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## Max Fisher: Distributor and Retailer

“Max immediately became my protégé” said Julius Klein of Detroit’s Republican Party powerbroker and philanthropist Max Fisher. “From that point on I have always kept Max well informed on all intelligence matters.”

The time is 1936, the year that marks Fisher’s promotion from “bagman” for Morris Dalitz’s Purple Gang to the inside of Julius Klein’s British intelligence section. From there, Fisher was trained for the franchise for the retail trade of Dope, Inc. Fisher’s story will take us to two enterprises: the one, well-known, is United Brands, which supplies the United States with most of its bananas—and shipped an estimated 20% of its cocaine and marijuana during the 1970s, according to U.S. law enforcement sources. The other is Airborne Freight which spirits dirty money and dope across the country.

In Detroit, the Fisher Building is owned by the Bronfman

family. The connection is to be expected. What the Bronfmans are to Canada and the East Coast, Max Fisher is to the Midwest and the West Coast, and his story begins the same way.

Max Fisher was born in Pittsburgh in 1908, the son of Russian Jews who had emigrated to the United States two years earlier. In 1930, immediately upon his graduation from Ohio State University, Fisher went into the oil business. He became a young partner in the Michigan-based Aurora Gasoline Company, which had been founded a year earlier by a mysterious character named Henry A. Wenger. Describing himself as an "international banker," Wenger had been forced to flee to Canada during the 1920s, when indictments for stock fraud were handed down against him. By 1920—after a stop in Oklahoma—Wenger wound up in the Michigan oil-drilling business.<sup>1</sup>

The strange Mr. Wenger aside, the Midwest oil business was one of the first legitimate businesses to be taken over by organized crime in the reorganization handed down by Johnny Torrio in 1928. In the Midwest, this meant control by the Purple Gang, the Detroit and Cleveland-based branch of the mob that ran all the bootlegging of whiskey during the 1920s and later narcotics.<sup>2</sup>

According to several sources, Max Fisher was a "runner" for the Purple Gang during the early 1930s. His job was to carry cash receipts across the Canadian border to the Bronfman gang in advanced payment for the next shipment of booze and drugs for the speakeasies of Detroit, Cleveland, and Buffalo. During this period, Fisher's activities brought him into contact with the Murder, Inc. syndicate headed by Meyer Lansky.

Meanwhile, on the East Coast, Julius Klein, as an underling of William Wiseman, the official head of British intelligence in the United States, was deployed to pull together a "dirty tricks unit" that would be ready for action on behalf of British interests in the Middle East as part of the "Great Game." Klein recruited the unit from the ranks of the Jewish War Veterans.<sup>3</sup>

British intelligence's Palestine operation dates officially back to the 1917 Balfour Declaration—the British oligarchy's statement of its determination to establish a "Jewish homeland" that would serve as an asset for British interests in the Middle

East, especially against France. The project was run through the British Secret Intelligence Service, with the London Hofjuden families—particularly the Rothschilds—and the “Our Crowd” investment bank circles of lower Manhattan the immediate sponsors, as cutouts for the higherups of the British-centered black nobility we have already met.

Run out of the Manhattan offices of Kuhn Loeb, Wiseman’s “plumbers unit” continued work that had begun with Baron Edmond de Rothschild’s founding of the Palestine Economics Commission in the 1920s. Under Rothschild funding, the commission established an intricate network of weapons-smuggling cells, money-laundering channels, and contraband shipping lines—utilizing criminal enterprises and respectable businesses interchangeably. Julius Klein supervised the smuggling networks stateside.<sup>4</sup>

In this venture he had the support of at least one agency of the U.S. government. In 1932, Klein was appointed director of the first anti-subversion section of the U.S. Justice Department. This brought Klein into close contact with J. Edgar Hoover, who himself was on intimate terms with Lansky’s partner Lewis Rosenstiel of Schenley’s Liquor.<sup>5</sup>

The cover for Klein’s Jewish War Veterans “plumbers’ unit” was anti-Nazism. Klein’s unit essentially operated as a subsidiary of William Stephenson’s British Special Operations Executive, which set up shop in the United States in preparation for American entry into World War II.

