

Niklas Frank, *Dunkle Seele, feiges Maul: Wie absurd, komisch und skandalös sich die Deutschen beim Entnazifizieren reinwaschen* (Bonn: Dietz, 2016). – 579 pages. – ISBN 9783801204051.

The author of this book is the son of Hitler's governor of Poland and leading Nazi, Hans Frank, one of the main instigators of the Holocaust, personally responsible for Auschwitz—the camp and what went on there. Denouncing his father, Niklas Frank also wrote a BBC documentary 'My Nazi Legacy'. In his latest book, *Dunkle Seele, feiges Maul* [*The Dark Souls of German Nazis*], Frank investigates what happened to ex-Nazis in the immediate postwar years in Germany. While his father was hanged after the Nuremberg trials for war crimes, most other leaders of the National Socialist movement got off virtually scot free.

Based on substantial archival studies, Niklas Frank takes the *Spruchkammerverfahren* or Denazification Hearings, set up precisely to make sure that did not happen, to task. Between 1946 and 1950 thousands of ex-Nazis appeared in front of such hearing. All but a few either served no time at all for their criminal acts or received short sentences. That the Nazis were not totally eradicated and punished beggars the imagination.

These so-called Denazification Hearings were linked to the word *Persilschein*, a German idiom deriving from a brand of laundry detergent, Persil. To gain a *Persilschein* means to be clean, forever purged of *schmutz*. Thousands of ex-Nazis were eager to gain a certificate [*Schein*] that said 'IV' or 'V', not guilty or sparkling clean. The five classification were:

- I major offenders (*Hauptschuldige*);
- II offenders: Nazi activists, militants, or profiteers (*Belastete*);
- III lesser offenders (*Minderbelastete*);
- IV followers (*Mitläufer*); and finally,
- V exonerated persons (*Entlastete*).

Most not-so-ex-Nazis were aware that they could not be classified as 'exonerated person' (V). They opted to be 'follower' (IV). That was good enough. Being classified 'V' (unlikely) or 'IV' (more likely) meant you received the *Persilschein*.

Frank's impressive archival work demonstrates exactly how the ex-Nazis lied, deceived, spun-out falsehoods and withdrew into silence. They falsified records and made fake statements, said anything to be classified as 'followers' (IV), despite having committed serious war crimes, while part of Hitler's killing machine.

The key to Frank's work is found in the archival work he undertook. It was impossible to go through all 3,660,648 files sitting in German archives.

Frank selected files to produce a representative picture of the Denazification Hearings that took place in all four zones occupied by the Allies. Frank writes, 'I was never disturbed by anyone while going through those files, except once when a woman asked me: "What do you do with the file of my father who was a *Obersturmbannführer*?"' An *Obersturmbannführer* was a high ranking SS officer. Adolf Eichmann, was an *Obersturmbannführer*. During Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, prosecutor Gideon Hausner asked Eichmann, 'Were you an *Obersturmbannführer* or an office girl?' Perhaps the daughter of the SS *Obersturmbannführer* who asked Niklas Frank that question also thought her father was an office girl and not a murderer in '*Der Vernichtung der jüdischen Rasse in Europa*' (The annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe).

Ex-Nazis tried to justify their activities and 'prove themselves innocent' (p. 9). In 1969, Justus Fürstenau ran a statistical search on the files, concluding: 'Just 1,667 were Nazis class I, 23,060 class II; 15,425 class III; 1,005,874 class IV; and 1,213,873 class V' (p. 10). This means 1.2 million were exonerated. The denazification process discovered only 1,700 Nazis! The rest were more or less innocent. Niklas Frank describes how the contradiction between oiling the Nazi death machine and being innocent came into being. There are five noteworthy particularities: 1) Men who were in a right-wing student fraternity strongly supported Nazism; 2) Skilled workers who entered the Nazi party became what Goldhagen (1996) called *Hitler's willing executioners*; 3) Two-thirds of all Nazi informers were women; 4) High-school teachers lied most outrageously about their Nazi past; and 5) There is geographical north-to-south division inside Germany – the more south one travels, the more nasty and deceitful the lying became (p. 11).

