

Network of former Nazis in German Interior Ministry

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The German Interior Ministry (BMI) employed more former Nazis after the Second World War than previously thought. Between 1949 and the beginning of the 1970s, there were more former Nazis in leading positions than in other ministries, such as the foreign office or the justice ministry, which were also teeming with former Nazis.

This was demonstrated in the concluding report of a preliminary study by historians, which appeared on October 29. In December 2014, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière ordered a project group, led by Professor Frank Bösch (ZZF Potsdam) and Andreas Wirsching (IfZ Munich-Berlin), to study the role of National Socialists in the Interior Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Interior Ministry of former Stalinist East Germany (GDR).

The Interior Ministry had blocked such a study for longer than most of the other ministries and authorities. Since they had something to hide, this is not surprising! Immediately after the founding of the BMI in 1949, half of all newly hired department heads, branch and subdivision leaders were former members of the Nazi Party. This percentage rose to 66 percent between 1956 and 1961. This number in the Interior Ministry was only exceeded by the number in the Federal Criminal Office (BKA), which is under the control of the Interior Ministry. The proportion of ex-Nazis in the BKA was 75 percent.

Among former Nazi Party members, numerous former Nazi storm troopers (members of the SA, whose murderous thugs helped Hitler gain power) worked for the BMI. Their proportion grew from 17 to 45 percent in 1961 and then fell to 25 percent. This meant that at the beginning of the 1960s almost half of all leading BMI officials had been active in Nazi storm troop divisions, and at the beginning of the 1970s, every fourth official was a former storm trooper.

Even former SS members were to be found in the BMI. At the beginning of the 1970s, the proportion of former members of Hitler's elite corps, some of whom ran concentration camps, was between seven and eight percent.

More Nazi Party members were also placed in East German government positions than the official German Democratic Republic (GDR) statistics admit. The proportion was clearly lower than the 66 percent who worked in the Interior Ministry of the Federal Republic. According to the study, only about 7 percent of former NSDAP members were active in the armed bodies of the GDR Interior Ministry. In the civil areas that were considered "unpolitical," such as science and culture, about 20 percent were former Nazis.

The network of Keßler and Globke

The personnel of the Federal Republic Interior Ministry were personally assembled by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (Christian Democratic Union)

in 1949. He commissioned Erich Keßler, former SA senior squad leader and, in 1945, section head in the Reich Ministry of the Interior, to prepare the "principles of a new civil servants policy" and "possible candidates for leading positions in the federal administration."

At Keßler's side was Hans Globke, who led Adenauer's chancellery starting in 1953. Globke was undersecretary in the Reich Interior Ministry and was involved in the infamous "Nuremberg race laws." He resigned in 1963 when the GDR sought to prosecute him for his role.

The circle around Globke and Keßler, which included Ritter von Lex, former organizer of the 1936 Olympic Games, was responsible for a "wide-ranging hiring policy" (closing report, page 26). Globke and Keßler quickly abandoned their initial hesitancy to bring especially notorious Nazi officials into key ministries. Out of 44 leading officials of the BMI, there were 24 former Nazi Party members. Fifteen percent had belonged to the SA and seven percent to the SS.

Globke and Kessler made use of networks of former Nazis. One of these networks clearly came from Eastern Prussia, in particular, the right-wing faculty of the University of Königsberg. A whole line-up of state secretaries and speakers, some of whom came from the families of the former Junker nobility in Eastern Prussia, occupied leading posts in the central division of the BMI. This included Keßler himself, along with Ritter von Lex, Sklode von Perbandt, Botho Bauch and Reinhard Dullien.

The superficial justification for this hiring practice was that one needed the "expertise" of the Nazi functionaries in building and management. At any rate, it rapidly became evident that the practice aimed at more than this: the Cold War had begun and the Adenauer government and the Western Allies needed the old anticommunist Nazi elite at the front lines of the struggle against the GDR. The former Nazis served as the basis of the efforts of the Foreign Ministry to rearm the Interior Ministry and suppress the KPD and other left-wing organizations.

The Adenauer Decree

The authors referred to Adenauer's "Memorandum on the internal and external security of the federal territory" from August 29, 1950, as well as his government decree on the "political activity of members of the public service against the democratic system." Adenauer conjured up a double threat scenario: the Federal Republic was threatened both by the GDR and the Communist Party, which supposedly was working toward a revolutionary upheaval (page 61).

While the government decree accused Communist Party members—who were pursued by the Nazis and had frequently organized resistance—of a "severe breach of duty," former membership in the Nazi Party was no longer seen as a hindrance to employment or a reason for dismissal. For such officials, the "traditional picture of an unpolitical management

expert” sufficed (page 51).

A certain Karl Behnke played a leading role in the drafting of the Adenauer decree. He was an expert in this area. As an official in the Third Reich, he had driven opponents of the Nazis from government service.

Parallel to Adenauer’s decree, there were public efforts to rearm the German military with the help of American occupation authorities. Federal Interior Minister Gustav Heinemann resigned in October 1950 as a result. Under his successors, Robert Lehr and Gerhard Schröder (both CDU), the number of leading ministry employees with a Nazi past increased. Schröder himself was a former member of the Nazi Party. In 1957, he initiated the debate over the emergency laws, which were finally passed in 1968 under a grand coalition government.