When Fisher was brought to New York City in 1936, the occasion was the War Veterans’ convention to call for an “Anti-Nazi Coalition.” It is there that Fisher became Klein’s top recruit. From that point until the mid-1940s, the shadowy strands of Fisher’s life are lost, as he became submerged in the intelligence operatives that Klein directed.

## Sonneborn and the Syndicate

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, it is known that Klein took Fisher along on a series of missions to Israel where Klein oversaw the organization and training of the Israeli army and

intelligence services. After the war, as head of the U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps in Western Europe—the same corps that produced Henry Kissinger—Klein had illegally rerouted whole shiploads of medical supplies, trucks, construction equipment, and so forth that were earmarked for Germany and Austria into the Zionist underground terrorist organizations in Palestine.<sup>6</sup>

The scramble for dominance after the war had put the Palestine project on the top of the list of Britain's operational priorities. The previous allotment of funds and manpower to the project was dwarfed by the Rothschild and SOE post-1945 operations. A large part of the work was directed from the United States by the little-known organization called the Sonneborn Institute.

In 1945, Orde Wingate, the SOE officer assigned to Palestine to train an expanded Haganah, had sent future Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion to the United States to link up with Julius Klein. Klein immediately steered him to Rudolph Sonneborn, the Baltimore chemical magnate, whose wife, Dorothy Schiff, was a member of the London Warburg clan.<sup>7</sup>

In July 1945, Sonneborn and Henry Montor, the chairman of United Jewish Appeal, pulled together a secret meeting in New York City, that drew sixteen top Zionists in the country for a strategy session with Ben-Gurion. Out of that meeting the Sonneborn Institute was born—with the purpose of providing smuggled military equipment, trained assassins, spies and demolition experts, and military and scientific secrets to Orde Wingate's Haganah.<sup>8</sup>

To give an idea of the size of the project, the average annual expenditure—all in violation of U.S. law—grew from an initial figure of over \$10 million into the range of \$100 million by the late 1940s. By 1947, Sonneborn could report to his executive board at one of its weekly secret meetings that the initial core of sixteen in July 1945 had become a continentwide underground with an executive of seventy and over 10,000 "cadre" burrowed into every Jewish community in the United States, Canada, and Mexico; a clandestine fleet of military convoy

planes; a network of schools for assassins; and one U.S. surplus aircraft carrier.<sup>9</sup>

Through Sonneborn, lines of daily contact were laid down between the drug syndicate, selected lawyers, bankers, businessmen, and labor leaders, seasoned Haganah operatives like Yehuda Arazi (of which more in a moment), and certain offices in the Justice Department and the FBI. At Klein's initiative, J. Edgar Hoover met with the Sonneborn executive and agreed to give it unofficial support.<sup>10</sup> At every level, of course, Sonneborn's net was controlled at the top by Stephenson's Special Operations Executive.

Yehuda Arazi was the ace Haganah weapons smuggler who had been sent to direct "weapons procurement" for Sonneborn. Originally trained by the British Mandatory Police in Palestine (he himself was a police commissioner), Arazi had spent the 1930s making gun deals with Nazi governments throughout Eastern Europe. In 1939 he was listed as an ambassador of the Nicaraguan government of dictator Anastasio Somoza. Responsibility: weapons procurement. Most of Arazi's "Nicaraguan" guns were bought either from Eastern Europe or Central America and found their way into the hands of the terrorist underground in Palestine.

Arazi was Sonneborn's contact man with the Lansky mob. As the official historian of the Sonneborn project, Leonard Slater, relates it:

One morning Al Robison [a New Jersey Zionist who was the number two man in Sonneborn's group and the Institute's case carrier] arrived at Arazi's apartment to find him talking to two hard-looking individuals. "As I walked in," Robison recalls, "he said, 'I'll see you tomorrow, Al.' I realized he was having a conversation with somebody he didn't want me to meet, so I took the hint and left. The next day, he apologized. 'In my business, Al, we can't be too fussy about who we do business with. Sometimes they're not nice people. You're a nice American fellow, with good standing in your community. I don't want you to meet some of the people I have to deal

with. This is an organization that comes out of Brooklyn. I think they're called Murder, Limited.' ”

As Slater commented, “The British-oriented Arazi had made an understandable error in the title of Murder, Inc.”<sup>11</sup>

Max Fisher, the protégé of Julius Klein, was Sonneborn's “glue man” for both weapons and petroleum smuggling. According to Sonneborn recruiter Sally Field of Detroit, Fisher delivered funds from Meyer Lansky into the Haganah war chest and also served as the mediator to army surplus distributors in buying up tanks, weapons systems, warplanes, and other equipment for illegal shipment to Palestine. The principal Midwest dealer in surplus at this time was the Purple Gang's Morris Dalitz.

