

The German Foreign Office and the Nazi Past

I

When the career diplomat Curt Prüfer, born in 1881, sat down at the end of the Second World War to think about his career and what he had done during the Third Reich, he could look back on nearly four decades of moving steadily up through the ranks of the German Foreign Office. An Arabist who had worked as an intelligence officer in the Middle East during World War I, Prüfer had served as deputy director of the Anglo-American and Oriental Division of the Foreign Office in Berlin from 1930 to 1936, when he was put in charge of the personnel division, before becoming ambassador to Brazil in 1939. In 1942, following Brazil's entry into the Allied camp, Prüfer returned to Berlin, but ill-health, age, and the fear that Germany would soon be defeated led him to obtain leave to go and live with his family in Switzerland, where he received confirmation of his official retirement just before the end of the war.¹

Prüfer did not look back over his life with either nostalgia or satisfaction. Despite his relatively humble origins, he had quickly become, through his command of Arabic and his knowledge of the Arab world, part of the conservative elite whose values and beliefs dominated the Foreign Office during the 1920s. But, he said, during the Hitler years this elite had been pushed aside by younger newcomers shoehorned into the Foreign Office by the Nazis. They were particularly prominent in the Germany Division (*Abteilung Deutschland*), which was responsible among other things for liaison with the Nazi Party and the SS. Prüfer thought it created unnecessary paperwork and got in the way of the proper functioning of the diplomatic service. The Nazis brought into the Foreign Office by Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Party man who had replaced the conservative Konstantin von Neurath as Foreign Minister in February 1938, were, he thought, mere dilettantes appointed for their ideological commitment rather than their expertise. Men like Under-Secretary of State Martin Luther knew nothing of foreign affairs, and key parts of the Office, including the Information and Oriental Divisions, were being ruined by the newcomers. The old diplomatic elite, Prüfer insisted, had remained professional and correct, hostile to Hitler and distrustful of his adventurism. The German people was not to be blamed for the outbreak of the war, but had instead been prepared systematically for it by a clique of Nazi warmongers. Left to get on with the job, he implied, the diplomats of the Foreign Office would have managed to solve Europe's crisis peacefully.²

In recollecting his past, Prüfer had the huge advantage of being able to refer to the diaries that he had kept all his life. Prüfer was almost unique among senior diplomats in keeping a private journal, so it is particularly valuable as a source. In many of the entries quoted in the book he prepared for publication at the end of the war, Prüfer's disillusion with the Nazi regime and its leader shines through. Reporting on 19 July 1943 on the dramatic decline in Germany's military fortunes, above all in Italy, he noted:

1 Donald M. McKale: Curt Prüfer. German Diplomat from the Kaiser to Hitler, Kent State UP, Kent, OH 1987.

2 Ibid., pp. 179-87.

"Perhaps the ultimate reason for this dreadful reversal is that the twilight of the gods is now upon the mass of the people who followed Hitler with such blind faith. It has become clear that the wrong road was chosen; that everybody was duped; and that all the unimaginable sacrifices were offered to a false idol, sacrifices which will earn us no reward, only punishment. These realizations have drained our courage, throttled out enthusiasm, and raised doubts as to the justice of our cause."³

Prüfer was also highly critical of Nazi policies towards the Jews, about which he said in his entry for 16 October 1942, the stories he heard were "so dreadful that we held them to be 'atrocious stories', or at the very least exaggerated."⁴ On 21 November 1942 he reported that stories of the extermination of the Jews would cause Germany "unspeakable harm" "if these stories really correspond to the facts". As far as the Jews were concerned, "everyone speaks of them with the greatest sympathy".⁵ On another occasion, he noted: "The persecution of these innocent people, who are being annihilated solely because their existence does not conform to the ideal projection of the National Socialist 'Weltanschauung', has burdened the conscience of every individual who knew about it." Regrettably, coercion and "the oath of allegiance" had kept people (including of course himself and his fellow-diplomats) in line. Most Germans, he wrote on 19 July 1943, wanted Hitler to be removed, "but as long as the enemy insists on unconditional surrender [...] the nation will keep resisting."⁶ Thus the absence of resistance was mainly the fault of the Allies.

Unfortunately, Prüfer never actually wrote these words in his original diaries. He inserted them for the benefit of his later readers, in 1946. In the original version of the entry for 19 July 1943, quoted above, he merely wrote: "The Führer is a great, a very great man, who made our nation – at that time facing ruin – into the most powerful country on earth." Germany's decline was "terrible to see", he wrote, "because I was sincerely converted to some of the beautiful ideas of National Socialism."⁷ The entry for 16 October 1942 in which he reported his scepticism about the extermination of the Jews never existed in the original; he wrote it in 1946. Nor did the original entry for 21 November 1942 contain even a single word about the Jews.

Prüfer doctored his diaries not least to conceal the fact that he was himself deeply anti-Semitic. His belief in a Jewish conspiracy to subvert Germany had already manifested itself during the General Strike that overthrew the Kapp putsch in 1920. Walking through Berlin during the strike, he found groups of people "standing around debating everywhere. The speakers are nearly exclusively Jews, behaving as if they were friends of the people. It is repulsive to see how the stupid Germans allow themselves to be ensnared by international Jewry." For Prüfer, the strike was "the Jewish affair".⁸ His anti-Semitism had a practical side too. During the Nazi era, Prüfer rushed to cover up the fact that one of his wife's ancestors was a baptized Jew by bribing an official to expunge the fact from the records, while later on he had no qualms about purchasing 'Aryanized' property in Baden-Baden.⁹

3 Donald M. McKale (ed.): *Rewriting History. The Original and Revised World War II Diaries of Curt Prüfer, Nazi Diplomat*, Kent State UP, Kent, OH 1988, p. 116. The diaries are now held in the Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 226-7.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 114-5.

8 Cited in McKale: Prüfer (footnote 1), p. 61.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 100-1, 175-6.

On 14 April 1943, he wrote of “the abysmal hatred of the Jews against all European Gentiles” and asked: “How can there ever be peace if Jews are the advisers of our enemies?”¹⁰

His report on 22 November 1942 that he had heard of the mass murder of the Jews in the East (“today every child knows this in the smallest detail”) was without comment on its morality, and was replaced in the revised version by the expression of doubt (“if these stories really correspond to the facts”) and the invented story of people’s sympathy for the victims.¹¹ One of Prüfer’s principal jobs during the war, after his return from Brazil, was, as an expert on Arab affairs, to deal with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haji Amin al-Husseini, whom he defended against the intrigues of his rival Rashid Ali al-Gailani, the Iraqi nationalist who had fled to Germany after a failed uprising against the British in 1941. The Mufti, Prüfer wrote in his original diary on 17 July 1943, “kept insisting on ‘getting rid of the Jewish settlements in Palestine’”, by which was meant, as the Mufti told Hitler on another occasion, exterminating the Jews there. This entry was simply cut from the revised diaries.¹²

Prüfer never published his diaries; when he completed them, he realized that they would incriminate his old boss Joachim von Ribbentrop, who was standing trial in Nuremberg for war crimes. But he kept them and after his death in 1959 passed them on to his son, who eventually made them available for scholarship. They are interesting not least because they show how consciously Prüfer doctored the historical record to make himself, and the professional diplomatic elite to which he belonged, seem as if they had been politically neutral during the Third Reich, had despised Hitler and the leading Nazis, had known little or nothing for sure about the extermination of the Jews, and on the basis of what they did know had condemned the Nazis for their anti-Semitism, which, like the mass of the German people, they had not shared themselves. Prüfer’s biography, and the story of his doctored diaries, can be taken as a dramatic example of how history can be manipulated and legends manufactured. Prüfer was not only unable to learn from the past, he actively engaged in covering it up.

