

The fascist roots of Germany's post-war Criminal Police Office

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The book *Blind in the right eye—The fascist roots of the BKA* * examines the post-war establishment of Germany's *Bundeskriminalamt* (BKA, Federal Criminal Police Office) and its roots within the fascist Third Reich. (The BKA is the equivalent of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation). The author, Dieter Schenk, who himself worked for nine years in the BKA, refutes the view that the organisation is basically non-political and free from any sort of responsibility for crimes committed during the Nazi regime: "In 1959 the leadership of the BKA consisted of 47 officials—only two of whom were not involved in the activities of the fascists".

At a time when the present Interior Minister Otto Schily (Social Democratic Party, SPD), is planning to give the Criminal Police enormous powers, the book throws a revealing light on the roots of the BKA. Reading it makes clear that giving the BKA such expanded powers represents a step back to the concepts of the police force used in the Third Reich. Conducting investigations in cases without any concrete cause for suspicion and the merging of the databases of the BKA and secret service was last possible for a centralised police authority only under Heinrich Himmler. Combined with recent laws legalising the use of police dragnets, the expanded possibilities for surveillance afforded the BKA also call to mind the BKA's predecessor organisation.

Schenk proves that those officials responsible for creating the BKA after the war had willingly served the Nazis' regime of terror. Meticulously researching their biographies, he shows how these police officers were involved in war crimes. The book is full of such biographies, unmasking officials who were previously regarded to have been merely "fellow travellers".

The facts presented not only prove this continuity in regard to personnel. The "founders" of the BKA, Paul Dickopf and Rolf Holl, were intimately involved in the machinery of the Third Reich as a result of their deeply held convictions. After the war, they also brought with them their views regarding organisational issues and who should be treated as potential enemies. With the support of political and legal institutions riddled with former Nazis, and together with the assistance of the American secret service, they managed to realise most of their concepts regarding the organisation of the police force, under the cover of the post-war German constitution. The BKA rapidly became a melting pot for those who had participated in Nazi crimes. With the protection of the newly created domestic police authority, they passed on their anti-democratic convictions to the next generation.

The central organisation for detecting crime in the Weimar republic after the First World War and in Hitler's Third Reich in the 1930s was the *Reichskriminalpolizeiamt* (RKPA, Imperial Criminal Investigation Department). In June 1936, three years after Hitler came to power, the RKPA and all Germany's other police forces were put under the control of Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*). In September, 1939 both the SS and the police were organised in the notorious *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA, Imperial Security Office). Inside the

RSHA, the secret police (*Gestapo*) were designated as *Department IV*, the criminal investigation department was *Department V*.

Arthur Nebe was one of the leaders of the RKPA, and participated in an assassination attempt on Hitler. After the war this was cited as proof that the police generally had been in opposition to the Nazis. But not only was Nebe a member of the SA (brown shirts), SS and Nazi Party since 1931, he also collaborated with Adolf Eichmann in the deportation of "Gypsies". As the head of the Criminal Investigation Department, he was also one of the central figures who organised the fascist genocide. From June to October 1941 he was the head of *Einsatzgruppe B* (Task Force B), active in the Baltic states and the Ukraine. Their job was to find Jews, communists, and "gypsies" behind the frontline and kill them. Many of those active in the various *Einsatzgruppe* joined the BKA or the secret police after the war. *Einsatzgruppe B* reported that it had liquidated 45,467 people by October 1941. Arthur Nebe, as its leader, bears responsibility for these crimes.

Dieter Schenk's book is an important contribution to the body of research on the organisational structure of Germany's Criminal Investigation Department. Previously the RKHA was said to have consisted of "non-political professionals," but this standpoint is contradicted by the facts gathered by Schenk. He thoroughly examines the reorganisation of the RKPA in the context of its integration into the Nazis' RSHA.

