The air in Montreal, Canada, was brisk on 16 February 1955 as Otto Strasser, smiling broadly beneath a black felt beret, boarded Trans-Canada Airlines flight 500 for London. The stocky, bald, fifty-eight-year-old ex-Nazi headed home to Bavaria following fourteen years of turbulent Canadian exile. Ottawa had initially sheltered Strasser as an anti-Hitler resister who might prove useful to the wartime Allied cause. But Strasser found himself censored and silenced when the Allies determined that personal, not political, differences had spawned his rift with Hitler and that his strident anticommunism embarrassed the U.S.-British-Soviet coalition. The Cold War’s onset made Strasser’s anti-Soviet views less problematic. Nonetheless fearful that Strasser could rally unreconstructed nationalists and challenge Germany’s emerging democratic order, the United States, Great Britain, and ultimately the Federal Republic of Germany employed numerous diplomatic and bureaucratic tactics to detain Strasser in Canada. Not until spring 1955, on the eve of West Germany’s entry into NATO, was Strasser finally renaturalized and permitted to go home.

The Strasser affair demonstrates that U.S. responses to the West German Right were far from uniform. Occupation authorities cooperated with Christian Democrats and other Atlanticist-minded German conservatives to promote West German economic and military integration with the West. The U.S. Army, with support from the Central Intelligence Agency, co-opted into U.S. service numerous ex-Nazi and Nazi-allied figures, including World War II veterans seeking to regain lost status and influence. American cultivation of positive ties with nationalistic West Germans displayed a pragmatic U.S. willingness to empower and sustain anticommunists abroad regardless of those figures’ democratic credentials.
Yet ongoing German denazification reflected enduring Western fears of nationalist extremism. U.S. party licensing programs sought to mute both right- and left-wing revolutionary tendencies in the new Germany. The containment of Otto Strasser from 1945 to 1955 likewise showed that, even as some conservative and reactionary figures regained credibility in post-war Germany, U.S. officials worked to restrain right-wing neutralist-nationalists, who sought German nonalignment in the Cold War, and so threatened American hegemony in Europe.

U.S. wariness of Otto Strasser originated during World War II. The United States’ wartime ally, Great Britain, courted this one-time Hitler supporter, hoping he might aid the anti-Nazi cause. A Bavarian World War I veteran and a staunch Catholic, Otto was the younger brother of Paul Strasser, a priest, and of Gregor Strasser, Hitler’s alleged “right-hand man” during the 1920s. Otto joined the Nazi Party (the National Socialist German Workers’ Party [Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, NSDAP]) in 1925, drawn to the antisemitic, nationalistic, and populist goals of National Socialism. He held no official post, but served as the “grey eminence” behind his brother’s work, drafting many articles published under Gregor’s name.

Otto Strasser’s attraction to Nazism flowed from his immersion in the “Conservative Revolutionary” movement of the Weimar period. Such cultural figures as the novelist Hans Grimm, the poet Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer, and the essayist Ernst Jünger embraced antirationalist ideals and rejected the perceived decadence of modern life. They promoted pan-Germanism, celebrated violence, and blamed Jews and Marxists for many social woes. Their antimodern vision attracted jaded youth and anticipated some of the racist and nationalist themes of National Socialism itself.

Strasser initially thought that Hitler shared those antimaterialist views. But Hitler’s electoral alliance with big industrialists, Junker landholders, and the petite bourgeoisie—collectively blamed for Germany’s post-Bismarckian moral decay—led Strasser to deride Hitler as a traitor to German labor. Strasser proffered an alternative National Socialist vision, a “third way” between “capitalist tyranny” and Marxist “dictatorship.” Whereas Hitler used capitalism and parliamentarism to advance his own political ends, Strasser demanded that “state feudalism” replace private property and that “guilds,” not parties, govern social and economic life. While Hitler sought a “total state” centered in Berlin under his own leadership, Otto promoted a federal system with diminished power for militant Prussia. Whereas Hitler found German identity in pagan forms and symbols, the
Catholic Strasser thought that Christianity should guide National Socialism.\(^\text{10}\)

Otto broke with Hitler in May 1930 after the Nazi leader backed industrialists against striking workers. With the cry, “The socialists are leaving the NSDAP!” Strasser formed a competing nationalist-militarist movement, the Black Front (\textit{Schwarze Front}).\(^\text{11}\) Gregor continued working toward a “Labor Front” within the NSDAP until 1932, when he quit the party and retired from politics altogether. Nonetheless viewing Gregor as a threat to Hitler’s power, the Gestapo on 30 June 1934 murdered him in the “Night of the Long Knives,” a bloody purge of the new regime.\(^\text{12}\) When, the following November, the Third Reich revoked both Otto’s and Paul’s citizenship under a law targeting political dissidents, the two brothers fled Germany. Paul settled in Minnesota. Otto spent the next seven years exiled in Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, France, Spain, and Portugal, allegedly plotting Hitler’s assassination, directing Black Front branches abroad, and publishing sensationalized accounts of his rift with Hitler.\(^\text{13}\) In September 1940, Britain rescued him, hoping that the Black Front leader’s self-proclaimed “massive” underground movement might aid the anti-Nazi war effort.

