

Article

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Historical Papers / Communications historiques, vol. 15, n° 1, 1980, p. 228-247.

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URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030859ar>

DOI: 10.7202/030859ar

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War Guilt Propaganda Conducted by the German Foreign Ministry During the 1920s

HERMAN J. WITTGENS

The war guilt propaganda campaign coordinated by the German Foreign Ministry had the political purpose of revising the material provisions of the Treaty of Versailles by attacking its alleged legal and moral base, Article 231, the so-called war guilt article. Characteristically of propaganda, the campaign was based on a distorted meaning of its object. Article 231, no longer a narrow statement of responsibility for reparations, was expanded into the moral and legal base for the entire treaty and a moral condemnation of the German people for having caused the war. A simple statement of liability for reparations became a complex question of historical causation open to continual debate, thus affording the opportunity for a sustained attack on the alleged basis of the treaty. According to German war guilt propagandists, the "Versailles War Guilt Thesis" was contained in the "Report of the Allied Commission on Responsibility for the War", in the treaty itself, in Part VII of the Ultimatum of 16 June 1919, and Part I of the Covering Note to the Ultimatum. However, Article 231 became the focal point of attack on the treaty, and war guilt propagandists resisted attempts to limit the meaning of the article to a simple statement of financial liability.¹

A continuation of wartime propaganda and the tactics of the German delegation at Versailles, the main outlines of the propaganda campaign are visible in the so-called "Professors' Memorandum", whose signatories would figure prominently in Foreign Ministry propaganda. It called for an impartial commission to examine the causes of the war on the basis of all the evidence, and it shifted responsibility to Russian imperial aims, French revanchism, the equivocal position of Lord Grey in July 1914, and Russian mobilization.²

The purpose of this paper is to indicate the nature and scope of the German Foreign Ministry's campaign by briefly delineating the activities of the Kriegsschuldreferat, the war guilt section in the Foreign Ministry, and its front organizations during the 1920s. This will be done in part by examining their relationship

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1. Alfred von Wegerer, "Ausländische Sachverständige zur Kriegsschuldfrage, Antworten auf drei Fragen", *Berliner Monatshefte*, IX (1931), p. 520. On the meaning of Article 231, see Fritz Dickmann, "Die Kriegsschuldfrage auf der Friedenskonferenz von Paris 1919", *Historische Zeitschrift*, CXCVII (1963), pp. 1-101.
 2. Alma Luckau, *The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941; reprinted, New York: Howard Fertig, 1971), pp. 288-99.

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with a particular revisionist, the American historian and publicist, Harry Elmer Barnes. Although the Schuldreferat, as it was commonly referred to, worked through a number of other governmental agencies, most of its propaganda was carried out by two organizations which it had created for that purpose and which presented themselves free from official control and influence. The Zentralstelle für Erforschung der Kriegsursachen (Center for the Study of the Causes of the War) was a small institute with scholarly ambitions, and the Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände (Working Committee of German Associations) was an umbrella organization which hoped to coordinate the German public on the war guilt question. A brief consideration of them and their relationship with an historian-propagandist should contribute to our understanding of the wide circulation of revisionist ideas and the essentially political aims of the innocence campaign.

The origins of the Schuldreferat connect with an office in the Political Department which was responsible for collecting documents on the outbreak of the war and the work of Bernard W. von Bülow, then an archivist in the Foreign Ministry who prepared documents for official use and served as the advisor on the war guilt question for the German delegation at Versailles.³ After the Schüler Reform of 1920, the Schuldreferat was attached to one or the other of the new regional departments until it was absorbed by the Historische Referat in 1937. It was a small section functionally divided into three parts: the head of the section with his deputy and assistant, the editors of the *Grosse Politik* with their assistants and clerks, and a third section representing the interests of the Foreign Ministry with the Parliamentary Investigating Committees.⁴ Friederich Stieve, who had been suggested by Bülow, headed the Schuldreferat for most of the 1920s and retained some influence even after he had left it.⁵ Within the Foreign Ministry the Schuldreferat became the centre of attack against Article 231 and thus an integral part of the attempt to revise the Treaty of Versailles.

The government saw as one of its most urgent tasks to enlighten public opinion at home and abroad about the war guilt question with the aim of revising the Treaty of Versailles. A united front of German public opinion and doubt regarding the verdict of war guilt in foreign countries were the necessary prerequisites

3. Imanuel Geiss, *Julikrise und Kriegsausbruch, 1914*, 2 Bde., (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschichte, 1963), I, p. 29. I. Geiss, 'The Outbreak of the First World War and German War Aims', *Journal of Contemporary History*, I (1966), p. 75.

4. Memo. by Dr. Weber, 'Unterbringung der Beamten des Schuldreferats nach dem Stand von 15.10.20', 9 October 1920, 8859/3410/E616775-6. Unless indicated otherwise, filmed sources belong to photocopy T 120, which is available at the National Archives in Washington; all correspondence originated in Berlin.

5. Friederich Stieve headed the Schuldreferat from 1922 to 1928. Formerly press attache of the German Embassy in Stockholm, he later became ambassador to Riga and then head of the Cultural Policy Department. He was preceded by Dr. Hans Freytag in 1919-20, and Professor Richard Delbrück in 1921-22.

for a successful official step against Article 231.⁶ According to Stieve, historical elucidation was of no importance: the purposes were political.⁷ No one in the Schuldreferat believed that reparations or any other part of the treaty would simply collapse once the dogma of German war guilt had been destroyed. It was also recognized that the identification of war guilt with demands for the revision of the material parts of the treaty would embarrass some well-meaning foreign defenders, and on occasion the connections were loosened for tactical reasons.⁸ Schwendemann, head of the Schuldreferat from 1928 to 1931, stated in 1928 that the true basis of the Treaty of Versailles was not war guilt, but military defeat in 1918. Thus, only a change in international power relationships could bring about a revision of the treaty. However, since the belief that Germany had unleashed war in 1914 deepened especially French feelings of insecurity, the war guilt question was an important imponderable in regard to disarmament and *Anschluss* with Austria.⁹ Nevertheless, Wegerer's statement, that the "impossible demands of the Versailles Treaty as such . . . the military disarmament of the Reich, the completely superfluous occupation of the Rhineland, the maintenance of the impossible Eastern frontiers, and the prohibition of the union between Germany and Austria are on every occasion justified by the idea of war guilt", probably reflects best the general view fostered by the Schuldreferat and one most widely accepted.¹⁰

The task of propaganda was to prepare the ground for an official step against Article 231, a step for which the German political right was pressing incessantly. However, as long as foreign governments could rest on the public opinion they had created during the war, this was expected to fail. The Foreign Ministry correctly ruled out direct, official mass propaganda as a method which had been discredited and rendered ineffectual by the war. Initially, it saw its task in the exploitation of the reaction by some foreign scholars and publicists against the wartime policies and propaganda of their governments. By providing them with documents and interpretive works, it hoped to enlarge this circle of spokesmen. Careful work and the concealment of the Schuldreferat as a driving force behind the cultivation of a native corps of scholars and journalists who would present the

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6. Foreign Ministry (Stieve) to Braunschweigischen Gesandten, 9 August 1922, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, Erlasse and Berichte, Aufzeichnungen, 2. Unless stated otherwise, unfiled sources are from the records of the Schuldreferat, Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt, Bonn. Memo., Foreign Minister to President, 18 May 1925, 4519/2277/E 134159.
 7. Memo., Stieve for Ref. II Oe., 3 May 1927, K 2217/5596/K612388-9.
 8. Geheime Aufzeichnung (Hagen), 16 September 1924, Arbeitsausschuss, 1. Hermann Lutz, Memorandum über das Ergebniss meines Aufenthaltes in England in Sachen der Kriegsschuldfrage, Vertraulich, 4 June 1925, 3738/1849/E039037-46.
 9. Memo., Schwendemann for Minister of Interior, 24 August 1928, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 2c. Dr. Schwendemann headed the Schuldreferat from 1928 to 1931.
 10. Alfred von Wegerer, *Die Widerlegung der Versailler Kriegsschuldthese* (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1928), p. 9. Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, *Anhaltspunkte für die Schuldfragearbeit, 1922* (Berlin: Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, 1922), p. 3. On Wegerer, see note 22.

