

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES  
RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS BRANCH  
BIOGRAPHICAL REPORT

CONFIDENTIAL 53.002  
General Down

Name: BACKE, Herbert

Nationality: German

Positions: Staatssekretär im Reichsministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft  
(State Secretary in the Reich Ministry for Food and Agriculture)  
1933 - 1942

Geschäftsführender Reichsminister für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft  
(Acting Reich Minister for Food and Agriculture), 1942 - 1944

Reichsminister für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (Reich Minister  
for Food and Agriculture), 1944 - 1945

Leiter der Geschäftsgruppe Ernährung (Head of the Administrative  
Group Food Supplies) under the Four Year Plan, 1936 - 1945

Member of the Generalrat der Wirtschaft (General Economic Council)  
1933 - ?

Hauptamtsleiter für das Reichsamt für Agrarpolitik (Chief of the  
Reich Office of Agrarian Policy) of the NSDAP, Munich, as of 1941/42,  
subsequently Oberbefehlsleiter des Reichsamts für das Landvolk (Reich  
Office for Rural Population), 1945 - 1945. He was chief.

SS-Obergruppenführer, 1942 - 1945

Member of the Advisory Board (Beirat) of the Deutsche Reichsbahn,  
1943 - 1945 (?)

1st Vice President of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft zur Förderung  
der Wissenschaften, Berlin, as of 1941/42

Birth date and Place: 1 May 1896; Datum in the Caucasus

Education and Work History:

Becke was the son of a technician and attended the Russian Gymnasium  
(secondary school) at Tiflis from 1905 - 1914. During World War I he was  
interned and held as a Russian Prisoner of War (1914 - 1918). After his  
release he studied for three years at the University of Göttingen, and then  
became an assistant at the College of Technology (Technische Hochschule) in  
Hannover (1923 - 1924.) In an attempt to become better acquainted with actual  
farming conditions, he accepted a position as farm manager in 1927. In 1928  
he settled as tenant farmer (Domänenpächter) in Alfeld County, Hannover.

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where he became manager of Domäne Hohnsen, and finally also chairman of the Alfeld County Rural Association (Kreislandbund Alfeld). 1/

In 1931, Backe joined the National Socialist Party. He soon became affiliated with the SS and rose to the rank of SS-Obergruppenführer in 1942. 2/

Backe came into prominence as representative of National Socialist peasant organizations when, on 4 April 1933, he was made a member of the Reichsführungsgemeinschaft des Deutschen Bauernstandes (National Federation of Leaders of the German Peasantry). This organization had been formed in order to unify all farmers and agricultural organizations. With Darré as Chairman, it included, among others representatives of the Reichslandbund (Reich Farm League) of the Vereinigung der deutschen Christlichen Bauernvereine (Federation of German Christian Farmers' Associations), and of the Party's Agrarpolitischer Apparat (Bureau of Agrarian Affairs). 3/

When, on 15 July 1933, a General Economic Council (Generalrat der Wirtschaft) was established by Hitler to insure closer cooperation between the Nazi government and the German economy, Backe was among the first eighteen to be selected as member of this body. The council was composed mainly of outstanding industrialists (Gustav Krupp von Bohlen Halback, Fritz Thyssen, K. F. von Siemens), as well as of representatives of German banking (Otto Christian Fischer), commerce (Carl Luer) and labor policies (Robert Ley) 4/.

On 27 October 1933, Backe was appointed State Secretary in the Reich Ministry for Food and Agriculture (Reichsministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft) 5/. On 1 January 1935, when the National and the Prussian Food Supply Ministries were combined under Darré as Reichs-und Preussischer Minister für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft, Backe, as First State Secretary, was entrusted with the administration of Sections I-V of the newly organized Ministry, while the former State Secretary of the Prussian Ministry, Willikens, 2nd State Secretary, was placed in charge of Sections VI-VIII. Subjects covered by Sections I - V included Verwaltung (Administration), Wirtschaftspolitik (Economic Policies), Bauern - und Bodenpolitik (Peasant and Farming Policies), Zoll - und Handelspolitik (Customs and Trade Policies), as well as Landeskultur und Wasserwirtschaft (Soil Cultivation and Water Supplies), i.e. the most essential branches of the Ministry. Sections VI-VIII dealt with Staatseigener Grundbesitz und Bauerliche Siedlung (State-owned Real Estate and Farm Settlements), Gestütewesen (Horse Breeding Establishments), and Preussische Veterinarverwaltung (Administration of Prussian Veterinarian Problems). 6/

In his capacity as 1st State Secretary of the Reich Ministry for Food and Agriculture, Backe was also one of the seven members of the Aufsichtsamt für das Kreditwesen (Supervisory office for credit transactions) of the Reichsbank which had been established by the law of 5 December 1934. 7/. This office was charged with the supervision of all domestic credit institutions as well as with the control of those branches of foreign credit enterprises that were located in German territory. 8/

