

INTRODUCTION

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As one senior official at the Reich Ministry of Labour wrote in 1940, the Nazi regime had reorganized the ministerial administration after 1933 not primarily for objective reasons but in the spirit of the ‘national socialist worldview’. The latter, he explained, had defined labour and social policy as the ‘most important branch of general policy’, making a stand-alone ministry with far-reaching powers indispensable.¹

Labour and social policy did in fact play an outstanding role in the ideology of the Nazi Party. Its claim to be a ‘workers’ party’ was more than just symbolism: from the perspective of the new regime, the creation of the ‘Volksgemeinschaft’ (the community of the folk, as an ethnonational ideal) required deep intervention in the social order. Leading Nazi ideologues, such as Robert Ley, pushed for the rapid and radical restructuring of the German welfare state, assailing it as a product of the Weimar Republic. Following the Nazi seizure of power, the new regime launched numerous initiatives in this field. In 1934, the Law on the Organization of National Labour (*Gesetz zur Ordnung der nationalen Arbeit*) abolished freedom of association and collective bargaining. Henceforth, employment contracts and wages were regulated by the labour trustees (*Treuhänder der Arbeit*) appointed in May 1933, which were subordinate to the Reich Labour Ministry. Institutions such as the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront* or DAF), the National Socialist People’s Welfare Association (*Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* or NSV) and the National Socialist factory cell organizations (*NS-Betriebszellenorganisationen* or NSBO) left no room for doubt about the new rulers’ aspirations to reshape this entire field of policy.

Through the expansion of its formal competences, the Reich Labour Ministry was strengthened significantly after 1933. Few Reich authorities possessed such a wide range of responsibilities. The ministry was not only

in charge of labour and social policy but also held authority in adjacent fields, such as housing and settlement, labour law and regulation as well as family and health policy. Last but not least, a large number of Reich agencies were subordinate to the ministry, enabling it to intervene directly in the local sphere.

The present volume thus investigates one of the most important governmental institutions in the 'Third Reich', which has nevertheless received very little scholarly attention. We will address the following questions. What role did the Reich Labour Ministry play within the Nazi power structure? Was it the central planning authority for the '*völkisch* [folkish, meaning ethnonationalist] welfare state' or was it one of many administrative bodies with essentially secondary powers? How did the ministry manage to assert itself vis-à-vis the numerous new bodies created by the party in the field of labour and social policy? How deeply was the ministry integrated into the dictatorship's apparatus of power? To what degree were staff members involved in the criminal practices of the Nazi system? What continuities on the level of personnel and institutions might we identify in the years before 1933 and after 1945?

As well as illuminating the specific role of the Reich Ministry of Labour, however, the present book also seeks to answer fundamental questions of crucial importance to the study of Nazism. In particular, we are keen to explore the responsibilities held and roles played by the classical ministerial administration and its staff within the Nazi regime's power structure.² The image of the bureaucracy within Nazism was long moulded by two interpretations. The first is the ideal-typical distinction, going back to Max Weber, between 'legal' and 'charismatic' power.³ The second is Ernst Fraenkel's interpretation of Nazism as a 'dual state', in which elements of the normative state (*Normenstaat*) and prerogative state (*Massnahmenstaat*) existed alongside one another.⁴ Both interpretations tended to present the classical administration as a remnant of the old system, one that was increasingly eclipsed by genuinely Nazi power structures.

There is a considerable need for research on these topics. While many studies have been produced on social and labour policy under National Socialism,⁵ little research has been conducted on the role of the Reich Ministry of Labour in this field.⁶ Comprehensive, archive-based research has not yet been carried out either on the structure of the ministry and the evolution of its personnel, or on its various fields of activity. The absence of scholarly research is not primarily due to a dearth of sources, given the large body of archival materials on the Reich Labour Ministry. Instead, the lack of interest in this institution goes back to a specific interpretation of the 'Third Reich', which ascribed negligible significance to the ministerial bureaucracy. This already affected the early research on Nazism, which

focused heavily on Hitler's role. As is widely recognized, Hitler himself had little interest in administrative processes. Within his worldview, 'administering' was vastly inferior to 'leading' as it contributed little to the exercise of political power. Hitler paid little attention to the everyday business of government. From 1935 onwards, meetings of the Cabinet were an irregular occurrence and only a few ministers had direct access to the Führer. This lack of 'immediate access' was considered a gauge of the political importance of particular politicians and the institutions they represented. Reich Labour Minister Seldte occupied a lowly position within this hierarchy: from 1938 at the latest, he no longer had access to Hitler and did not attend official occasions arranged at the Führer's behest.⁷

