

Guide to the Alexander Kesküla papers

MS 311



July 2008

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 311

CREATOR: Kesküla, Alexander, 1882-1964

TITLE: Alexander Kesküla papers

DATES: 1915-1964

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.25 linear feet (5 boxes)

LANGUAGE: Estonian

SUMMARY: The papers contain passports, correspondence (including letters from Estonian and Russian socialists and revolutionaries during the period 1916-1944), fragmentary memoirs, unpublished manuscripts, family papers, brochures, and books of the Estonian bolshevik, mostly written in German. Also included is a copy of Northern Underground (1963) by Michael Futrell with corrections in Kesküla's hand.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0311>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0311>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The papers were the gift of Mrs. I. Weidmann-Kesküla, Alexander Kesküla's daughter in 1965.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright status for collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

Preferred Citation

Alexander Kesküla Papers (MS 311). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Processing Information

Materials are arranged as received and descriptive information is primarily derived from original labels.

Biographical / Historical

Alexander Kesküla became a bolshevik at the beginning of 1905 when he was a student at Tartu in Estonia. He was imprisoned later that year, but in three months was released after a popular uprising. Kesküla lived illegally in Estonia for two more years and Russian historical works reveal that he was a leading bolshevik underground organizer in Estonia during the years 1905-7. In 1907 Kesküla moved to Moscow, staying there illegally for several months. He left Russia in 1908, living first in Germany, where he attended the universities of Berlin and Leipzig, and after, in 1910, in Switzerland where he studied in Zurich and Bern.

In September, 1914, at the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia, Kesküla contacted Gisbert von Romberg, the German minister in Bern. Kesküla's aims were the independence of Estonia and the exclusion of Russia from Europe. He believed that revolution in Russia could not be forced, but instead, was the third link in a chain he envisioned. First, the Russian army must be smashed—that was the task of the German army. Second, the western borderlands of Russia would be occupied and Sweden, Finland and Estonia would form a federation. Third, after military defeat and the occupation of the borderlands, the Russian revolution would occur and, in Kesküla's opinion, the man to accomplish this was V. I. Lenin.

Kesküla's contacts with both Germans and bolsheviks were merely elements in his broad design of independence for Estonia. From his knowledge of the Russian revolutionary movement he was convinced of Lenin's pre-eminence as a revolutionary leader, from the resources made available to him by the Germans he supported the bolsheviks and he strove to impress on the Germans Lenin's potentialities.

In 1915, returning to Switzerland from Stockholm, Kesküla met another Estonian, Arthur Siefeldt (or Ziefeldt), who was in contact with Lenin and his organization. It was through Siefeldt and Kesküla that the indirect link between the bolsheviks and Germans operated. Kesküla supplied Siefeldt with money, which Siefeldt infiltrated into the bolshevik organization, and, in turn, Siefeldt gave Kesküla information from Lenin's circle which Kesküla then transmitted to the Germans. This arrangement continued until the summer of 1916. Then Kesküla's relations with the Germans cooled. Sometime afterwards, Siefeldt quarrelled with Lenin over the national question, and his close contact with Lenin and Kesküla ceased. Kesküla received no more money from the Germans after October 1916, and finally broke with them in the spring of 1917. He turned his attention to Sweden attempting to influence opinion for Sweden's entry into the war which would lead to the occupation of Finland and Estonia. The final outcome would be his longheld dream of a Swedish- Finnish- Estonian federation; in this he failed.

Later, leaving Switzerland, Kesküla lived with his Swiss born wife in Stocksund, on the northern side of Stockholm. He left there sometime around 1923. Keskula died in Madrid in 1964.

Though his grandiose political design was not realized, it may be suggested that Alexander Kesküla's place in history is secure. He not only appreciated Lenin's qualities and potentialities, but also transmitted this appreciation to German authorities. His friend in Switzerland, the German minister Romberg, was one of the Germans chiefly concerned with Lenin's, journey from Switzerland through Germany to Russia in April 1917. Moreover, Kesküla's assistance to the bolsheviks came at a time when their fortunes were low, both literally and metaphorically.

Excerpted from *Northern Underground*, by Michael Futrell Great Britain, 1963, pages 119-151.

Scope and Contents

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Collection Contents

Original accession

- | | |
|------|---|
| b. 1 | <p>"Estnisches, Russisches, etc.", <i>Kalewipoeg</i>
The box appears to contain significant amounts of correspondence, possibly in Estonian.</p> |
| b. 2 | <p>Politik I", "Politik II"
The box contains primarily typescripts of writings in German and other languages.</p> |
| b. 3 | <p>"Personliches", "Elvi Keskula (Name der Schwester)", unmarked package</p> |
| b. 4 | <p>Loose letters and booklets, including a newspaper article about A. Keskula; <i>Memorial de la Guerre; Northern Underground</i> by Michael Futrell (London: Faber and Faber, 1963); and "La Question Esthionine et la Question Septemtrionale" (1918) by M. Keskula
Booklets appear to be primarily student related, from the Universities of Berlin, Bern, and Zurich. Also includes a copy of the pamphlet <i>Das Hakenkreuz</i> (1934) by Theobald Bieder.</p> |
| b. 5 | <p>"Broschuren I", "Broshuren II", manuscripts in French of his study of Don Quixote</p> |

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Communism -- Soviet Union
Communists
World War, 1914-1918 -- Underground
movements

Geographic Names

Estonia -- History

Names

Kesküla, Alexander, 1882-1964