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German case against Article 231 to their reading publics was crucial. The Schuldreferat regarded this slower method as basically successful during the 1920s.¹¹

The more patient strategists shared the basic conviction that publication of documents would prove German innocence most conclusively in the long run, and the release of the raw materials for historical scholarship together with its propagation became the central activity of the Schuldreferat. An apparently complete opening of the archives was presented as a radical break with the system of secret diplomacy demanded by liberal opinion everywhere, and the other powers were challenged to follow suit.¹² Beginning with the so-called Kautsky documents in 1919, the Schuldreferat regained the initiative when it rendered relatively harmless a collection of documents designed to discredit the fallen regime. This was done by attaching Count Maximilian Montgelas and the international jurist, Walther Schücking, as co-editors, producing a commentary, and inaugurating a systematic polemic against Kautsky by writers close to the Schuldreferat.¹³ The immense *Grosse Politik*, released between 1922 and 1927 in forty volumes under the general editorship of Friedrich Thimme, clearly established an early dependency of all students of prewar diplomacy on German materials, and it gave credence to the German demand that the war guilt issue could never be resolved until all other governments had opened their archives as completely. When Britain and France did so, it was celebrated as a consequence of the German example taken with the *Grosse Politik*. This collection had grown in response to the widening war guilt debate; the structure of the individual volumes and chapters, the final selection and arrangement of documents, the commentary in the footnotes — all were executed with an eye on the desired impact in foreign countries. The release of the documents was accompanied by much commentary in the domestic and foreign press, all designed to create and sustain interest and exploit the collection propagandistically.¹⁴

11. Memo., Foreign Ministry for Chancellor, 25 November 1921, 8551/3408/E615808-9. Memo., Stieve for Dr. Hergt, 22 February 1927; Memo., Schwendemann to Minister of Interior, 24 August 1928, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 2c.

12. It is impossible to even list here the many collections published, translated, and supported by the *Schuldreferat*.

13. B.W. von Bülow, Graf Max Montgelas, *Kommentar zu den Deutschen Dokumenten zum Kriegausbruch* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, n.d.). Besides Bülow and Montgelas, the editors of the *Grosse Politik*, Friederich Thimme and Albrecht Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and the historian, Hans Delbrück, participated in the polemic.

14. *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914, Sammlung der Diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes*, hrsg. von Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Friederich Thimme, (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922-27); Thimme to Schuldreferat, 5 December 1923, 8859/3411/E617532-6; Mendelssohn-Bartholdy to Delbrück, Hamburg, 23 November 1921, 8859/3410/E16894-5; Stieve to Romberg, 23 February 1924, 8854/3408/E616188-90.

In order to demonstrate the guilt of others, the Schuldreferat published in the press, in its journals, or as collections, documents from the Russian archives. These either had been betrayed by former Russian officials, released by the Soviets in order to discredit their predecessors, published elsewhere already, or purchased by the German Foreign Ministry. The Schuldreferat believed these to be especially damaging to France and Russia, and thus easily exploited for propagandistic needs.¹⁵ For example, *Die Fälschungen des Russischen Orangebuches*, which actually was edited by Stieve and only signed by G. von Romberg, former envoy to Switzerland, charged that France had not only failed to restrain Russia, but strengthened her resolve to go to war by repeated assurances of support. What makes the small volume interesting is the extensive treatment that Chancellor Wirth gave it when addressing the foreign press corps on the topic of "The German Government and the Guilt Question" on 30 September 1922. While other collections were mentioned, nearly half of the speech, which was an indictment of French policy during the critical last week in July 1914, dwelt on the *Fälschungen*.¹⁶ The speech coincided with the preparation by the Arbeitsausschuss of a massive popular campaign against France and Poincaré in anticipation of hostile French action in the reparation question.¹⁷ The *Falsifications* were highly successful with revisionists; and, partially prompted by that success, Stieve published *Der Diplomatische Schriftwechsel Iswolskis* in 1924. Planned and approved during the Ruhr crisis, there was pressure to finish it when the Dawes Plan was accepted.¹⁸ Whatever the restraints imposed upon the Schuldreferat to maintain the credibility of these publications, they were the hard core of an operation in historiographical warfare, whose purpose was to reduce or explain away completely German responsibility for the war and to shift it to the former opponents, chiefly Russia and France. In order to bring the contents of these documents before the public eye, the Schuldreferat retained writers and created for itself several non-official organs of which the Zentralstelle and the Arbeitsausschuss were the most important.¹⁹

The Zentralstelle für Erforschung der Kriegsursachen originated in February 1921, when Foreign Minister Dr. Simons requested that the Schuldreferat energetically pursue the establishment of a private foundation which would be close to the Foreign Ministry and concern itself with the outbreak, conduct, and duration

15. G. von Romberg, *Falsifications of the Russian Orange Book: Actual Exchange of Telegrams between Paris and St. Petersburg at the Outbreak of the War* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1923); Friederich Stieve, *Der Diplomatische Schriftwechsel Iswolskis, 1911-1914, aus den Geheimakten der Russischen Staatsarchive i.A. des Deutschen A.A. in Deutscher Uebersetzung* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1924).

16. *Die Reichsregierung und die Schuldfrage. Ein Interview mit dem Reichskanzler*, n.d., 8859/3410/E617420-4.

17. Memo., Stieve for Haniel, 12 October 1922, Schriftwechsel mit Vereinen und Privatpersonen, 2.

18. Memo. (secret), Stieve, 15 March 1923, 8859/3411/EG17465-8, initialled by Schubert and Maltzan; Stieve to Romberg, 19 September 1924, 8854/3408/E616157-8.