The British saw in Strasser a prospective ally against Hitler. Prime Minister Winston Churchill knew that Britain alone was too weak to execute a ground invasion of German-occupied Europe.\(^\text{14}\) From May 1940, when he took over the British government, until June 1941, when the Soviet-German alliance collapsed, Churchill coupled a defensive military strategy with an indirect, but multi-pronged, offensive. While employing the Royal Air Force and Navy against Axis forces in France, Britain, and North Africa, Churchill maintained an anti-German blockade, denounced German aggression in speeches, and created a psychological warfare unit to wage a propaganda war against Nazism.\(^\text{15}\) His government recognized and sheltered in England many Nazi-resisters, including the Polish government-in-exile and the Free French movement of General Charles de Gaulle. And in November 1940, Churchill ordered the General Staff of the new Special Operations Executive (SOE) to build secret links with anti-Nazi groups throughout Germany and occupied Europe. This underground force would cooperate in the eventual Allied liberation of Europe.\(^\text{16}\)

Consistent with Churchill’s “fifth-column” scheme, in August 1940, the British Secret Service in Lisbon offered Strasser sanctuary.\(^\text{17}\) Strasser seized the offer; his visa would soon expire, and the Nazis had already pressed Portugal to extradite him.\(^\text{18}\) Foreign Office Chief Robert Vansittart knew that the sheltering of a well-known ex-Nazi in Britain invited opprobrium.
He therefore asked the United States—then still technically a nonbelligerent—to take Strasser, instead. The Roosevelt administration willingly gave refuge to the former Chancellor Heinrich Bruening, the one-time German Foreign Office chief Kurt Riezler, and other Weimar-era conservatives who supported the anti-Axis war effort. But such U.S. officials as the presidential aide and assistant secretary for Latin American affairs Adolf Berle thought that Strasser’s “only and real quarrel” with the Hitler government “is on the question of the incumbent of the dictatorship”—that “politically and ideologically,” Strasser “does not differ [from] the Nazis, and it is essentially their doctrines that he is preaching.” After anti-fascist and German-American groups in late December 1940 flooded Washington with telegrams protesting a Strasser visit, the Roosevelt government feared a public relations imbroglio and rejected Vansittart’s request. Vansittart instead persuaded Canada to provide a haven. Following a six-month holdover in Bermuda, Strasser on 8 April 1941 arrived at St. John’s, New Brunswick, and then traveled by train to his new home in Montreal.

Strasser did assist the Allied effort, as Britain hoped. He rallied Canadian-Germans to oppose Nazism, declaring in numerous radio and newspaper interviews that Hitler’s armies were “desperate” and “weak,” “doomed to fail” in their foolish quest to take over Europe. Throughout 1941 and 1942, he published anti-Axis tirades not only in leading Canadian newspapers, but also in the New Statesman (London), the New York Times, Reader’s Digest, the Christian Science Monitor, and others. Strasser’s writings also informed the Office of Strategic Service’s “Psychological Profile of Hitler,” which described, among other features of Hitler’s personality, the German leader’s erratic temper, his “libidinal attachment” to his mother, and his pathological fixation with “soiling” and “humiliation.”

Strasser, to his chagrin, never gained official Canadian sanction for the Free German Movement (Freie Deutsche Bewegung, FDB) he formed in exile. Ottawa, from the outset, refused to fund the FDB and placed all of Strasser’s mail and personal movements under surveillance by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Lacking any other means of support, and having lost all his money during the war, Strasser earned a modest income speaking and writing, supplemented by occasional donations from his brother Paul in Minnesota.

Strasser impressed both Ottawa officials and the general public with his anti-Hitler views. The Toronto Daily Star hailed the “fervent little German who has haunted Hitler for ten years,” while the Montreal Gazette...
praised the leader of “Germany’s greatest underground movement.”

RCMP Commissioner S.T. Wood quickly concluded that the FDB leader could “definitely be relied upon insofar as his sentiments towards Hitler are concerned.” Undersecretary of State Norman A. Robertson acknowledged Strasser’s undemocratic, “clericalist,” and “anti-Jewish” biases, but thought that “all these prejudices and tendencies are to be found here and there among our own people and those of our allies.” Robertson pressed his government to fund Strasserite newspapers in Latin America and to fill prisoner-of-war libraries with Strasser’s books. So popular did Strasser’s story and writings become that the Gazette, beginning in September, gave Strasser his own bi-weekly column, and Warner Brothers in 1941 acquired rights to dramatize the German exile’s adventures.

Yet Britain and Canada soon soured on Otto Strasser. After the Soviet Union joined the British side in mid-1941, the vocally anticommunist Strasser repeatedly and publicly maligned the “embarrassing” wartime East-West alliance. He criticized the Allies for making an unholy pact with the “Beelzebub” Stalin and vowed to fight “just as relentlessly against the Communist dictatorship of a class as against the Nazi dictatorship of a race.” Britain, anxious to avoid offending its new Soviet ally, abandoned its support of Otto Strasser, and in October 1942 the Foreign Office joined the U.S. State Department in warning Canada that Strasser was a “dangerous man,” who risked stirring up “opposition among our . . . friends which would outweigh any benefit” to be gained from Strasser’s anti-Hitler activities.

Strasser’s “good German” edifice crumbled in the public sphere, as well, thanks in part to his own personal Beelzebub, H.G. Wells. While stranded in late 1940 during bad weather in Bermuda, the brilliant British journalist and novelist found his curiosity “violently” aroused by Strasser, who repeatedly shouted, “Heil Germany!” throughout their hurried interview. Wells investigated further and declared in a widely syndicated article of January 1942 that both living Strasser brothers were “blood-stained-Nazis” and Otto “quite insanely anti-Bolshevik and soaked to the marrow with the idea of the German people being first and foremost in Europe and the world.” Wells demanded to know “why Otto Strasser is not in a concentration camp and why he has been petted and encouraged by . . . people in responsible positions in Britain and Canada.”

Canadians quickly noted the descent of their “Montreal star.” Two parliamentary inquiries prompted Prime Minister W.L. MacKenzie King to affirm that, while Strasser came to Canada for vague “political reasons,” the German refugee received no funds or other aid from Ottawa.
again in April of a visa quashed plans for a paid Canadian-U.S. lecture tour, a “misfortune,” Strasser told Robertson, that cost a projected $5,000 in lost fees. Strasser’s financial prospects worsened when the Gazette stopped publishing his articles, and a deluge of anti-Strasser letters-to-the-editor in fall 1942 signaled the former hero’s waning appeal.