The training of criminologists was reorganised in accordance with fascist leadership structures. All the criminologists who later enjoyed a career in the BKA, had passed through the so-called "Führer-School" lead by Reinhard Heydrich, in order to qualify for "duty in higher ranks". Here, detectives and Gestapo members were drilled in fascist ideology, to become part of the Nazi killing-machine. The author writes: "To avoid misunderstanding, I stress: It was not the task of the Gestapo but of the Criminal Investigation Department to place people in preventive custody, which often meant sending them to almost certain death in one of the concentration camps." According to his research, the RKPA—and those working for it—was responsible for the deaths of between 70 to 80,000 people.

Under the leadership of Himmler, Heydrich and people like Nebe, the Nazis' Criminal Investigation Department had the job of tracking down so-called *Volksfeinde* (enemies of the people), oppositional workers, youth and intellectuals, most of them being members of the German Communist Party (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party, as well as Jews, Sinti, Roma, homosexuals, unemployed, etc. To carry out this kind of persecution the Criminal Investigation Department established its own subdivisions, collected data and began to arrest and deport its victims to concentration camps using "preventive custody," which had been legalised in 1937.

Following the collapse of the Third Reich, the Allied military government planned to make the police responsible to the individual *Länder*, or states, replacing the centralised structures of Nazi Germany

with federal forms of organisation. Only as the East-West conflict intensified did the Allies agree to establish a central office responsible for internal security.

Paul Dickopf, who later became the president of the BKA, from 1965-1971, was already a leading figure in early discussions on future forms of police organisation. In 1951, the West German government established a new head office for the internal police, in which he also had decisive influence.

Dickopf was born in 1910 and graduated from the “Führer-School” in 1938. Apart from his theoretical training, he had had only limited practical training in different parts of the police force, including the *Gestapo*, and had worked as a detective superintendent for two months. For the bulk of his career, he had worked as a Nazi secret agent. This espionage work, which took him to Switzerland in 1943, made it possible for Dickopf to play a central role liaising between the American secret service and the newly established German office for internal security.

Schenk provides a detailed personal history of Dickopf. For his espionage activities in Switzerland, it was essential for him to portray himself as an opponent of the Nazi regime. After the war he utilised this fiction to present himself as politically guiltless. While he was in Switzerland he also established relations with the American secret service, OSS. He was a classic double agent. These relationships made it possible for him to exert his influence, backed by letters of recommendation from the OSS. Being an informer, he was aware, to a certain extent, of American intentions, and with American support became an important adviser to the German authorities. His services were indispensable in helping to establish Germany’s post-war Criminal Investigation Department. “In fact, Dickopf had more weight than the interior ministers of the federal states in West Germany when it came to establishing the police force.”

On March 8, 1951, the BKA-law was passed in the *Bundesrat* (upper house of parliament) and Dickopf was given the task of creating the new body. The plans for the organisation came from Dickopf’s pen, and are a copy of the *Reichskriminalamt* of the Third Reich. During the debate over the character of the new police force, he wrote that his plan “introduces nothing new, but the ideal solution for the future shape of the Criminal Investigation Department rests on the situation of 1936/37 to 1945.”

The BKA as developed by Dickopf was divided into many departments. “The organisational division of the BKA served the purpose of creating posts that could be filled—the amount of personnel rapidly increased. Under Dickopf’s ‘care’ the BKA became an institution for politically tainted ‘old criminologists’.” The career guidelines, as well as the basic forms used by the BKA drawn up by Dickopf were also nearly identical to those of the RKPA.

Dickopf’s influential position meant he had absolute powers regarding the choice of personnel—even though he did not become the BKA’s first president. He chose his personnel from the many old Nazi criminologists who applied for jobs in the BKA. So many applications were received that the Interior Ministry was able to forgo advertising for BKA vacancies.

As the author points out, former Nazis poured into the BKA where they made their careers. After years of work, principally directed against the political left, these participants in the Nazi genocide went into well-paid retirement. In detailing a number of their biographies, Dieter Schenk presents the reader with a “chamber of horrors”.

For instance, Dickopf employed Kurt Griese, who had joined the SS in 1933. From 1942/43 to 1944, Griese had been a high-ranking SS officer in *Einsatzgruppe A* in Lithuania, where their “work” involved murdering about 140,000 Jews. According to the orders of the day, officers like Griese were expected to personally take part in these killings.