19. Foreign Minister for Reich President, 18 May 1925, 45/2277/E134153-60.

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of the war.²⁰ That direct propaganda carried on by the war guilt section would likely be met with distrust was accepted by the first head of the Schuldreferat, who attempted for much of 1920 to establish such a foundation and arrange the necessary private funds for it.²¹ Although well-known scholars had been considered for the directorship of the Zentralstelle, the post was held by the retired officer, Alfred von Wegerer.²² A tireless worker and prolific writer, Wegerer was assisted by a small staff that fluctuated with the economic misfortunes of the country, but rarely exceeded eight persons.²³ However, in order to improve indifferent performance, establish firm guidelines, and insure much needed uniformity, the Schuldreferat effectively expanded the Zentralstelle at the end of 1922 by creating an unpaid Directory of six established experts in the war guilt question: the historian, Hans Delbrück; the classical archeologist, Georg Karo; the then Secretary of the First Subcommittee (causes of the war) of the Parliamentary Investigating Committee, Eugen Fischer; Bernard W. von Bülow, who had left the Foreign Ministry between 1919 and 1923; and two war guilt writers retained by the Foreign Ministry, Hermann Lutz and Count Max Montgelas.²⁴

With the establishment of the Zentralstelle, the Schuldreferat had created a clearinghouse for officially desirable views on the outbreak of the war, giving them wider and faster circulation. Possessing its specialized arsenal of published documents, memoirs, important secondary works, essays, reviews, and clippings file, the Zentralstelle served as a link between scholars and publicists and the Schuldreferat. By 1925, Wegerer claimed to have established direct contact with everyone of note engaged in the war guilt debate by means of correspondence, visits to Berlin, and his own travels. Frequent use of materials from the archive of the Zentralstelle was taken as a measure of success and usually rewarded with supportive treatment in the publications of the Zentralstelle.²⁵

The Schuldreferat and its front organizations loosened an avalanche of documentary collections and secondary works, and the output of the Zentralstelle was formidable. Wegerer alone churned out well over three hundred articles and

20. Memo., Dr. Simons on a conversation with Bülow on 22 February 1921, 25 February 1921, 8850/3408/E615724-5.

21. The extensive correspondence can be found in Serial 3738/Roll 1849. The Heidelberger Vereinigung was briefly considered as a core for the institute.

22. Wegerer, who had joined the Zentralstelle in 1921 after a career in the army and Grenzschutz, succeeded the Swiss historian, Ernst Sauerbeck, in late 1922.

23. Report, Wegerer to Stieve. 16 March 1925, 37381/1848/E037866-96. The financial picture of the Zentralstelle is difficult to piece together because the Schuldreferat subsidized projects outside the budget. On balance, support seems not to have been overly generous.

24. Draft, Stieve to prospective members, 6 November 1922; Memo., Stieve for Schubert, 15 December 1922, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 4. The Directorium was dissolved in 1928, leaving Wegerer in charge.

25. Memo., by Zentralstelle, January 1922, 8851/3408/E615816-27. Wegerer suggests contacts with a range of foreign institutions, many of them pacifist. See also "Wegerer Denkschrift", January 1923; "Kurzer Bericht", December 1923, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 3.

numerous books, crowning his achievements in 1939 with the two volume *Der Ausbruch des Weltkrieges*, a work which would remain the basic German account until the Fischer controversy.²⁶ Of the many publications, the most important for the innocence campaign was probably *Die Kriegsschuldfrage, Monatsschrift für Internationale Aufklärung*. Its appearance in July 1923 might seem to be rather tardy, but the monthly expanded and incorporated already existing publications.²⁷ Interestingly, Wegerer claimed to have founded it on his own initiative, against unnamed opposition and with financial support from a patriotic organization. In time, the Foreign Ministry financed it, even if not lavishly so, to serve the official purpose of publicizing war guilt research so that the injustice of Versailles would not fade from memory.²⁸ As such the *Kriegsschuldfrage* did not promote scholarly debate on the causes of the war, but it was an international forum for revisionist writers, providing the substance for their arguments, while amplifying and circulating their views. Its documentations and articles sought to demonstrate the guilt of the other powers with highly detailed examinations of prewar diplomacy, all too often concentrating on the July crisis, and its reviews bolstered works which exonerated Germany and vigorously disputed those which did not.

The circle of contributors widened and became more international in the course of the 1920s. It was not professional historians who wrote the bulk of the articles, but the heads of the Schuldreferat and the roster of writers directly associated with them: the editors of the *Grosse Politik*, Wegerer and his assistants, former statesmen, retired diplomatic personnel and military men, and a host of publicists. Despite its foreign contributors and international distribution — one-half of the copies normally being sold or given away to academics, writers, and libraries abroad — the *Kriegsschuldfrage* essentially remained a German-language publication with a modest circulation.²⁹ Regardless of its scholarly pretensions — the emphasis on documentary research, the highly detailed articles, the reviews and bibliographies, and the often professed search for impartial, historical truth — the *Kriegsschuldfrage* was foremost a means to strengthen the German case in the war guilt question and, consequently, the cause of treaty revision.³⁰ Because of the journal's success as a useful conduit into foreign countries, the Foreign Ministry retained it even after the Zentralstelle had outlived its politi-

26. Geiss, *Julikrise* I, p. 25.

27. Its title was changed to the less specific *Berliner Monatshefte für Internationale Aufklärung* in January 1931, with some subsequent minor changes.

28. Wegerer to Dienstmann, 24 August 1936; Pawelke (Zentralstelle) to St. S. v. Bülow, 25 October 1930, 2788/1397B/546550-1. Foreign Ministry to Reichspressekammer, 3 September 1934, 3738/1848/E038946-7.

29. In 1925 publication fluctuated between 2,500 and 3,000, of which 500 went to foreigners. Report, Wegerer for Stieve, 16 March 1925, 3738/1848/E037890-91. By 1932, 1,450 out of 3,300 printed went to foreign countries. Memo., Hüffer for St. S. v. Bülow, 19 May 1932, 3738/1848/E037945.

30. Foreign Ministry to Reichspressekammer, 3 September 1934, 3738/1848/E038946-7.

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cal *raison d'être* with the passing of reparations, the introduction of conscription, and the remilitarization of the Rhineland.³¹

Founded in 1921, the *Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände* was an umbrella organization through which the Foreign Ministry attempted to gain a measure of control over patriotic organizations which called for a revision of the war guilt verdict and the Treaty of Versailles. The need for such an organization had been recognized early in the *Schuldreferat*, though the impetus for its actual formation appears to have come from outside the Foreign Ministry.³² A board of directors (*Kuratorium*) aided by several committees gave the *Arbeitsausschuss* political and organizational direction as well as representation to its major member organizations. A business office, mostly under Dr. Hans Draeger, managed its daily affairs and was in regular contact with the *Schuldreferat* and other agencies of the government.³³ Financial support flowed from many sources, including the *Schuldreferat* and the Press Section of the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of the Interior, the Chancellery, the State of Prussia, industrial and commercial pressure groups, contributions from member organizations, lotteries, and public solicitations.³⁴

In the course of the 1920s, the *Arbeitsausschuss* acquired between seventeen hundred and two thousand member organizations, and even Draeger was uncertain of the exact number owing to the complex interconnections between patriotic organizations in the Weimer Republic.³⁵ They included most of the political parties, the non-socialist unions, industrial and commercial interest groups, and a range of patriotic organizations, many of which made protest against war guilt and treaty their exclusive cause. While the intent had been to encompass the entire political spectrum with the exception of the communists, the *Arbeitsausschuss* remained an essentially right-of-centre organization. Its stated aim was to create a uniform public opinion by moderating the extreme protestations

31. Memo., Werner Frauendienst (head of the *Schuldreferat*, 1935-36) to M.D. Dienstmann, 2 June 1936, 3738/1848/E038061-67.

32. Professor E. Jaeckh (Berlin) to St. S. Haniel, 21 February 1921, *Andere Bearbeiter und Organisationen*, 1. Hans Draeger, *Der Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, 1921-1931* (Berlin: Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, 1931), pp. 19-21; Memo., Delbrück for St. S. v. Haniel, 5 March 1921, 8850/3408/E615765-6. Owing to the great range of activities of the *Arbeitsausschuss*, only a bare sketch for purposes of orientation can be given here.