Under Schröder’s direction, 15 out of a total of 17 leading and central branch posts of the BMI were occupied by former Nazi Party and SA members. Key branches such as domestic security, the immigration department and the press office were in the hands of leading officials of the fascist dictatorship.

One of these men was Erwin Gehrhardt, press spokesman of the BMI starting in 1959 and leader of the press law department starting in 1965. Gehrhardt joined the Nazi Party as early as 1924 and was active as an SA squad leader. As a student, he had written for the Götting *Kampfblatt*. In 1929, he became a member of the Alliance of National Socialist German Jurists, and in 1932 he began making propaganda speeches at numerous Nazi gatherings. When he was hired into the BMI, these activities were downplayed as the “sins of youth.”

Kurt Breull led the residency and immigration department from 1953 to 1964. As a junior lawyer, he was already a vehement anti-Semite. As a leading official in the Federal Republic, he seamlessly continued his anti-Semitism. Breull of all people was the Interior Ministry official responsible for the Föhrenwald Displaced Persons Camp. The camp housed Jews who had survived the Holocaust and whose efforts to emigrate to Israel had failed.

Breull treated these Jews as “illegal” and instructed the diplomatic mission not to issue any more visas for entry, made federal border checks stricter and tried everything he could to deport those already in the camp and deny them social services. In the end he failed because of the opposition of local authorities and the population.

Intelligence agencies under the control of former Nazis

The development of the security organs makes it especially clear how much the West German state based itself on the personnel of the fascist dictatorship in spite of its professions of democracy. In the course of the anticommunist propaganda of the 1950s and 1960s, the security apparatus was massively expanded. Close collaborators of Hitler’s Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick, who was sentenced to death in Nuremberg in 1946, and SS head Heinrich Himmler, were more or less seamlessly brought into federal service.

Reinhard Gehlen, head of the department “Foreign Armies East” is one of the best-known examples. After the war, he collaborated with the United States to build the German foreign intelligence agency, became a federal official in 1950, and hired a large number of his former employees into the Federal Intelligence Agency.

Another example is Max Hagemann, who led the BMI public security subdivision and played a leading role in the building of the Federal Criminal Office (BKA). He was active in the Reich Ministry of Justice before 1945, most recently as a consultant for the Reich Commission for the “Handling of Enemy Property.” From there, he moved to the “Central Office for Asset Management” founded by the allies and became a BMI

consultant for police and police law in 1949. As a leading editor of the journal *Kriminalistik*, Hagemann propagandized against supposed “hereditary criminals” in a fight that was “merciless to the point of destruction.” He also wrote a review praising Globke’s commentary on the race laws.

The traces of Nazism in the present

The preliminary study on the Nazi past of the Interior Ministry concentrates on the continuity of personnel. The larger study planned, which should last until 2018, aims to give special attention to how former Nazi members influenced domestic policy.

However, the results of the preliminary study already permit one to draw important conclusions. On the surface, it may appear as though the Federal Republic was founded under democratic auspices following the destruction of the Third Reich. However, from the very beginning, there were parallel structures in the state apparatus that were deeply rooted in the Nazi dictatorship. As the authors of the study themselves remark, there was a “public recognition of the crimes committed ‘in the German name’ and a distancing from neo-Nazi tendencies, which were declared taboo, while at the same time there was also a conscious integration of a large number of perpetrators and supporters from the Nazi period” (page 14).

According to the study, the “authoritarian state” and antidemocratic orientation of the officials did not disappear after 1945 and this is reflected in the current policies of the BMI. There are “clear indications of a continuing anti-Semitic attitude in the residency and immigration departments,” and an “authoritarian practice of censorship in the culture department,” as well as a “social conservative-oriented understanding” in the social department.

In addition, the investigation of the Federal Criminal Office in 2011 showed “how concepts of the fight against crime, which were developed during the Second World War in the context of the fight against partisans, were once again put to use in the combatting of terrorism in the 1970s, and ‘cultural racism’ found its reflection in discriminatory measures against Sinti and Roma.”

The historians explained in their paper that Germany had developed “a stable democracy” in later years in spite of the large number of former Nazis in the ministry. But more recent events bring this claim into question. Seventy years after the end of the Nazi dictatorship, there may no longer be any more former Nazi party members in the state apparatus, but that is only because those who are still alive are all of retirement age. Their tradition, on the other hand, is alive and well.

For example, the series of racist murders carried out by the neo-fascist National Socialist Underground took place under the supervision of the security agencies and the police. Moreover, many questions surrounding the Munich Oktoberfest terror bombing have never been explained. Finally, the security agencies continue to spy massively and illegally on the population. Along with the sharpening of social contradictions and the revival of German militarism, the basic antidemocratic, racist and militaristic tendencies of the German state are returning with full force.

Descendants of former officials of the Third Reich are to be found in leading positions to this day. Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière himself, whose father enjoyed Hitler’s confidence as an officer of his general staff, is one of the best-known examples.

The return of the antidemocratic, racist and militaristic tendencies of the Nazi dictatorship cannot be understood, however, merely in personal or individual terms. Rather, it must be recognized that the root cause of war and fascism—the capitalist profit system, which is once again trying to solve its crisis with wars and dictatorial methods—remained in place at the

so-called “hour zero,” after the end of the Second World War.



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