mit Schuss. Verhelf Kronprinz Wilhelm 1933 Hitler an die Macht?' [The bonkers prince. Did Crown Prince Wilhelm help Hitler to power in 1933?], *Der Spiegel*, xxxvii (2014). See also S. Malinowski, 'Der braune Kronprinz' [The brown crown prince], *Die Zeit*, 30 Aug. 2015. An uncritical view of the historic achievements of the Hohenzollern after 1918 can be found in an interview with the current head of the family: P. Bahners and J. Brachmann, 'Georg Friedrich Prinz von Preussen: "Wir wollen nicht mehr scheinen, als wir sind"' [Georg Friedrich Prince of Prussia, 'We don't want to appear to be more than we are'], *FAZ*, 9 Nov. 2018, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> "'The man was a twit'" Historian Christopher Clark on the Hohenzollern Dispute', *Der Spiegel*, 26 Oct. 2019 <<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/historian-christopher-clark-on-the-hohenzollern-dispute-in-germany-a-1293369.html>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

<sup>83</sup> On Wolfram Pyta, see also 'Drei Männer gegen Hitler', lecture given on 5 March 2018 at the Katholische Akademie Bayern, audio: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOnoPFomPtA>> [accessed 5 May 2020]. On Hitler's political manoeuvres in 1932–3, see B. Simms, *Hitler: Only the World Was Enough* (London, 2019), pp. 168–84. Criticism of Pyta's Schleicher argument first appeared in the ZEIT: see P. Brandt and S. Malinowski, 'Ein Prinz im Widerstand?' [A prince in the resistance?], *Die Zeit*, 14 Nov. 2019 and in *Der Spiegel* online: <<https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/hohenzollern-streit-historikerin-karina-urbach-ueber-kronprinz-nazis-geld-a-1298129.html>> [accessed 5 May 2020].

<sup>84</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 241.

<sup>85</sup> Unlike his brother Auwi, the crown prince had not been a fervent National Socialist from the outset, but he rapidly switched into the role of kingmaker for Hitler. In Jan. 1933 Wilhelm II, the crown prince and Auwi for once agreed on something: they all welcomed Hitler's appointment as Reich chancellor. For more detail, see Machtan, *Kaisersohn*, p. 279.

Pyta's thesis was sharply criticized by leading historians of the period. Eckart Conze, Richard J. Evans, Norbert Frei, Ulrich Herbert, Jörn Leonhard, Martin Sabrow and Heinrich-August Winkler reacted with articles in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Zeit* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.<sup>86</sup> Pyta's thesis was also dismissed in the German parliament (the Bundestag). Thanks to the initiative of the M.P. Erhard Grundl (Alliance 90/The Green Party) a hearing took place in the Bundestag on 29 January 2020 in which historians, lawyers and politicians from all parties gave statements and answered questions about the Hohenzollern case. The hearing was covered by all German media outlets and broadcast on German television. Wolfram Pyta did not attend the hearing and therefore the Luther specialist Benjamin Hasselhorn was the only historian present to argue for the crown prince.

During the hearing historian Stefanie Middendorf presented a letter that contradicted Pyta's argument completely: in March 1933 the crown prince had written to his friend Ferdinand von Bredow that he had been against Schleicher's plans to prevent Hitler from gaining power:

We all regret that Schleicher has allowed himself to be manoeuvred into this pathetic position and it is a truism when I say that I had urgently warned him from accepting the chancellorship, because it was for me personally clear that after the Papen government resigned, there was only one solution: to give Adolf Hitler the chancellorship. If Schleicher had only listened to me at the time, he would be defence minister today ... Now we have to support the unity of this government in every way and to smash everyone's face who tries to bring disquiet and distrust against it. In the last days I have already smashed a few faces with the necessary ruthlessness.<sup>87</sup>

Another – better known – letter that also contradicts Pyta's argument was written by the crown prince a year later, in 1934. In it he explained to his friend Lord Rothermere,<sup>88</sup> how he had actively helped Hitler from the beginning – in part because men like Schleicher were not sufficiently dynamic:

<sup>86</sup> E.g., E. Conze, *Weimar lässt grüßen*, 15. Jan. 2020 in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and U. Herbert in *Vier Gutachter, ein Kronprinz und die nationale Diktatur*, 30 Nov. 2019, in *FAZ*. Other historians who contradicted Pyta's portrayal were Volker Berghahn, John Röhl, Gisela Bock, Peter Fritzsche, Robert Gerwarth, Christian Goeschel, Günther Hockerts, Larry E. Jones, Ian Kershaw, Birthe Kundrus, David Motadel, Herfried Mückler, Kiran Patel, Sven Reichardt, Heinz Reif, Daniel Schönpflug, Daniel Siemens, Hartwin Spenkuch, Sibylle Steinbacher, Dietmar Süß and Michael Wildt. See, for this, the statement of Stephan Malinowski given in the Bundestag, 29 Jan. 2020. See for the full television coverage of the debate: <<https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2020/kwo5-pa-kultur-hohenzollern-677910>> [accessed 5 May 2020]. Heribert Prantl made the Bundestags-debate the focal point of his *Süddeutsche Zeitung* column 'Prantls Blick – die politische Wochenvorschau' [Prantl's point of view], 2 Jan. 2020.

<sup>87</sup> This letter had been first published in 2009 and was ignored by Wolfram Pyta. See *Ferdinand von Bredow. Notizen vom 20.2.1933 bis 31.12.1933*, ed. I. Strenge (Berlin, 2009). In Nov. 1933 Bredow wrote in his diary that the crown prince had a skeleton in his cupboard ('Leiche im Keller') regarding his arrangement with Hitler and his betrayal of Schleicher. Together with Schleicher, Bredow was killed in the Night of the Long Knives in 1934. The German original of the letter reads:

Wir alle bedauern es, dass Schleicher sich überhaupt in diese unglückselige Situation hat hineinmanövrieren lassen und es ist keine Binsenweisheit, wenn ich sage, dass ich ihn dringend vor der Annahme der Kanzlerschaft gewarnt habe, weil es für mich persönlich klar war, dass nachdem die Regierung Papen zurückgetreten war, es nur noch eine Lösung gab: nämlich die Beauftragung Adolf Hitlers mit dem Reichskanzler-Posten. Hätte Schleicher damals auf mich gehört, er wäre heute noch Reichswehrminister. Es hat aber nie Zweck über gemachte Fehler nachzudenken, nur insofern, als wir daraus lernen sollen für die Zukunft. Jetzt heisst es, die Geschlossenheit dieser Regierung in jeder Beziehung zu unterstützen und Jedem in die Presse zu hauen, der versucht, in diese Geschlossenheit Unruhe und Misstrauen hineinzutragen. Dieses "in die Presse hauen" habe ich bereits verschiedentlich mit der notwendigen Rücksichtslosigkeit in den letzten Tagen besorgt. Indem ich Dir alles Gute wünsche und hoffe, dass Du auch weiter Deine Kräfte für die grosse nationale Sache einsetzen wirst, verbleibe ich in alter Freundschaft Dein Wilhelm.

<sup>88</sup> At this time Rothermere supported Oswald Moseley and his British Union of Fascists.

Hitler found his followers not only amongst labourers; every decent German, who had hated and despised the black-red-gold Republic from the innermost of his soul, saw in him the saviour of our people. The more so as even men like General von Seeckt, Stresemann, Bruening and General von Schleicher, all of whom I cannot deny the recognition of their great abilities and best intentions, had never shown the will and the energy required for really thoroughgoing action. Thus, I also joined Adolf Hitler, already at a time when wide circles of the Stahlhelm and particularly of the German Nationalists refused to recognize him. May I remind you of our last conversation at Cecilienhof and of the things I had to say then in favour of Hitler? May I summarise it once more: I had tried, repeatedly to induce already Chancellor Bruening to retire voluntarily, and to recommend Hitler as his successor to the Field Marshal. I continued these attempts under the Chancellorship of General von Schleicher. At the presidential elections, I stated publicly that I would vote for Adolf Hitler and against the Field Marshal. I believe to have thus secured for Adolf Hitler about two million votes from my Stahlhelm comrades and from the German Nationalists. I also intervened personally to obtain the cancellation of the interdict against the National Socialist formations. At last the old Field Marshal, after the negotiations of Franz von Papen, entrusted Adolf Hitler with the leadership of the Reich, as its Chancellor. All I can say is that on that day indescribable jubilation went through the whole German nation. Then came the day of Potsdam, the 21st March 1933, when Adolf Hitler delivered a speech at the old Garnisonkirche at Potsdam ... a speech deeper and more moving than any I had ever heard from a German statesman. Only one who has been present on that occasion can realise the sublime mood of the Germans in these hours. Large parts of the nation accepted already then, that Adolf Hitler would express on that day the reunion with the monarchy in some form.<sup>89</sup>