Fisher was also important to Sonneborn as the key man in Detroit, the capital of the U.S. war production industry and a petroleum boom area. Through mob connections, Fisher's Aurora Oil Company maintained full capacity stocks of gasoline throughout the war period—despite federal rationing. Portions of the gasoline found its way onto tankers bound for Palestine.<sup>12</sup>

## Out of the Shadows

During the early 1950s, Max Fisher was rewarded for his work with a new, “legitimate” identity. In 1952, he was named Michigan chairman of the United Jewish Appeal—the successor to the Sonneborn Institute as the largest Zionist fundraising organization. By the late 1950s, Fisher was its national director. Fisher's big break into financial prominence and respectability, however, came in 1957, at the personal initiative of Edmond de Rothschild. Max Fisher was permitted to buy one-third ownership in Paz Oil, Ltd. and Paz Chemical, Ltd., of Israel.

We have already discovered the men Fisher joined on the board of the Paz conglomerate: the leading figures in the Permindex web. But for Fisher, entry into Paz marked the begin-

ning of his **career in drug-smuggling**. It is not a matter of speculation that the Paz corporations are directly involved in narcotics transport. In 1978, the *New York Times* reported a series of incidents in which tanker ships transporting Paz petroleum products on ships owned by the Israeli state sector, were caught in the New York City harbor filled not with oil, but with liquid hashish.

Fisher's part-ownership in Paz was but a stepping stone to other advantageous corporate holdings: chairmanship of United Brands (previously United Fruit Company), chairmanship of the Fruehauf Trucking Company, and ownership of the Airborne Freight Corporation. All three companies have been implicated in dope trafficking.

Beginning in 1975, law enforcement officials in the Midwest began **pointing to Fisher as a "kingpin" behind the area's dope trade**, and cited his relation to Fruehauf Trucking as one component of the drug machine. Fruehauf is one of the largest distributors of tractor-trailers in the country. Certain shopping centers in the Detroit suburb of Southfield were identified as transshipment points for narcotics delivered in Fruehauf trucks. One of Max Fisher's closest associates, Charles Taubman, himself a part owner in United Brands, also conveniently owns a number of shopping centers in that city.

Airborne Freight is a joint enterprise of Max Fisher and the Jacobs brothers of Buffalo—**longtime crime colleagues of Fisher's since the days of the 1920s Purple Gang**. Airborne Freight shares its airlines exclusively with the Federal Reserve as the only two clients of an entity known as Midwest Airlines. The advantage of this is that the Federal Reserve contract makes Midwest Airlines' planes security free. Airborne Freight uses the "secure" cargo planes of Midwest Airlines to make large-scale narcotics pick-ups and deliveries—beginning in such locations as Seattle, a 100% containerized port and a location immediately adjacent to British Columbia, the entry point of dope from Hong Kong.

It is not in the least surprising that Midwest sources also report that the pilots designated with these "most valuable" cargo deliveries are predominantly former South African mer-

cenaries. Some are allegedly associated with Permindex directly. Reportedly, previous pilots in Midwest were forced into early retirement and paid off lucratively with shares in Resorts International.

The close proximity of Canada to Fisher's Detroit has been identified by law enforcement and intelligence agents on both sides of the border as another key component of the Fisher crime connection. Windsor, Ontario, just across the river from Detroit, is another depot stop on the Permindex underground railroad, **safehousing dope traffickers and hitmen from all corners of the globe.** One Windsor-based operative of the Fisher-Bronfman crowd, "Hank" Jacobsen, has recently been implicated in a Juarez City, Mexico-based cocaine and killers-for-hire apparatus that echoes the Bloomfield Permindex operation. As Bloomfield did earlier, Jacobsen enjoys the protection of high levels of the FBI and Royal Canadian Mounted Police—in large measure thanks to the good offices of Fisher and Bronfman.