II

How typical was Curt Prüfer? How far did the old-style, career diplomats who served in the German Foreign Office during the Nazi period cover up their own involvement in Nazism’s crimes? How deep was their involvement in any case? For decades after the war, the Foreign Office showed little or no inclination to confront these questions. Reconstituted in West Germany in 1951, it described in a pamphlet published in 1979 its history in the years 1933-34 in three sentences:

“Das AA leistete den Plänen der NS-Machthaber zähen, inhaltenden Widerstand, ohne jedoch das Schlimmste verhüten zu können. Das Amt blieb lange eine ‘unpolitische’ Behörde und galt den Nationalsozialisten als eine Stätte der Opposition. In der Eingangshalle des neuen Amtes in Bonn befindet sich eine Gedenktafel, die an diejenigen Mitarbeiter des AA erinnert, die im Kampf gegen das Hitler-Regime ihr Leben gaben.”¹³

10 McKale: *Rewriting History* (footnote 3), p. 74.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 151.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 113, 225.

13 *Auswärtiges Amt* (ed.): *Auswärtige Politik heute*, Bonn 1979.

This account became more or less dogma in the Foreign Office and remained so up to the end of the twentieth century and even beyond. On a number of occasions it was challenged, but attempts to pillory the Foreign Office as a tool of Nazism seemingly had no influence on its collective memory.

In 2003, as was its custom, the German Foreign Office published in its in-house magazine a respectful obituary of a recently deceased career diplomat, in this case the former Consul-General in Barcelona, Franz Nüßlein. On reading the obituary, Marga Henseler, a retired foreign office translator, protested to the Foreign Minister, the Green Party politician and former radical activist Joschka Fischer, and the Social Democratic leader of the coalition government, Gerhard Schröder, pointing out that it neglected to mention the fact that Nüßlein had served during the war as a state prosecutor in German-occupied Prague, where he had among other things been responsible for considering appeals for clemency by Czechs condemned to death for their involvement in the resistance; he had, she alleged, turned down more than a hundred such appeals. In 1948 Nüßlein had been condemned to twenty years' imprisonment by a Czech court, before being returned to Germany in 1955 as a non-amnestied war criminal. Nüßlein claimed merely to have been 'interned' and indeed successfully sued for compensation as a late-released prisoner of war. Thanks to his personal connections he had almost immediately obtained a post in the Foreign Office, where he served in various capacities, including dealing with claims for compensation for wrongful dismissal (pp. 10, 583-5).¹⁴ Despite widespread publicity given to his Nazi past in the late 1950s and early 1960s – orchestrated by East German propaganda but backed by a former diplomat, who had been refused compensation by Nüßlein for his dismissal by the Nazis – the diplomat stayed in post until his retirement in 1974.

Foreign Minister Fischer, shocked that a man with such a past could receive a respectful obituary, one which, to boot, made no mention of his past crimes, banned the writing of any more obituaries for former members of the Nazi Party in the Foreign Office. The following year, another retired diplomat, Franz Krapf, former German ambassador to Japan and head of the German delegation at NATO headquarters, died, and since he had been a member not only of the Nazi Party but also of the SS, Fischer's ban meant that there could be no obituary published by the Foreign Office's in-house magazine. The reaction amongst retired diplomats was furious. It was dishonourable conduct on the Minister's part, complained one. Members of the Resistance to Hitler within the Foreign Office, such as Adam von Trott zu Solz, had themselves been members of the Party. Would they too have been denied an obituary had they survived? Krapf himself, they said, had been a close friend of another official, Erich Kordt, who had opposed Hitler throughout his life and had testified after the war to Krapf's sympathies with the resistance to Nazism. Outraged by the ban, 128 retired officials signed a large obituary notice in the conservative newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, honouring Krapf's memory in respectful terms.¹⁵

This was an open act of rebellion that the Foreign Minister could not afford to ignore. Fischer's reaction was to commission an independent group of professional historians to investigate the "Geschichte des Auswärtigen Dienstes in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus, den Umgang mit dieser Vergangenheit nach der Wiedegründung des Auswärtigen Amtes 1951 und die Frage personeller Kontinuität beziehungsweise Diskontinuität nach 1945" (p. 12) in 2005. The members of the commission originally included two conservative elder

¹⁴ This and subsequent page references in the text refer to the volume under review.

¹⁵ Jan Friedmann/Klaus Wiegrefe: Angriff auf die "Mumien", in: *Der Spiegel*, N° 43, 2010, pp. 36-8; Fischers Gedenkpraxis, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 February, 2005.

statesmen of the profession, Henry Ashby Turner and Klaus Hildebrand, but ill-health forced them both to resign, leaving the Germans Eckart Conze and Norbert Frei, the American Peter Hayes and the Israeli Moshe Zimmermann to organize the research and writing. All had experience of working variously on the Nazi period and the postwar years. All, however, were extremely busy men, so in turn they commissioned twelve junior colleagues to do the work, and a thirteenth to carry out the task of editing. The role of the four senior historians in the project is unclear, but it seems to have been in practice fairly minimal, and indeed with commendable honesty they list at the very end the actual authors and the passages for which they are responsible. At the same time, however, the chance removal of the two most senior and most conservative historians on the original commission (Turner and Hildebrand) placed the direction of the project in the hands of a younger generation of historians with a rather different set of attitudes, while the research and writing were carried out by men and women predominantly of a younger generation still. This was to have profound consequences for the interpretations advanced by the book when it finally appeared in the autumn of 2010.¹⁶

By this time, the Social Democratic-Green Party coalition had long since given way to a more conservative government, and Fischer had left office, but at the book's launch, he declared triumphantly that this was the obituary that the diplomats had really earned. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Eckart Conze summed up its findings. The Foreign Office, he said, "hat an den nationalsozialistischen Gewaltverbrechen bis hin zur Ermordung der Juden als Institution mitgewirkt. Insofern kann man sagen: Das Auswärtige Amt war eine verbrecherische Organisation." This put it on the same footing as the SS, condemned at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials as a criminal organization. Conze went on to claim that most diplomats and officials "empfanden schon die nationalsozialistische Machtübernahme 1933 als Erlösung".¹⁷ Far from being 'unpolitical', they were opponents of democracy and were sufficiently anti-Semitic to make them sympathetic to the anti-Jewish measures taken by the Nazis. The replacement of Neurath by Ribbentrop made no difference. The old guard of professional diplomats were as bad as the new Nazi officials; and only a tiny proportion of them were involved in any kind of resistance.

The book's publication caused an enormous storm in the media. The huge publicity given to the book's launch, especially with the presence of Fischer and other senior politicians, helped – along with the book's undeniably clear and readable style – make *Das Amt* into a best-seller. Initial reactions in the press were overwhelmingly positive.¹⁸ But soon, critics were denouncing its conclusions as too sweeping, its research filled with innumerable errors of detail, its arguments consistently biased and unsupported by the evidence. *Der Spiegel's* writers Jan Friedmann and Klaus Wiegrefe complained that the book repeatedly referred to 'the' diplomats as if they were all involved in Nazism to the same degree; or that the book equated knowledge of mass murder with approval or even responsibility.¹⁹

16 Eckart Conze/Norbert Frei/Peter Hayes/Moshe Zimmermann (eds.): *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik*, 879 S., Blessing, München 2010.