Even the studies of the institutions and structures of Nazism first undertaken in the 1960s continued to leave the ministerial bureaucracy out of account. Most of the research on the civil service brought out how the administrative elites supported Hitler's 'seizure of power'.⁸ Few researchers, however, grappled with the specific role of the state bureaucracy within the Nazi power system because they failed to recognize it as a relevant factor. For example, as early as 1969, in his influential book *Der Staat Hitlers*, Martin Broszat referred to the 'loss of prestige and dwindling significance of the state bureaucracy'.⁹ This process, he asserted, had already begun when the Nazis took power and had accelerated again as the state prepared for war from 1936. Broszat argued that the gradual disempowerment of the civil service was partly bound up with the unfulfilled expectations of many Nazi leaders (particularly Hitler and Bormann), who had hoped to form a new elite out of it, one that would implement Nazi ideology efficiently and radically. The 'stymying of the civil service and the traditional administration' through the establishment of new special administrations under the direct control of the party or Hitler, Broszat asserted, was a conscious strategy intended to solve this problem: 'In terms of their form, the old government ministries and their subordinate administrations remained untouched. But the real decisions were made without them; the old ministerial bureaucracy was increasingly bypassed and politically paralysed'.¹⁰

This picture was reinforced by the interpretation of Nazism as a 'polycratic system of rule'. The polycratic model shifted scholars' attention away from Hitler towards the institutions of the Nazi state. Moreover, they attributed the true dynamism of 'cumulative radicalization' (Hans Mommsen) to the new special administrations and party organizations. As a result of the 'party's unrestrained intrusion into the administration', according to Peter Hüttenberger, 'despite putting up resistance' the 'civil service gradually disintegrated politically'.¹¹

This perspective, however, has not gone unchallenged. By 1978, Jane Caplan had already pointed out that the attempt to identify the classical

state administration as part of the 'normative state' was an element in an exculpatory strategy – one through which leading ministerial officials sought to exonerate themselves after 1945.¹² Rather than a general loss of significance, Caplan perceived a contradictory development: the ministries had come under pressure from the Nazi regime's new institutions, yet they had been granted additional powers from the Weimar era onwards.

Caplan's insights, gleaned from examination of the Reich Ministry of the Interior, apply even more to the Reich Labour Ministry. During the period of the presidential cabinets at the latest, the strengthening of the executive as a technocratic authority had made the bureaucracy significantly more important, while the economic depression left it with new and onerous responsibilities. After the Nazi takeover, numerous new laws and measures were implemented in order to deal with the challenges of the economic crisis. This intensified the pressure to take action within the agencies of the labour and social administration, engendering a permanent process of 'adaptive reproduction'.¹³

The present volume regards the Reich Ministry of Labour not as a passive institution but as one of many political actors seeking to assert themselves within the Nazi state's complex and increasingly confusing power structures. This throws up the question of what strategies the different branches of the ministerial apparatus used to preserve their institutional power. Our assumption is that precisely because access to Hitler – and thus to the centre of political power – was limited, the ministerial bureaucracy increasingly focused on its core classical competencies: the performance of policy-related administrative tasks through efficient action in conformity, as far as possible, with the regulations. Against the background of vigorous Nazi policymaking, officials' expert knowledge was of great significance: policies could only be implemented administratively with their support. Until the end of the Nazi period, administrative action was geared towards specific rules and routines. These could be bypassed or adapted situationally but not rendered entirely inoperative. Though Nazism destroyed the liberal legal system, core areas of administrative law thus remained intact.

Hence, the following analyses go beyond the ministerial leadership's political action within the Nazi apparatus of power. This is because we can acquire an adequate grasp of the Reich Ministry of Labour's authority and *modus operandi* only by exploring officials' everyday administrative practices. A praxeological approach of this kind entails a number of implications. First, it means taking the bureaucracy seriously as a key factor within the Nazi regime. But rather than assuming that it played a static part within the power hierarchies of the 'Third Reich', we must view its role as the outcome of processes of social and political negotiation within a dynamic framework of competing forces. Second, a bureaucratic apparatus

cannot be analysed as a monolithic entity. It is a complex organization in which actors proceed in light of varying interests and pursue a variety of strategies. Rather than restricting itself to the description of formal structures, an approach of this kind, drawing on theories of organization, requires a micro-historical analysis of internal processes of communication, informal hierarchies, personal networks and everyday routines.¹⁴