He continued by saying how 'satisfactory' the government's first measures had been: doing away with the 'red bosses'; destroying the S.P.D. (German Socialist Party), the communists and the Centre Party; rearmament; withdrawing from the League of Nations; and boosting the economy (including the automobile industry, which was particularly close to both his and Louis Ferdinand's heart).<sup>90</sup> Despite this the crown prince revealed his disappointment that Hitler had not kept his word and that hopes of a restoration had not yet been fulfilled. For this reason, he asked Rothermere to intervene, for it would strengthen Hitler's position in German society 'if he could bring about a reunion with the monarchy in some form or other'. Otherwise, so the crown prince thought, there was the danger that the regime would keep 'sliding' to the left. As an example of this he pointed to the Hitler Youth: 'The young generation is more and more brought up in the radical spirit of the left'. The crown prince believed that the negative influence of Goebbels on Hitler was responsible for this.

In truth, this was a case of unrequited love. Not long before, Goebbels and the crown prince had been co-operating closely. Thanks to Goebbels's diary entries it is easy to reconstruct the beginning and end of their relationship. Referring to a 'friendly

<sup>89</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm to Lord Rothermere, 20 June 1934. The original is among the papers of a friend of the crown prince, Prinzessin Stephanie zu Hohenlohe-Waldenburg-Schillingsfürst, in the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, Collection Number 77020.

<sup>90</sup> 'The first actions of the new government were highly satisfying; they showed the determination to penetrate all spheres without any inhibition. They launched their program of work, magnificently and brilliantly. The corruption of the red bosses was thoroughly exterminated. Social Democrats, Communists and the Zentrum were liquidated. The rearmament of the nation was recognized as a necessity. The withdrawal from the League of Nations and from the Disarmament conference announced to the world at large the determination of the new German government, behind which for the first time the whole nation was concentrated, not to tolerate any longer to be treated as a second class people. At the same time, everything was done to re-start the German economy. The motor car industry experienced an unparalleled expansion' (see n. 89 above).





Figure 2. Homestory: the Crown Prince and his sons posing in S.A. uniforms at Castle Cecilienhof in 1934. Source: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (GStA PK, BPH, BS, Nr. 287).





5. **MORGENTRÆNING** Kronprinsen har altid været en glimrende Sportsmand, og han sørger for at holde sig i god Form ved daglig at træne med en *Punching-Ball*. Prins Hubertus, Prins Friedrich og Prinsesse Cécilie overvaager Træningen, og de ser ud til at være tilfredse med dens Resultater.

6. **DE UNGE MÆNNESKER** Prins Hubertus og Prins Friedrich tager sig beskyttende af Prinsesse Cécilie, hvis Blik udtrykker Glæde og Beundring over de to store Døgnere.

7. **VED SKRIVEBORDET** Kronprinsen arbejder, omgivet af Blomster og Fotografier af sine Nærmeste. Læg Mærke til Bogen: *Aufbau einer Nation* af Göring! Herren i Cécilien-Hof følger godt med.

8. **FADER OG SØNNER** Alle tre i drabeligt S.A.-Udstyr. Den brune Skjorte klæder Kronprinsens slanke Krop, men mon han alligevel ikke selv vilde foretrække *Totenkopf*-Husarerens sorte og hvide Gala? Den plejede han at bære, da han endnu var sikker paa den tyske Kejsertrone.

Figure 3. Homestory: on the Crown Prince's desk can be seen Göring's book *Aufbau einer Nation*. Berlingske illustreret Tidende, 22 April 1934. Source: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (GStA PK, BPH, BS, Nr. 287).

letter' from the crown prince in February 1933, the minister for propaganda noted: 'A sycophant. Nauseating'.<sup>91</sup> One month later Goebbels met the crown prince at a soirée held by Viktoria von Dirksen and started to show an interest in him.<sup>92</sup> The minister for propaganda remarked about the evening: 'Then at the Dirksens. I sit beside the crown princess [Cecilie]. She is lovely. Have a long conversation with the crown prince. A smart man and a rogue. A level up from Auwi at any rate, though the latter has a stronger character'.<sup>93</sup>