17 Jan Friedmann/Klaus Wiegrefe: "Verbrecherische Organisation", in: *Der Spiegel*, N° 43, 2010, pp. 40-50.

18 See the various internet links in: *Pressespiegel zur Debatte um das Auswärtige Amt und seine Vergangenheit. Ausgewählte Artikel und Interviews*, zusammengestellt von Georg Koch/Matthias Speidel/Christian Mentel, URL: <<http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/site/40209125/default.aspx>> [accessed 13 May, 2011].

19 Friedmann/Wiegrefe: *Angriff* (footnote 15), p. 38.

The commission's work, complained the historian and journalist Rainer Blasius, "verletzt wissenschaftliche Standards und pflegt Vorurteile". It virtually ignored the role of individual diplomats in the resistance to Hitler, and consistently put the worst possible interpretation on their conduct. It repeated old propaganda stories concocted by the German Democratic Republic in an effort to discredit the Federal Republic.²⁰ Other critics pointed to the fact that although the commission presented its research as if it broke a whole series of taboos for the first time, there had in fact been a number of serious academic studies of the Foreign Office's involvement in the Holocaust, notably by Christopher Browning²¹ and Hans-Jürgen Döscher, who had also published a major study of the Foreign Office in the postwar years.²² Critics found considerable fault with the book's lack of reference to other relevant secondary work.²³ Hans Mommsen and Johannes Hürter both criticized the commission's narrow focus on the Holocaust, to the neglect of other issues, and complained once more of the book's tendency to sweeping and undifferentiated judgements.²⁴ Mommsen added that none of the four editors was an expert on the history of the Holocaust – a plainly unfair remark²⁵, since Peter Hayes has published major research work on the involvement of companies such as IG Farben and Degussa and Norbert Frei is one of the few remaining senior historians in Germany who has written extensively on the Third Reich, while the major part of the book, on the postwar period, surely required the expertise of a historian like Eckart Conze, author of a recent history of Germany since 1945.²⁶ Still, his point could none the less be fairly applied to a number of the researchers who actually wrote the book, who included young scholars who had not even finished their PhD.

The fact that the four responsible historians did not actually write the book has not prevented them from leaping to its defence. Moshe Zimmermann accused Hürter in particular

- 20 Rainer Blasius: Schnellbrief und Braunbuch, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 13 January, 2011.
- 21 Christopher Browning: *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office. A Study of Referat D III der Abteilung Deutschland 1940-1943*, Holmes & Meyer, New York/London 1978.
- 22 Hans-Jürgen Döscher: *Das Auswärtige Amt im Dritten Reich. Diplomatie im Schatten der "Endlösung"*, Siedler, Berlin, 1987; idem: *SS und Auswärtiges Amt im Dritten Reich. Diplomatie im Schatten der "Endlösung"*, Ullstein, Frankfurt a. M./Berlin 1991; idem: *Verschworene Gesellschaft. Das Auswärtige Amt unter Adenauer zwischen Neubeginn und Kontinuität*, Akademie, Berlin, 1995; idem: *Seilschaften. Die verdrängte Vergangenheit des Auswärtigen Amtes*, Propyläen, Berlin, 2005.
- 23 See for example Stefan Troebst: Rezension zu: Eckart Conze/Norbert Frei/Peter Hayes/Moshe Zimmermann (Hrsg.): *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik*. München 2010, in: *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 15.02.2011, URL: <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2011-1-108>> [accessed 13 May, 2011].
- 24 Hans Mommsen: *Das ganze Ausmaß der Verstrickung*, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 16 November, 2010; idem: *Vergebene Chancen. "Das Amt" hat methodische Mängel*, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 December, 2010; Johannes Hürter: *Das Auswärtige Amt, die NS-Diktatur und der Holocaust. Kritische Bemerkungen zu einem Kommissionsbericht*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 59 (2011), pp. 167-92. See also Klaus Wiegrefe: *Historiker zerpfückt Bestseller*, in: *Der Spiegel-online*, 1 April, 2011, URL: <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,754558,00.html>> [accessed 12 May, 2011]. The editors have recently published a response to Hürter's review: *Zauberwort Differenzierung*, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 3 May, 2011.
- 25 Mommsen: *Vergebene Chancen* (footnote 24); for Ulrich Herbert's comments on Mommsen's remark see: *Am Ende nur noch Opfer*. Interview mit Ulrich Herbert, in: *die tageszeitung*, 8 December, 2010.
- 26 Peter Hayes: *Industry and Ideology. IG Farben in the Nazi Era*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge u. a. 1987; idem: *From Cooperation to Complicity. Degussa in the Third Reich*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge u. a. 2004; Norbert Frei, among numerous publications perhaps most relevantly, idem, et al.: *Flick: Der Konzern, die Familie, die Macht, Blessing*, Munich 2009; Eckart Conze: *Die Suche nach Sicherheit. Eine Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1949 bis in die Gegenwart*, Siedler, Munich 2009. Moshe Zimmermann's research expertise is in the nineteenth century though he has published overviews of German-Jewish history.

of speaking for the conservative Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, which, he alleged, was constantly trying these days to exculpate the old German elite. It was abstruse to accuse the authors of focusing too much on the Holocaust, said Zimmermann. The critics were running a political campaign to rehabilitate the Foreign Office of the 1950s and to discredit the editors of *Das Amt* because they were outsiders.²⁷

While there might well have been some plausibility in these charges as far as some of the critics were concerned, however²⁸, it is not plausible to accuse Hürter of speaking on behalf of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte or of trying to exculpate the old elites – he is author of a major critical study of the army officer corps in the Third Reich that is anything but exculpatory – and in any case other critics, particularly Mommsen, have no connection with the Institut and no conservative axe to grind. Ascribing political motives to the book's critics is not an answer to their criticisms. The points they raise are serious ones and have to be confronted head-on. Any discussion of the book needs to ask, therefore: are the critics right? And if they are, do their criticisms add up to a vindication of the traditional Foreign Office position on the ministry's role in the Third Reich and its treatment of that role in subsequent decades?

III

The opening section, by Lars Lüdicke, at the time of writing a doctoral student at Potsdam University and author of a short study of German foreign policy from 1933 to 1945, published in 2009,²⁹ that, obviously, is closely linked to his lengthy contribution to *Das Amt*, deals with the period up to the outbreak of war. Devoting a good deal of attention to the internal personnel structures and policies of the Foreign Office, Lüdicke argues convincingly that the attempts made in the Weimar Republic to modernize the service were a failure. In 1933 its upper echelons in particular were still dominated by diplomats who had learned their trade under the Kaiser. Many of them were aristocrats and shared the aristocracy's prejudices against democracy, egalitarianism, reform – and Jews. Very few officials in the Foreign Office chose to resign when the Nazis came to power – Friedrich von Prittwitz und Gaffron, ambassador in Washington and a convinced democrat, was a solitary exception in the top ranks of the diplomatic service, for although some of his colleagues also considered resignation, he was the only one who actually put his principles into action. As dyed-in-the-wool imperialists and expansionists, the vast majority welcomed the advent of the Nazis, whom they did not view as 'party-political' in the sense that, say, the Social Democrats were. The Foreign Office collaborated willingly with the Nazis in identifying Jewish officials and applying the law of 7 April 1933 that forced most of them to leave the service, obliged the regime by issuing rebuttals of foreign press accounts of anti-Semitic outrages in Germany, and took a full part not only in revoking the citizenship of anti-Nazis like Albert Einstein but also in keeping a close watch on their activities in exile.