Anatomy of a Ministry

What kind of body was the Reich Labour Ministry? Its genesis alone gave it a special status. Not one of the classical ministries, it was relatively young and specialized in character, its origins lying in the First World War and the regime's extensive wartime interventions in the labour market. One important impetus for the establishment of a discrete ministry on the Reich level derived from the system of welfare for war veterans, which required a tremendous administrative effort; the central coordination of the Public Aid Offices (*Versorgungsämter*) was one of the most difficult tasks of the postwar period. The dynamic development of the labour and social administration, however, was not solely a consequence of the First World War but was also due to the dynamic evolution of the welfare state in the Weimar Republic, which created new fields of social policy, relating in particular to labour and wages, housing and social provision. Hence, during this period no other ministry saw a greater increase in personnel and financial resources, but also in regulatory powers of a legal and administrative nature.

This trend was reinforced rather than interrupted by the Great Depression and the Nazi 'seizure of power'. In the course of the centralization of social policy and the extension of Reich jurisdiction over it, the ministry became significantly more important on the formal level. The autonomy of social insurance agencies, as it had existed since the nineteenth century, was superseded by the 'leader principle' (*Führerprinzip*), with most insurers and welfare corporations being made directly subordinate to the ministry. In 1935, meanwhile, Prussian powers over social policy were transferred to the ministry. The year 1939 brought probably the most important change, when the Reich Institution for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance (*Reichsanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung*) was integrated into the ministry and its president Friedrich Syrup appointed second state secretary. On the eve of the Second World War, the Reich Ministry of Labour reached what was at that point its greatest extent, encompassing sixteen departments. Its responsibilities ranged from labour market and wages policy through social housing, urban planning and resettlement to family policy. They also took in occupational safety

and health, plant security, labour law, social welfare and the entire field of social insurance and health policy. Finally, the ministry was responsible for the working conditions inspectorates, the labour and social welfare tribunals, the Reich Insurance Office (Reichsversicherungsamt or RVA) and the cooperatives.

We can get a true sense of the specific role played by the Reich Labour Ministry within National Socialism only by considering the political and institutional legacy of the First World War and the Weimar Republic. In her chapter, Ulrike Schulz shows how, since its establishment, the ministry was confronted with an unceasing flow of new tasks and organizational challenges, so that it had to strive constantly to achieve institutional stability. This might explain the strikingly high degree of continuity among senior staff at the ministry from its foundation until the end of the Second World War. As a rule, state secretaries and department heads occupied their posts for lengthy periods, while there were generally few changes of personnel despite the numerous Cabinet changes that marked the Weimar period. Moreover, neither in an institutional sense nor with respect to staffing did the year 1933 represent a profound break with the past. The Nazi leadership only briefly considered dissolving the ministry and merging it with the Reich Ministry of the Economy (Reichswirtschaftsministerium). They soon backed away from this idea, mainly because of the far more pressing tasks confronting them. It was in large part the 'crisis management' (Ulrike Schulz) it had practised so extensively in the late Weimar era that made the ministry indispensable to the Nazi regime after 1933.

Examination of the ministry's personnel structure makes it clear that very few changes were made at the leadership level and that – at least until 1938 – professional aptitude was more important in the appointment and promotion of officials than Nazi convictions. As in other authorities, however, Jewish employees had already been dismissed by 1933, women were ousted from leading positions and many members of trade unions, the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or KPD) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands or SPD) were dismissed from the ministry's administration and its subordinate agencies. Nonetheless, the ideal of the professionally qualified and administratively trained official was deeply rooted in ministerial culture. This went not just for the leadership level but for the entire apparatus, including much of the mid-level civil service, as demonstrated by Lisa-Maria Röhling's chapter on recruitment practices in the public aid authorities (Versorgungsbehörden). With respect to education as well, the practice-oriented, professional qualification continued to play a prominent role, while initially ideological elements were adopted in an essentially superficial way. It was not until the passing of the Civil Service

Law (*Beamtengesetz*) of 1937 that this changed, as membership of, and loyalty to, the Nazi Party became the central criteria of appointment and promotion. In the Reich Ministry of Labour, the recruitment of new personnel within the framework of the war economy provided an opportunity to appoint 'old party fighters' and ideologically reliable individuals, a trend reinforced when hard-line Nazi Wilhelm Börger became head of personnel in 1938. As Schulz's analysis of ministry staff reveals, the number of Nazi Party members – who made up well below 20 per cent until 1938 – now increased by leaps and bounds. At the same time, the proportion of leading officials trained in law declined markedly, evidence that Nazism helped erode the lawyers' monopoly within the ministerial administration.