Auwi had been undertaking propaganda work for the N.S.D.A.P. at home and abroad for a long time. Another child of Wilhelm II, Viktoria Luise, was used by Ribbentrop for operations abroad.<sup>94</sup> Although in her selective memoirs Viktoria Luise speaks only of 'our English efforts',<sup>95</sup> in fact she and her husband had been in discussions with Lord Londonderry, the aviation minister, since the beginning of the 1930s in an attempt to win him over to National Socialism. Viktoria Luise believed that it was her husband who had given Ribbentrop the key advice for the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935.<sup>96</sup> Ribbentrop also used the couple at dinners to promote his Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft and the Anglo-German Fellowship in London. At the Nuremberg rallies and at the Olympic Games in 1936, Viktoria Luise enthusiastically took care of the British guests.<sup>97</sup>

Auwi's and Viktoria Luise's early propaganda work must have given Goebbels the idea of using the crown prince for such purposes too. The opportunity came about in 1933. In his diary, he noted: 'Atrocity propaganda: crown prince great help to me with an open letter to Viereck in New York'.<sup>98</sup> The German-American Georg Viereck was an admirer of Wilhelm II and Hitler. He served Goebbels as a 'fixer', that is, he sorted out press contacts for him in the U.S.A. In 1933 Viereck managed to place two decisive articles by the crown prince. The first one was distributed by the Associated Press on 28 March 1933 and was picked up by several leading American newspapers, including the *New York Times*. The *Chicago Tribune* chose the headline: 'Crown Prince denies Germany is abusing Jews'; the *Baltimore Sun* put the story on page 1: 'Former Crown Prince calls stories "Propaganda of Lies"'.<sup>99</sup>

The second, much longer article by the crown prince appeared in August in the *New York Herald Tribune*. Under the headline 'Why is the World Against us?' readers were

<sup>91</sup> *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil I, Band 2/III, Oktober 1932–März 1934*, ed. E. Fröhlich (Munich, 2006), p. 126.

<sup>92</sup> Frau von Dirksen had been working for Hitler since the 1920s and regularly brought the Hohenzollern and the Nazi elite together. Her stepson Herbert von Dirksen became ambassador to London in 1938. Louis Ferdinand met Goebbels several times at Frau von Dirksen's (see Wonschik-Steege and Stribny, *Ein Vermächtnis*, p. 176).

<sup>93</sup> Goebbels's diary entry, 16 March 1933, Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher*, p. 148.

<sup>94</sup> She was married to the duke of Brunswick, an enthusiastic supporter of Hitler. For her selective memoirs, see Luise, *Im Strom der Zeit*. Between 1965–77 Viktoria Luise wrote – or had written for her – a total of seven volumes of memoirs.

<sup>95</sup> Urbach, *Go-Betweens for Hitler*, p. 168.

<sup>96</sup> K. Urbach, *Hitlers heimliche Helfer* (Darmstadt, 2016), p. 209.

<sup>97</sup> The man who, besides Ribbentrop, recruited aristocrats as Hitler's helpers was Hermann Göring. Through his Swedish marriage he had the best contacts in aristocratic circles and he won over, among others, the princes of Hesse (who provided connections to Italy and Great Britain), Prince Viktor zu Wied and the duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, who was called 'the grand-ducal Nazi agent' (Urbach, *Hitlers heimliche Helfer*, p. 210). On the princes of Hesse, see J. Petropoulos, *Royals and the Reich: the Princes von Hessen in Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher*, p. 155.

<sup>99</sup> 'Crown Prince denies Germany is abusing Jews', *Chicago Tribune*, 28 March 33; 'Ex-Crown Prince denies Atrocities', *New York Times*, 28 March 1933; 'Former Crown Prince calls stories "Propaganda of Lies"', *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 March 1933.

informed in capital letters: 'Here is the First Expression from Germany's Former Royal Family on Hitler and the Nazi Government: While Foreign Public Opinion Today is Largely Hostile, in Time the Whole Cultured World Will Thank Hitler for Saving Civilization from Bolshevism says former Crown Prince Wilhelm'.

