

TV documentary exposes Nazi collaboration with German intelligence agency

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In 2010, suspicions were confirmed that Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie had worked for the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND). A year later, it was discovered that in the 1990s the BND had destroyed nearly 600 pages of documents relating to Nazi mass murderer Alois Brunner, who was responsible for the deportation of 128,000 people. There is evidence that Brunner, one of Adolf Eichmann's key collaborators, worked with the BND. This year, the BND had to admit it had also employed Wilfred von Oven, the former press secretary of Joseph Goebbels.

A recent Arte television documentary by Christine Rütten, *Nazis in the German Federal Intelligence Service: A new job for old buddies*, presented an insight into the survival of the Nazi dictatorship, which was carefully maintained by a compliant bureaucracy behind the facade of a democratic German Federal Republic. The scandalous history of the BND and its US-initiated precursor is narrated by eyewitnesses and historians such as Gerhard Sälter. The latter works for the independent Historians' Commission, which has been investigating Nazism in the BND since 2011.

The most important figure in the early days of the intelligence agency was Reinhard Gehlen. He was a member of Hitler's military elite and responsible for espionage against the Soviet Union. This involved the interrogation of Soviet prisoners of war. Although little is known about this chapter of BND history, according to the voiceover, "It is certain that more than 3 million Soviet soldiers died in German camps at the end of the war".

After the war, Gehlen surrendered his department's records to the Americans. They were not interested in whether or not he was a war criminal: "Whoever appeared useful to the American intelligence forces was given employment". In determining whether someone had "behaved decently", emphasis was placed on references from previous employers and co-workers prior to 1945.

Gehlen's sister recalls in the film that her brother was an idealistic German patriot, ready to offer devoted service to the Fatherland—first in the Black Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic, and later in Hitler's Wehrmacht, where he rose to become a general. The US secret service incorporated part of his staff in 1946. These officeholders were thus able to continue the Nazis' war against "Bolshevism" under a new label.

Wilhelm Krichbaum, a senior figure in the Nazi military, joined Gehlen in 1948. He had been head of the secret military police, which was—as American historian Paul B. Brown relates in the

film—deeply involved in war crimes. Krichbaum became Gehlen's recruitment director and sought out reliable people from the old Nazi milieu. His son said he was known among his mates as "Willi the communist eater". Following Krichbaum's death, evidence emerged that the Soviets had also tried to recruit him—without success.

Krichbaum was incorporated into the BND, which was established in 1956 as a department directly subordinate to the federal chancellery. Gehlen and his staff, now federal civil servants, found it easy to convince their new employers they were no longer Nazis. As shown in the film, a huge painting of Frederick the Great hung in the department. Prussian military traditions were also held high after the fall of the Third Reich. Former Nazi and BND agent Hans Globke's ascendency to the ranks of the German Federal Republic's top civil servants at the time of Konrad Adenauer's chancellorship, appeared to be an unspoken amnesty with Nazism, as politician Egon Bahr (Social Democratic Party, SPD) aptly remarked.

In 1958, BND staffer Emil Augsburg was appointed senior civil servant for life, despite having been on the American war criminals wanted list 10 years earlier. Augsburg's task force had been involved in mass executions of Jews in the Soviet Union. Another Nazi war criminal vouched for Augsburg's clean slate. This was Franz Six, who was sentenced to prison for 20 years during the Nuremberg trials of 1948. He owed his release after just five years to the Adenauer administration.

A turning point was reached with the internationally sensational trial of Adolf Eichmann, which in 1961 sparked public protests and the demand to settle accounts with former Nazis employed by the German state. The BND feared that Eichmann might publicly discredit Globke during his trial. No one knows to this day why Eichmann remained silent—except, presumably, the BND. Public pressure on the German intelligence community increased with the Auschwitz trials, beginning in 1963.

In 1961, a review of all tenured BND agents was carried out internally in connection with the unmasking of double agent Heinz Felfe. This was a matter of self-protection, not de-Nazification. It became necessary to determine which agents were potentially vulnerable—due to their Nazi past—to blackmail by the Soviet KGB secret service.

Hans-Henning Crome, who had been commissioned by Gehlen to lead the review, described on camera the shock he felt when faced with details under the heading of "military service" in the

files of several of the BND's employees. He found himself confronted with the final report on the extermination of Jews in the Baltic states. There were more than 100,000 victims, Crome recalled. The report on his investigation was quashed. None of the colleagues he reviewed was ever punished for Nazi crimes.