The growth in the Reich Labour Ministry's staff and responsibilities shows that Nazism, contrary to its antibureaucratic posture, was not hostile to administration, but in fact set in motion a massive wave of bureaucratization. As Rüdiger Hachtmann shows with reference to the DAF, this applied both to the classical authorities and to the numerous party and special administrations.

As is well known, administrative and political turf wars led to grave personal conflicts between DAF Reich Leader Robert Ley and Labour Minister Franz Seldte, but also enveloped other functionaries in both institutions. However, as Hachtmann explains, these clashes do not necessarily indicate substantive divergences; often, they were more a matter of habit and were moulded by personal rivalries. Ley not only laid claim to powers over business and wages policy but also pressed for the state's housing and settlement building programmes as a whole to be incorporated into his domain, something he finally achieved in 1942. The impression that Ley rapidly gained the upper hand within this conflict came about in significant part as a result of his aggressive style and the effective propaganda disseminated by the DAF, which seemed organizationally superior to the Reich Ministry of Labour. Franz Seldte, by way of contrast, was considered uncharismatic and lacking in experience in social policy. Many observers believed Hitler appointed the long-standing head of the *Stahlhelm* paramilitary organization to his Cabinet – rather than Friedrich Syrup, who possessed relevant expertise – as a tactical, coalition-building manoeuvre, one that inspired complaints both from established social policy experts and Nazi leaders. Goebbels, for example, saw this as a 'blemish' that must be 'erased' as soon as possible.¹⁵ That Seldte remained in charge of the ministry until the end of the regime may seem surprising in light of these profound antagonisms, but is fully consonant with Hitler's political strategy. In any event, Seldte's entire period in office was characterized by serious conflicts with other Nazi politicians active in the field of social policy; in 1935 he offered to resign, only to be turned down by Hitler.

Scholars long interpreted the profound conflicts and Seldte's rather cautious manner as evidence that 'under his weak, impotent leadership' the Labour Ministry 'was unable to cope within a highly competitive environment'. According to Willi Boelcke, for example, Seldte 'had virtually no expertise and as a minister he showed no particular ambition, but he had excellent staff whom he trusted and shielded from the party's attacks and opposition'.¹⁶ This assessment also indicates that what looked like weakness from the outside ultimately proved a relative strength. Seldte clearly succeeded in riding out conflicts and thus protecting the ministry from external attack. In this way he gained the loyalty of his colleagues, who were permitted to act with a considerable degree of freedom.¹⁷ Ultimately, Ley's continual attacks on the ministry were probably beneficial to Seldte: the head of the DAF was a controversial figure within the Nazi leadership and his sweeping political ambitions triggered countervailing forces. Seldte's long stint at the head of the ministry, moreover, represented a form of continuity with the Weimar period, when it was also headed by the same individual, namely Heinrich Brauns, for an exceptionally long period.

We should not, however, overlook the fact that the Labour Ministry's responsibilities were constantly altered, while the boundaries between the ministry and the new party and special administrations often became blurred. This applied not just to the DAF but also to the Reich Labour Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst or RAD), led by Konstantin Hierl until 1945. The latter had been appointed state secretary in the Reich Ministry of Labour in March 1933 and was granted the title 'Reich labour leader' (*Reichsarbeitsführer*). In order to obtain as independent a post as possible, in 1934 Hierl switched from the Labour to the Interior Ministry.¹⁸ Even more importantly, the Four-Year-Plan Authority (Vierjahresplanbehörde) under Hermann Göring, established in 1936, secured its ability to shape labour and wages policy by appointing Friedrich Syrup, president of the Reich Institution for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance, and Werner Mansfeld, head of the relevant department in the Labour Ministry, as plenipotentiaries. Finally, in the shape of Fritz Sauckel, appointed general plenipotentiary for labour deployment (Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz or GBA) in March 1942, a new power centre emerged during the war that enjoyed direct access to the departments of the Labour Ministry.