33. The first president of the *Arbeitsausschuss* was Freiherr v. Lersener, former head of the German Peace Delegation, who was followed in 1925 by Dr. Heinrich Schnee, the former governor of German East Africa. Dr. v. Vietsch, on leave from the *Reichswanderungsamt*, was the first managing director who was succeeded in 1923 by Dr. Hans Draeger.

34. Memo., Dittler (Presseabteilung), 11 May 1925, 8851/3408/E615889. Prussian Minister of the Interior to *Arbeitsausschuss*, 2 February 1926, *Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände* 2; Memo., Stieve for Schubert 20 December 1924, *Ibid.*, 1.

35. Draeger, *Arbeitsausschuss, 1921-1931*, p. 60. On the complex interconnections, see Dieter Fricke, *et. al.*, *Die Bürgerlichen Parteien in Deutschland*, 2 Bde., (Berlin: Das Europäische Buch, 1968).

of innocence on the right and admission of guilt on the left. In practice it meant attempting to silence those willing to allow for a measure of German responsibility. This uniform, national public opinion, ostensibly above party, was expected to strengthen German demands for treaty revision by providing a popular backbone for the government and to weaken foreign critics by depriving them of German sources for their arguments.³⁶ Special efforts to influence the left were not a complete success. While the Arbeitsausschuss was able to attract individuals from the left and penetrate its press with articles, the SPD, its unions, and the republican Reichsbanner remained outside the organizational net.³⁷ An example of the organizational expression of this right-of-centre gravity is the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Vaterländische Aufklärung (Working Association for Patriotic Enlightenment). A large umbrella organization with connections to the far right, it predated the Arbeitsausschuss and then became its decisive right wing.³⁸

To create a uniform approach and to sustain public interest in the war guilt question and treaty revision, the Arbeitsausschuss provided a number of services to the member organizations. It held speakers' seminars and special training weeks for representatives of the press, union officials, and the many liaison personnel (*Vertrauensleute*) who acted as contacts between the various organizations and the public.³⁹ Exhibitions, conventions, and rallies (*Kundgebungen*) coordinated by the Arbeitsausschuss, usually with the approval of the Schuldreferat, kept the issues before the public.⁴⁰

Like the Zentralstelle, the Arbeitsausschuss aided the propagandistic exploitation and distribution of the Schuldreferat's documentary collections and other publications. It also circulated the works of French, English, and American revisionists at home and abroad.⁴¹ Its journal, *Der Weg zur Freiheit*, was much more popular in appeal and propagandistic in approach than Wegerer's *Kriegsschuldfrage*. Not nearly so restricted to the war guilt question, it addressed itself to the practical issues of the treaty: reparations, armaments, colonies, the Rhineland,

36. For example, see Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, *Anhaltspunkte für die Schuldfragearbeit*, (als Manuskript gedruckt), (Berlin: Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, 1922); *Leitsätze für Aufklärungsarbeit in der Kriegsschuldfrage*, Arbeitsausschuss Tagung, Stuttgart, 22-28 June 1925, Arbeitsausschuss, 2.

37. Draeger to Schnee, 15 April 1925, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc. 4; "Geschäftsbericht, 1925", Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, 3; "Arbeitsausschuss Bericht", n.d. [1931], Schwertfeger Papers, Folder 90, items 104-5, German Federal Archives, Koblenz.

38. Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Vaterländische Aufklärung, *Bericht*, 14 March 1925, Schwertfeger Papers, 80, 159-62; Draeger to Schuldreferat, 10 July 1925, Arbeitsausschuss, 2.

39. Protokoll, Meeting of the Kuratorium, 3 February 1928, Schwertfeger Papers, 89, 109-10, Draeger, *Arbeitsausschuss, 1921-1931*, pp. 81-91.

40. Memo., Stieve for St. S. Haniel, 12 October 1922, Schriftwechsel mit Vereinen und Einzelpersonen, 2.

41. Draeger, *Arbeitsausschuss, 1921-1931*, p. 72. Vietsch to Delbrück, 14 November 1921, Andere Bearbeiter und Organisationen, 3; Delbrück to Schwertfeger, 28 November 1921, Schwertfeger Papers, 81, 248.

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Germans abroad, minorities, and the League of Nations. Much of the literature distributed through the member organizations consisted of simple guides, easily understood pamphlets, and broadsides produced in large editions. The Schuldreferat deemed flyers to be ineffective except for special occasions, and some were prepared by it for the Arbeitsausschuss.⁴² These publications reinforced a basic polemical point. Whatever the adverse conditions in Germany, they resulted from the Treaty of Versailles which rested upon the defamation of the German people, the war guilt lie. The Arbeitsausschuss effectively penetrated the German press, claiming direct contact with fifteen hundred papers and regular relations with thirty-five correspondence services. It distributed materials directly to teacher organizations and schools, notably Stieve's *Deutschland und Europa, 1890-1914*.⁴³

Although the primary purpose of the Arbeitsausschuss seems to have been the coordination of German public opinion, it maintained contacts with scholars and publicists abroad through individuals and some of the member organizations. For example, the Wirtschaftspolitische Gesellschaft (Association for Political Economy) which was founded in 1922 received special funds from the Arbeitsausschuss. Concerned with all aspects of treaty revision, it established excellent connections with scholars, publicists, and politicians in English-speaking countries.⁴⁴ A special committee of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce acted through the German press and organizations in foreign countries.⁴⁵ The Schuldreferat actually preferred not to work through these, fearing that they could discredit the efforts of foreign revisionists.⁴⁶ Domestic and foreign propaganda should not be separated too sharply, because at the time it was believed that these two aspects reinforced each other. While foreign revisionists were used to strengthen the innocentist case at home, a unified German public opinion was believed to strengthen foreign revisionists. Work in Germany was work on foreign countries.⁴⁷ A brief examination of the relationship between the foreign revisionist, Harry Elmer Barnes, and the Schuldreferat through these front organizations should give an indication of the nature and the scope of the Foreign Ministry campaign against Article 231.

42. On literature, see Draeger, *Arbeitsausschuss, 1921-31*, pp. 121-35; Memo., Stieve, 21 May 1923, in *Schriftwechsel mit Behörden*, etc. 3.

43. "Geschäftsbericht, 1925", p. 8, in *Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände*, 3; Draeger, *Arbeitsausschuss, 1921-1931*, p. 80. On schools see, for example, Draeger to Schuldreferat, 6 November 1926, *Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände*, 3; "Arbeitsausschuss Bericht", n.d. [1931], p. 2, *Schwertfeger Papers* 90, 103.

44. Vietsch to Schuldreferat, 20 April 1922, *Schriftwechsel mit Vereinen und Privatpersonen*, 1; Margarete Gärtner, *Botschafterin des Guten Willens* (Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1955).

45. "Kampfspende, 1924", *Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände*, 1; "Geschäftsbericht, 1925", pp. 9-11, *Ibid.*, 3.