The Four Year Plan was enacted on 18 October 1936 to "promote a better utilization of all German resources with a view to possible future 'emergencies'", Goering, as head of the new program, in his first decree (24 October 1936), appointed Backe head of the Food Division (Geschäftsgruppe Ernährung). In this decree Goering pointed out that the individual group chiefs were personally responsible to him and were to carry out his assignments. 9/ At the fourth National Peasant Meeting (Reichsbauerntag) in Goslar in November 1936, Backe stressed as principal agricultural goals under the Four Year Plan three major aspects: 1) an increase in production (Mehrerzeugung), 2) the accumulation of stocks (Vorratswirtschaft), and 3) a training program suitable to the development of new attitudes in accordance with National Socialist principles (Erziehung zur neuen Haltung). 10/

When the Reichsnährstand (Reich Food Estate) was established under Darré's leadership in September 1933, Backe received the important position of Leader of Chief Section A "Economics" in the Staff Office of the Reich Peasant Leader (Hauptabteilung A "Wirtschaft" im Stabsamt des Reichsbauernführers). 11/

The Staff Office worked out laws and decrees concerning agriculture and food distribution and handled the correspondence arising with Reich Ministries and with Party offices. All agricultural questions concerning other countries also were sent to the Staff Office so far as the Ministry did not attend to them. 12/

When, in 1942, poor crops and lack of farm labor caused increasing dissatisfaction, the Minister for Food and Agriculture, Walther Darré, was given a "long leave of absence", and Backe was charged with the execution of his duties (23 May 1942) 13/. For many years previously Backe in reality had been the person running the Food Ministry. Darré, known as inefficient, had proved successful in inventing slogans such as "Erzeugungsschlecht" (Battle of Production), and had been an ardent advocate of Nazi racial ideologies. His radical tendencies, however, his early attempts to break up large estates into small farms, as well as his opposition to large scale financial interests, had caused much suspicion against him in conservative circles in Germany. His failure to live up to his promises finally had made Darré unpopular even with the peasantry, so that jokes developed as "Rather three years of Därre (draught) than one year of Darré". 14/

Backe, in contrast to Darré, was known to be a supporter of the big estates, because he believed that they were better able to produce and deliver foodstuffs for the market; they therefore appeared to him as indispensable under a policy of "autarchy" followed by the Four Year Plan. Backe supported especially the large distilleries which obtained alcohol from potatoes, inasmuch as this alcohol (converted into "Monopolin") yielded one of the most vital substitutes for gasoline, and also proved essential in the manufacture of munitions. On the other hand, Backe had closed all distilleries producing alcohol from grain, because the grain was to be preserved as feed for cattle.

In his speech of July 1942, Backe emphasized that, in the future, problems in the field of agriculture were not to be solved by vague romanticism (verschwommene Romantik), but by only a positive idealism (realer Idealismus). Backe now functioned as acting Reich and Prussian Minister for Food and Agriculture (Geschäftsführender Reich-und Preussischer Minister für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft), and in this capacity also represented Darré as Reich Peasant Leader (Reichsbauernführer) and as leader of the Office for Agrarian Affairs (Oberbefehlsleiter des Reichs für Agrarpolitik) of the NSDAP. 15/. Although, after 2. July 1942, Darré was separated from practically all activities of these departments, he remained their nominal head until 6. July 1944, when Backe was officially promoted to the position of Reichsminister. 16/.

As soon as Backe had taken over full administrative functions in 1942, a thorough reorganization of the agricultural department was initiated. The principal change was the transfer of the functions of Chief Section I, "Man" (Hauptabteilung I "Der Mensch") of the Reichsnährstand to several Party agencies. Part of the settlement section was taken over by the SS. These changes were in line with the general trend to decrease the power of the Reichsnährstand as an administrative organization. 17/. It had already lost much of its autonomy in 1939 when regional and local machinery was created for the Ministry for Food and Agriculture through establishment of the regional and local Reich-Food Offices (Landesernährungsämter und Kreisernährungsämter) 20/.

In May 1942, the Party's Reich Office for Agrarian affairs (Reichsamt für Agrarpolitik) in which Backe had functioned under Darré's administration as Special Commissioner and Hauptamtsleiter (Chief Office Leader), was transformed into the Reich Office for Rural Population (Reichsamt für das Landvolk), with Backe as Oberbefehlsleiter (Chief) representing Darré, who was "on leave". This office dealt with all ideological questions formerly dealt with by the Reichsnährstand, and hereafter was charged with the indoctrination of the peasantry along party lines (beauftragt, die Menschenführung des Landvolks in Rahmen der Partei durchzuführen. 21/). Subsequent changes, announced by Backe in May 1944, included the transformation of regional farmers' organizations into Gau farmers' organizations, thus bringing about an even closer coordination of peasant organizations with the Party setup. 22/