On the one hand, these overlapping powers weakened the autonomy of the Reich Ministry of Labour. On the other, they resulted in its indirect strengthening, because its administrative units were constantly allocated new responsibilities. In fact, the chapters in the present volume show that at the administrative level the relations between the ministry and the new authorities were far smoother and more efficient than has been as-

sumed. This finding is consonant with recent research on the Nazi power system that underlines the functional shift in state structures. From this perspective, rather than being dysfunctional, the rivalries between different agencies and their overlapping powers were an expression of a 'hybrid' organizational type, one that transcended the strict division between classical bureaucracy and non-state institutions. In this context, personal networks, informal decision-making procedures and new communicative forums played an important role.¹⁹ Here Rüdiger Hachtmann perceives nothing less than the beginnings of a 'new statehood'; for him, this explains the radical efficiency of the Nazi regime but also paved the way for the genesis of modern institutions.²⁰

The Ministry in Action: Spheres of Political Action and Conflicts

More than other state agencies, the Reich Ministry of Labour was characterized by constant interaction with subordinate authorities and associations. Many social and labour policies could in fact only be implemented through close coordination with the relevant administrative units at the level of the *Länder* and municipalities. The outsourcing of administrative tasks to subordinate agencies and organizations was already a characteristic of the ministry during the Weimar Republic and became a pronounced feature of its development during the Nazi period. According to Ulrike Schulz, what contemporaries perceived as 'bad design' turned out to be an organizational advantage, enhancing the enforceability of laws and administrative directives and facilitating communication between the ministry, as central authority, and the executive administrative bodies.

The specific interactions between the Reich Ministry of Labour and its subordinate institutions, then, are of crucial significance to its historical investigation. The present volume sheds light on these interactions by examining the core aspects of labour and social policy. Taking pensions policy as his example, Alexander Klimo asks what impact Nazi labour market policy had on insurance systems and, in particular, the practice of pension provision. This also enables him to refute the idea, commonly held by historians, that social insurance largely remained untouched under the Nazis. At the same time, two examples reveal how complex the interactions between the ministry and social insurance agencies were. The differing interests and logics of action often led to conflicts. While, for example, the ministry pushed for the provision of pensions to be adapted to the requirements of the labour market, the insurance agencies adopted a restrictive approach to the approval of disability pensions in order to minimize their financial burdens. And yet, until the end of the regime, officials contin-

ued to take their lead from legal norms and bureaucratic procedures. This proved a considerable problem when the state stripped Jews and others subject to racial persecution of their rights to future pension payments, as this required the comprehensive modification of the laws governing social welfare.

The Ministry of Labour also had to make far-reaching modifications when it came to public housing schemes in order to support the war economy, as Karl Christian Führer shows. It proved impossible to implement either the liberalization of the housing market to which the Ministry of Labour aspired or the ambitious public building and settlement programmes propagated chiefly by the DAF. In 1941, with Ley's appointment as Reich commissioner for social housing (Reichskommissar für den sozialen Wohnungsbau), the ministry lost political responsibility for the building of public housing, though this came to a standstill during the war due to the lack of financial resources.²¹

In order to regulate labour markets, new institutions gained tremendous importance. Sören Eden examines the 'labour trustees', who exercised a significant influence on labour and wages laws during the Nazi period. As bodies subordinate to the Labour Ministry, the trustees discharged important tasks involved in the reconfiguration of the labour market, as Eden shows with reference to breaches of employment contracts. In light of this example, Eden demonstrates that the organization of labour law was not – as has generally been assumed – dictated at the ministerial level but in fact resulted from a process of negotiation involving all levels of authority, one in which a broad range of actors were involved in a variety of ways, ranging from the individual employee through the courts to the general plenipotentiary for labour deployment. Due to their status as 'hinge' between the workplace and the Reich Labour Ministry, the labour trustees played an important role through the criminalization of breaches of employment contracts.

Taking the labour administration as an example, Henry Marx probes the interactions between the ministerial level and the local labour offices, which faced tremendous challenges from 1936 onwards. The gradual transformation of the Reich Institution for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance into an agency responsible not primarily for the placing of workers but for job creation and the regulation of employment required the expansion and centralization of administrative authority. The Reich Institution was incorporated into the ministry in 1939 chiefly in an attempt to solve these increasingly complex problems of coordination and communication. Though this could not eliminate the labour shortage, the labour administration helped maintain the production of armaments until the end of the war.