46. Memo., Böhme for Deputy Director of Department, II, 9 June 1931, K 1852/5189/K463242-5.

47. Draeger, *Arbeitsausschuss, 1921-1931*, pp. 65-7.

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Harry Elmer Barnes was America's most vocal spokesman for the German case in the war guilt question.⁴⁸ An ardent interventionist during the war, he had accused a militaristic and expansionistic Germany of having plotted a "sudden, vigorous, and well-nigh successful assault upon the foundations of modern civilization and world order."⁴⁹ Converted to revisionism in 1921 by Sidney B. Fay's articles in the *American Historical Review*, Barnes attracted public attention in 1924.⁵⁰ In a hostile review of Charles D. Hazen's *Europe Since 1815* in the *New Republic*, he faulted the author with failure to use the new sources which had become available since 1919. The Schuldreferat had published, supported, or propagated almost all of those mentioned by him.⁵¹ Barnes followed through with a series of articles in which he rendered verdicts of divided responsibility, though his views became progressively more pro-German. His article, "Assessing the Blame for the World War", in *Current History* (May 1924) began with a survey of the latest documentary sources. He aligned Austria-Hungary, Russia, France, Germany, and England on a diminishing scale, stressed the militarism of France and Russia, and attempted to justify the actions of Austria-Hungary.⁵² In a February 1925 article in the *Nation*, Barnes had adopted the formulation of the French revisionist, Fabre-Luce, that the gestures of the Central Powers had made the war possible and the actions of the Entente had made it inevitable.⁵³ When in late 1925 Barnes published the series of articles in the *Christian Century* which would become the basis of his *Genesis of the World War*, he had reached the innocentist position. France and Russia were the villains of Europe and Germany their innocent victim.⁵⁴

As nearly as can be ascertained, the Zentralstelle took an interest in Barnes from early 1924 onward, when it provided him with some materials, gave him advice and encouragement, propagated his writings, and established personal con-

48. Educated at Syracuse and Columbia, Barnes had taught the history of culture at Clark University for three years before he moved to Smith College in 1923 to teach historical sociology until 1930. He then held an editorial post with the Scripps-Howard chain.

49. Quoted by Selig Adler, "The War Guilt Question and American Disillusionment, 1918-1928", *Journal of Modern History*, XXIII (1951), p. 16, n. 106, from a National Security League pamphlet. The NSL promoted patriotic education and universal military service.

50. S.B. Fay, "New Light on the Origin of the World War, I, II, III. . .", *American Historical Review*, XXV (1920), pp. 616-39; XXVI (1921), pp. 37-53, and pp. 225-54.

51. *New Republic*, XXVIII (19 March 1924), Pt. II, pp. 10-5. Also reprinted in Harry Elmer Barnes, *In Quest of Truth and Justice: De-Bunking the War Guilt Myth* (Chicago: National Historical Society, 1928; Reprinted, New York: Arno Press, 1972), pp. 165-77, 169, 171, 182. Besides various Austrian collections, they included the Kautsky documents, Romberg's *Falsifications of the Russian Orangebook*, Siebert's *Diplomatische Aktenstücke*, and Marchand's *Livre Noir*.

52. *Current History Magazine*, XX (May 1924), pp. 171-96.

53. "Liquidating War Illusions", *The Nation*, CXX (11 February 1925), pp. 154-5. See also Barnes, *In Quest*, p. 329.

54. "Was America Deluded by the War?", *Christian Century*, XLII (8 October-17 December 1925).

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tact.⁵⁵ Because much of the Schuldreferat's material was distributed through the German missions, which in turn passed it on discretely, there is relatively little direct evidence of documents and books mailed to Barnes before he published *Genesis*. The German Embassy presented him with the *Grosse Politik*, but there is little trace of it in his writings.⁵⁶ Hermann Lutz acted as a middleman between Barnes and Milós Boghitschewitsch, the former Serbian *chargé d'affaires* in Germany who published documents and essays for the Schuldreferat during the 1920s. His highly pro-German *Causes of the War* had been paid for by the German Foreign Ministry and was an immediate success in revisionist circles.⁵⁷

Barnes seems to have been greatly influenced by the propagandistic efforts of the head of the Schuldreferat, Stieve. Wegerer sent him *Der Diplomatische Schriftwechsel Iswolskis, 1911-1914*, advising that it was of great significance.⁵⁸ The expressed purpose of this collection was to provide scholars with sources highly damaging to both France and Russia and easily exploited for propagandistic purposes.⁵⁹ Barnes approached the documents through a tendentious commentary by Stieve which underlined the Franco-Russian conspiracy and eased the chore for the hurried or those intimidated by four volumes of documents. Hermann Kantorowicz, who had been highly critical of Stieve's Iswolski correspondence and similar publications of the Schuldreferat, repeatedly attempted to nudge Barnes into a more critical stance by suggesting that falsifications were not unique to Russian documents, and by encouraging him to investigate the falsifications of Austrian and German documents as well. Colleagues and friends urged Barnes to reflect upon the evidence more carefully, to restrain his strong feeling, and to rely less upon the secondary accounts written by Stieve, Montgelas, and Wegerer.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Barnes pronounced Stieve's work the most thorough and important published collection of Russian materials and praised him as the

55. Wegerer to Barnes, 18 June 1924, Barnes Papers, Archive of Contemporary History, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyo.; *Die Kriegsschuldfrage 2: passim*.

56. Wegerer to Barnes, 25 November 1924; German Embassy, Washington, to Barnes, 27 May 1925, 3 June 1926, Barnes Papers.

57. *The Causes of the War: an Examination into the Causes of the European War, with Special Reference to Russia and Serbia* (Amsterdam: C.L. van Langenhuysen, 1919); Geiss, "Outbreak", p. 77. Boghitschewitsch was highly influential in English revisionist circles as well. See M. Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), p. 23-4.

58. Wegerer to Barnes, 25 November 1924, Barnes Papers.

59. Memo., Stieve, Secret, 15 March 1923, 8859/3411/E617465-8.

60. Kantorowicz to Stieve, Littenweiler, 9 November 1925, 8853/3408/E616085-90; 28 November 1925, *Ibid.*, /E616097-100; Kantorowicz to Barnes, Littenweiler, 23 July 1926, 26 October 1926, 28 July 1927, 31 October 1928; Shotwell to Barnes, New York, 18 February 1926; Fay to Barnes, Northampton, 19 September 1928, all in Barnes Papers. Kantorowicz was a German legal scholar who had written an expert opinion on war guilt for the parliamentary investigating committee. Because it deviated from the official line on war guilt, the Foreign Ministry prevented its timely publication. See Hermann Kantorowicz, *Gutachten zur Kriegsschuldfrage 1914*, edited with an introduction by Imanuel Geiss, (Frankfurt/M: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1967).

world's foremost authority on the Russian documents of prewar diplomacy. There can be little doubt that his formulation of an innocent Germany fallen victim to a Franco-Russian conspiracy came from this and similar collections, as the notes in *Genesis* amply demonstrate.⁶¹

However, Barnes also freely used French and English revisionists, credited them in his notes, and would later acknowledge his intellectual debt to them.⁶² Selig Adler also stresses the prevalence of French materials in the United States during the 1920s. The Schuldreferat aided the distribution of these authors as well. Alfred Fabre-Luce used Foreign Ministry materials for his *La Victoire*, and its distribution by the Volksbund "Rettet die Ehre" was mentioned in connection with a sum of twenty thousand Mark.⁶³ The Bremen-based Volksbund belonged to the Arbeitsausschuss and boasted particularly good contacts to English-speaking countries. Alcide Ebray's *La Paix Malpropre* was distributed through the missions,⁶⁴ and so was Victor Marguerite's *Les Criminels*, which resulted in considerable requests by the missions for further copies.⁶⁵ George Demartial's *La Guerre de 1914* was translated into German by the Arbeitsausschuss and English by the Deutsche Notbund, one of its subsidiaries.⁶⁶ Also E.D. Morel's books — *Pre-War Diplomacy* (1920), *Diplomacy Revealed* (1921), *The Secret History of a Great Betrayal* (1922), and *The Poison that Destroys* (1922) — leaned heavily on the Serb Boghitschewitsch who was supported by the Schuldreferat, which also promoted Morel's writings.⁶⁷

