

Frederick Hoffman,⁵² if not its Rachel Carson (for his critique of environmental degradation).

Liek wrote two books on cancer. In his 1932 volume on "The Spread, Prevention, and Control of Cancer," the Danzig surgeon argued that cancer was a disease of civilization, a "cultural disease" whose incidence was on the rise. A natural way of life was the best protection: "the simpler and more natural one's way of life, the rarer is cancer."⁵³ Liek endorsed the view that cancer was rare among the primitive races of the world, a view dating back at least to the 1840s and subsequently upheld by people like Frederick Hoffman, the American insurance agent, and Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the Arctic explorer.⁵⁴ Liek was convinced that the growth of cancer could be traced to things like arsenic pesticides, artificial fertilizers, excessive smoking and drinking, and sexual promiscuity. People were getting too many X-rays, and stress from the rapid pace of modern life was weakening our overall bodily resistance, making us vulnerable to cancer.

Faulty nutrition, in Liek's view, was the single most important cause of cancer. Japan's high rate of stomach cancer, for example, must have something to do with their consumption of "enormous quantities" of spicy foods, compounded by their infrequent consumption of meat. In Germany, the pumping of massive quantities of petrochemical preservatives and colorings into foods must play a role. Vegetables, Liek complained, were too often "greened" with copper sulfate (one hundred milligrams per kilogram was the legal limit in his day), while sugar was routinely "blued" with a dye known as "ultramarine" (a sulfated sodium aluminum silicate—later replaced by the coal tar derivative indanthrene). Bread was regularly bleached with benzoyl peroxide after many of the natural vitamins and fibers found in traditional whole-grain breads had been destroyed by overprocessing.⁵⁵ All of these things, in Liek's view, contributed to the cancer burden.

In his second book on this topic—*The Struggle against Cancer*, published in 1934—Liek admitted exaggerations on the part of some food critics. He did not believe, for example, that aluminum pans were a cause of cancer (a near-hysterical fear in the late 1920s), and he questioned whether the dangers of lead or mercury

had been exaggerated (fears of poisoning from dental fillings had already begun to be raised). He also corrected certain errors in his 1932 book—that raw sugar was superior to refined, for example, and that the most common "blueing" agent of sugar was a coal tar derivative (the coal tar product was introduced later).⁵⁶ The larger point was still valid, however, he maintained: cancer could be prevented. If lifestyle degradations were behind the increase, then lifestyle changes could reverse the trend. What was needed was a reorientation of medicine from cure and care to prevention: *Fürsorge* and *Nachsorge* (comfort and care) were to be complemented by an increased attention to *Vorsorge* (taking precautions).⁵⁷

Liek was well aware that powerful financial interests would resist efforts to remove carcinogens from the environment—suppliers of alcohol, food products, and pharmaceuticals, for example, who made it their business to convince the public that beer was food, that tin cans were a convenience, and that Brand X toothpaste would fight cavities. He pointed out that resistance was to be expected from such companies; he also pointed out, though, that new political winds were blowing which might change all this. (He doesn't actually mention Nazism, but that is clearly implied). It had taken ten years for his critique of surgery to be taken seriously, he says, but his cancer complaints were likely to gain a sympathetic hearing sooner. Universities (e.g., the University of Vienna) were establishing cancer clinics featuring dietary therapeutics, and cancer journals (e.g., the *Zeitschrift für Krebsforschung*) were recommending nutritional expertise as a requirement for directors of German cancer clinics. Germans were preparing, he says, to move from "care for the individual" to "cancer prevention on a large scale—for the entire people."⁵⁸

Liek's was not the only voice from the political right-of-center advocating prevention. A broad range of Nazi officials—from Gauleiter Julius Streicher to Reich Health Führer Leonardo Conti—championed a renewed focus on preventive medicine.⁵⁹ The *Monatsschrift für Krebsbekämpfung* adopted the motto: "The earlier a tumor is treated, the better the likelihood of a cure." The *Zeitschrift für Krebsforschung* announced that "prevention is the best therapy."⁶⁰ The ideology of prevention merged with the