27 Alan Posener: "Das ist eine Kampagne". Das Münchener Institut für Zeitgeschichte greift den Bestseller "Das Amt und die Vergangenheit" an, in: Die Welt, 4 April, 2011. See also the joint statement of the editors in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 December, 2010.

28 Daniel Koerfer, interviewed in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 28 November, 2010; see also Blasius (footnote 20). Ulrich Herbert comments on Koerfer in: *Am Ende nur noch Opfer* (footnote 25).

29 Lars Lüdicke: *Griff nach der Weltherrschaft. Die Außenpolitik des Dritten Reiches 1933-1945*, bebra, Berlin 2009.

Yet all of these activities could be defended at the time as part of the normal business of a foreign ministry. What was not normal was not the activities, but the nature of the regime they served. As with other key institutions, such as the officer corps, the university professoriate, or the judiciary, it seems legitimate enough, for all the terror and coercion in operation in Germany in the first half of 1933, to use the term *Selbstgleichschaltung* to describe this process of more or less voluntary adaptation (p. 72). Soon, too, officials were using the 'German greeting' and swearing a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler. None of this should be particularly surprising. The comparison (p. 51) between the legal profession, where 4,000 lawyers lost their jobs in 1933, or the medical profession, where 2,000 were sacked, shows merely how few Jews and how few left-wing or liberal political activists had made it into the Foreign Office, in comparison to medicine or the law.

Yet this conformity was not enough for the Nazis, least of all for Joachim von Ribbentrop, the self-proclaimed foreign policy expert in the Party. From 1933 onwards the Foreign Office grew rapidly in size, reaching a strength of 2,665 in 1938 and 6,458 four years later (p. 128). The number of men in the higher service rose from 436 in 1933 to 596 in 1939 (p. 141). In the course of this expansion, many young, committed Nazis came into the service. Most of them were in relatively junior positions, though, as Jan-Erik Schulte, an expert on the SS who has written an excellent monograph on its economic empire,³⁰ shows in the final section on the peacetime years, Ribbentrop's closest links were with the new men rather than the old (pp. 138, 152-3). No fewer than 28 members of Ribbentrop's Party Office (the *Dienststelle Ribbentrop*) joined the service in peacetime. Men in the upper reaches of the service increasingly joined the Nazi Party but this did not necessarily signal adherence to its central beliefs. Heinrich Himmler and the SS tried to gain influence by appointing leading officials to positions in the SS, which obliged them of course to give at least lip-service to SS ideas and principles (p. 123). Lüdicke concludes his contribution by arguing that despite these changes, the old elite remained dominant at the higher levels of the service, above all in the embassies and consulates. It was only during the war that the number of people brought into senior positions for ideological reasons underwent a serious expansion. At the same time, the old elite did not remain immune from the influence of Nazism, and many of them – one could cite the example of Curt Prüfer – either applauded or approved of the anti-Semitic policies of the regime, or remained silent about them while continuing to justify them abroad.

These findings are persuasive and illuminating, though far from surprising. Nevertheless, Lüdicke's section has a number of serious weaknesses. First, on occasion the author exaggerates the importance of the Foreign Office in key areas of Nazi policy. After describing the reports on anti-Nazi press reports and actions in the USA in the early months of 1933, for instance, Lüdicke concludes that these provided the decisive excuse for the anti-Jewish boycott launched on 1 April 1933 at the behest of Hitler and Goebbels, indeed the indirect trigger for the boycott (p. 29). But in fact neither Goebbels nor Hitler needed to read Foreign Office reports to know what was going on in America: they could read the daily papers. Lüdicke provides no direct evidence to back up his point. The idea of a boycott had been around for two years at least; and by the time the dispatches cited by Lüdicke as decisive had been sent, from 26 to 29 March 1933, preparations for the boy-

30 Jan-Erik Schulte: *Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung: Das Wirtschaftsimperium der SS: Oswald Pohl und das SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt 1933-1945*, Schöningh, Paderborn u. a. 2001.

cott had already been underway for a fortnight, the cabinet had discussed it on 24 March, and the final decision had been taken two days later.³¹

Similarly, Lüdicke ascribes to the Foreign Office a large part of the responsibility for the introduction of the anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws in September 1935, noting State Secretary Bülow's statement in a meeting on 20 August 1935 that spontaneous anti-Semitic actions were damaging Germany's image abroad (p. 101). Yet there is no direct evidence for this link. In the voluminous scholarly literature dealing with the genesis of the Nuremberg Laws, the Foreign Office plays only the most minor of roles, if any at all. If there was a driving force within the civil administration, it was Reich Economics Minister Schacht, but the key role was played by Hitler himself, who already cracked down on individual violence against Jews on 8 August 1935 and saw the Laws as a way of neutralizing the remaining 'radicals' within the Party.³²

Lüdicke's treatment of these two cases points to a major weakness in his contribution, as in many (though not all) of the other chapters in *Das Amt*: the failure to consult the relevant secondary literature. The archival documentation used as the basis for the research should have been backed up by a systematic evaluation of the scholarly work carried out by others on the subjects discussed. Particularly weak is the coverage of the English-language literature. Research on National Socialist Germany has long been international – and in no area more obviously so than in its foreign policy. Yet even standard works are not cited where they should have been, and more specialized work is frequently missing altogether. A case in point is provided by the the diary and biography of Curt Prüfer with which this essay began. Despite their obvious relevance and importance, they appear nowhere in the notes and bibliography to *Das Amt* and are apparently completely unknown to its authors. Perhaps this is a reflection of the tight deadlines to which the researchers had to work; perhaps it is a result of their conception of how to go about their task, namely just by ploughing through the Foreign Office archives; either way, it means that the book does fall short in a crucial respect of the scholarly standards one should expect from a commission report of this importance.

A third, equally problematical aspect of Lüdicke's contribution, is its failure to deal with foreign policy and diplomacy. This is a particular deficit in the treatment of the peacetime years because it was so central to the prosecution case in the war crimes trials from 1945 onwards. As Astrid Eckert notes in her account of the trial of the major war criminals in Nuremberg, including the two Nazi Foreign Ministers Neurath and Ribbentrop pp. (375-401): "Herzstück der Anklage war die Vorstellung einer kriminellen Verschwörung, die einem deutschen Angriffskrieg den Weg bereitet hatte und zur Beherrschung Europas und letztlich der Welt führen sollte" (pp. 375-6). The diplomatic manoeuvres carried out by the Foreign Office under their direction were not necessarily criminal in themselves, but took on a criminal character by virtue of their embedding in this conspiracy. Two years later, in the 'Wilhelmstraße' trial, leading diplomats were confronted with the same accusation. By this time, the emerging Cold War was having its influence, and the accused men – former State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker at their head, followed by many other members of the old diplomatic elite – managed to rally round numerous supporters to testify to their innocence to ensure that only three of them were found guilty of launching a war of aggression, and

31 Saul Friedländer: *Nazi Germany and the Jews. The Years of Persecution 1933-39*, Phoenix, London, 1997, p. 19.

32 *Ibid.*, 147; Ian Kershaw: *Hitler 1889-1936*. Hubris, Lane, London 1998, pp. 562-9 (the Foreign Office is mentioned only as reporting on the 20 August meeting).

two of these verdicts were quashed later on. The court abandoned the charge of conspiracy. The 48 charges facing eight accused led to a mere 15 guilty verdicts, mostly for crimes against humanity (pp. 400-01).