Besides being provisioned with literature, a number of writers close to the Schuldreferat and its front organizations corresponded with Barnes over the years. However, evidence of attempts to influence his views this way is relatively rare and concerns only minor points after *Genesis* had been published.⁶⁸ Attempts to exploit Barnes' relationship with other American historians, notably Fay and Shotwell, in order to convene under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation the international meeting of experts, long demanded by Germany, met with failure.⁶⁹ Much of the correspondence consists of routine exchanges between

61. H.E. Barnes, *The Genesis of the World War: An Introduction to the Problem of War Guilt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), pp. 50, 151, 722. German Embassy, Washington, to Foreign Ministry, 25 May 1925, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 5.

62. Adler, "War Guilt Question", p. 22, n. 164, p. 23.

63. Memo., Stieve, 29 July 1924, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 2a; Stieve to Volksbund, 23 September 1924, *Ibid.*, 2b.

64. Circular to Missions, 20 February 1925, *Ibid.*

65. Circular to Missions, 24 June 1925, *Ibid.*, 2c.

66. Reimar Hobbing to Stieve, 20 October 1925, Schriftwechsel mit Vereinen u. Einzelpersonen, 5; Notbund to Stieve, 5 August 1926, *Ibid.*, 6.

67. Gilbert, *Roots of Appeasement*, pp. 23-4. Foreign Ministry to Reichsvertretung Darmstadt, 2 August 1921, Schriftwechsel mit Vereinen und Privatpersonen, 1. Barnes, *Genesis*, pp. 128, 140, 461, 481, 485, 733.

68. Barnes corresponded with Wegerer, Montgelas, Schnee, Lutz, von Jagow, and Schoen, among others.

69. Schnee to Barnes, 3 November 1926, 3 December 1926, 6 February 1927; Edgar Speyer to Barnes, New York, 22 January 1927, Barnes Papers.

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Barnes and Wegerer, Montgelas, Lutz, and Schnee attending to the details of getting each others' articles on war guilt published. It does show that Barnes helped publicize the views of European revisionists. He had good connections with A. A. Knopf, a notable publisher of revisionists, and helped promote translations of the works of Montgelas, Wegerer, Lutz, and the French revisionists, Alfred Fabre-Luce and Alcide Ebray.⁷⁰ Barnes, driven by the force of his own arguments like so many who relish controversy, needed little encouragement; besides, he had quickly arrived at an extreme position on the revisionist spectrum upon which the Zentralstelle could little improve.

In 1925 Wegerer visited the United States on behalf of the Foreign Ministry. His task was to influence a historical project of the Legislative Reference Service, establish personal contact with historians, assess the development of the war guilt debate, and recommend ways to influence it in the future.⁷¹ Wegerer met twice with Barnes who furnished him with letters of introduction to other scholars, among them Sidney B. Fay, Bernadotte E. Schmitt, William Langer, Carlton J. Hayes, and Ferdinand Schevill.⁷² It is not known what transpired between them. In his report to the Foreign Ministry, he ranked Barnes second to Fay, even though lacking his scholarly reputation. Wegerer was not perturbed by this. Barnes tended to handle his opponents roughly and make sweeping conclusions; but, because he was journalistically active, he was a good complement to Fay. Regarding the state of the war guilt question in the United States, Wegerer was optimistic. The basic approach of supplying scholars with documentation was correct and had yielded handsome dividends. However, in order to prepare American public opinion for an official German step against Article 231, much more work needed to be done. The German Ambassador seconded this conclusion.⁷³

Foreign champions of the German position elevated the war guilt question from national self-pleading to an international concern for justice and historical truth. Barnes had his views amplified and circulated by various organizations near the Schuldreferat. Between 1924 and 1932, the *Kriegsschuldfrage* published

70. William L. Neumann, "World War I Revisionist", in Arthur Goddard, ed., *Harry Elmer Barnes Learned Crusader, The New History in Action*, (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles, 1968), p. 280. Wegerer to Barnes, 21 September 1928, 19 August 1929; Montgelas to Barnes 3 March 1927, 4 March 1927, 7 September 1929, 30 December 1929, Barnes Papers.

71. A Senate Resolution of 16 February 1925 had instructed the Legislative Reference Service, a section in the Library of Congress which helps Congress in the preparation of legislation, to furnish the Senate with ". . . an impartial abstract and index of all important evidence . . . bearing on the origin and causes of the World War. . . ." *Congressional Record*, 68th Congress, 2nd Session, LXVI, Pt. 4, p. 3789.

72. Wegerer, U.S. Report, 1 December 1925, 3738/1848/E0 7908-9; Wegerer to Barnes, Washington, D.C., 27 October 1925, Barnes Papers. In 1925 Barnes was also visited by Schnee who was lecturing in North America on the economic situation in Germany. Schnee to Barnes, Toronto, 12 October 1925, *Ibid.*

73. Maltzan to Foreign Ministry, Washington, 2 November 1925, 3738/1848/E037897.

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six original articles, republished an equal number from other journals, and summarized and pointed to his innumerable shorter pieces in the bibliographical sections of the journal.⁷⁴ His May 1924 article in *Current History* was sent to various missions with the instruction to use it in a suitable manner in the press or to influence specific persons.⁷⁵ Wegerer translated it for the *Kriegsschuldfrage*.⁷⁶ Hans Delbrück praised it as the most reasonable survey yet published in English, even though it did not go far enough in exonerating Germany.⁷⁷ The series of articles, "How America Entered the War", in the *Christian Century* was translated by Margarete Gärtner, even though she was critical of the documentation. She was in contact with Barnes in her capacity as head of the Wirtschaftspolitische Gesellschaft.⁷⁸

Naturally, *Genesis* was distributed through the missions and it seems to have moved very well.⁷⁹ In order to bring the work before the German people, the Arbeitsausschuss translated it with financial support from the Foreign Ministry. The French edition, with a foreword by George Demartial, was published by the revisionist journal, *Evolution*, also with the financial support of the Foreign Ministry.⁸⁰ Featured in the *Kriegsschuldfrage* and press, translated into French and German, Barnes' writings were used by the Schuldreferat as a vindication of the German protest and campaign against Article 231.

Barnes, much like other scholars, travelled to Germany in order to meet with experts on prewar diplomacy and with former German officials, who were usually in contact with the Schuldreferat. Barnes accepted their information and arguments, using them against his opponents.⁸¹ In spite of admonitions by the head of the Amerika Institut, Bertling, and by the German Embassy Councillor, Dieckhoff, that celebrating Barnes would undermine him with his colleagues, the 1926

74. Lack of space precludes even listing them.

75. German General Consulate, New York, to Foreign Ministry, 5 May 1924, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 5; German Embassy, Washington, to Foreign Ministry, 29 May 1924, *Ibid.*, 1; Foreign Ministry to various missions, 26 May 1924, *Ibid.*, 5.