The Expanded Ministry: Social Order, Occupation and Violence

Despite its radical, nationalistic self-image and its pursuit of autarky, the Nazi state was not a hermetically sealed economic and sociopolitical system. In reality it drew ideologically on, and overlapped politically with, other authoritarian movements and regimes of the interwar period. This was especially true of fascist Italy, whose corporative employment and welfare regime made it a role model for right-wing circles under the late Weimar Republic.²² International social policies continued to find a reception in Germany after 1933 as well, as Kiran Klaus Patel and Sandrine Kott demonstrate in their contribution. In the summer of 1933, for example, Seldte travelled to Milan to learn about the fascist state's job creation measures. The Labour Ministry thus closely followed international developments. And while Germany left both the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization in 1933, German social policy makers remained active on the international level – whether through welfare agreements or, for example, within the framework of the binational treaties governing the recruitment of foreign workers, which Germany had concluded with a number of states before the war began. Finally, the ministry also played an important role in propaganda, aimed at foreign countries, which exalted the alleged achievements of the Nazi system. This propaganda campaign benefited from the widespread interest in new instruments of labour market organization and social policy, an interest that had surged everywhere in the wake of the world economic crisis. On the international stage too the Labour Ministry competed with its domestic political adversaries – particularly the DAF and the RAD, which tried to monopolize external propaganda.²³

Propaganda glorifying German labour and social policy was, however, simultaneously an aspect of visions of imperial domination that imagined the long-term reordering of Europe under German leadership.²⁴ This is evident in the attempts, beginning in 1940, to develop a 'brown' International as an alternative to the International Labour Organization. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that this was more than just propaganda. In fact, the Nazi state was making long-term plans to establish a *völkisch* social order in Europe. Just what this social order ought to entail was, however, far from clear. Divergent economic development and race-based hierarchies, as evident in the contrast between the eastern European territories, which the Nazis planned to 'Germanize' completely, and the occupied countries of western and northern Europe, are likely to have played a key role here.

Comparative analysis of the forced labour regime in the occupied territories provides us with a powerful tool for reconstructing the different models of social order in 'Hitler's imperium'.²⁵ As Elizabeth Harvey

explains, the specific form taken by labour policy depended on a range of different factors. These included experiences of the First World War, whether a functioning system for arranging employment already existed or had to be developed and the local elites' and authorities' willingness to collaborate. Local administrative conditions were also of crucial importance. Had a given territory been annexed and earmarked for integration into the Reich? Was it an occupation zone with a civil administration or was it under military occupation? The economic structure also played an important role because eastern European regions chiefly served as a reservoir of labour, raw materials and foodstuffs that could be ruthlessly exploited, whereas in industrially developed regions – such as Belgium, France, the Netherlands or northern Italy – the Nazi regime proceeded in a more measured way to avoid disrupting local production of industrial goods and armaments. Finally, a comparison between Belgium and the General Government (Generalgouvernement) – two territories featuring particularly high numbers of forced labourers – demonstrates that the 'racial divide' between east and west did much to determine the degree of violence involved in the recruitment of forced labour until the end of the 'Third Reich'.

But what role did the Reich Ministry of Labour play in Nazi forced labour policies? Swantje Greve shows that the appointment of the GBA did not signify a major rupture in the organization of forced labour policy. Fritz Sauckel used the established structures of the ministry, its departments and their staff in order to actively shape the deployment of forced labourers. His involvement was not limited to administrative processes within the Berlin headquarters but extended to local recruitment. In the wake of the Wehrmacht, almost everywhere officials seconded from Reich, Land and municipal authorities were dispatched to the occupied territories. Most of them were promoted and gained far greater responsibilities than in their previous posts in the Reich. These officials made a major contribution to ensuring that the labour force was 'successfully' mobilized to benefit the war economy of the 'Third Reich'. This applied not just to the recruitment of the more than twelve million forced labourers transported into the Reich territory but also to the ever more strictly enforced obligation to work in the occupied territories.

With reference to the Wartheland Reichsgau (Reich District), the General Government and Lithuania, furthermore, Michael Wildt shows how deeply the labour administration was involved in the organization of the ghettos and, indirectly, the Holocaust as well.²⁶ Officials not only registered and recorded workers but also decided who in the Jewish ghettos was categorized as 'fit for work' – as a rule, the latter equated to a death sentence, as those working in the offices concerned were generally aware.

In certain cases, labour administration staff sought to spare Jewish ghetto residents this fate. This shows that they had options. 'It was a personal decision whether to become an accomplice or do everything possible to save human lives' (Michael Wildt).