Under Dickopf’s direction, Griese wrote an expert report, which stated that graduation from the fascist “Führer-School” justified promotion to higher ranks within the BKA, including that of president. In 1970, Griese

retired from his leading post as government director of the Criminal Investigation Department.

The BKA was a hideout for many high-ranking Nazis like Griese, who had led *Einsatzgruppe* or who, from their desks, had sent opponents of the Nazi regime to their death. They all bore responsibility for the murder of those the Nazis deemed to be opponents on religious, political or ethnic grounds.

Many former members of the secret military police, who had committed mass-murder behind the frontline, also ended up in the BKA. The head of the BKA’s Technical Institute had been a commander in the Third Reich, leading over 1,200 secret military policemen. The military police was proven to have committed arbitrary murders, executions, and possessed virtually unlimited powers to kill. Torture was a part of the organisation’s everyday life. The various local leaders sent their commanders proposals for punishment, which mainly read “execution”, and the commanders usually agreed.

No member of the BKA was ever brought to court and removed from duty. Only two officials were convicted overseas. One of these was Theo Saevecke, “the butcher of Milan”. Dickopf brought him into the BKA in 1951, and he eventually retired in 1971. Because of the murders he had carried out, an Italian military court sentenced him to death in absentia in 1998. He died in Germany last year, aged 89.

To a certain extent, the same people who had occupied the posts under the Nazi regime filled the senior ranks of the newly established BKA. The chief biologist in the RKPA became the leading biologist of the BKA, and likewise the BKA’s senior detective officer had previously held the same post in the fascist police force.

Blind in the right eye also proves that not only was there a continuity in personnel and organisational forms, but also the concepts of policing and notions of identifying the enemy were taken over from the Nazis. Using a number of official and unofficial letters from Dickopf, the author demonstrates this ideological continuity. In one of its publications dealing with preventive custody, the BKA comes to the conclusion: “The measures used in the Third Reich were sensible, including the handing over of house keys, so that the delinquent could be checked upon at any time of day by the police.”

The BKA officers regarded the liberation of concentration camp inmates as tantamount to releasing criminals and that this was responsible for rising crime, based on statistics they themselves had drawn up. Sinti and Roma, dubbed “travellers” by the BKA, were regarded as “notorious criminals” and were kept under observation by the criminal authorities in the federal states.

The BKA officers also continued to view left-wingers—meaning people who in one or other form were connected to the workers’ movement—as their main enemy. For Dickopf, the Soviet-Union, which despite Stalinism embodied certain gains of the working class in a distorted form, was a special enemy, which the political police had to fight with all the means at their disposal. In a report to the American secret service in 1946, he wrote, “Maybe the Russians are animals, as many Germans, and not only Germans, believe, but if this is so, they are very intelligent animals.”

For the same reason the BKA participated in measures directed against the German Communist Party (KPD) prior to it being banned in 1956. BKA departments were ordered to search for and confiscate KPD-material. Schenk also points out that Dickopf also viewed the SPD as an enemy, since it was to the left of his “self-defined political middle”.

The “tradition” of opposing everything and anyone with a connection to the workers’ movement formed the basis of the work of the BKA following the collapse of the Third Reich. “Personal convictions cannot be separated from state measures [against communists—author’s note.]. To be suspected of being a communist was a crime, while at the same time the rightwing extremism was virtually ignored.”

Following the establishment of the BKA, the separation of the Criminal

Investigation Department from the secret police existed only on paper. Officials in the secret service transferred to the BKA, and vice versa, and the databases of these two authorities were combined in 1971.

Blind in the right eye can be recommended to anyone who wants to get a clear picture of the founding and character of West Germany and its institutions. With thorough detailed work, many cross-references, and additional information (which could not be dealt with in this review) Dieter Schenk has drawn up a detailed and penetrating history of the BKA.

* *Auf dem rechten Auge blind—Die braunen Wurzeln des BKA*, by Dieter Schenk

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