76. Wegerer to Barnes, 22 August 1924, Barnes Papers.

77. Imlach to Barnes, 5 August 1924, Barnes Papers. Delbrück spoke on war guilt before the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Berlin during August 1924.

78. Gärtner to Stieve, 20 November 1925, 25 January 1926, Schriftwechsel mit Vereinen und Privatpersonen, 5.

79. I have not located the original instructions, though the files contain numerous requests from the missions for additional copies.

80. Schnee to Barnes, 3 November 1926, Barnes Papers; Draeger to Stieve, 5 March 1928, Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, 3; Draeger to Schwertfeger 30 March 1928, Schwertfeger Papers 89, 116; Schwendemann to General Consulate, New York, 27 November 1929, Überlassung von Material an Behörden, 5; Kühn (Paris) to Schwendemann, 13 January 1931, 3738/1849/E038846-7.

81. Barnes cited them against Schmitt's "preposterous" notion that many influential leaders were against regarding Russian mobilization as a *casus belli*. Barnes, *Truth and Justice*, p. 54.

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visit was orchestrated by the Arbeitsausschuss and widely reported in the press.⁸² In Berlin, he lectured to a restricted audience, and a supper in his honor was attended by representatives of the Schuldreferat, the Zentralstelle, and the Arbeitsausschuss, as well as by historians, former statesmen, and other war guilt fighters. In Munich, Barnes expounded his views on war guilt and their political consequences — the rejection of all measures based on Article 231 — before an enthusiastic overflow audience at the university. Likewise, attending an information week of the Arbeitsausschuss in Vienna with expenses covered for him by the Zentralstelle served to expose him and exploit his standing for the innocentist campaign in Germany.⁸³

The German missions and others repeatedly warned the Schuldreferat about Barnes' sinking reputation with historians and the potential harm this could do to the cause. The German Embassy warned that Barnes was careless with the facts and stood accused of insufficient thoroughness and bias in favour of Germany. His intemperate attacks on Schmitt were harmful, and in 1926 the German Consulate in Chicago suggested that the Foreign Office distance itself from Barnes and draw closer to Sidney B. Fay and William Langer.⁸⁴ Barnes' introduction to Wegerer's *A Refutation of the Versailles War Guilt Thesis* had made it useless for serious academics. Again, lack of scholarly thoroughness and special pleading left it suitable only for the less demanding, intellectually and politically.⁸⁵ Bertling noted these diverse reactions to Barnes, but defended his role as an effective popularizer.⁸⁶ Wegerer concurred and thought that negative reactions derived from Barnes' challenge to the orthodoxies of the historical establishment. Stieve agreed that Barnes was careless, but noted with satisfaction that all three thousand copies of the first edition of *Genesis* had sold out very quickly. Whatever the reservations, Barnes was encouraged and flattered because he was believed to be a useful popularizer.⁸⁷ A perusal of a bibliography of Barnes' many articles shows

82. Bertling to Stieve, 4 September 1926, Schriftwechsel mit Vereinen und Privatpersonen; 6; Dieckhoff to Stieve, Washington, D.C., 18 January 1927, Privatev Schriftwechsel, 1926-27. The Amerika Institut promoted German-American cultural and academic contacts and exchanges. Its head was in frequent contact with the Schuldreferat in matters pertaining to the origins of the World War.

83. Draeger to Stieve, 6 July 1926; Draeger to Kiep 15 May 1926, Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände 2; Haniel to Reichskanzlei 29 July 1926; Trampler to Stieve, 1 August 1926, Veröffentlichung Prof. H.E. Barnes.

84. Dieckhoff to Stieve, Washington, 18 January 1927, Privater Schriftwechsel, 1922-27; Maltzan to Foreign Ministry, Washington, 17 December 1926, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 9.

85. German Embassy to Foreign Ministry, Washington, 15 March 1932, 3738/1848/E037833.

86. Bertling to Stieve, 4 September 1926, Schriftwechsel mit Vereinen und Privatpersonen, 5.

87. Stieve to Dieckhoff, 16 August 1926, *Ibid.*, 9. Barnes received many letters in praise of his work from the German war guilt workers near the Schuldreferat. The normally critical Hermann Lutz liked Barnes' *In Quest* because it reprinted a controversy with B.E. Schmitt. Actually, much of it was a scurrilous, personal attack on Schmitt. Lutz to Barnes, Munich, 6 December 1928; von Jagow to Barnes, November 1928, Barnes Papers.

that he, like other revisionists, had access to the opinion journals of the intellectual elite, and this assured the dissemination of his views to wide circles of the American reading public. The May 1924 *Current History* article had spread the war guilt debate to the major campuses in the United States.⁸⁸

Fay had access to some of these journals and was the most respected American scholar writing on the war guilt question. He had visited the Zentralstelle's archive as early as 1923, published in the *Kriegsschuldfrage*, and Wegerer had reported glowingly about him after his 1925 visit to the United States. Fay, who had written extensively and impressively on the war guilt question in the *American Historical Review* and *Current History*, enjoyed a good name with his fellow historians and the press that judged him highly for his objectivity. Preparing a major work likely to be decisive in the controversy, Fay was hailed as the coming messiah.⁸⁹ Once the *Origins of the War*, which had been eagerly awaited by revisionists of all shades as a vindication of their position, did appear in 1928, Schwendemann, the head of the Schuldreferat, recognized it as the most valuable weapon in the fight against the war guilt lie. The Schuldreferat purchased over 250 copies of the two-volume work for distribution through the missions. A small booklet prepared by the Zentralstelle directed the overworked reviewer to the right passages which showed German diplomacy as essentially peaceful or merely inept, that of the Entente as offensive or failing to preserve the peace.⁹⁰ The Schuldreferat, initially balking at the high cost of a German translation, was primarily interested in the widest circulation of the English original and a French translation which it subsidized and promoted.⁹¹ The *Origins* enjoyed an excellent reception and most reviewers concluded that the doctrine of sole German war guilt was no longer tenable. If this could be achieved with the respected Fay, why did the Schuldreferat support Barnes at all?

Support of Barnes betrays impatience on the part of the German propagandists to state their case quickly and widely. Revisionists like Barnes made war guilt a public issue, and the Schuldreferat valued them for this. In observations on a note about Barnes' activities made after the Second World War, Heinz-Günther Sasse, a trained historian who worked in the Zentralstelle and later headed the Political Archive in the Foreign Ministry, held Fay to be superior to Barnes from a scholarly standpoint. He and Wegerer had used him often in writing their great work, something they could not say about Barnes. Nevertheless, Barnes' effectiveness during the early years of the war guilt discussion had been truly valuable. His strength was in his capacity as a publicist and propagandist, and as such he was crucial for the German case in the United States.⁹²

88. W. Newmann, in *Learned Crusader*, p. 268.

89. Zentralstelle, "Kurzer Bericht", 1923, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden, etc., 3; Wegerer, U.S. Report, 1 December 1925, 3738/1848/E037906-7.

90. Foreign Ministry to Missions, 27 March 1929, 3738/1849/E038894-6, Enclosure, 897-912.

91. Schwendemann to Wegerer, 25 February 1929, 3738/1849/E038889.

92. Herman Lutz Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Box 1, Alfred von Wegerer, *Der Ausbruch des Weltkrieges, 1914*, 2 Bde., (Hamburg: Hansatische Verlagsanstalt, 1939).