Nevertheless, given the fact that Eckert quite rightly criticizes the 'Wilhelmstraße' trial for its extreme leniency, and thus, presumably, considers that the accused, along with many other senior officials in the Ministry, were in actual fact guilty of conspiring to launch a war of aggression, in violation of the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, to which Germany had been a signatory, it is astonishing to find in the earlier sections of the book no mention of the Foreign Office engaging in these activities either before September 1939 or afterwards. Even if one concedes that the book's authors had to stick to their brief of researching the crimes committed by the Foreign Office and its members rather than writing a general history of the institution, it is still surprising that they failed to deal with the preparation of an illegal and criminal war of aggression, in comparison to which the issues on which Lüdicke spends so much time – the surveillance of émigrés, and even the sacking of officials regarded by the regime as Jewish – pale into relative insignificance. The reason for this surprising omission, as Johannes Hürter has pointed out, is all the more extraordinary since the classical realm of diplomacy that lay at the heart of this criminal activity was still dominated by the old elites.³³

IV

The book's narrow focus on the involvement of the Foreign Office in the persecution and, ultimately, the mass murder of Germany's, then Europe's Jews, becomes even more relentless in the sections dealing with the war. In his introduction to this part of the commission's report, Jochen Böehler, author of an important if controversial book on the German invasion and occupation of Poland,³⁴ notes that the Foreign Office was involved in the requisitioning of slave labour, the theft of cultural objects and artworks, and the extermination of the Jews (pp. 161-71); but in the coverage of the war the first two points are barely mentioned. As Böehler notes (pp. 200-220), the *Sonderkommando Künsberg*, which plundered occupied territories across Eastern and South-Eastern Europe on a massive scale in 1941–42, focusing particularly on library books and cases of champagne, was directly subordinate to the Foreign Office, and carried out numerous tasks for Ribbentrop. But the cultural depredations of the occupying German forces in many other countries, notably France and Italy, were also vast in scale, and far too little space is given in the rest of the book to elucidating the role of the Foreign Office in what was probably the greatest act of wartime looting in history.

In Poland, as Jochen Böehler and Irith Dublon-Knebel, editor of *German Foreign Office Documents on the Holocaust in Greece, 1937-44*, Tel Aviv 2007, note, the Foreign Office and its representatives urged moderation, concerned that the brutal and murderous policy of the occupying forces was alienating the local population (pp. 221-86 and pp. 227-94 respectively). Similarly, in France, ambassador Otto Abetz – not a member of the traditional elite – tried to soften the harsh repressive policy taken by the SS against the resistance and

33 Hürter: *Das Auswärtige Amt* (footnote 24), pp. 174-5. There is a brief treatment of the role of the German embassy in Warsaw in the run-up to the war (p. 223) but not much more.

34 Jochen Böehler: *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939*, Fischer, Frankfurt a. M. 2006.

to go slow on the requisitioning of forced labour, for much the same reason. We learn little, however, of the wider activities of the ambassadors in France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark or Norway, and almost nothing at all about the involvement of Foreign Office envoys in the occupation of Tunisia and other parts of North Africa, or their role, often carried out in conjunction with army units such as the *Panzerarmee Afrika*, in propaganda and political warfare. The focus is overwhelmingly on the involvement of the Foreign Office in the deportation of the Jews. In a number of instances indeed this did indeed spill over into the active advocacy of mass murder.

Thus in Serbia for instance the Foreign Office plenipotentiary Felix Benzler, prompted by mounting army concerns about the growing military resistance to German occupation, concerns that were expressed in large-scale shootings of Jews as the supposed originators of this resistance, repeatedly pressed Berlin for the deportation of Serbian Jews. When this was ruled out as impracticable, Ribbentrop sent Franz Rademacher, head of the Foreign Office's Jewish Department, to arrange, as Rademacher put on his application for travel permission, the "Liquidation von Juden in Belgrad (p. 254)." Once in Serbia, Rademacher pressed hard for the complete extermination of all the Jews on the spot. Even if the primary driving force here was the army, aided and abetted by the SS, there is no doubt that, as the authors put it: "Die Grenze zwischen der Behandlung außenpolitischer Aspekte der Judenfrage und der aktiven Beteiligung am Morde wurde dabei verwischt – und sie wurde überschritten" (p. 254).³⁵ By contrast, the Reich Plenipotentiary in Athens, the diplomat Günther Altenburg, distanced himself from the actions taken against Greek Jews and took steps, partly successful for a while, to reduce the severity of SS actions against the local population (pp. 256-7). There were, therefore, choices that could be made.

Yet Foreign Minister Ribbentrop himself was temperamentally and ideologically inclined always to take the harshest measures against the Jews. How significant was this fact? On page 185 we find an extraordinary claim:

"An der Entscheidung über die 'Endlösung' war die Spitze des Auswärtigen Amtes direkt beteiligt. Das Schicksal der deutschen Juden wurde am 17. September 1941 besiegelt: An diesem Tag fand ein Treffen Hitlers mit Ribbentrop statt. Dem Treffen unmittelbar voraus ging Hitlers Anordnung, die soeben durch den Judenstern gekennzeichneten deutschen Juden in den Osten zu deportieren. Was im Zusammenhang mit dem Madagaskar-Plan bereits erkennbar gewesen war, setzte sich nach dem deutschen Überfall auf die Sowjetunion im Juni 1941 fort: Das Auswärtige Amt ergriff die Initiative zur Lösung der 'Judenfrage' auf europäischer Ebene."

It should hardly be necessary to point out that there is an enormous and almost unmanageable scholarly literature on the question of when, how, and by whom the decision to exterminate Europe's Jews was taken. This literature is neither referenced nor discussed in the book: indeed the bold claim quoted above is not even footnoted. The standard research literature on the arrest and deportation of the Jews from Holland, Belgium, France and other occupied countries is not mentioned. In all of this literature, and in the most important syntheses on the extermination of the Jews, the Foreign Office is mentioned as involved, but it is never portrayed as the driving force.

As this voluminous literature shows, Ribbentrop's meeting with Hitler on 17 September 1941 was only one of a whole series of meetings over several days, involving Hitler, SS chief Heinrich Himmler and his deputy Reinhard Heydrich, and other SS officials, along

³⁵ Christopher Browning: *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE/Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 2004.

with ambassador Abetz. According to Christopher Browning's authoritative account of these meetings, the actual impetus to deport German and French and potentially all European Jews to the east came from Eastern Minister Rosenberg (who wanted retaliation for Stalin's deportation of the Volga Germans), Otto Abetz, (who in conjunction with military and SS officials wanted reprisals for acts of resistance in France, which they blamed on the Jews), and the *Gauleiter* of Hamburg and Cologne (who wanted to evict Jews to rehouse non-Jews made homeless in bombing raids). All accounts are agreed, however, that the decisive intervention came from Himmler. Ribbentrop was not even informed of the decision to deport the German Jews once it had been taken, even though, as Browning notes, he had "played a small role in the decision-making process"³⁶. Peter Longerich's account of the same series of meetings suggests that Hitler had already in essence decided to start the deportations even if he was confirmed in his intention by the interventions of Himmler, Ribbentrop and others.³⁷ Thus the neglect of the secondary literature feeds the authors' tendency to over-interpret the sources. If they had taken the trouble to put them into their historical context they would have been in a position to deliver a more nuanced and more accurate account of the Foreign Office's role. This would not have prevented them from echoing Döscher's conclusion, reached already in the mid-1980s, that "die Zusammenarbeit des Auswärtigen Amtes mit dem Reichssicherheitshauptamt bei der 'Endlösung der Judenfrage' von Anfang an ohne erkennbare Reibungen verlief" and, crucially: "Die dabei verantwortlich mitwirkenden Beamten des AA waren in ihrer Mehrheit keine alten Nationalsozialisten, sondern Berufsdiplomaten, die überwiegend erst nach 1933 der NSDAP oder einer ihrer Gliederungen beitraten".³⁸

