

## New Uses of the Bundesarchiv Außenstelle Ludwigsburg

Established in April 2000 in a former women's prison located just down the street from the city's famous Baroque palace and garden, the Bundesarchiv Außenstelle Ludwigsburg houses most of the archival records of the Central Agency for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes. The Central Agency was created in 1958 as the principal West German institution to, in the words of a former Agency director, "collect and sift all the relevant records obtainable about [National Socialist crimes] ... separate delimitable series of crimes and determine the whereabouts of the perpetrators," and still operates today<sup>1</sup>.

For years, scholars have made use of the unique archival collections now administered by the Bundesarchiv, and much of this scholarly interest has focused on the history of the Holocaust. Historians such as Christopher Browning and Götz Aly have reconstructed specific Holocaust events and shed light on issues such as perpetrator motivation based in part on the interviews and interrogations that constitute an important part of the Agency investigation files<sup>2</sup>. Other scholars have used the archival collection to illuminate the history of the Central Agency itself. Both older and more recent accounts of the Agency like Adalbert Rückerl's *The Investigation of Nazi Crimes 1945-1978* have drawn upon the institution's records to tell the story of its genesis and development<sup>3</sup>. More recently, historians have incorporated the Agency's history and its archival holdings into larger projects regarding the National Socialist legacy in the postwar German judiciary and the role of high-profile trials of former Nazis in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*<sup>4</sup>.

Scholars have yet to exhaust the research possibilities of the archive regarding the history of the Holocaust, but there are several additional ways, either previously unrealized or underutilized, in which the Bundesarchiv Außenstelle Ludwigsburg's holdings could be of use to scholars interested in postwar German history. The following suggestions derive from my own research experiences at the Bundesarchiv and thereby reflect several of the ways in which I am currently utilizing its archival resources for a book project on the

role of the Central Agency in the larger process of the West German state and society's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Although by no means comprehensive, this brief illustration of possible new uses of the Bundesarchiv will, I hope, interest and benefit those already familiar with the archive and also, especially, those who have yet to research in Ludwigsburg.

In addition to illuminating specific historical events such as the shootings of Jews near Liepaja from 1941 to 1943 or the execution of inmates in Buchenwald in 1940, the archival collections of the Bundesarchiv Außenstelle Ludwigsburg are uniquely relevant for the history of West Germany's efforts, beginning in the late 1950s, to identify and locate Germans who had allegedly participated in already determined "National Socialist crimes" and then to bring these perpetrators to justice. The Bundesarchiv consists largely of the investigative files of the Central Agency. Frequently running into the thousands of pages, these files allow historians to reconstruct the state's journey from often absolute ignorance of the historical events and their perpetrators to knowledge of both what happened and who participated. In many cases, the files go on to document the prosecution of individual Germans. Each file represents a paper trail by which the historian can follow the twisting, halting progress of an investigation, thereby illuminating the many minor and even major successes and failures of West German judicial institutions such as the Central Agency, individual state prosecutors, and the police to bring to justice men and women accused of participating in the Holocaust.

That the collection of files permits a variety of comparative analyses is especially relevant. One can compare, say, Central Agency activities and investigation outcomes over time, from 1958 to the present. Was the Agency more successful at a particular time than at others? Does the West German state's willingness to confront the Nazi past juridically increase gradually and continually over the course of its history? Or does such a 'Whig' interpretation of the Agency's history overlook important regressive developments, as when the

Agency's activities and efficacy were curtailed by shifts in popular attitudes and state policy? What impact, if any, did the social, political, and cultural upheavals of the 1960s have on the Agency's investigations? One could also compare the Central Agency's actions in terms of the types of National Socialist crimes pursued. In the investigations it carried out, did the Agency possibly privilege particular types of crimes and thereby neglect others? In what ways and to what extent do Agency investigations mirror the developing popular and even scholarly understanding of the Holocaust in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s? Finally, geographic comparisons are also possible. Were Holocaust crimes that took place in Western Europe or involved Western Europeans, for example, investigated differently than those that occurred behind the Iron Curtain and involved Poles, Russians, and others?

