

(b) The White Book on the Black Reichswehr

A document whose authenticity is testified to by Professor Walter Schuecking, a judge of the International Court at the Hague, and by the famous German historian, Professor Ludwig Quidde, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, sheds much light on the early period of Germany's secret rearmament.

On February 24, 1926, at the request of various German peace organizations, Professor Quidde presented a memorandum to the German Reichstag on Germany's illegal military organizations. It opens by explaining why the German peace organizations preferred to address themselves to the Reichstag rather than to "the competent authorities":

"Our experience of lodging protests with the proper authorities has been too disheartening to warrant a repetition: plain facts were disputed or put down as malicious gossip; sometimes promises were made that undeniable abuses would be rectified, but despite this nothing was done."

The memorandum then went on to point out that secret rearmament was seriously compromising the Locarno policy of the Reich's Government, and represented a serious and growing danger to the very existence of the Republic.

Each member of the Reichstag was presented with a copy of this memorandum, but the only newspaper in Germany even to refer to it was the Frankfurter Zeitung, which dismissed it in a brief reference.

The memorandum was accompanied by a number of documents of which one was a statement sworn before a Notary Public in Frankfurt on Main on August 30, 1924. This document gives an account of a meeting of the Employers' Federation for the Lahn and Oberhessen districts which was addressed by a certain Colonel Kock. About forty industrialists were present, including the signatory, who was the representative of an important German industrial firm. It describes the proceedings as follows:

"After various business matters had been dealt with a certain retired Colonel, Kock by name, gave a long talk the aim of which was to secure the financial support of industry, or rather of the firms belonging to the Employers-Association, for the training of temporary volunteers for the Reichswehr in excess of the figures laid down in the Peace Treaty of Versailles. Colonel Kock assured his listeners repeatedly that he was acting in complete agreement with the official

army leadership. He supported his claims by pointing to the necessity of keeping the German people military-minded (wehrhaft) and prepared to play their part in future political decisions--a defenceless people would not be in a position to play an important role in the world. In particular, Germany was once more to become worthy of alliances (buendnisfaehig). As long as her armed forces remained in their present condition she was not a desirable ally. He was at pains to assure his listeners that there was no question of planning any war of revenge, and he sharply condemned the activities of certain nationalist associations, insisting that the leaders of the army also disapproved of them and were anxious to obtain firm control of such organizations and their leaders in order to prevent further rash and undisciplined actions. The Reichswehr was anxious to fulfil its duty, but at present it was too weak to do so.

"The number of trained men in Germany was steadily diminishing and consequently new generations must be trained to take their places. The plan of the army leaders--Colonel Kock referred to it expressly in this fashion--was to train volunteers in six-or eight-week courses in the formations of the Reichswehr. The total period of training requisite was at least six months, as the demands made on the individual soldier by future modern warfare would be far greater than in the world war, and in consequence no lesser period of training was acceptable.

"Within the next few years, by means of such voluntary training arrangements, Germany was to secure thirty-five trained Divisions for mobilization in the event of war. If I am not mistaken five Divisions were to be allotted to each Army Command. The cost of these training arrangements could, of course, not be included in the normal Reichswehr Budget and would therefore have to be obtained by voluntary contributions on the part of the German people. The representatives of various organizations had already been sounded and some of them had already expressed their agreement. Colonel Kock reckoned that the cost of this training as far as it applied to the Lahn and Oberhessen districts of the Employers' Association would amount to rather more than 800,000 marks in two years, of which some 120,000 marks would be contributed by the Wetzlar district and about one-third of this sum by the firms affiliated to the

Employers-Association. Colonel Kock dealt in full detail with the plan and the methods of financing it, and stressed that the matter was one of great urgency as the first call-up for these training courses had already been issued.