Continuities

There is no lack of evidence of the labour administration's involvement in the criminal practice of forced labour and the murder of the Jewish population. As Kim Christian Priemel elaborates, the long-standing scholarly and cultural failure to come to terms with its responsibility is partly bound up with the successful defence strategy adopted during the Nuremberg trials, in which Seldte and his colleagues managed to play down their own role in forced labour policy. They pointed out that the Labour Ministry was in charge of policy only until 1942 within the framework of the voluntary recruitment of workers. The brutal forced labour policy pursued from the spring of 1942 onwards, meanwhile, had come under the sole remit of GBA Fritz Sauckel, who had been aided chiefly by the Wehrmacht and the firms involved. In Nuremberg, leading ministry officials such as Hubert Hildebrandt, Wilhelm Kimmich, Walter Letsch, Walter Stothfang and Max Timm benefited from their ability, as witnesses and experts, to make extensive statements – including attempts to exonerate themselves. Furthermore, in the shape of Fritz Sauckel and Albert Speer, two of the main protagonists in the war economy had already been sentenced, while Seldte died in April 1947, escaping potential criminal charges. Because the Allies were pressing for the war crimes trials to be wound up as rapidly as possible, in the end the leading officials at the Labour Ministry were spared prosecution. Most of them were soon able to find their feet again professionally in West Germany and return to their middle-class lives. These top officials' successful exoneration strategy, however, has also moulded the historical assessment of the Reich Labour Ministry. It was perceived as an authority that – definitively stripped of its powers during the war – carried out merely minor administrative activities and bore no responsibility for the Nazi state's criminal practices.

Martin Münzel's chapter brings out the complexities of staffing continuities after 1945. Initially, in all four Allied occupation zones, former Nazis were almost entirely removed from leading positions in the labour and welfare administration. The upper levels of the relevant authorities in East Germany were also systematically denazified, the vast majority of newly appointed officials and other staff being loyal members of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands

or SED). The permanent removal of former Nazis from senior administrative posts was carried out more consistently in East Germany than in the western occupation zones and West Germany, with the latter showing a precocious tendency to reappoint qualified officials despite their Nazi past. Often, during the era of the bizonal administration, the lack of trained administrative personnel was already cited as the rationale for returning former senior staff to responsible roles despite their political baggage. The ongoing effects of the exculpatory strategy pursued in Nuremberg are evident in the case of Walter Stothfang. Despite having been a close colleague of Sauckel, following a number of occupational stopovers he was employed in the ministry once again. As in other cases, personal networks from the pre-1945 period played an important role in Stothfang's rehabilitation: individuals were frequently issued with denazification certificates ('Persilscheine'), which had a mitigating effect in the context of the denazification trials. Due to Adenauer's policy of reintegration, beginning in the early 1950s all Federal authorities had to reserve at least 20 per cent of their permanent posts for officials, dismissed after 1945, who had not been categorized, within the framework of the denazification trials, as 'major offenders' (*Hauptschuldige*) or the 'encumbered' (*Belastete*, including activists, militants and profiteers). Most Nazi bureaucrats found employment once again in the ministries of West Germany; in some cases this involved the reactivation of old networks.

As Münzel shows, in 1953 former Nazi Party members occupied 57 per cent of senior roles in the state bureaucracy, increasing to more than 70 per cent by 1960. Hence, at the most senior levels, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was among the 'Federal ministries employing the highest proportion of former Nazi Party members' (Martin Münzel). During this period, the Federal Labour Office (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit) and its subordinate labour offices also employed many former party members, sometimes in senior roles. Formal party membership, however, does not tell us the whole story when it comes to political continuities. More significant is the fact that the ministerial elites clearly consisted of a largely homogeneous group of welfare specialists, administrative experts and officials, a group characterized by shared professional socialization and political experiences, both extending from the Weimar Republic through the Nazi era and into the postwar period.

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Finances. Taxation, State Spending and Debt since the 1970s (Cambridge University Press, 2017); *Stunde der Ökonomen. Wissenschaft, Expertenkultur und Politik in der Bundesrepublik 1949–1974* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); with Wolfgang Schieder (eds), *Zeitgeschichte als Problem. Nationale Traditionen und Perspektiven der Forschung in Europa* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); *Landwirtschaft, Staat und Autarkie. Agrarpolitik im faschistischen Italien 1922–1943* (de Gruyter, 1997).