Also relevant to issues surrounding West Germany's juridical *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is a second large document collection at the Bundesarchiv Außenstelle Ludwigsburg: the case files of individual civil servants whom the Central Agency was asked to investigate for possible participation in National Socialist crimes. Instigated by the civil servant's home institution, the vetting of these bureaucrats in the 1950s and 1960s for possible crimes committed in the past represents another potential

trove for scholars. Were the investigations, individually or collectively, zealously pursued by the Agency? Did the Agency receive the support of other elements of the West German state? What percentage of the civil service was affected by this process? Did all, most, or only a small number of agencies and institutions request the Agency's services? Moreover, what was the relationship between the Agency's findings and the fate of the individual bureaucrat? In other words, did the Agency's efforts result in a second, more effective denazification of the bureaucracy? The investigation files of both civil servants and everyday Germans that constitute the heart of the Bundesarchiv's holdings provide a special insight into, for example, both the successful investigative strategies of the state and also the obstacles Central Agency officials and their allies encountered within the German state, among the German populace, and abroad. When surveyed over a long period of time, as I am currently doing in my research, the files hold the possibility, for example, of illuminating the process by which individual state institutions and their civil servants, in their actions and attitudes, themselves came to terms with the Nazi past and also compelled others to do so.

Two other collections deserve to be mentioned here because they not only relate to the issues discussed above but also introduce additional,



Torhaus und Zentrale Stelle/Außenstelle Ludwigsburg

Bild: Bundesarchiv

equally important research possibilities. The first is the transcribed oral interviews conducted by a German historian with former Central Agency officials. The detailed recollections shed light on a wide variety of issues, including the attitudes of the larger German populace to the Central Agency and its activities. The hostility the staff experienced, sometimes resulting in violence, and the lengths to which the investigators went to conceal their employment, in some cases even from immediate family members, adds to our understanding of popular German attitudes regarding the broader project of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

The second noteworthy collection consists of the transcripts of a series of special conferences in the 1960s and 1970s that were attended by the Central Agency and West Germany's state prosecutors. The transcripts also provide a window onto, among other things, the frictions between the Central Agency and other state institutions. One of the most important impediments to Agency investigations were the multifaceted and rigid constraints placed on the Agency by West German foreign policy. West Germany's relationships with both the West and the East, and especially its relationship with the German Democratic Republic, had a profound impact on the ability of Ludwigsburg officials to gather evidence, interview witnesses, and examine crime scenes. That so much of the

Holocaust took place in locales that now lay behind the Iron Curtain made the issue especially relevant. Yet as the conference transcripts demonstrate, such obstacles were not permanent, and the ability of the Agency to interact with foreign governments and citizens changed dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>5</sup>. This raises the possibility that the record of Agency officials' efforts to obtain documents from Moscow or travel to Minsk to meet with camp survivors can shed light on the development of West German foreign policy. It is certainly possible that new insights regarding the history of, for example, the Hallstein Doctrine, West Germany's relations with France, or *Ostpolitik* could be mined from Agency records.

Our understanding of the Holocaust has been shaped in important ways by scholars who utilized the holdings of the Bundesarchiv Außenstelle Ludwigsburg. As my suggestions demonstrate, the rich and diverse archival collection at Ludwigsburg represents an equally valuable resource for scholars interested in various aspects of German postwar history, especially those surrounding the Federal Republic's juridical "coming to terms" with the Nazi past and the "recivilizing" of Germans and German society.

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#### Anmerkungen

- 1) Adalbert Rückerl, *The Investigation of Nazi Crimes 1945-1978. A Documentation*, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1980), 50.
- 2) The numerous works include Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993) and Götz Aly, *The 'Final Solution': Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of European Jews*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 3) See for example, Rückerl, *The Investigation of Nazi Crimes*, and Rüdiger Fleiter "Die Ludwigsburger Zentrale Stelle und ihr politisches und gesellschaftliches Umfeld," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, (1 : 2002), 32-50.
- 4) The rich recent literature includes Annette Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern im geteilten Deutschland. Vergangenheitsbewältigungen 1949-1969* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), Marc von Miquel, *Ahnden oder amnestieren. Westdeutsche Justiz und Vergangenheitspolitik in den sechziger Jahren* (Göttingen, 2004), and Michael Greve, *Der justitielle und rechtspolitische Umgang mit den NS-Gewaltverbrechen in den sechziger Jahren*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001).
- 5) This idea was developed more fully in a conference paper "The German State and Vergangenheitsbewältigung: The Central Office for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes, 1958 to 1988," I delivered in October 2007 at the Thirty-First German Studies Association Conference in San Diego, California.