This subhead was no exaggeration. In his article, the crown prince argued that there was a campaign of calumny in order to prevent the German nation, now conscious of its race, from regaining the place which belongs to it by rights. As a result of the insidious propaganda of these international forces, among which Marxism and Jewry must be named as leading factors, foreign countries are getting a picture of present conditions in Germany which in no way corresponds to the facts ... The forces which by systematic agitation during the World War gradually sapped the national power of resistance, which were responsible for the loss of the war and the disgrace of the peace terms dictated at Versailles, which afterward for fourteen years of misdirected economy and corruption, profiteering and 'bonzenism', sucked the very life-blood of our nation and tried to exterminate all notions of loyalty, of honour, of the fear of God and of freedom – now these forces suddenly have been divested of their power and defeated ... It may be that regrettable mistakes or acts of violence have occurred in individual cases, but that is unavoidable in the course of such an incisive and profound movement as we are experiencing at the present time in Germany. But it would be a supreme fallacy to draw general conclusions from such isolated incidents ... The two men who will take the responsibility in history for this development – the President of the Reich, von Hindenburg, and the Chancellor of the Reich, Adolf Hitler – have accomplished a deed for which the German people owe them a debt of everlasting gratitude ... I am convinced that the time is not far distant when Europe and the whole cultured world will be thankful to Adolf Hitler for saving not only Germany but the whole fabric of civilization from Bolshevism.<sup>100</sup>

For a representative of the old elite to throw his weight behind Hitler so publicly was priceless for Nazi propaganda. Goebbels could not have wished for a better 'journalist' than the crown prince. In Great Britain too the crown prince performed 'valuable' work informing people about National Socialism. His prominently placed articles were published in Lord Rothermere's papers, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Dispatch*. In July 1933 the *Sunday Dispatch* had acquired exclusive rights to the crown prince's memoirs and gave the book great publicity. Below the image of a swastika the crown prince explained to British readers why he was on the National Socialists' side. Hitler, he claimed, had managed to salvage the German soul. Unfortunately, the British public still had a total misconception of the Führer, which was down to leftist influences. The crown prince was confident, however, that this would soon change. After all, Mussolini had been misunderstood in the beginning too.<sup>101</sup>

Because of his indefatigable commitment to the Nazi cause the crown prince seemed unaware that his hopes of a restoration along Italian lines were not getting anywhere.<sup>102</sup> In August 1933 an irritated Goebbels noted: 'Discussion with the crown prince about the monarchy. They all believe in a restoration. I made myself clear'.<sup>103</sup> But it seems as if Goebbels did not make himself clear enough. The crown prince continued to hope. In 1934, one month after the Night of the Long Knives, he once again undertook

<sup>100</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, 27 Aug. 1933.

<sup>101</sup> *Sunday Dispatch*, 30 July 1933. In summer 1933 the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* printed a digest of pro-Hitler reporting in British newspapers: 'Hitler and Nazi Regime acclaimed in British Press, Goebbels' Attack reprinted', *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 1 Aug. 1933.

<sup>102</sup> As far as Goebbels was concerned, the crown prince remained a 'useful idiot': 'The Crown Prince ... complains about his tragedy. The mistakes he and the Kaiser made. Too late! It won't ever come back' (Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher*, p. 159, 31 March 1933). In Aug. 1933 Goebbels noted: 'Crown Prince entertains us. All of them are sucking up to us'.

<sup>103</sup> Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher*, p. 241, 5 Aug. 1933.



enthusiastic propaganda work for the National Socialists abroad. Under the headline ‘Magnetic Hitler. Ex-Crown Prince’s Tribute’, the *Daily Mail* published an interview that the crown prince had given to the French *Petit Journal*. In it, Wilhelm underlined once again that foreigners did not understand how much the German nation owed to the Führer. Germany needed Hitler’s incomparable energy.<sup>104</sup>

The daughter of the American ambassador in Berlin, Martha Dodd, confirmed that the crown prince and his wife still hoped for some sort of arrangement. Dodd was a close friend of Louis Ferdinand. Although in many respects an unreliable witness,<sup>105</sup> her descriptions of the couple and their expectations correspond with Goebbels’s comments. Dodd suspected too that Louis Ferdinand had returned to Germany to support the family’s ambitions: ‘He loved [America] passionately, but was called home by his grandfather, the Kaiser, I believe in the hope that Hitler would keep his promise and restore one member of the family’.<sup>106</sup>

Again, it was the American press which reported in 1934 that a restoration was looming. The *North American Review* wrote:

Hitler’s repeated, though obscure, intimations that a change in the form of government is contemplated for some future date, his friendly relations with the Hohenzollerns, the strengthening of the Reichswehr with monarchist elements, and the reduction in the number of anti-monarchist elements Storm Troops – we are inevitably led to the conclusion that Hitler either is definitely planning a Hohenzollern restoration or is being impelled by force of circumstances to embark upon a course that can have no other outcome.<sup>107</sup>

As the crown prince was unpopular, it already seemed clear to the writer who would play the main role in this restoration – Louis Ferdinand: ‘It would be a limited monarchy serving purely symbolic function, supreme executive power being retained in the hand of the Chancellor. Hitler would undoubtedly contemplate a relationship between Emperor and Chancellor such as now obtains between King Victor Emmanuel and Mussolini’.<sup>108</sup>

Louis Ferdinand’s mother, Crown Princess Cecilie, also seems to have favoured such a restoration at any price. Jürgen Luh and Alexandra Nina Bauer have shown that although Cecilie described herself in her memoirs as politically inactive, this was disguising the true facts of the matter.<sup>109</sup> Just like her husband she was hoping to accede to the throne

<sup>104</sup> *Daily Mail*, 16 Aug. 1934.

<sup>105</sup> From 1933 to 1937 Martha Dodd lived with her parents in the American embassy in Berlin. After initial admiration for the National Socialists she changed her opinion of them following the ‘Night of the Long Knives’ and was recruited by Soviet Intelligence (NKVD). As we know today, she did not just have a close relationship with Ernst Hanfstaengel and Louis Ferdinand at this time, but with her NKVD contact too. Understandably there is no mention of any of this in her memoirs, published in 1939. Dodd does describe, however, how in 1933 the Associated Press correspondent and close friend of Louis Ferdinand, L. Lochner, kept predicting the imminent restoration of the Hohenzollern. After 1945, too, Lochner tried to paint a positive image of the Hohenzollern (M. Dodd, *Through Embassy Eyes* (New York, 1939), pp. 111f). Martha Dodd’s intricate love life, involving Gestapo chief Rudolf Diels, Louis Ferdinand and her Soviet ‘handler’ is also discussed in D. Mayers, ‘Neither war nor peace: F.D.R.’s ambassadors in embassy Berlin and policy toward Germany 1933–1941’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, xx (2009), 50–68, at p. 52.

<sup>106</sup> Dodd, *Through Embassy Eyes*, p. 68.

<sup>107</sup> G. E. W. Johnson, ‘Hitler or Hohenzollern? There are indications that Hitler is approaching a choice of monarchs’, in *North American Review* (Boston, Mass., 1934), p. 522.

<sup>108</sup> Johnson, *Hitler*, p. 523.

<sup>109</sup> Cecilie wrote her memoirs in 1930. She spends only four pages discussing the 1918 revolution and its consequences. She does mention, however, that her mother-in-law Empress Augusta asked her to accompany the imperial couple into exile. Cecilie decided pointedly against it: ‘But I refused to leave Germany, Potsdam, for I was not prepared to abandon the Fatherland at its most difficult time. I wanted our children to be raised as Germans, grow up in their German homeland and not become estranged from their people, even under changed circumstances’ (Crown Princess Cecilie, *Erinnerungen* (Leipzig, 1930), p. 217).



and for this reason she had been entertaining on a lavish scale in Berlin since the end of the 1920s.<sup>110</sup> She was also involved with patriotic women's associations, and became patron of the Königin Luisebund (Queen Luise League),<sup>111</sup> which was established in 1923 and soon boasted 200,000 members. The League excluded 'Jews and other foreign races' from membership so as to preserve 'the purity of the race'. When the League was dissolved in 1934 to become part of the Deutsches Frauenwerk (German Women's Association), its leaders were only too happy to undertake 'this sacrifice ... for the Fatherland ... its unity, its greatness and its Führer'.<sup>112</sup>

In 1932 Cecilie had also advised her husband to ignore his father's proscription and put himself forward as the National Front candidate for the presidency. Kaiser Wilhelm had told the crown prince: 'If you take this post you'll have to swear an oath of loyalty to the republic. If you do that and stick by it, then you're finished as far as I'm concerned, I'll disinherit you and kick you out of my house'. Although the crown prince ultimately heeded his father's words, he let it be known publicly that he would vote for Hitler in the second ballot.<sup>113</sup>