The hubbub prompted Wood, on London’s request, to test Strasser’s “large claims” of international support. The RCMP chief thereupon discovered that both the Black Front’s alleged infiltration of the Nazi hierarchy and the Free German Movement’s supposed rallying of anti-Hitler emigrants worldwide were, in the words of the historian Robert H. Keyserlingk, “cunning inventions” that had duped both the Allies and the general public. Strasser exchanged a voluminous correspondence with other exiled Germans. But his following comprised little more than a half-dozen friends in South America, a smattering of U.S. and European admirers, and his brother Paul in Minnesota. Far from unifying free Germans, Strasser rejected any alliance with the exile community in London, which he considered too “Jewish-democratic.” “Personal ambitions and irritability” plagued the small and disorganized South American FDB group, while Free Norwegian and Free Austrian groups spurned Strasser’s call for a greater Free German Legion. Strasser’s bank statements, moreover, reflected a scant $1.62 in savings—hardly sufficient capital to wage any underground offensive.

Nonetheless persuaded by the United States and Britain that Strasser undermined the Allied war effort, Ottawa, beginning in December 1942, explicitly forbade Strasser to speak publicly and publish anywhere in Canada, thus depriving him of his main income. In order to better surveil him, and symbolic of his new isolation, Strasser was moved from thriving Montreal to a tiny apartment above a grocery store in the seaside town of Paradise, Nova Scotia. There, prompted in part by his desperate financial straits, he worked fervently to circumvent the ban. He took quite literally the proscription on publishing “in Canada” and pursued overseas contracts, including one for his latest manuscript, “Private File on Hitler.” He procured intermediaries to transmit letters to his brother and, as censors discovered too late, found ingenious ways to smuggle mail. One intercepted letter to Strasser read: “Dear Doctor, The ham is coming and I hope your time is coming too... look inside the ham... before you cook it.” Inspectors remembered such trickery come Christmas. Strasser complained to Robertson that the police had not only opened Strasser’s holiday parcel “as a whole,” but “also each item and even the officially sealed bottle of port wine.” As a result, Strasser reported, “the bottle was empty to
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the last drop and nearly all the goods in the parcel have been spoiled. In this condition I received the parcel, ten days after Christmas."52

The Ottawa government tolerated Strasser, believing, as did Strasser himself, that Hitler’s one-time ally would exit the country following hostilities. Yet by the time the war ended and quadripartite control of Germany had commenced, U.S. and British officials found new reasons to keep Strasser quarantined in Canada. The former Nazi’s intercepted mail showed that he retained his prewar vision of a German “Reich.” Strasser continued calling for a “third way” between capitalism and Bolshevism and promoting himself as the future leader of a new chiliastic order. He professed democratic ideals but envisioned a corporatist system void of political parties. Already in 1943, Strasser had asked his close friend and supporter, Bruno Fricke, to form a preliminary postwar party whose “motto shall be: The Renewal of Germany!” and whose program would advance the “building of German Socialism” (“Aufbau des Deutschen Sozialismus”) along nationalistic lines.53 Fricke’s organization became the basis for the small, diffuse League of German Renewal (Bund für Deutschlands Erneuerung), founded in 1947 in Germany under the proxy leadership of Waldemar Wadsack (Munich), Kurt Sprengel (Wildeshausen/Odenwald), and Hans Giessen (Wuppertal).54

Strasser’s activities appeared threatening to the United States in several ways. U.S. leaders persistently feared that European postwar weakness could breed social confusion and spawn a middle class longing for order that only a strongman could fill. Strasser epitomized this prospective “man on horseback,” who, if not restrained, might “ride in,” “take charge,” and establish a “fascist-type dictatorship” in Germany.55 Strasser’s racist and nationalist ideals conflicted with U.S. plans for a liberal democratic German state, and his antisemitism targeted such influential American figures as the financier and advisor to presidents, Bernard Baruch, the alleged “emperor of capitalism” and “recognized leader of Jewry.”56

Strasser, moreover, nourished a deep grudge against the Allied powers. Although he remained steadfastly anticommunist—a view that after 1945 conformed broadly with the U.S. outlook—Strasser urged his followers to have no “illusions about the Anglo-Saxons,” who were “only more mendacious than the others.” He declared occupied Germany a “concentration camp,” whose “inmates” suffered under the control of Allied “guards.” “East and West,” he said, “have done their best to ruin us, and not only the Hitler system as such.” “We must become as selfish as the others are,” by exploiting the Soviet-American rivalry without succumbing to it or choosing sides, for only in so doing could German independence be achieved.57
U.S. authorities distrusted Otto Strasser not merely because of his authoritarian bent, but because they believed that his neutralist agenda aided the communist cause. Strasser’s inflammatory rhetoric itself appeared likely to foment social unrest, the perceived breeding ground for revolution. His conception of a powerful, independent Germany, capable of playing off the superpowers toward its own ends, recalled the dreaded specter of German Schaukelpolitik and a Soviet-German alliance.

Strasser hence posed a twin totalitarian threat. By pursuing his nationalism goals, he roused fears of a Nazi resurgence. By promoting German nonalignment in the Cold War, he appeared implicitly to serve Soviet ambitions in Europe. The United States accordingly opposed Strasser’s return to occupied Germany, lest he rally Germans toward nationalist and perpetuate the social disorder conducive to a communist victory.