It was, as Irith Dublon-Knebel and Lars Lüdicke note (pp. 167-99, 171-85 respectively), in the Foreign Office that plans to deport the Jews to Madagascar were – obviously – worked out, but these came to nothing in view of the British domination of the seas. The actual implementation of the extermination was a very different matter from the concoction of such impracticable plans. And here the role of the Foreign Office, as the detailed accounts in the book show, was very much smaller. To begin with, in Denmark and Norway, the Foreign Office had little influence compared to the SS and the Nazi Party, and, like Rosenberg's Eastern Ministry, it was outflanked by these institutions and by the armed forces in Poland and in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union after its invasion in June 1941. The influence of the Foreign Office was greater, as the authors show, in Hungary, especially as Hitler and Ribbentrop ratcheted up the pressure on the Hungarian leader Admiral Horthy in 1943-44, and in Croatia and Slovakia. In France, ambassador Abetz played a significant role in the deportations. In some of these areas, such as Greece or Hungary, the representatives of the Foreign Office argued against harsh reprisals against acts of resistance so as not to alienate the local population. But as the authors rightly note, this policy of mildness never extended to the Jews, unless (p. 293) they were foreign nationals from non-combatant countries, in which case they were to be protected in the interests of good bilateral relations.

None of this suggests that the Foreign Office was a hotbed of resistance to the regime and its policies. In a notably brief treatment of the resistance (pp. 295-316) the authors (Jan-Erik Schulte, Irith Dublon-Knebel and Andrea Wiegeshoff – another PhD student)

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 323-5.

³⁷ Peter Longerich: *Holocaust. The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2010, pp. 265-6.

³⁸ See for instance Döscher: *Das Auswärtige Amt* (footnote 22), p. 255.

note that the few men within the Foreign Office who had contacts with the military leaders of the resistance in its various phases were mostly young officials in the information department, which had expanded rapidly and recruited people from unconventional backgrounds in comparison to those of the mainstream career diplomats. A few had connections to the Kreisau Circle, in which private discussions were held about the contours of a post-Nazi Germany. A small number, including the young Adam von Trott zu Solz, the retired diplomat Ulrich von Hassell, and the head of the Russian department, Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, were involved in the plot to kill Hitler that failed to achieve its aim on 20 July 1944.

The authors give equal status to other individuals such as Fritz Kolbe, another outsider who advised Ribbentrop on the war economy and regularly supplied secret information to the American Secret Service, or Gerhart Feine, a more conventional diplomat who nevertheless worked tirelessly from his office in Budapest against the extermination of the Jews in Hungary and did his best to save as many as he was able. This breadth of coverage is surely right. It has the effect of downgrading the uniqueness of the July bomb plot and therefore further undermining the account of its past constructed within the Foreign Office after the end of the war. Even before 20 July 1944 Hitler and Ribbentrop had begun to purge the Foreign Office of men with 'international connections' and what the regime regarded as dubious links, for example to the families of the higher nobility. A good number were dismissed. Yet this was not evidence of any major role played by the Foreign Office in the resistance. On the contrary, a tiny minority of largely isolated figures or *groupuscules* had undertaken a variety of steps to distance themselves from, oppose, or in very rare cases try to overthrow the regime or circumvent its policies. These all deserve commemoration, perhaps at greater length than they receive here, but their behaviour and attitudes should in no way be taken as typical of those of the Foreign Office as a whole.

V

The later chapters of the book are devoted to the second part of Foreign Minister Fischer's brief, namely how the Foreign Office dealt after 1945 with its role in the Nazi period and how much continuity there was from that era to the years from 1951 onwards, when it was refounded in the Federal Republic, in personnel terms. As Katrin Paehler, a German scholar who has worked on the siege of Leningrad and its role in memory, and now teaches in the USA, shows (pp. 321-42), the Foreign Office was quickly dissolved as an institution in 1945, its officials scattered everywhere, some in Soviet prisons (especially if they were members of the SA), some in interrogation centres, some arrested and tried for war crimes; a few took part in the massive wave of suicides that rolled over the official world in Germany in the first half of the year. Many found new careers in industry, academia, the law, the civil service, local government, and even the church. Their high social background, education and abilities stood them in good stead. The process of denazification, as Thomas Maulucci, an American professor who works on American policy in the Cold War, shows (pp. 342-62), resulted in 108 higher officials in the Foreign Office being excused (*entlastet*), 70 untouched (*nicht betroffen*), 15 being classified as fellow-travellers (*Mitläufer*), five amnestied and 39 unaffected by the entire process. Nevertheless, in their correspondence with one another, former diplomats continued to complain about what they

saw as the unreasonable prejudice of the Occupying Powers against former German diplomats.

The 'Wilhelmstraße' trial of alleged Nazi war criminals in the Foreign Office (1947-1949), analysed by Astrid Eckert, yet another German historian teaching in an American university, author of a useful study of the return of captured German files to the Federal Republic,³⁹ covers the proceedings in detail (pp. 375-401). She shows clearly how the trial focused on the top layer of officials, notably the State Secretaries and Under-Secretaries, who were regarded by the American prosecutors as responsible for the Foreign Office's crimes, so that many middle-ranking officials who had been directly involved in crimes such as the murder of Europe's Jews (Rademacher, for example) were not dragged into the net. The only one who had been directly involved in the murders and stood in the dock was Edmund Veesebmayer, who had been Ribbentrop's roving emissary in Yugoslavia and Slovakia and Reich Plenipotentiary in Hungary in the crucial period of 1944 and sent large numbers of Jews to their death, even suggesting methods for improving their transportation to the gas chambers. Veesebmayer was responsible among other things for subversion in countries about to be invaded by the Nazi regime, and had been closely involved in setting up the genocidal puppet governments in Croatia and Slovakia. Despite pressure from those who wanted these particular crimes to be highlighted, the emphasis was very much on the issue of conspiracy to launch a war of aggression. This, as Annette Weinke, author of several studies of the prosecution of German war criminals,⁴⁰ shows in her excellent discussion of the creation of the myth of the Foreign Office as a centre of resistance (pp. 401-35), allowed former officials, taking up their informal social and professional ties once more, to organize a co-ordinated defence particularly centred on the key figure of former State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker, whose family played a significant part in all this.

The picture these men put together was much as Curt Prüfer had painted it for himself in his doctored diaries immediately after the war. They portrayed the marginal figures who had taken part in the active resistance to Hitler, as if they had mainstream figures in the Foreign Office. They presented the isolated and diffuse resisters as having worked together in a co-ordinated group centred on Weizsäcker. And they distinguished them from the 'traitors' who had leaked information to the Americans or the Soviets. Assisted by influential journalists such as Marion Gräfin Dönhoff and Margaret Boveri, they convinced the court and the public that the overwhelming majority of diplomats had stayed on rather than resigning, in order to moderate the extreme policies of the Nazis. It was the new ideological men brought in after Neurath had given way to Ribbentrop who overrode the continuing scruples of the old hands, forcing them to sign incriminating documents in order to protect themselves from harm. They claimed that the Foreign Ministry had the highest rate of executions of officials of all Ministries after the Bomb Plot. They obtained innumerable *Persilscheine* from former Jewish officials and members of the military-aristocratic resistance to testify to their opposition to the regime. They did their best, often in the most unscrupulous manner, to smear the prosecutor Robert Kempner, an experienced Jewish-German lawyer

39 Astrid Eckert: *Kampf um die Akten. Die Westalliierten und die Rückgabe von deutschem Archivgut nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Steiner, Stuttgart 2004.