The integration of the central administration of the Reichsnährstand into the Ministry of Food and Agriculture took place in 1943. 23/

Acting for Darré, Backe also functioned from 1942 on as President of the Reich Hereditary Farm Court (Reichserbhofgericht). 24/

While SS Obergruppenführer and closely cooperating with Himmler as Commissioner of the NSDAP for all questions connected with the strengthening of the German folkdom (Beauftragter der NSDAP für alle Volkstumsfragen), 25/. Backe, in 1942, did not take charge of the Race and Settlement Office (Rasse und Siedlungsamt) of the SS, an office held originally by Darré, and later on (as of 1943) taken over by Richard Hildebrandt. 26/

Under Backe's direction, the emphasis in the Battle of Production shifted from attempts to increase over-all production to the building of safeguards against a decline in yield, 27/ and to the redistribution of production quotas. Furthermore, mobilization of the last reserves of labor and of commodity production were admittedly essential to the success of this policy. Therefore, portions of the existing reservoir of foreign labor were utilized in industry, but shifted to agriculture during the planting and harvest season. 28/ The concomitant plan for using evacuees as farm replacement workers, however, had definite limitations because of special skills required of agricultural labor. 29/

With respect to production and delivery quotas, efforts were directed at an increase in the increments from each farm through even more effective supervision. Punitive measures against delinquent peasants became more severe: imprisonment only, instead of fines, was imposed as penalty for infringement of the requirement to surrender crops. 30/ Also the sale of State-controlled produce by self-suppliers was banned by Backe. 31/

Confronted with a potentially serious food crisis, Backe called a meeting of members of the Food Ministry in Berlin on 29 January 1943, which was attended by such agricultural leaders as Gustav Behrens, Landesbauernführer (Regional Peasant Leader) Körner, Ministerial Councillor Moritz, and others. In view of increasing difficulties, Backe had been asked by Hitler whether, in spite of losses to Russia, the remaining agricultural regions in the East could insure German food supply.



Backe reported to the Ministry that the East could supply the food, if Hitler agreed to his request for more workers, machines and communication facilities in that area, and gave him jurisdiction instead of Rosenberg. Körner and Behrens agreed with Backe, but probably mainly because they would have welcomed an opportunity to get rid of Rosenberg. Moritz strongly opposed Backe's view because of the impracticality of his demands. Backe, therefore, decided to postpone his reply to Hitler until the Eastern Front could be stabilized, and intimated to members of the Ministry that Hitler had worked out plans to build an East Wall similar to the West Wall. 32/

In order to foster agricultural theories propagated by the Nazis, Backe, in June 1944, founded the Thuenen Gesellschaft (Thuenen Society). Johann Heinrich von Thuenen had, in the beginning of the 19th century, introduced a profit sharing program on his estate Tellow in Mecklenburg, and written extensively on agricultural problems arising for an isolated state, in his book Der Isolierte Staat in Beziehung auf Landwirtschaft und Nationalökonomie (The Isolated State with reference to Agriculture and National Economics), 1826. The first meeting of the society was attended not only by prominent Party members, members of the Armed Forces, and Government representatives (State Secretary von Steengracht representing Reich Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop), but also by many foreign guests, including the Japanese Ambassador, Oshima, and the Roumanian Minister, Gheorghe. 33/

Backe was also 1st Vice President of the Kaiser Wilhelmgesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften - 1941-42 (Emperor William Society for the advancement of Science), Berlin. 34/. From 1 January 1943 on, he functioned as member of the Advisory Board (Beirat) of the Deutsche Reichsbahn. 35/.

Literary activities of Backe include his editorship of the periodical Deutsche Agrarpolitik (as successor to Darré). Among books published by him are Um die Nahrungsfreiheit Europas (The Struggle for European self-sufficiency with respect to food supplies) and Das Ende des Liberalismus in der Wirtschaft (The end of liberalism in economics.) In these volumes Backe expounded National Socialist theories, discussed the agricultural goals of the Four Year Plan, and pictured the anticipated success of Nazi policies. 36/

In recognition of his achievements for the Nazi Party Backe received the Party Badge in Gold. 37/

On 14 May 1945, when the German Foreign Minister Schwerin von Krosick announced the formation of the surrender regime under Grand Admiral Doenitz, Backe was disclosed as being one of the members of the cabinet. (The others were Albert Speer, Franz Seldte and Julius Heinrich Dorpmueller.)

Backe was arrested at Flensburg and held as a prisoner of war by the Allied Forces, when the Doenitz government was formally dissolved on 23 May 1945.

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- 32/ Wer Leitet, 1941/42
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NOTE

This record is a summary of such intelligence (from one or more sources as indicated) as was available at the time of preparation. It may consequently be subject to amendment by additional or more recent intelligence. Index numbers and letters are solely for indexing statements in the report.