

The German Foreign Ministry and the Nazis

Ulrich Rippert
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The report by the Historical Commission on the German Foreign Ministry in the period of Hitler's Nazi regime is causing a stir in Europe. In the nearly 900-page document, historians Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Moshe Zimmermann (Israel) and Peter Hayes (US) show how directly the Foreign Ministry was involved in the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship.

The extensive and thorough documentation leaves no doubt that the leading members of the Foreign Ministry were not only informed about the war and the Nazis' policies of extermination, but actively participated. For example, a Foreign Ministry representative was among the 15 high-ranking officials at the Wannsee conference in January 1942. The conference was led by SS General Reinhard Heydrich to organise in detail the "final solution" to the Jewish question—that is, the ongoing Holocaust. As a result, transportation to the extermination camps was authorised and organized by the Foreign Ministry.

Many war criminals from the Nazi diplomatic service were able to continue their careers in the Foreign Ministry after the war. They systematically spread the false legend that the ministry's formal acceptance of the Nazi dictatorship had been a cover for active resistance. This lie was maintained for 65 years.

Contrary to all the known facts at that time, post-war West Germany and the establishment of the Federal Republic were presented as a new democratic beginning. The role of the old Nazi cliques in the Foreign Ministry and in many areas of politics, business and the legal system is still being covered over and whitewashed.

A good example is Richard von Weizsäcker. The ninety-year-old Weizsäcker was, from 1984 to 1994, the sixth president of the Federal Republic of Germany. He began his political career as a defender of his father, Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker, who was indicted and sentenced as a war criminal at the Nuremberg trials.

Even after the publication of the report of the Historical Commission, Richard von Weizsäcker has continued to defend his father and justify his actions.

The elder von Weizsäcker joined the Nazi Party in April 1938 and the same month was made an SS Colonel in the personal staff of Heinrich Himmler (SS Reich Leader). Two years earlier, Weizsäcker had been put in charge of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry. Probably at Hitler's behest, he was made a ministerial director in 1937, and in 1938 became First Secretary at the Foreign Ministry. After Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, he was the second highest ranking official. In this position he was instrumental in the development of the Munich Agreement, which led to the carve-up of Czechoslovakia prior to World War II. He was later to justify his role by saying he had wanted in this way to preserve the peace.

Ernst von Weizsäcker also played a role in the deportation of the Jews, which was again confirmed by the report of the Historical Commission. When deportations were made from occupied or allied countries, the Foreign Ministry had to give its consent, which it did as a rule. Weizsäcker raised "no objection" when, in 1942, Adolf Eichmann sought to transport 6,000 Jews from Paris to Auschwitz. He also consented to a decree for the deportation of 90,000 Jews from Belgium, Holland and France.

The claim that his father had been opposed to the Nazi regime is also untrue. The Historical Commission cites personal records of Ernst von Weizsäcker immediately after Hitler took power in February 1933. He states: "The likes of us must support the new era. For what would come afterwards if they failed! Of course, we must also help with experience, international knowledge and general wisdom. About this, I am determined..."

The Commission commented on this by saying: "Weizsäcker's remarks are an exemplary reflection of

the thoughts and wishes of the leading diplomats: the liberal democratic system which they unanimously opposed, should be replaced by an authoritarian form of government, a goal that the Reich President called a 'project of national renewal and unity'."

This is very revealing. It makes clear why, against all the statements in the Commission's report, Richard von Weizsäcker, as a former President, clings fast to the old lies about the Foreign Ministry being a stronghold of resistance to Nazi rule. It is not primarily a matter of defending family honour. The lie that the social elite rejected the Nazi regime and its terror serves a political function. It is used to justify the fact that, after the supposed "year zero", the very same people then built up the refined democratic constitutional state.

The Weizsäcker family is a prime example of the continuity of the political elite across different political systems. Coming from the educated upper middle class, ennobled in 1916, in three successive generations this family has served in the highest state offices of the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Nazi dictatorship and the German Federal Republic. Karl von Weizsäcker, Ernst's father and grandfather to Richard, was Prime Minister to the King of Württemberg from 1906 to 1918.

There is also a second point to consider. The report by the Historical Commission makes clear that the leading officials of the Foreign Ministry worked closely with the Nazi regime because they agreed with its political goals. The motives of the members of the Foreign Ministry stretched from "hopes for a resurgence of an authoritarian political power in Germany; to agreement with the premises of Nazi policy: from hostility to democracy to anti-Semitism," it says in the introduction to the historians' report.

But this means that the policies of the Nazi Party were not simply the product of a madman named Adolf Hitler, but had deep roots in the interests of German imperialism. The aggressive goals of the fascists were the continuation of the policy of conquest of German capitalism, as Trotsky had explained already in 1932.

The Historical Commission has refuted the myths of resistance inside the German Foreign Ministry. It has therefore removed an important cornerstone from the edifice of lies about a supposedly fundamental new beginning for democracy after 1945. Now it is necessary to oppose the ruling elite today, who are

again considering the "merits" of authoritarian forms of rule.



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