It would have been perfectly understandable if the failure to achieve a restoration had sent the crown prince into 'inner exile' at least. But although he had to acknowledge over the next few years that he was no longer needed, he remained loyal to the regime. He and his father Wilhelm II stood behind Hitler's wars of conquest and welcomed the invasion of Poland. The crown prince also asked Hitler 'for an active role in the Wehrmacht for himself and his sons'.<sup>114</sup> This wish was only to be granted to the sons; the crown prince was too old and had to stay at home.<sup>115</sup> It barely dampened his enthusiasm. In May 1940, he wrote to Adolf von Trotha: 'I've followed the heroic deeds of our navy with keen interest over the past few months of the war. May God continue to bless our armed forces'.<sup>116</sup>

A month later he sent Hitler a now famous telegram:

'My Führer!

Thanks to your brilliant leadership and the incomparable courage of our troops ... we have managed, in the unimaginably short period of 5 weeks, to force the surrender of Belgium and Holland, driving the remnants of the English Expeditionary Force into the sea ... Today the guns in the West are silent and the way is free for a definitive reckoning with perfidious Albion. At this hour of great historical importance, as an old soldier and a German I should like to shake your hand, full of admiration. May God protect you and our German Fatherland!<sup>117</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Louis Ferdinand described how successful his mother's social endeavours were: 'Finally, at the beginning of the 1930s or shortly before, the ambassadors of Britain, France, Belgium and the US became regular house guests of ours' (Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 264).

<sup>111</sup> Its full name was Königin Luise, Bund deutscher Frauen und Mädchen (Queen Luise, League of German women and girls). Birte Förster has shown how enthusiastically Crown Princess Cecilie welcomed Hitler (see B. Förster, *Der Königin Luise-Mythos. Mediengeschichte des 'Idealbilds deutscher Weiblichkeit' 1860–196* (Göttingen, 2011), pp. 343ff).

<sup>112</sup> Cited in Luh and Bauer, *Cecilie*, p. 54.

<sup>113</sup> Kirschstein, *Kronprinzessin Cecilie*, p. 16; W. Stribny, 'Der Versuch einer Kandidatur des Kronprinzen Wilhelm bei der Reichspräsidentenwahl 1932', in *Geschichte und Gegenwart. Festschrift für Kurt Kluxen*, ed. E. Heinen and H. J. Schoeps (Paderborn, 1972), pp. 199–210.

<sup>114</sup> See, e.g., Luh and Bauer, *Cecilie*, p. 56.

<sup>115</sup> Luh and Bauer, *Cecilie*, p. 57.

<sup>116</sup> Bückeburg, Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Dep. 18 A. Nr. 262, Wilhelm of Prussia to Adolf von Trotha, 7 May 1940.

<sup>117</sup> Berlin Lichterfelde, Bundesarchiv, NS 10 18, telegram from Crown Prince Wilhelm to the Führer and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht, Führerhauptquartier, 26 July 1940.

In this telegram, the crown prince fails to mention the situation of his father who, after all, was living in defeated Holland. In fact, he did not have to worry about him; the Kaiser endorsed the occupation of the Netherlands. Although the British king had offered asylum to his relative, Wilhelm II stayed in Doorn. Long after the war Louis Ferdinand advanced a reason for this decision: '[The Kaiser] didn't want to leave a second time'.<sup>118</sup> It was not, however, a question of whether Wilhelm would venture a 'second flight' at his advanced age. In reality, he stayed in occupied Holland out of political conviction and he was angry at the British offer of asylum. Via a courtier he sent a statement to his old friend Bigelow:

In the event that Holland entered the war, His Majesty had drawn up the following guidelines: 1. That he wouldn't do anything which, even maliciously, could be misrepresented as running away, and 2. He wouldn't accept the hospitality of one of Germany's enemies. The rapid onset of the war meant it was no longer possible for the Kaiser to move to Germany.<sup>119</sup>

As far as the Kaiser was concerned, Hitler's war was his war too. In 1940, he wrote to Bigelow that Hitler's successes were based on his spadework: 'The rest of the war was a brilliant succession of miracles! The old Prussian spirit of Fredericus Rex surfaced again. The brilliant leading generals in this war came from my school, they fought under my command in the World War as lieutenants, captains and young majors'.<sup>120</sup> The Kaiser did not live to see the invasion of the Soviet Union. This war against Bolshevism would have fulfilled all his hopes.