Britain again took the lead in orchestrating Strasser's containment. Early on, the Labour government of Clement Atlee (1945–51) and the administration of Democratic President Harry S. Truman coordinated their vision of an economically unified, democratic Germany firmly anchored to the West. Given that Britain had initially arranged Strasser’s residency in Canada, it followed logically that London would continue engineering Strasser’s postwar detention in conformity with Anglo-American plans. The cooperation of Canada and later the Federal Republic in preventing Strasser’s return to Germany reflected a shared transnational belief that the future security of all Western states hinged upon Germany’s postwar fate. Concurrent evidence that some French agents offered German Strasserites logistical support, possibly out of a desire to promote a neutral, demilitarized Germany, strained interallied ties and tested the coherence of the Atlanticist consensus.

Whitehall’s postwar approach to the Strasser problem was largely ad hoc; so long as Strasser remained in Canada, the Foreign Office ignored him—unless Ottawa complained (as in July 1945, August 1949, and November 1953) that it had had enough of Strasser and planned to let him go. At such moments, British officials earnestly assured Ottawa that “[w]e have not lost sight of your very understandable desire to be rid of” Strasser, and that the Foreign Office made every effort to resolve the issue. “In the meantime,” the British “should very greatly appreciate it if the Canadian government would allow him to continue his residence there.” In all such instances, Canada backed down and Strasser remained in North America. The British, in fact, did very little to find Strasser a new home until the next complaint came along and Ottawa could again be played for time.
In this way, Britain could avoid justifying what was, in fact, a legally problematic policy of keeping Strasser indefinitely exiled from his homeland. U.K., U.S., and French officials did have the right, under occupation statutes, to ban from Germany any political figure deemed a threat to Allied security. But as London policymakers themselves acknowledged, the Western powers had no legal power to keep Strasser from leaving Canada or from going to any other country for which he could obtain a visa. A bureaucratic technicality closed this loophole, which otherwise might have enabled Strasser to enter Germany through a third state. Under a 1931 international agreement ratified by Canada, Britain, and several other Western European nations, political émigrés seeking to travel abroad required from their host country an International Identity Certificate before any foreign visa would be issued. By repeatedly persuading Ottawa to deny Strasser such papers, the Allies succeeded in detaining Strasser against his will for an entire decade.

Ottawa acceded to British and American pressure with little complaint, at least between 1945 and 1949. A proliferating foreign service bureaucracy and growing Cold War international commitments kept External Affairs preoccupied with issues other than Strasser. Robertson and Wood had initially admired and even liked the peculiar German; their frustration grew as much from disenchantment as from perceived national security requirements. But the reorganization of External Affairs in 1946 moved Robertson to England as Canadian high commissioner, and for the new core of bureaucrats—Undersecretary of State Lester B. Pearson, European Division Chief Jules Léger, Second Political Division Head Escott Reid, and others—Strasser seemed a nuisance merely in the abstract. These officials had had little or no contact with Strasser during the war, and they now viewed him as only one of many foreign policy problems facing Canada in the era of superpower conflict. Resentment occasionally surfaced, as in July 1947, when Reid, facing U.S. refusal of yet another visa application (this time to enable free surgery on Strasser’s kidney stones by a Minnesota physician procured by Paul), impatiently exclaimed: “We cannot always be a catspaw for other governments!” But as the Cold War, like World War II, subsumed Strasser’s fate to larger international dynamics, Ottawa generally proved willing to “absorb the embarrassment” of keeping Strasser, so long as doing so did not prove costly in manpower, money, or national reputation.

Strasser hence remained, if not, in the words of his sympathetic biographer Douglas Reed, a “prisoner of Ottawa,” then a kind of German captive to the Cold War, much as Germany itself became occupied, controlled,
and divided as a function of East-West rivalry. Although in August 1945 Canada lifted the censorship ban on Strasser, the RCMP continued to read his mail, and his continued lack of employment (he refused to take a wage-paying job) meant that he stayed poor. To pay his bills and get medical attention, Otto relied monthly on his brother’s $50 check and on $40–50 from German-language newspapers in Canada, South America, and Europe, which paid him to write occasional columns. He lived alone in his rickety, book-strewn apartment, his wife and two children still in Switzerland, where in 1940 he had seen them last. A gourmet cook with epicurean tastes, Otto frequently sacrificed meat to pay postage. “The one luxury I can afford,” he sighed to a Macleans journalist, “is lying in bed in the morning.” To his Paradise neighbors, Strasser appeared “an amiable and slightly pathetic eccentric” who “wears a white linen cap in midwinter, uses big words, sits up half the night,” drafting letters and articles, “sleeps until noon, and bows low and kisses the hands of women to whom he’s introduced.” To Strasser, Paradise was nice to visit, but he did not want to live there.

He applied six times between 1945 and 1949 for an identity certificate that would enable him to visit Switzerland, if not Germany, all to no avail. Canadian authorities in each instance conferred with British officials and, usually after a delay of several months, returned the same disappointing verdict. In July 1949, following Strasser’s sixth unsuccessful attempt, he determined to bring his case before the “public opinion of the world” by appealing to the United Nations under Article 13 of the Declaration of Human Rights (December 1948), which stated that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own” and to return home.

Strasser’s recourse to the UN signaled that his status was quickly becoming an international question. Britain had largely managed its Strasser containment policy alone through late 1948. While Washington had endorsed Ottawa’s censorship measures in 1943 and regularly reiterated opposition to Strasser visiting the United States, American leaders largely trusted the Commonwealth states to deal with the matter themselves, so long as those powers continued to prevent Strasser’s return to Germany.

Strasser might have remained primarily a British and Canadian problem had not France in late 1948 begun curiously to hinder Whitehall’s efforts to keep Strasser out of Germany. In November, the French Consul in Winnipeg inadvertently issued Strasser a one-year visa to France, alarming British and U.S. authorities who feared Strasser’s “surreptitious” entry into Germany. The Quai d’Orsay, upon excited queries, called the action...
“a misunderstanding” and promptly withdrew the visa. Had events occurred in isolation, British and North American officials might have dismissed the French move as a bureaucratic error.