Notes

1. M. Zschucke, *Das Reichsarbeitsministerium*, Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1940, 5 f.
2. On the recent debate, see W. Gruner and A. Nolzen (eds), *‘Bürokratien’. Initiative und Effizienz*, Berlin: Assoziation A, 2001; C. Kuller, “‘Kämpfende Verwaltung’”. Bürokratie im NS-Staat, in D. Süß and W. Süß (eds), *Das ‘Dritte Reich’. Eine Einführung*, Munich: Pantheon, 2008, 227–45; S. Reichardt and W. Seibel (eds), *Der prekäre Staat. Herrschen und Verwalten im Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2011.
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7. See the chapter by Ulrike Schulz in this volume.

8. See H. Mommsen, *Beamtentum im Dritten Reich. Mit ausgewählten Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Beamtenpolitik*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966; D. Rebentisch and K. Teppe (eds), *Verwaltung contra Menschenführung im Staat Hitlers. Studien zum politisch-administrativen System*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986; D. Rebentisch, *Führerstaat und Verwaltung im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Verfassungsentwicklung und Verwaltungspolitik 1939–1945*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989; with a strong focus on administrative history, see also H. Hattenhauer, *Geschichte des deutschen Beamtentums*, Cologne: Heymanns, 1993; S. Mühl-Benninghaus, *Das Beamtentum in der NS-Diktatur bis zum Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Zu Entstehung, Inhalt und Durchführung der einschlägigen Beamtengesetze*, Düsseldorf: Droste, 1996.

9. M. Broszat, *Der Staat Hitlers. Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung*, 10th ed., Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1983, 323.

10. *Ibid.*, 324 f.

11. P. Hüttenberger, 'Nationalsozialistische Polykratie', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2(4) (1976), 417–42, here 430; on the polycracy debate, see H.-U. Thamer, 'Monokratie – Polykratie. Historiographischer Überblick über eine kontroverse Debatte', in G. Otto and J. Houwink ten Cate (eds), *Das organisierte Chaos. 'Ämterdarwinismus' und 'Gesinnungsethik'. Determinanten nationalsozialistischer Besatzungsherrschaft*, Berlin: Metropol, 1999, 21–34.

12. J. Caplan, 'Bureaucracy, Politics and the National Socialist State', in P.D. Stachura (ed.), *The Shaping of the Nazi State*, London: Croom Helm, 1978, 234–56; see also J. Caplan, *Government without Administration. State and Civil Service in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.

13. Caplan, 'Bureaucracy', 251.

14. See the contributions in Reichardt and Seibel (eds), *Der prekäre Staat*.

15. *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Sämtliche Fragmente*, series editor E. Fröhlich, Part I: *Aufzeichnungen 1924–1945*, vol. 2/III: *Oktober 1932–März 1934*, ed. A. Hermann, Munich: Saur, 2006, 120 (entry, 30 January 1933).

16. W.A. Boelcke, 'Arbeit und Soziales', in K.G.A. Jeserich, H. Pohl and G.-C. von Unruh (eds), *Deutsche Verwaltungsgeschichte*, vol. 4: *Das Reich als Republik und in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1985, 793–807, here 795.

17. See the chapter by Ulrike Schulz in this volume.

18. K.K. Patel, 'Soldaten der Arbeit'. *Arbeitsdienste in Deutschland und den USA, 1933*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003, 74–123.

19. S. Reichardt and W. Seibel, 'Radikalität und Stabilität: Herrschen und Verwalten im Nationalsozialismus', in Reichardt and Seibel (eds), *Der prekäre Staat*, 7–27, here 11.

20. R. Hachtmann, '"Systemverfall" oder "Neue Staatlichkeit"? Thesen zur Binnenstruktur des NS-Regimes', in F. Bösch and M. Sabrow (eds), *ZeitRäume. Potsdamer Almanach 2011*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012, 89–100.

21. Ultimately, Ley was made Reich housing commissioner (Reichswohnungskommissar) in October 1942, a post that enhanced his powers; see also R. Smelser, *Robert Ley. Hitler's Labor Front Leader*, Oxford: Berg, 1989.

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24. See also K.-H. Roth, 'Die Sozialpolitik des "europäischen Grossraum" im Spannungsfeld von Okkupation und Kollaboration (1938–1945)', in W. Röhr (ed.), *Okkupation und Kollaboration (1938–1945). Beiträge zu Konzepten und Praxis der Kollaboration in der deutschen Okkupationspolitik*, Berlin: Hühig, 1994, 461–565.

25. M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe*, London: Allen Lane, 2008.

26. See also J. Hensel and S. Lehnstaedt (eds), *Arbeit in den nationalsozialistischen Ghettos*, Osnabrück: Fibre, 2013.

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