40 Including Annette Weinke: *Eine Gesellschaft ermittelt gegen sich selbst. Die Geschichte der Zentralen Stelle Ludwigsburg 1958-2008*, WBG, Darmstadt 2008; *Die Nürnberger Prozesse*, Beck, Munich 2006; and *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern im geteilten Deutschland. Vergangenheitsbewältigungen 1949-1969 oder: Eine deutsch-deutsche Beziehungsgeschichte im Kalten Krieg*, Schöningh, Paderborn u. a. 2002.

who had been arrested and forced into exile by the Nazis. Finally they put the whole prosecution, like those of the industrialists and the army officers, down to an attempt by egalitarian Americans to discredit Germany's traditional aristocratic elites.

To his credit, Weizsäcker's son Richard, a key member of the defence team and later President of the Federal Republic (1985-1995), regarded such smear tactics as counter-productive and tried to moderate them (pp. 431-2). But the Cold War was now under way, and American sentiment had veered towards leniency so as not to upset West Germans with the appearance of vindictiveness. Ernst von Weizsäcker was duly released, only to die of a stroke shortly afterwards. As the American historian William Gray, author of "Germany's Cold War", Chapel Hill, NC 2007, notes (pp. 435-48), even the lenient sentences passed down in the 'Wilhelmstraße' trial soon came to be considered too harsh, and a commission of enquiry recommended a reduction. Even the odious Veessenmayer's prison term was halved, for instance, on the grounds that he had been "only a roving ambassador" and had merely reported to Berlin and conveyed the German government's views to the Hungarians, as any ambassador would. His only crime had been membership in a banned organization – the SS. Veessenmayer's real activities were now conveniently forgotten.

The Federal Republic was duly permitted to establish first a consular service then, in 1951, a full-blown Foreign Office. As with other areas of professional life, West Germany found that it needed men with professional expertise whatever their role had been before 1945. To represent the emerging state of the Federal Republic abroad, people with technical and linguistic expertise were needed, along with experience of diplomacy and its often arcane rules and conventions. As Weinke shows (pp. 448-88), Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was keen to avoid any resurrection of the old Wilhelmstraße, but in practice he lacked the detailed information on personnel to prevent it. A key figure here was the head of the Foreign Office's Political Division Herbert Blankenhorn, who had managed somehow to convince his American interrogators at the end of the war that he had been a member of the resistance. Gaining Adenauer's confidence to the extent that he became his personal assistant before his move in 1951 to the Foreign Office, Blankenhorn provided the means whereby substantial numbers of old Foreign Office hands from the Nazi years found their way back into the diplomatic and consular service and its administration in Bonn. One after another, they were presented as having been distant from Nazism or even involved in the July 1944 Bomb Plot.

Remarkably, as Weinke shows, this aroused the criticism above all of a group of former *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) men who had been deliberately recruited to *Der Spiegel* by its editor Rudolf Augstein. A sixteen-part series on the new Foreign Office by Horst Mahnke, who had worked in the Reich Security Head Office's section for research into ideological opponents of Nazism and considered the men of July 1944 to be traitors, poured scorn on the claims of the diplomats to have been involved in the resistance. But there were other criticisms too, from left-leaning newspapers like the *Frankfurter Rundschau* to the propaganda apparatus of the German Democratic Republic, which never tired of exposing old Nazis in high places in the West, culminating in its publication of Albert Norden's "Brown Book: War and Nazi criminals in West Germany, state, economy, administration, army, justice, science" in 1965. After failing to suppress it, the West German authorities dismissed it as a tissue of lies and fabrications. It turned out in the end to be largely correct.

Nevertheless, the Foreign Office was able to shrug off all these attacks. In 1953, for instance, it re-employed Otto Bräutigam, a career diplomat who had worked during the war on the sequestration of Polish property – "eine der radikalsten Räubereien der Welt-

geschichte und ein[en] Hohn auf das Völkerrecht" – as he characterized it with remarkable honesty in his memoirs (p. 201). Attached to Rosenberg's Eastern Ministry, Bräutigam had become an energetic spokesman for its view that it would be more useful for Germany in the long term not to maltreat the Slav population of the occupied areas, a view that had little influence on the actual course of events. It was a different matter with the Jews. During the war Bräutigam had pressed for the deportation of the Jews as retaliation for Stalin's maltreatment of the Volga Germans, taken part in a meeting on the use of gas vans for mass murder, and chaired a discussion held in the wake of the Wannsee Conference to deal with the definition and treatment of Jews and half-Jews in the East at which Rosenberg's Ministry had declared the latter were "racially just as undesirable as full Jews".⁴¹ In 1950 a district court in Nuremberg had none the less cleared Bräutigam of the charge that he had participated in the extermination. But evidence of his role began to be publicized, notably through the pioneering work on the Holocaust by Gerald Reitlinger.⁴² In the Foreign Office strenuous efforts were made to expunge Bräutigam's name from the German edition of the book, along with other damaging evidence, but the press furore led to the cabinet forcing the abandonment of Bräutigam's appointment as envoy to Brazil in 1955 and his suspension from office the following year. Although the East Germans made the maximum political capital out of the affair, and questions were raised about his past in the British House of Commons, Bräutigam was reinstated in 1957 on the grounds that he had tried to avoid the worst excesses of Nazism's genocidal politics, and he ended his career as Consul-General in Hong Kong (pp. 588-95).

In fact, in the new Foreign Office, as Andrea Wiegeshoff shows (pp. 489-532), the higher up the ranks one went, the more likely one was to encounter diplomats and officials from the old Wilhelmstraße. Between a quarter and a third of ambassadors and consuls belonged to this category; and with the rapid expansion of the Foreign Office during these years (1,000 personnel in 1951, over 4,500 in 1955), there were soon actually more Nazi Party members in the new Foreign Office than there had been in the old one before 1945. Some of them even taught courses to young officials on the countries where they had been stationed during the Third Reich: thus for example Werner von Barga, who had spent the war years in Belgium, gave lectures on the Benelux states, while Werner von Grundherr, who had run the Scandinavian department of the Foreign Office during the war, and been involved in the financing of the puppet Norwegian Quisling regime and the abortive attempt to deport the Jews of Denmark, taught a course on Scandinavia. Herbert Müller-Roschach, responsible for 'Jewish Questions' in the Germany Division during the Nazi period, found himself teaching about European integration. In the end, therefore, there is no doubt that many committed former Nazis who had been seriously involved in the persecution and extermination of the Jews or in other crimes of the Nazi era were re-employed in responsible positions in the Foreign Office after 1951.

This is not always easy to find out in detail from the pages of this book. One of the most serious problems in these accounts for the reader, and a symptom of the slack editorial control that can be detected throughout the book, lies in the fact that many of the figures mentioned in the post-war sections do not appear at all, or at most only fleetingly, in the pre-war chapters. Thus there is little or no continuity, and it is difficult to get a clear idea of how important these people were in the 1930s and early 1940s. Werner Blankenhorn's name for instance does not appear at all until we get to the postwar years; similarly

41 Browning: *The Origins* (footnote 35), pp. 303, 307, 324, 326, 368, 414.

42 Gerald Reitlinger: *The Final Solution*, Beechurst, New York 1953.

with Müller-Roschach and many others. This makes it all the more difficult to get a clear picture. It would have been simple enough to ensure that figures who play a major role in the post-1945 sections of the book were given adequate treatment in the pre-1945 sections. But the editors failed to do this.