The incident, however, coincided with British intelligence reports revealing that Strasser had established in the French zone of Germany contacts with followers of the French general Charles de Gaulle. De Gaulle, like Strasser, was staunchly anticommunist, nationalistic, and devoutly Catholic. He, too, invoked anti-American rhetoric and called for an armed European “Third Force” between the United States and the Soviet Union, a plea that challenged U.S. leadership in Europe. Sieben Tage, a French-zone German newspaper, simultaneously ran a serialized version of Strasser’s book Hitler and I (Hitler und Ich), while a sudden visit by Paul Strasser to Paris in spring 1949 roused suspicions that Otto’s brother conspired in France on his sibling’s behalf. French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville’s failure to find Strasser an alternate home, after promising Bevin and U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson at the October 1949 UN Conference that the Quai d’Orsay “might consider bringing” Strasser to French-controlled Martinique or Guadeloupe, furthered Anglo-American misgivings toward France on the Strasser question.

Paris, in fact, officially endorsed all Allied efforts to keep Strasser in Canada. Fearful that German nationalism could mutate into anti-French aggression, as it had three times in the preceding century, French officials vigorously maintained their opposition to Strasser and resented British suggestions that Paris did not take Strasser’s threat to Germany seriously. The array of apparently pro-Strasser actions in the French zone, at a time when nationalism intensified in both France and Germany, nonetheless exacerbated Anglo-American concern that the Quai d’Orsay could not be trusted to help check Strasser’s influence in Europe.

Strasser’s own activities increasingly troubled U.K. and U.S. officials. Throughout 1949, Strasser worked to publicize his ordeal. He lobbied Eleanor Roosevelt and other well-known personalities, and he announced, “on every possible occasion . . . that he is being held in Canada against his will and that he is virtually a prisoner . . . in violation of the declaration on human rights.” He sought visas from third states in defiance of British objections and published regularly in Canada’s German language newspaper Der Kurier, which he now co-edited, in an alleged “calculated effort to disturb relations between Canadians of German origin and their fellow citizens” and to build ethnic support for his plight.

Strasser further vexed Allied leaders by appearing to flirt politically with far leftists. Strasser continuously railed against communism in pub-
lic. Yet he told Nova Scotian Parliamentary Minister George Nowlan that Soviet emissaries had offered to smuggle Strasser home through the Eastern zone. Fricke, in an open letter to Stalin printed in Chicago’s Deutsch-Amerikanische Burger-Zeitung, also called for a Russo-German alliance. These actions prompted Allied observers to label Strasser a “national bolshevik” who, notwithstanding an “intensely nationalist outlook,” was “ideologically much closer to . . . the Soviet Union than he is to the forces supported by the Western powers.”

The perception that Strasser was a “red fascist,” who “[sought] aid from both sides” in the Cold War, pushed the United States and Britain toward concerted action. In late 1948, U.S. and U.K. occupiers jointly denied a party license to the Strasserite League for German Renewal (BDE). In January 1949, U.S. Military Governor Lucius Clay announced that he “strongly opposed” Strasser’s return and would “not permit him to enter” his home state of Bavaria, in the U.S. zone. British and American authorities in March successfully pushed through the Allied High Commission (AHC), which jointly governed Germany, an edict placing both Otto and Paul Strasser on the Combined Travel Board’s “black list,” forbidding their entry into West Germany from any state. And anxious to ensure that, even should Ottawa let him leave, Strasser would have no place else to go, Anglo-American officials in December 1949 gained assurances from Denmark, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Portugal, Luxembourg, Italy, and Sweden that those states would cooperate to keep Strasser out of Europe. After the September 1950 New York Council of Foreign Ministers conference granted the new Federal Republic of Germany the right to issue its own passports, the AHC pressured the government of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to keep Strasser on its own “black list” of undesirables, widening further the gulf between Canada’s desire to expel Strasser and the ex-Nazi’s odds of going home.

West German leaders fortuitously opposed Strasser for their own reasons. Adenauer’s closest adviser, Dr. Herbert Blankenhorn, may have exaggerated in April 1950 when he told Christopher Steel of the U.K. High Commission that the usually stiff and stoic chancellor viewed “with utmost horror” any prospect of this “dangerous demagogue’s” return. But Adenauer’s government had undertaken in the Petersberg Protocol of 22 November 1949 “to eradicate all traces of Nazism from German life and institutions and prevent the revival of totalitarianism in . . . any form,” and Strasser displayed more than a modicum of Nazi bias.

German intelligence data mirrored Allied sources in portraying Strasser as a single-minded German nationalist—a “blazing torch” who
had “devoted his entire life to achieving his political goals” and is “still, today, not burned out.” Just as Hitler blamed Weimar for Germany’s World War I defeat, Strasser opposed the Bonn regime for selling out Germany to the Allies. He called Adenauer the “German Quisling” of the occupiers and declared that his own planned political party would adopt the slogan “neither Wall Street nor Moscow.” He rejected the coal-sharing Schuman Plan as favoring French over German interests and opposed German rearment within the Atlantic framework, as pursued by both Bonn and the Allies, claiming that if he led Germany during the “inevitable war with Russia, his country would fight with the West”—but “only with the promise” that Germany’s eastern provinces, excised as a condition of the Yalta accords, would be returned. “No German is going to die to save the United States and Canada unless there is good reason for it,” he vowed.