As well as the full-time BND staffers, informants played an important role in the secret international fight against "communism". Walther Rauff began working as an informant for the BND in 1958. This Nazi war criminal was known as the inventor of the gas van that was used to kill half a million people.

Rauff was recruited by former Waffen-SS man Wilhelm Beisner. They had known each other from their involvement with the Africa task force, which was intended to implement the final solution to the Jewish question in the Middle East. The end of the war prevented the planned mass annihilation. Like other Nazis, Rauff was later able to escape to Latin America. The BND also took advantage of the Nazi network in that region.

From 1958, Rauff lived in Chile as a businessman with close connections to the Chilean military. Although Germany had submitted a request for his extradition, he participated in a BND training programme in Germany, even travelling there under his own name, according to author Maria de la Soledad. A surviving 1963 report by a BND informant reveals that the extradition request was a deceptive manoeuvre on the part of the authorities. According to the informant, the endorsement of Rauff's extradition by a Chilean court of first instance was only effected to placate influential Jewish circles. The Chilean supreme court rejected the German extradition request. Rauff's legal fees were partly covered by the BND.

In 1965, a BND agent in Bolivia met with a wood exporter, Klaus Altmann, who showed himself willing to work as an informant. When Altmann was banned from the German Club of La Paz for giving a Nazi salute, the agent declared it was "outrageous ... to demean in this way a man whose national spirit was sound and private lifestyle impeccable". Altmann, who maintained close contacts with Bolivia's military and government circles, was working for the BND by the next year. His 35 reports as a spy are allegedly missing.

Altmann told the BND that the Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in Ludwigsburg was investigating him. He was therefore unable to travel to Germany to take part in a training course. A telephone call by the BND to Ludwigsburg would have immediately revealed that Altmann was none other than the wanted war criminal, Klaus Barbie. Although contact with Altmann was hastily cancelled in December 1966, it is possible that the collaboration was pursued at a different level. At the time, Barbie alias Altmann was a representative for Merex PLC, a company that concluded arms deals—including with the BND.

Today, SPD politician and former state prosecutor Willfried Penner accuses the BND of "obstructing justice" because of its failure to inform the office for Nazi crimes about Barbie/Altmann. They claim the intelligence agency was under an obligation to notify the appropriate authorities. But Penner, the chairman of the parliamentary control commission for intelligence matters, was not particularly resolute. When certain questions remained unanswered

following Barbie's arrest, the commission allowed the BND to evade them by claiming they were unaware that Barbie was Altmann. Apparently the "controllers" of the intelligence service also shared the opinion that "Altmann" should not have been reported and investigated.

Historian Gerhard Sälder regards as simply inexplicable the state's deficit of "concern" about people who were possibly mass murderers. The BND's argument that it lacked specialised knowledge about the Nazi criminals cannot apply. It implies that the BND needed nothing less than "a Gestapo thug to torture the required information out of prisoners".

A look at post-war German history shows that right-wing forces were "used" to rebuild and defend the capitalist state. No right-wingers were better suited for the task than former Nazis unimpeded by any bias towards democracy.

Immediately after the war, strong anti-capitalist sentiments were held by the people of Germany. In the 1950s, many protested against the build-up of the German army and nuclear weapons. In the 1960s, many layers of the population demanded democratic reforms. As a result, the SPD and right-wing parties joined forces in the grand coalition of 1966. Former emigré Willy Brandt (SPD) sat next to former Nazi Kurt Georg Kiesinger (Christian Social Union, CDU), and next to former communist Herbert Wehner (SPD) sat Franz Josef Strauss (Christian Democratic Union, CSU).

From 1967, every German government delayed requesting the US to return Nazi membership records to the German authorities. Only in 1994 were the controversial Nazi documents taken into German possession. These provided information about the former NSDAP (Nazi party) membership of many high-ranking politicians, including three of the country's federal presidents.

Christine Rütten's film is an urgent appeal to the public to settle accounts with the Nazi past of the BND and the Federal Republic. The current "independent" commission of inquiry is hardly suitable for this undertaking. It was initiated by the BND and serves as an attempt to appease the public. Not only did the BND refuse to release information to the film crew. It also determines what historians are allowed to publish.

Christine Rütten's film, *Nazis in the German Federal Intelligence Service: A new job for old buddies*, can be viewed in German on YouTube.



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