"On the whole Colonel Kock's remarks were listened to with sympathy and approval. I, too, declare myself in agreement with the fundamental principle of maintaining the military qualities (Wehrfaehigkeit) of the German people. Unfortunately, I did not express the misgivings I felt even then at the possible political consequences of the scheme. The chairman of the meeting and other speakers pointed out that the matter could not be dealt by the Association as such, and that it would have to be left to the individual firms to lend financial support to the plan. The upshot of the discussion was the formation of a committee to draft suitable proposals for raising the sums required and fixing the contributions of individual firms. I was made a member of this committee as the representative of the firm E. Leitz. About a week after this meeting the committee met at the offices of the Association in Giessen. As far as I remember, the following were present in addition to myself: Muench, the Secretary of the Employers-Association for the Lahn and Oberhessen districts; Dr. Bangert, the director of the Buderussche Iron Works Ltd., in Wetzlar, and Major D. Lempp of F. Hollmann & Co., the ball-bearing works in Wetzlar. An active Captain of the Reichswehr stationed in Giessen was also present and in his remarks he fully confirmed and amplified the observations of Colonel Kock, and did his best to allay certain misgivings which were expressed. In answer to the objection that it would prove impossible to keep such a matter secret, and that the revelation might do Germany quite a lot of harm, as it would give Poincaré a welcome opportunity for making new charges against Germany, extending restrictive measures and tightening up the system of inter-allied control, this officer declared that the French would not be able to prove anything, and that as long as they had no definite proofs they could do nothing. Even then I felt that the army representatives were treating the matter much too lightly.

"As the representative of my firm I reported what had happened to our Director Dr. Leitz, who immediately expressed serious objections to the whole affair, declaring he would have nothing to do with it, and would report it to our Reichstag Deputy,

Professor Schuecking, who happened to be in Wetzlar at the time in connection with the Reichstag elections. Professor Schuecking was deeply shocked by the revelation, and at the request of my chief Dr. Leitz I had to confirm to him in person what had taken place. Professor Schuecking then declared that he would take the necessary steps in the matter.

"I hereby solemnly testify in the presence of a Notary Public that the above is a true statement, as witness my hand and seal:

"(Sig.) GOTTLIEB SCHWARZ

"(Seal)

"Frankfort on Main

August 30, 1924.

"I hereby certify that the above signature is that of Herr Gottlieb Schwarz, formerly representative of Messrs. E. Leitz, Optical Works in Wetzlar, now in Neustadt (Harz), and that the signature was given in my presence.

"(Sig) ALBERT HELFF  
Notary Public."

"(Seal)

One would have thought that the publication of a document of that nature would have produced a political sensation. In actual fact the German Reichstag took it very differently.

About a year before Professor Quidde presented his memorandum to the Reichstag, i.e., in May 1925, the German League for the Rights of Man had published a White Book on the Black Reichswehr. One of the authors of this book was Berthold Jakob, later kidnapped on Swiss territory and taken to Germany, and freed only after vigorous diplomatic pressure by the Swiss Government. On the basis of his investigations into the so-called "Traditional Companies" of the Reichswehr, and from indications in an article published by General J. H. Morgan in the Quarterly Review in October 1924, Jakob came to the conclusion that a plan was afoot to set up 33 Divisions of the Reichswehr in secret, as a sort of "shadow army" behind the legal Reichswehr.

The memorandum presented by Professor Quidde to the Reichstag contained sworn confirmation by Gottlieb Schwarz of Jakob's suspicions, except that there were to be 35 Divisions according to Colonel Kock instead of 33 as estimated by Jakob.

Far from regarding this "White Book" and its documentary confirmation in 1926 as welcome assistance in the cause of

peace, the Reichstag regarded their publication as black treachery. In May 1925 it devoted five days to a discussion of the book, and demands for the prosecution of its authors were raised on all sides. The Reichswehr Minister Gessler condemned the book as "extremely dangerous", but regretted that the law gave him no opportunity of instituting a prosecution for high treason. In his heart of hearts Gessler was only too glad to avoid a prosecution for fear of what else might come to light.

A year later (Field-Marshal von Hindenburg had in the meantime been elected President of the Weimar Republic) Professor Quidde's memorandum met with no better fate, although its allegations were even more serious and substantiated in still greater detail. This time the tactic employed was more a conspiracy of silence, and those Deputies who did refer to it did so only to express their indignation that Professor Quidde had dared to present such a memorandum.

Just ten years after the publication of this White Book, i.e., in March 1935, the Third Reich introduced the military attachés of the Great Powers to these 35 Divisions. Illegally conceived and founded in secret under the Weimar Republic, they had now been made legal by the introduction of compulsory military service. The German air arm had also been so vigorously developed in the meantime that at the moment of its "legal" birth it was already stronger than the first-line air force of Great Britain.