Strasser, moreover, apparently progressed in his effort to build “all the political groups outside of the historic parties” into a single movement. Strasser’s representatives in Germany nursed close connections with both the neutralist-nationalist Günther Gereke and with the neonazi leader Fritz Dorls, while his Düsseldorf representative Hans Giessen gained notoriety as an outspoken critic of rearment. Strasser’s alleged links to anti-Adenauer forces enhanced the German government’s fear that, if Strasser ever did attain power, he would cause “enormous trouble for the democracy,” for “all of the rootless thugs, desperados, failures, and toadies—indeed, all those elements which are found in every authoritarian movement—would rise to power with him.”

Keeping Strasser out thus made sense from a domestic perspective. The policy had international benefits as well. Given enduring Allied fears of a German nationalist revival, Adenauer sought repeatedly to prove the Republic’s viability as a democratic state. In Strasser, a relatively well-known ex-Nazi widely viewed as an unsympathetic fanatic, Adenauer possessed a low-risk, high-profile way to show that Germany was not in danger of reverting reflexively to a national goosestep; rather, it would work harmoniously with the Western powers to contain extremist tendencies. Hence Blankenhorn, during his meeting with Steel, volunteered “without any prompting, . . . that the Germans would certainly cooperate in any measures to keep Otto Strasser out of Germany.”

The Federal Republic accordingly ignored, dismissed, delayed, and fought Strasser’s continuing efforts of 1950–55 to come home. Three times—in February 1950, August 1950, and November 1951—Strasser applied for renaturalization, first with his home state, Bavaria, then twice with the federal government. In each instance, Strasser pointed out the
legal tenuousness of his exclusion from citizenship: he was still technically a German citizen, for no legal prohibition against his return existed except a now-invalid decree by Hitler’s government; the Basic Law explicitly protected German citizenship against revocation (Article 16, paragraphs 1 and 2) and states that Germans whose citizenship had been revoked for political, racial, or religious reasons between 30 January 1933 and 8 May 1945 were eligible for renaturalization (Article 116, paragraph 2); and denial of Strasser’s passport amounted to a denial of his personal right to freedom, democracy and justice, as laid out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights.100

The Federal Interior Ministry (Bundesinnenministerium, BMI) successfully thwarted Strasser’s first appeal of February 1950 by dissuading the Bavarian government from awarding him a resident permit.101 In August 1950, when Strasser petitioned the federal government directly for a visa, the BMI deflected his request by maintaining (correctly) that it had, as yet, no power to grant passports.102 But when the Federal Republic gained full exit and entry control on 15 January 1951, and Strasser in March applied at the new Ottawa consulate for a visa, German officers there told him, on Interior Minister Robert Lehr’s instruction, that only the New York consulate could help. New York, in turn, directed him to Bonn, which promptly “pigeon-holed” his application, leaving it unanswered for eight months.103

Not until Strasser petitioned Lehr directly in November 1951 did the government formally deny his request for readmission. On 18 December 1951 Lehr objected that, because Strasser had played a leading role in the National Socialist movement and then broken with Hitler, his German citizenship had been revoked purely because of internal party differences, not because he was politically, religiously, or racially victimized by the Nazi regime. Article 116, paragraph 2 of the Basic Law did not apply. Moreover, as West Germany had not ratified the Declaration on Human Rights, that UN document was irrelevant to the case.104

Strasser sought new means to circumvent Allied and German authorities. He secured a Bavarian residence permit with the help of a sympathetic intermediary and then used this certification to book air and sea passage home.105 The Bavarian interior ministry’s apparent reversal in granting such papers worried Allied leaders, who feared the action meant that Bonn “might also be softening towards” Strasser.106 In this early test of federal authority in the new republic, however, the Adenauer government trumped the forces of Bavarian particularism and won. West Germany joined Britain, France, and the United States in successfully persuading
every airline that Strasser approached, including KLM (Dutch), SAS (Swedish), Air France (French), Pan American (U.S.), and American Airlines (U.S.), as well as the March Shipping Company (a Nova Scotia–based cruise company), to deny Strasser travel privileges, declaring that he would not be permitted to disembark in Germany should any transportation firm violate these requests.\textsuperscript{107}

Gaining no political redress, Strasser in November 1952 sued the German government, demanding that the Interior Ministry renaturalize him.\textsuperscript{108} He won his case on 29 April 1953. The Cologne Administrative Court ruled, in direct opposition to Lehr, that political pretexts in both the past and the present had been used to deny Strasser citizenship. Strasser was constitutionally entitled to a visa and must be allowed to come home.\textsuperscript{109}

German authorities assured British and U.S. officials that all was not lost. Strasser still would not return anytime soon, for the government planned to appeal the ruling, purposefully using administrative delays to postpone Strasser’s departure from Canada. One German diplomat predicted that the government could “hold up Strasser’s return for one and a half to two years,” even if the appeal failed.\textsuperscript{110} At the very least, Adenauer’s government would prevent Strasser’s comeback prior to the republic’s second federal elections, scheduled for September 1953, and keep Strasser from draining rightist votes away from the CDU.\textsuperscript{111}

The governing parties resoundingly won in September, affirming the stability of Adenauer’s government, but marking the end of Ottawa’s pliancy on the Strasser question. After their failed 1949 bid to oust Strasser, Assistant Undersecretary C.S.A. Ritchie and others had agreed to “stop bleating” and accept the refugee’s presence “indefinitely.”\textsuperscript{112} But Ottawa now declared itself “utterly sick” of Strasser and threatened again to provide an identity certificate, contending that the two overriding dangers to date—Strasser’s ability to undermine the federal elections and to harm Germany’s international image—were now moot.\textsuperscript{113}