## United Brands: A Case History of Crime

In the spring of 1975, Max Fisher was voted in as chairman of the board of United Brands. This placed him at the helm of a corporation whose records reveal the very beginnings of organized crime in the United States.

**The story begins even before the American Civil War, when New Orleans, the base of United Brands, became the receiving station for what was then known as "Mazzini's Mafia." Back in Italy, Joseph Mazzini, leader of the Scottish Rite in that country, commanded the "Young Italy" movement sponsored by British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and funded by the Rothschilds. In New Orleans, Mazzini's protégés, Joseph Macheca and Charles Matrenga, became the "godfathers" of the city, taking the port over on behalf of the Palermo mob, which reported directly to Mazzini and thence to Disraeli. The chain of command was so well known that the joke made the**



rounds that the word “mafia” was really an acronym from “Mazzini autorizza furti, incendi, e avvelenamente”—“Mazzini authorizes theft, arson, and kidnapping.”<sup>13</sup>

The first of the Mazzini networks drifted in before and during the Civil War. “The Mafias in New Orleans, New York, and Palermo were separate societies,” wrote one leading historian of the period, “but they cooperated closely. A member who was properly sponsored could be transferred from one city to another, from one family to another.”<sup>14</sup>

By the close of the Civil War, Disraeli’s Mafia in New Orleans was in the hands of Joseph Macheca. By contemporary accounts, the activities of the Macheca gang were indistinguishable from those of the Ku Klux Klan. In 1868, Macheca organized the New Orleans side of Democratic candidate Seymour’s campaign against Ulysses S. Grant. Seymour’s funding and political direction came from August Belmont, the Rothschilds’ official business agent in the United States. The campaign was described as follows in the *New Orleans Picayune*:

This popular and pleasant-mannered gentleman [Macheca] organized and commanded a company of Sicilians, 150 strong, known as the Innocents. Their uniform was a white cape bearing a Maltese Cross [the insignia of the British Royal Family’s Order of St. John of Jerusalem] on the left shoulder. They wore sidearms and when they marched the streets they shot at every Negro that came in sight. They left a trail of a dozen dead Negroes behind them. General James E. Steadman, managing the [Seymour] campaign, forbade them from making further parades and they were disbanded.<sup>15</sup>

One historian of the Mafia notes, “This matter-of-fact account is the first report of a formal Sicilian organization in New Orleans, and it is likely that from the ranks of these armed Innocents came the nucleus of Macheca’s Mafia.”<sup>16</sup>

Belmont’s presidential candidate ran on a program drafted at the Seligman and associated banking houses in New York: the repeal of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. The same networks controlled controlled General Albert Pike and his

hooded goons, the Ku Klux Klan, whom Macheca's gangsters took such great pains to imitate—along with the conceit of the Maltese Cross. Pike, Macheca, and their paramilitary irregulars unleashed a wave of violence across the South that buried Lincoln's Reconstruction policy not many years after the President himself.

The historical record shows that Macheca's group in New Orleans, which started out by shooting blacks for the Copperhead banks in New York, had proved its mettle by the early 1870s. It became the jumping-off point for the organization of the mob throughout the United States. Macheca provided a base for Mazzini's syndicate organizer of the first years of the Mafia, Giuseppe Esposito. A close Mazzini associate, Esposito fled Sicily in the early 1870s, arriving in New Orleans to make contact with Macheca. Esposito traveled through the United States, pulling together Italian-speaking secret societies and establishing intercity communications where none had existed before. From Esposito's tour onward, the Sicilian-speaking secret societies became crime syndicates. Mazzini's representative on the scene had absolute authority over the local godfathers, even over the leader of the New Orleans base organization. Macheca's "Mafia leadership was eclipsed briefly," according to one historian, "from 1879 to 1881, when he temporarily deferred to Giuseppe Esposito."<sup>17</sup>

Macheca died at the hands of a New Orleans mob, which dragged him from a prison cell and lynched him, after he had been arrested for the murder of a policeman.<sup>18</sup> His old lieutenant Matrenga took over the reins. Macheca's death left a deep impression on the syndicates; possibly this is the point where the mob decided to "go legit," its strategy ever since.

