

# German government report highlights Nazi past of public officials

Sybille Fuchs  
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In December 2010, the parliamentary faction of the Left Party formally requested an official explanation of the federal government's dealings with the Nazi past. After one year, the government has presented an 85-page response, which is available online in PDF.

The Left Party's request consisted of 64 individual questions. These included information on politicians and high officials who were able to continue their careers after the founding of the Federal Republic (West Germany) in 1949, despite having been members of the Nazi Party or one of its sub-organizations. Another question concerned historical investigations of the Nazi past in regard to the various ministries and federal agencies. Still another concerned the manner in which the government dealt with compensation claims by victims of Nazi rule. Some of the questions focused on the handling of the Nazi past by the German Democratic Republic (GDR—East Germany).

Other questions dealt with the rehabilitation of deserters from the Wehrmacht (Hitler's army), compensation for Nazi victims of forced sterilization and the euthanasia programmes, and the establishment of memorials commemorating Nazi crimes and their victims.

The response of the government deals in great detail with this last question. It meticulously lists the means provided for the various memorials.

It is also clear from the report, however, that the preservation and restoration of former concentration camps and other Nazi crime sites and the promotion of knowledge about this period of history in schools and through academic research have depended more on the initiative of concerned citizens than the actions of the government, which has generally provided support only after the fact.

The government refused to provide answers to questions regarding compensation and reparations for Italian military internees, non-Jewish Nazi victims in Eastern Europe, or Greek and Italian victims of Nazi terror.

However, it provided extensive information about compensation for victims of the Holocaust. They are being paid compensation to this day, but their descendants, some of whom suffer from traumatic stress, have been left just as empty-handed as non-Jewish victims.

## Uninterrupted careers

The government report makes clear that the West German authorities were riddled with former Nazi Party, SS and SA members. The decision-making bodies of West German politics, administration and justice were for decades occupied by persons whose Nazi past had never been investigated in detail. Therefore, the extent of their participation in Nazi crimes was never clarified, or only in exceptional cases.

The careers of many former Nazis in West Germany have been gradually revealed through individual studies or research by journalists. The response of the federal government summarizes these findings and provides additional material relating to individual ministries and agencies of the federal and state governments.

For example, the report quotes a table from the post-doctoral thesis by Bernhard Löffler (1), stating that of 204 top officials in the Federal Economics Ministry who served under Ludwig Erhard between 1949 and 1962, more than half had a Nazi past. Four of them joined the Nazi Party before Adolf Hitler came to power 1933, 29 percent after March 1933, and 20 percent after 1937. In the Third Reich, they were Nazi section leaders (*Rottenführer*) or squad leaders (*Scharführer*), senior assault leaders (*Obersturmführer*) and assault leaders (*Sturmbannführer*) in the SA. Four belonged to the SS Cavalry Corps, and seven to the General SS, of whom one was an SS senior assault leader and six were block leaders.

Of the candidates applying for a post under the de-Nazification proceedings, 19 (11 percent) were classified as "fellow travellers," while 70 were regarded as "tainted." Among them were a minister and 25 state secretaries.

The basis for the recruitment of former Nazi party members into the ministries was a supplementary Act of 1951 to Article 131 of the Constitution, according to which previously released "lesser offenders" could be reintroduced into the civil service. Between 1951 and 1953, the total number of those re-employed in the federal and state administrations (excluding the post office and railways) under Article 131 was 39,000.

In 1952, approximately 38 percent of senior civil servants in the Foreign Ministry were former Nazi Party members. By March 31, 1955, some 77.4 percent of all civil servants at the Ministry of Defence had come in under Article 131. At the Ministry of

Economics, the figure was 68.3 percent, and at the Press and Information Office, 58.1 percent. At the Ministry of Defence, there were 190,280 soldiers, Army officials and survivors who fell under Article 131.

The response lists 27 government members who were in the Nazi Party. The list includes members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Many of them, like Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger and Federal Minister Hans Dhlgrün (Finance), Theodor Oberländer (Displaced Persons), Richard Hunter (Justice), Hans Krüger (Displaced Persons), Hans Lenz (federal minister of the treasury and scientific research) had been Nazi Party members as of 1933. Hermann Höcherl (interior minister) was a Nazi Party member from 1931 to 1932, and then again after 1935. Others joined in 1937. Former Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder (not related to the former Social Democratic Party chancellor of the same name) had been a member since 1933, but resigned in 1943.

Herbert Ehrenberg (SPD), Horst Ehmke (SPD), Hans Dietrich Genscher (FDP) and Erhard Eppler (SPD) are recorded only as members as of 1944 or 1945 in the register of the Nazi Party. Some of them say they would never knowingly have applied for membership, but are in the records as a result of so-called mass recruitments—a claim that has not yet been historically verified.

Interestingly, the findings regarding the “Gehlen Organisation,” the forerunner of the Federal Intelligence Service (BND), established in 1946 by the Allies, note: “According to public documents from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), by early 1954, some 50 or 51 employees of the Gehlen Organization had previously been in the Waffen SS, General SS or the SS Security Service.” The continued employment of staunch Nazis during the Cold War was viewed as desirable because they were regarded as reliable anti-communists.

To establish how many of those with a Nazi past have worked in the federal courts since 1949 the government bases itself on the Annual Report of the Justice Department. According to this, of 57 judges of the Federal Labour Court and Federal Social Court, one was found to have had Nazi Party membership. There were 203 officials with a Nazi past in the Office of the Attorney General.

### Gaps and omissions

The figures in the government response are incomplete in many respects, because the reporting of Nazi Party membership on taking up a post varied widely from one institution to another. As one report from 2005 shows, many personnel records made no note of Nazi Party membership.

Numerous personnel files have been destroyed, making impossible a scientific investigation of those with a possible Nazi past. Of the nearly one million public servants in 1955, the personnel files of only 210,000 remain.

For these reasons, the government response is essentially based on existing studies, such as the already-cited study of the Ministry

of Economics by Bernhard Löffler; the 1996 book by Norbert Frei, *Politics of the Past*, and the 2010 study on the Foreign Ministry by a Historical Commission. (2) The response lists numerous other sources on the requested topics.

In addition to the Foreign Ministry, in recent years other ministries and federal authorities have allowed their past during the Third Reich to be examined by historians. In May, Agriculture Minister Ilse Aigner placed on the Internet the report initiated by her predecessor, Renate Künast, on the role of the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture in the Nazi era. The histories of the Federal Intelligence Service (BND) and Ministry of Finance are currently being investigated. Related research projects have begun on the federal ministries of Justice, Economics and Technology.

Answers are lacking on many issues—such as court proceedings against federal officials because of their Nazi past and disciplinary procedures on the same grounds—with the federal government citing problems with sources or a lack of competence.

The long delay in appraising Nazi crimes and the long history of concealment of the Nazi links of officeholders in Germany have led to a situation where much can simply no longer be investigated.

In the Federal Republic in the 1950s and 1960s, there was virtually no investigation into the twelve years of Nazi rule. This was regarded as having been completed by the Nuremberg Trials of the Allies and the “de-Nazification” process.

Notes:

1) Bernhard Löffler: „SozialeMarktwirtschaft und administrative Praxis: Das BMWi unter Ludwig Erhard,” (“Social Market Economy and Administrative Practice: The Federal Ministry of Economics Under Ludwig Erhard”), *Quarterly Magazine for Social and Economic History*, supplement 162, Stuttgart 2002.

2) EckartConze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes, Moshe Zimmermann: *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit: Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik (The Foreign Office and the past: German diplomats in the Third Reich and the Federal Republic)*, Munich 2010



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