In the first case, the Canadian Embassy’s V.C. Moore argued to the AHC, the “danger from extremist parties” had vanished—“for the present at least”—and “if Adenauer’s position is not secure now, it never will be.” Besides, Strasser had been “out of the country for 21 years and completely out of touch with German politics” for the 12 years that he lived in Paradise, Nova Scotia. There was “no evidence that he has any significant following in Germany, and being somewhat broken in spirit, he is unlikely to be able to rebuild a party. His return might very well have the effect of further breaking up the right-wing elements, thereby rendering them
still less effective." As for the second point, “the conclusion which might be
drawn from [the] argument that the Federal government cannot cope with
one worn-out Nazi such as Otto Strasser is that its proponent, whether the
German government or the occupying powers, regards German demo-
cracy and the new German state as a very fragile thing. It might well be time
for the German government to back up its confident words with positive
action” and deal with Otto Strasser head-on.114

The High Commission sympathetically heard Canada’s appeal. Indeed,
such Allied officials as Roger Dow, political analyst for the U.S. High
Commission’s Intelligence Division, had raised questions as early as 1949
about whether the Strasser movement was not largely a “political hoax”
and efforts to detain him a waste of time.115 Steel expressed similar reser-
vations.116 By March 1951, Secretary of State Acheson agreed that it would
be a “political miracle [were Strasser] able to exert any appreciable influ-
ence on German politics,” whereupon the State Department lifted its for-
mal objection to Strasser’s return.117

But the AHC as a body had always resisted Canadian pleas to take
Strasser back, and it did so again here. U.S. High Commissioner John J.
McCloy knew that Adenauer’s government stood to gain little but negative
publicity should Strasser precipitously return.118 Given Adenauer’s anti-
Strasser views, the High Commission could not very well pressure the FRG
to admit a notorious ex-Nazi in defiance of prior bans—and indeed,
counter to the whole spirit of denazification and democratization that had
impelled Allied policy since 1945—simply to appease Canada, whose alle-
giance to the West was never in doubt. French High Commissioner André
François-Poncet, moreover, pressed as loudly as Adenauer for Strasser’s
continued detention in Canada. Poncet objected that, precisely because of
the rightist parties’ defeat in the last elections, Otto Strasser could be a
“greater danger in Germany today than Adolf Hitler,” for extreme rightists
“doubtless realized that they must unite,” and Strasser could become their
“able leader.”119

The AHC refused Canadian requests to intervene with the Federal
Republic on Ottawa’s behalf, although the High Commission promised
not to obstruct Canada’s own efforts to sway the German government.120
On 10 December 1953, External Affairs informed Strasser that he would
now be granted his long-sought Identity Certificate; on 28 December the
Canadian Embassy in Bonn presented the Federal Government a harshly-
worded “Note Verbale,” stating that, with the elections safely behind,
Strasser’s danger to the republic was undoubtedly small, especially given
that “he has always been a fractious individual and will . . . have lost
through isolation any ability he had of getting along with rival leaders.\textsuperscript{121}  
The note, drafted by Chargé d’Affaires John K. Starnes, opined that “good grounds” existed for Bonn “quietly to drop the appeal” and issue Strasser a passport, for the Federal Appeals Court and the Supreme Court would likely uphold the Cologne Court’s decision. “It need hardly be emphasized,” Starnes wrote dryly, “that one and a half or two years of this delay . . . is far too long from the point of view of the Canadian Government.”\textsuperscript{122}  
The Bonn Foreign Office expressed surprise at the blunt communiqué, as did dismayed External Affairs officers George Southam, P.C. Dobbell, and Jean Chapdelaine, whose initial call for a “formal” approach based on frank in-house memoranda had prompted the Embassy’s impolitic message.\textsuperscript{123}  Canada scrambled to repair any damage, and the two sides quickly mended fences, but Germany refused to back down.\textsuperscript{124}  The government went on to lose its case in the Federal Appeal Court at Münster on 23 February 1954, as on a subsequent appeal to the Federal High Court in Berlin on 29 November 1954.\textsuperscript{125}  
Even following defeat, Adenauer considered asking the Bundestag for a law specifically excluding Strasser from the constitutional provisions that had helped win his case. A week’s deliberation persuaded the chancellor that “the best way to deal with Strasser would be to let him return home and hang himself with his own outdated propaganda line.”\textsuperscript{126}  Federal authorities nonetheless instructed officials to “go slow” on the paperwork, and the Ottawa embassy managed to procrastinate for another six months, until February 1955, Strasser’s ultimate departure for Germany.\textsuperscript{127}  In March, when at last Strasser stepped off the plane in Bavaria, following whirlwind stops in London, Switzerland, and Ireland, U.K. officials described him, rather in keeping with Moore’s profile, as looking more “exhausted and nervous” than megalomaniacal.\textsuperscript{128}  
In retrospect, Allied and German officials exaggerated Strasser’s threat to the Federal Republic. Allied opinion surveys revealed from the outset that war-weary Germans had little interest in this exiled former Nazi’s ordeal across the sea; the likelihood of Strasser riding into Germany on proverbial horseback was always rather improbable.\textsuperscript{129}  British intelligence reports undermined depictions of Strasser as a “Soviet stooge,” revealing that he had few, if any, East Zone connections at all.\textsuperscript{130}  That German post-war rehabilitation came to rank as one of the marked success stories of Allied diplomacy further suggests that, even had Strasser returned early, the Adenauer government would have dealt with him effectively and peremptorily, much as it did in outlawing and disbanding the Socialist Party of the Reich and other extreme rightist groups beginning in 1952.\textsuperscript{131}
West German leaders instead joined U.K., U.S., and Canadian officials in holding Strasser captive in Canada—arguably committing human rights violations—in their efforts to stabilize the West German democracy itself.