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Barnes was doubly useful because he viewed the war guilt debate not merely as a scholarly pursuit of historical truth, but an argument from which flowed political results. Barnes firmly linked war guilt and reparations and drew the consequences from his findings: "The guilt for the World War having been redistributed, the expense of indemnifying the sufferers should likewise be redistributed." Thus, the United States should cancel war debts and pressure France and England into foregoing all reparations from Germany. The burden of reconstruction and rehabilitation would be shared mutually.⁹³ He repeated the essence of this in countless articles, but there is no particular evidence that the Zentralstelle encouraged him.

Barnes' revisionism connects with something larger which the Schuldreferat could only exploit and reinforce. Barnes was debunking wartime myths in the name of historical truth, and his animus was directed against the established historians who would not break radically and speedily with the patriotic preachments of the Creel Press Bureau.⁹⁴ He turned to revisionism in order to discredit reaction and economic imperialism, and this was, as for so many disillusioned young liberals, an aspect of a general rebelliousness against established institutions, values, and beliefs.⁹⁵ And for many liberals, though less so for Barnes during the 1920s, war guilt revisionism led to isolationism.⁹⁶ Barnes' ideals were lofty. The war guilt question was not a matter of erudite scholarship, but the most important practical issue of dealing with future war. Only by destroying the illusions of the last war — the inspiration of the holy cause, the idea of the just war — could war in the future be avoided. Hatred of war motivated Barnes.⁹⁷

There is a postscript. In 1955, Hermann Lutz, then at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, approached several German historians on behalf of an unnamed western philanthropist who annually made available a considerable sum of money for the distribution of a work that promoted understanding among nations. Since the benefactor's interests were the outbreak of the First World War, Lutz asked the historians to consider Barnes' *Genesis* and *In Quest of Truth and Justice* and Fay's *Origin* from the standpoint of scholarship and potential to promote understanding among nations. Lutz excluded Schmitt. While some historians allowed for Barnes' work as "a document in the struggle for the war guilt thesis whose noble spirit cannot be appreciated enough", so Hans Herzfeld, all recognized Fay's scholarly merits and judged his work decidedly superior and deservedly lasting. All except Stieve. He thought that Barnes was the more reliable on purely scholarly grounds because he more comprehensively used all available

93. H.E. Barnes, *Genesis*, pp. 708-10; Fay to Barnes, Northhampton, 5 May 1924, Barnes Papers; German General Consulate, New York, to Foreign Ministry, 16 March 1925, Schriftwechsel mit Behörden etc., 4, 1; Warren I. Cohen, *The American Revisionists: The Lesson of Intervention in World War I* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 78.

94. Barnes, *In Quest*, Pt. II, Ch. I, pp. 141-64.

95. Adler, "War Guilt Question", pp. 1, 11, 16.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

97. Barnes, *Genesis*, VII-XI; W. Cohen, *American Revisionists*, pp. 78, 82.

documentation and reached more valuable conclusions free from prejudice regarding the events. Barnes, according to Stieve, was without doubt the more resolute advocate (*Verfechter*) of really objective historical truth.⁹⁸ This is either the honest opinion of a war guilt propagandist who became convinced by his own arguments and methods or a reflexive defence of the innocence campaign in the service of historical truth. In either case, it says more about the former head of the Schuldreferat than Barnes.

An assessment of the German war guilt campaign is difficult because it relates to complex and ranging issues which far exceed the limits of this paper. Domestically, the campaign strengthened the nationalist enemies who associated the republic with defeat, revolution, and the acceptance of the shameful peace. Instead of moderating views on the outbreak of the war, the work of the Arbeitssausschuss likely hardened with documentary proof what was already held as an article of patriotic faith. It helped retard a critical appraisal of the antecedents of the war until the Fischer controversy changed the historiographical landscape.

While in Germany the war guilt campaign served in the defence of the old order, it exploited a natural corrective to wartime propaganda in the allied states, thus lending force to the rejection of the official explanation for the outbreak of the war. Quite naturally, this was directed against the statesmen associated with prewar diplomacy, the conduct of the war, and the negotiations at Versailles. In England, for example, the war guilt question became crucial to the drive for an early negotiated peace by E.D. Morel and the Union of Democratic Control. Morel condemned secret diplomacy, presented Germany as the wronged nation, and rendered a verdict of *all guilty* as early as late 1914. After the war, UDC dissent focused on what was believed to be an unjust and harsh peace which precluded the lasting pacification of Europe. In France, war guilt revisionism was related to opposition to the *bloc nationale* by small groups, like the League of the Rights of Man and those associated with the revisionist journal, *Evolution*. They were led by a revulsion against wartime nationalism, a desire for international understanding, and fear of renewed conflict. That the Schuldreferat exploited their pacifism, reinforced their views, and gave them greater circulation does not detract from its propaganda campaign, but suggests its possibilities and limitations.

Once Fay had shown him the new direction, Harry Elmer Barnes also used the war guilt question as a means to higher ends, namely, to bring about a just and peaceful world order by destroying what he believed to be the assumptions of the war and its settlement — the myth of a guilty nation. The example of Barnes shows that German war guilt propaganda was most influential in an already predisposed intellectual and emotional climate of pacifism, disillusionment with intervention, or just plain rebelliousness against accepted values. Thus, the influence of the Schuldreferat was no so much pressure and persuasion, but rather corroboration and reinforcement of opinions and emotions. And Barnes was read and discussed because he reflected and amplified what was thought and felt by

98. H. Lutz Papers, Box 1.

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many liberals. The English revisionist historian, G.P. Gooch, wrote in 1926 that “no other American scholar has done so much as Professor Barnes to familiarize his countrymen with the new evidence which had been rapidly accumulating during the last few years, or to compel them to revise their war-time judgments in the light of the new material.”⁹⁹ This and early engagement in the war guilt campaign made Barnes, like other foreign revisionists, useful to the Schuldreferat. The Zentralstelle gave greater circulation to his writings, even if he was not as scholarly as the innocence campaign was claimed to be by its managers. Like Barnes, those associated with the Schuldreferat were also “learned crusaders”. When this predisposition did not exist or was checked by rigorous scholarly practices, as in the cases of Sidney B. Fay, Bernadotte E. Schmitt, or Luigi Albertini, conclusions were reached more slowly, tended to be more critical of the German viewpoint on the war guilt question, or opposed to it.

The war guilt argument only helped aggravate the unpopularity of the Treaty of Versailles already created, for example, by the idea that it did not conform to the “Fourteen Points”, by the criticisms advanced in John Maynard Keynes’ *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, and by the attempts to enforce the settlement with sanctions culminating in the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923, not to mention a general desire for normalcy. Nevertheless, the German Embassy in Washington was optimistic about the achievements of German war guilt propaganda during the 1920s, and Wegerer cited the French historian, Pierre Renouvin, who thought that German work in the United States had created interest in the question, doubts about German guilt for the war, and wide-spread sympathy for Germany.¹⁰⁰

99. G.P. Gooch, *Contemporary Review*, (October 1926), as quoted by Barnes, *In Quest*, p. 346.

100. Memo., Wegerer, 1 October 1932, 3738/1849/E038849-50. He quotes Pierre Renouvin from *Revue des Deux Mondes*, (April 1931).