Germany's ex-Nazis lied through their teeth to get a *Persilschein*. This document allowed them to carry on as though concentration camps never existed and Jews never murdered. A typical case unfolded as follows: Hans Mark joined the Nazi party in 1927. He was an enthusiastic Nazi who served in the Hitler's SA at the rank of *Truppenführer*. The Denazification Hearing categorised Mark as 'follower' (p. 14). Another case was Karl Lades, the *Ortsgruppenleiter* who was still using Nazi jargon of master race only three years after Hitler's end who was judged to be a 'lesser offender' (p. 15). Lades even sported the Nazi's 'medallion of honour' (p. 23), because of his work *zur Volkspflege*, supervising the Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft*. The same medal went to Ernst Heinkel, owner of a factory where KZ-slaves worked under horrific conditions. Heinkel said, 'I felt sorry for the bad living conditions but couldn't do anything'. He too was categorised as a mere 'follower' (p. 43).

The file of Fräulein Lina von Osten, wife of Reinhard Heydrich is particularly revealing. Heydrich was responsible for the death of millions. At their wedding, the *Horst Wessel Song*, the Nazi anthem, was performed. Hitler gave the newlyweds *Panenske Brezany* castle, which became Heydrich's weekend residence. Mrs Heydrich told the Denazification panel: 'I never felt empathy for the Jews' (p. 47). She was sentenced to prison by a Czech court, found guilty of mistreating Jewish labour, feeding them table scraps, and asking her household staff to beat Jews with whips and clubs. 'Lina personally kicked labouring Jews' (p. 49). Later a West-German Denazification Hearing found her to be a 'follower' and 'ordered her to pay 75DM payable in three instalments of 25.-' (p. 56). Of course, she gained a *Persilschein*.

Annelies von Ribbentrop, wife of the Foreign Minister of Nazi Germany, showed a similar attitude in saying, 'I did not know anything about the crimes of the Nazi system' (p. 99) and thus was found to have been a mere 'follower' (p. 107). The same verdict was given to Michael Mayer, a 'zealous Nazi' (p. 111), who claimed, 'Without my knowledge, they shot two-hundred Jews in the forest' (p. 111).

Niklas Frank even examined the files of his mother, Brigitte Frank. Brigitte enjoyed a comfortable life among Germany's higher Nazi echelons. She had a Mercedes and chauffeur at her disposal. She lived in a spacious mansion as residence in Berlin and Castle Kressendorf near Krakow in Poland. Niklas Frank concluded: 'People in the ghetto were forced to sell their belongings at any price my mother dictated' (p. 144). After Nazi Germany was defeated, Mrs Frank claimed, 'I did not benefit' from the Nazi system (p. 134). Niklas Frank uncovered a letter written by his mother saying, 'When I think about the past, we were ruthless' (p. 141). After all this, the case against Brigitte Frank was 'shelved' on 3 March 1946 because the judges found the evidence inconclusive (p. 145).

In the trial of Emmy Göring, a witness testified that the wife of Hitler's deputy, 'lived a life of luxury . . . off the back of the German people' (p. 263). Frau Göring received special funding called *Ehrensold* (p. 266) – *Sold* a term indicating payments to soldiers or civil servants. Frau Göring was neither a soldier nor a civil servant. The court was lenient.

Frank shows how Germany's denazification during the post-Nazi years was organised (*organisiert*), not to detect and punish Nazis but rather to distribute *Persilscheine*. Murderers, torturers and sadists became 'lesser offenders' or mere 'followers' on a massive scale. Therefore either ex-Nazis showed their dark soul and their cowardly natures when they lied to absolve themselves from their heinous crimes; or, there was in fact no denazification programme,

only a systematic whitewashing so that the ex-Nazis could live an undeserved peaceful life in postwar Germany.

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