Once home, Strasser did found the German Social Union (Deutsche Soziale Union, DSU), an alternative, he said, to the “impotent” CDU and SPD, “whose shabby platforms consist of capitalism, parliamentarism . . . , watered-down Christianity, and perfumed Marxism.” Strasser promoted a “neutral Europe” to overcome Germany’s “fatal division.” He declared that Germans “must be prepared to shoot at anyone, whether in Russian or American uniform,” and announced that “Jews should be treated in Germany . . . the same way as [Germans] will be in Israel,” an implicitly antisemitic remark for which he was almost arrested.

Yet Germans’ lack of interest left Strasser “bitterly disappointed.” Socialists made “rude noises” at Strasser in the street, but the press generally ignored him, and the public thought him a joke. Strasser quickly toned down the DSU’s chauvinistic platform. The party retained a nationalist-neutralist stance but embraced tax reform and pensions for all, scarcely a revolutionary program. As Strasser’s former Kurier co-editor Herr Ehmann put it, the one-time BDE leader appeared not to ask, “What policy does Germany need?” but rather, “What policy might prove sufficiently popular to enable me to get a fresh start in German politics?”

Strasser was not exactly an opportunist, as Ehmann implied. His political ideals remained tenaciously intact until his death in 1974, and he repeatedly sacrificed wealth, family, and personal freedom to sustain them. But this “bad actor,” as the State Department called him, clearly craved the spotlight. Like other aspiring protagonists of history and lore—Bonnie Prince Charlie in France, Napoleon Bonaparte at Elba, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna in Havana, and Juan Peron in Spain—Strasser anticipated the climactic final act of his life-long drama. He, too, would escape exile in a blaze of glory, then deliver his people to their Promised Land—a “Paradise” of his own making.

Yet this would-be leading man seemed perennially cast in a supporting role. Gregor overshadowed Otto in life and historical memory; Hitler’s “conservative” National Socialism trumped Strasser’s anticapitalist brand; even Captain Douglas Bader, the famed legless Royal Air Force ace who shared Strasser’s transatlantic flight, traveled first-class, while Strasser went coach. Knowing, like any seasoned performer, that there are no small parts, only “small actors,” Strasser delivered his few allotted lines with gusto and verve. But when deprived of an audience, as during the war years and during periods of prolonged postwar isolation in Canada, Strasser...
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grew depressed and lonely—even, at one point in 1950, suicidal.141

The maladroit Strasser, moreover, suffered a chronic case of bad timing. He repeatedly missed his chance to shape German history, as he believed was his calling, owing first to the Nazi threat, then to the Allied-imposed exile, which banned him from his homeland during its hour of greatest political fluidity. When Strasser finally did return, Germans scorned his outdated message. The DSU failed so completely in its first two years that Strasser, desperate for funds, joined a Düsseldorf investment firm—surrendering, in a final, ironic twist, to the very capitalist forces he had fought for most of his life.142

Perhaps, then, Strasser finally resembled less the epic hero Odysseus than the irksome, broken-legged Sheridan Whiteside, Broadway’s “Man Who Came to Dinner” during the 1930s and 1940s. Strasser, too, was an unwanted guest, who long overstay his Canadian welcome. Immobilized not by a wheelchair, but by reams and reams of bureaucratic red tape, the demanding visitor sorely tried the patience of his unwilling host, who toiled abjectly and thanklessly in the tedious role of caretaker.

Eventually, however, Strasser, like Whiteside, adopted a more appreciative stance. In September 1957, Strasser’s new employer sent him back to Canada on business. Upon arrival at Montreal Airport, the beaming traveler greeted waiting reporters. He told them with much bravado that he had found his “first love” at last. He then apologized for taking sixty years to discover that Canada was it.143

The Strasser affair showed that U.S. leaders, like their Allied counterparts, did not view all non- and counterrevolutionary individuals uniformly. Americans cooperated with and co-opted conservatives who facilitated U.S. overseas goals. But they sought to limit the political influence of right-wing critics who challenged the United States and prospectively undermined Western unity.

That U.S. and U.K. officials successfully pressed numerous states to help contain Strasser after the war demonstrates that a readiness to inhibit neutralism-nationalism, as well as communism, came to be seen as a measure of loyalty to the West during the Cold War. Ottawa acquiesced, however grudgingly, in detaining Strasser because Canadian leaders generally viewed their acquiescence in the matter as a service to the Atlantic alliance. The eagerness of Adenauer to keep Strasser out of Germany likewise confirmed that the new Federal Republic stood with the United States in opposing Third Force appeals. French apparent uncooperativeness, at a time when Anglo-American tensions with France over Germany ran high, conversely exacerbated U.S. and British perceptions that France could not
be trusted to keep its own neutralist-nationalistic urges in check.

Just as Strasser’s Canadian exile of 1941–45 can only be understood within the context of anti-Nazi efforts during World War II, the Strasser affair of 1945–55 must be seen as a function of the Cold War itself. U.S. officials feared neutralist-nationalism as a facilitator for the perceived communist program of political polarization and civil conflict. Believing that any disagreement with American policy played to the Soviet advantage, the United States and its allies worked to curtail right-wing, as well as left-wing, opposition.

Yet American officials also took seriously Strasser’s nationalism in its own right. The belated recognition that Strasser lacked a following helped break down barriers to his return. But U.S. leaders accepted Strasser’s homecoming not merely because he had legally won his right to renaturalization, or because other powers had ceased obstructing his efforts, or even because Strasser himself turned out to be an empty threat. Rather, the Federal Republic, just months away from gaining full sovereignty and joining NATO, at last appeared so firmly tied to the West that Germans themselves could be trusted to reject extremism in all its forms. Anti-communism fed postwar Allied distrust of Otto Strasser. But it was ultimately the conviction that both nationalism and communism had been contained in West Germany that finally enabled Strasser’s protracted exile to come to an end.