The vehicle for the New Orleans mob's conversion to "legitimate business" in 1900 was an immigrant from the Romanian province of Bessarabia, whence Yechiel Bronfman had migrated to Canada some ten years earlier. The new immigrant, one Samuel Zemurray, obtained financing from a group of Boston and New York Our Crowd banks, and bought out a portion of the Macheca gang's shipping interests. A historian comments, "Joe Macheca's shipping line merged with four others

to form the great United Fruit Company, which remains one of the largest of all U.S. firms."<sup>19</sup> United Fruit—rechartered recently as United Brands Company—traditionally brought in Our Crowd bankers for its top management. Nonetheless, the Sicilian mob was remembered with nostalgia. When Charles Matrenga died in 1943, the entire board of United Fruit turned out for the funeral.<sup>20</sup>

Max Fisher did not take over the helm of the huge corporation for another thirty years. Fisher's predecessor Eli Black, who had succeeded Zemurray, was killed in February of 1975 when he walked out a 44th-story window of his Pan Am Building offices in New York City. The official cause of death was suicide; however, there still exists widespread speculation that Black was shoved out of the way to make room for a more ruthless figure.<sup>21</sup>

Under the directorship of Max Fisher, United Brands' drug-trafficking appears to have flourished. According to 1978 estimates of the Drug Enforcement Administration, over 20% of the cocaine and marijuana smuggled into the United States enters aboard the ships and planes of United Brands.

Fisher's personal hand in this dope route (DEA official reports show that over \$7 billion a year in heroin, cocaine, and marijuana is smuggled into the Florida Keys alone through this "Silver Triangle" channel) is further suggested by reports from several Midwest sources that his principal "contact man" into the Caribbean is Robert Vesco. Fisher's privately owned Marathon Oil Company, barging crude oil into the Midwest from ports of call in South America, is also suspected of joining United Brands in running the "Silver Triangle" drug traffic.

## United Brands of Genocide

It is common knowledge in the United States and throughout the world that the power ruling the "banana republics" of Central America is and has been the United Fruit Company—United Brands. It is no exaggeration to say that every coup

that has taken place in the region was backed by the fruit company, which ran the nations of Central America mercilessly as slave-labor plantations. In 1932, a coup in El Salvador—with United Fruit sponsorship—exterminated 300,000 peasants who had risen up in revolt against the conditions in which they were forced to live.<sup>22</sup> For forty years, the United Fruit Company stood behind the regime of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. It is through the offices of United Fruit that Haganah gunrunner Yehuda Arazi came to be listed as an ambassador of the Nicaraguan government.

Once the state of Israel was established, the flow of weapons through Nicaragua into Palestine was reversed: a sizeable part of the Israeli armaments industry (an estimated 60%) was pumped back into the Central American “banana dictatorships.” Israeli weapons and military hardware sustained the Somoza regime when it came under attack and permitted Somoza to carry out his scorched earth policy against his own population.<sup>23</sup> When Somoza’s regime finally collapsed, it was a former United Brands employee, Francisco Urcuyo, who briefly stepped into the presidency. Israeli weapons to Somoza were funneled under the cover of the Israeli Maritime Fruit Company, through the services of Max Fisher’s associates, including Fisher’s partner in Paz, Shaul Eisenberg. And when the United Brands mafia determined to dump the traditional dictators of the previous half-century, the same flow of Israeli and East Bloc originating arms began to flow into the Sandinistas and Moscow-backed narco-terrorist groups in Guatemala and El Salvador. All of this simultaneously with Lansky successor Vesco’s move into the Soviet-Cuban orbit.

The cocaine and marijuana consumed in the United States is the blood product of hundreds of thousands in Central America who live under the rule of United Brands. Yet today, United Brands chairman Max Fisher is acknowledged “kingmaker” of the Michigan Republican Party, and has served as president of the United Jewish Appeal, president of the Jewish Welfare Fund, honorary chairman of the American Jewish Committee, and was until 1978 the national fundraising chairman for the Republican Party. In 1979 the *Jerusalem Post* named him “Jew of the Year.”

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