Bigelow and Henry Ford also kept faith with the old ideals. In 1940 Ford had become a member of the America First Committee, which lobbied against the U.S.A. entering the war.<sup>121</sup> One man greatly disappointed Bigelow, however – his neighbour Roosevelt. In October 1940, long before Pearl Harbour, he broke with the president. In an open letter to the *Herald Tribune* Bigelow wrote:

Hitherto I have supported my honoured neighbour and friend, Franklin D. Roosevelt, for many reasons – not the least of which is his incomparable mother. But that support, unimportant as it may seem, I now am forced to withdraw, because he deceived me by pretending neutrality whilst acting as though he desired war against Japan, Germany and Italy.<sup>122</sup>

We know that Louis Ferdinand, through his aforementioned friendship with Otto John, had contacts during the war with monarchist groups working for the restoration of the Hohenzollerns. Louis Ferdinand also knew men involved in the 20th July plot, although he was not party to the assassination plans himself. When in 1943 he asked his father whether he should go down this path, the crown prince said, 'he had kept his distance from all such movements, wouldn't have anything to do with them in the future, and he advised me [Louis Ferdinand] not to get myself mixed up in

<sup>118</sup> Television interview 'Zeugen des Jahrhunderts: Louis Ferdinand von Preußen im Gespräch mit Friedrich Müller', 18 Nov. 1987.

<sup>119</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 34A, statement to Bigelow, Doorn 1940, with a comment in the margin by Wilhelm II.

<sup>120</sup> Bigelow Papers, Box 35A, Wilhelm II to Bigelow, 14 Sept. 1940. His opinions had not changed by 1941, Hermine assured their loyal correspondent Bigelow: '[The Kaiser] has great confidence in Germany's future. The courage of our army, the discipline in the country and the organisation everywhere justify this confidence' (Bigelow Papers, Box 35A, Hermine to Bigelow, 14 Jan. 1941).

<sup>121</sup> The committee was established in Sept. 1940 at Yale University, Bigelow's alma mater. Charles Lindbergh, an admirer of Nazi Germany, was the movement's spokesman.

<sup>122</sup> Copy in F.D.R. Libr., PSF Poultney Bigelow.

such things'.<sup>123</sup> Louis Ferdinand obeyed. This was a major setback for the monarchist resistance.<sup>124</sup>

After his father's death in 1951 Louis Ferdinand resumed his plans for a restoration. In 1952, he was interested in becoming president of West Germany; a constitutional report to this effect had already been drawn up.<sup>125</sup> He got help from his old friend, the American journalist Louis Lochner. In the end, however, all their efforts failed.

The principal motive behind the activities of the Hohenzollern family was to bring about a restoration. In conclusion, therefore, it must be stated that in the 1930s many Hohenzollerns helped the National Socialists into power. Opportunism was not the only reason for their keen involvement, however. They also shared a number of ideological similarities with National Socialism – anti-parliamentarism, anti-Semitism, anti-communism and, later, real enthusiasm for Hitler's wars of conquest.

This lack of resistance towards National Socialism is particularly striking when compared to the behaviour of the Wittelsbachs and Habsburgs. Otto von Habsburg was also a man who hoped for a restoration, but he did not enter into a pact with Hitler, working instead in exile against Nazi Germany. For the National Socialists, the Hohenzollern's enthusiasm was a welcome gift. They saw the family as 'useful idiots' who could be exploited during Hitler's transition to power and then happily dropped. As Schiller wrote: 'The Moor has done his work, the Moor can go'.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Louis Ferdinand, *Im Strom der Geschichte*, p. 376.

<sup>124</sup> Gerhard Ritter, a member of the conservative resistance, wrote in resignation: 'A Hohenzollern prince with the tremendous courage to put himself at the head of the German resistance movement ... would have at the very least changed the historical situation of the monarchy in Germany at a stroke' (G. Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung* (Stuttgart, 1955), p. 293).

<sup>125</sup> P. Bahners, 'Louis Ferdinand hielt sich in Reserve' [Louis Ferdinand kept himself in reserve], *FAZ*, 5 May 2010.

<sup>126</sup> This quote from Friedrich Schiller's 1783 play *Verschwörung des Fiesco zu Genua* is often misquoted as 'The Moor has done his duty'. In fact, the character Muley Hassan says about himself: 'The Moor has done his work'.