VI

With time, the proportion and influence of the old guard within the Foreign Office declined. At the same time, however, they succeeded in some respects in stamping their views on their successors. Thus long after this generation's departure from office, the Foreign Office's way of dealing with the past remained deeply problematical. Annette Weinke (pp. 533-58) demonstrates that the old Wilhelmstraße hands now conveniently re-edited their memories, just as Curt Prüfer had done, devoting considerable efforts to researching the history of the resistance and those few of their colleagues who had actually taken part in it, quietly ignoring the history of the officials who had been dismissed or persecuted for their political beliefs or their race, and treating those who had collaborated with the enemy, like Fritz Kolbe, as traitors. Astrid Eckert (pp. 558-69) has some distressing tales to tell about former officials in this category or their widows being denied recognition or compensation for their dismissal or execution by the Nazis, particularly if these men had had connections with the so-called Red Orchestra, now regarded as a Soviet spy ring rather than the loosely organized network of resisters of varying ideological convictions that it actually was.

Did the presence of a network of former Nazis in the Foreign Office have any effect on the actual conduct of foreign policy? It was certainly relevant to issues such as relations with Israel or the Foreign Office's legal obligation to offer assistance to German citizens standing trial in foreign courts (such as, for example, Adolf Eichmann in Israel). It played a role in the Foreign Office's withdrawal of a grant subsidizing an American lecture tour of the historian Fritz Fischer, whose book on Germany's aims in the First World War was described by the conservative historian Theodor Schieder in a phone call to the Office as a "nationale Katastrophe" (p. 616). Eckert's account of the internal debates in the Foreign Office on the invitation gives a fascinating picture of the institution in a moment of transition. While the conservatives won out in the end, the much-publicized protest of senior American and German-American historians like Gordon Craig, Fritz Stern, Klaus Epstein and Hans Rosenberg, who ensured that the money was raised to enable the lecture tour to go ahead, provided precisely the kind of bad publicity that the Foreign Office had hoped to avoid.

How much did all of this really matter? The ex-Nazis in the Foreign Office did not revive Nazi ideas or policies. The Cold War enabled them to translate their Nazi anti-Communism smoothly into an advocacy of the western orientation of the new Federal Republic. They did not conspire against democracy or try to revise the peace settlement. If one of Adenauer's purposes was to re-integrate former Nazis into the West German establishment and convert them to new way of thinking more in tune with the postwar world, then the evidence of the Foreign Office suggests he succeeded. Yet at the same time, the presence of many former officials and diplomats from the Nazi years in the Foreign Office, and the relative success they had achieved in covering up their past and that of the institution to which they belonged, had serious implications for the conduct of West German foreign policy. The memory of National Socialism and its many crimes remained very much alive outside Germany,

however much it might be obscured or manipulated within, and continued, as indeed it still continues today, to frame the world's attitudes towards the Federal Republic. Germany's reputation in the world depended, and depends, not least on its ability to convince the world that it has come to terms openly and honestly with the Nazi past. The continued presence in the Foreign Office of men implicated in the crimes of Nazism and the persistence of a culture of exculpation in its attitudes to the past made this aim more difficult to achieve.

Has it been achieved by this book? This is not "eine aus den Quellen und der verstreuten Forschungsliteratur gearbeitete systematische und integrierende Gesamtdarstellung" of the history of the German Foreign Office from 1933 to the end of the twentieth century, though the four responsible editors claim it is (p. 11). Both the immediate background to Foreign Minister Fischer's establishment of the commission and the terms in which he framed its task prioritized the question of how far the Foreign Office and its civil servants were involved in or responsible for the crimes of Nazism, how far those who were responsible reappeared to serve in the Foreign Office in the 1950s and subsequently, and what the attitude of the Foreign Office was to its involvement in the Nazi past. Thus the approach of the researchers and authors is not merely necessarily selective, it is also cast in moral terms dictated by the questions raised in the present, rather than in purely historical terms suggested by a more strictly academic approach. The moral charge carried by Fischer's original commission could not fail to find its way into the research and the writing of the book. In terms of its *political* effects, which have been considerable, this is no bad thing.

Yet there is no doubt that this book is deeply flawed as a work of scholarship. The research is not properly embedded in the context of the secondary literature, and neglect of the current state of knowledge in a number of the topics studied leads to errors and misinterpretations. There is a persistent tendency to exaggerate the active participation of the Foreign Office in a number of the criminal activities of the Nazis. At the same time, the field of vision is too narrow, so that warmongering, a key aspect of the Nuremberg indictments, is almost entirely left out of the frame, although it is surely of direct relevance in the present day; other crimes, such as wartime looting and spoliation, also fade into the background. The almost exclusive concentration on the Holocaust may reflect the way in which the Nazi regime is viewed by the younger generation of historians, and by the public, in the early twenty-first century, but this does not help a broader understanding of Nazism, what it did and how it worked.

There is no doubt that this book was needed. Previous work by Browning, Döscher, McKale and others, mentioned in this review, has touched on the problems it covers and explored some aspects of them with exemplary thoroughness, but it has been addressed to a scholarly readership and had little wider resonance. This deficit has now been remedied by *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*. Despite its unevennesses and inadequacies, this book has unquestionably succeeded in proving beyond reasonable doubt that the Foreign Office was an essential part of the machinery of government in the Third Reich; that it subscribed to and carried out Nazism's ideologically driven policies, including the persecution and extermination of the Jews, insofar as they lay within its area of competence, which at particular moments and in particular places they did; that its old-established diplomats and officials in their overwhelming majority believed in and happily implemented these policies; and that after the war these same diplomats and officials did their best to cover up what they and the Foreign Office had done during the Nazi years. The myth of the Foreign Office's resistance has been publicly exploded by this book.

Richard J. Evans

All the more pity, therefore, that the book's deficits and exaggerations make it easier for those who still believe in this myth to try and discredit it. The importance of the topics it covers deserved better. The blame for this lies squarely with the editors. If you are going to employ PhD students as researchers, then it is your duty as a senior historian to go carefully through their work to make sure it properly references the secondary literature, avoids over-interpretation, and strikes a proper balance in its coverage. The editors have failed in this duty. Other departmental histories have more recently been commissioned, notably of the Finance Ministry and the Intelligence Service. Let us hope that more care is taken over their research and presentation, and that they avoid some of the failings of the present work.

For in undertaking research of this kind, historians need to be fair, and they need to be precise. There is a whiff of the witch-hunt about this book, as if the authors saw it as their job to hunt down the complicity of diplomats and officials in the Holocaust and slap on the most serious charges they could find. Even given the brief they had to carry out, however, they should have remembered that the historian is not a prosecutor and history is not a court. And even if it were a court, the fact still remains that it's important to differentiate, to be exact, and to avoid sweeping generalizations. As one of the greatest historians of Nazism, Tim Mason, once wrote:

"The precision of the identification matters [...] While systems of domination and exploitation cannot be represented as individual moral actors can, it can be demonstrated that they generate barbarism. The demonstration of exactly how they have done so is often complex, but complex historical arguments are not indifferent to moral issues just because they are complex. If historians do have a public responsibility, if hating is part of their method and warning part of their task, it is necessary that they should hate precisely."⁴³

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⁴³ Tim Mason: Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism, in: Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (eds.): The "Führer State": Myth and Reality. Studies on the Structure and Politics of the Third Reich, DVA, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 23-40, at 40.

