

In Memoriam

JOHANNES ULLRICH
1902–1965

As head of the Political Archives of the German Foreign Office before 1945 and again from 1956 until his death on December 25, 1965, Dr. Johannes Ullrich earned himself the gratitude and the friendship of many an American historian. To archivists in the United States, however, his name remained largely unknown, and that is why I should feel remiss were I not to pay tribute to this extraordinary man in the pages of our professional journal. For Ullrich, a man of the mind rather than of action, was hit by the brutal realities of our times with terrible severity. That he survived them, unbroken in spirit and without bitterness, entitles him to the respect of his colleagues beyond the confines of his native land.

Ullrich came from a family that for many generations had dwelled in Lower Silesia.* After his father, a schoolmaster, had been transferred from Marklissa to Potsdam, he received his education at the Victoria-Gymnasium of that city. Rich in buildings of the rococo and neoclassic periods, residence of the Prussian kings, and garrison of some of their elite regiments, Potsdam was a place in which a young man's fancy might easily turn to history as his principal interest, particularly if he were also devoted to the music of Bach. And so it was history that Ullrich began to study, after he had passed his maturity examinations in 1919.

Studying history at the University of Berlin meant being exposed to the teaching of Friedrich Meinecke, whose concern with *Ideengeschichte* exercised a profound influence on historians and would-be historians of that time. Ullrich became one of Meinecke's favorite disciples and, for a number of years, actually lived with his family on Hirschsprung in Berlin-Dahlem. He earned his doctorate and, in 1930, entered the newly founded Institute for Archival Science and Advanced Historical Studies. Having concentrated on modern history in most of his academic work, Ullrich, as did many others, found it difficult to meet the Institute's stiff requirements in the auxiliary sciences and in foreign languages. He passed the final examinations, however, and from 1933 served as an assistant in the Political Archives of the German Foreign Office on Wilhelmstrasse. In 1939 he became the head of the Archives with the title of *Legationsrat*.

Although undoubtedly in a sensitive position, particularly after the Foreign Office had been taken over by Ribbentrop, Ullrich managed to stay out of the Nazi Party, which he detested. Three times he was asked to join it, and three times he declined. His persistent refusal not only hurt his career prospects but also exposed him to considerable danger. In fact, Bormann,

*The author wishes to thank Frau Sabine Ullrich for certain data she has kindly furnished. He has also used, and quoted from, a lengthy letter that Dr. Ullrich sent him in October 1955 and his report on the evacuation of the Political Archives during World War II, a copy of which Prof. Julius Epstein of Lincoln University made available to the newspaper *Die Welt* for publication in its Mar. 26, 1966, issue.

Head of the Party Chancery, and the Security Service watched him with menacing interest, and so for years he "danced on a volcano."

The war came, and with the intensification of aerial bombardment the safety of the Political Archives began to weigh heavily on Ullrich's mind. After the first severe attack on Berlin on March 1, 1943, he explained to H. S. Schröder, Director of the Division of Personnel of the Foreign Office and his superior, the need for evacuating the Archives. To make the suggestion required courage, because it was likely to be interpreted as a defeatist attitude. Schröder, however, secretly authorized Ullrich to prepare the holdings of the Political Archives for evacuation, and so, beginning in 1943, they were transferred to evacuation centers, five of them in castles in the Harz Mountains and three east of Berlin. As the military situation on the Russian front deteriorated, the records in the latter three centers were also shipped to places of safety in the Harz Mountains. Recent material of the divisions of the Foreign Office was included in the evacuation move so that at the end of the war a considerable portion of them, almost all the holdings of the Political Archives, and certain records of diplomatic and consular posts were in Castle Meisdorf, the main evacuation center, and in other centers west of the Elbe River, that is, in places likely to be occupied by the Western Allies.

Originally, Ullrich had planned to go to Meisdorf himself and to surrender the documents to the Allied forces. Since a small quantity of record material was still in the Wilhelmstrasse, however, and since no member of the Archives staff was willing to stay, Ullrich, true to his sense of duty, decided to remain with the records so that he might turn them over to the occupant in an orderly fashion.

It was a fateful decision. Ullrich was arrested by the Russians on April 28, 1945, held in NKVD custody, and then flown to Moscow where he spent 39 months in detention, before proceedings against him were started in April 1948. Charges were based on the alleged fact that, as head of the historical office of the Foreign Office, he had aided Hitler in preparing his criminal war. The Attorney General of the Army asked him three questions: "Why did you stay in Germany if you were not a Fascist? Why have you, through your work in one of the highest offices of the Reich, supported the war crimes of the regime? What have you done to overthrow the regime?" Ullrich's answers were to the point but did not help him, for he was told: "You have served the National Socialist Government and hence are coreponsible for its crimes." Ten days later he was called before a commissar to sign a document in Russian. Since he could not read it, the commissar explained to him that, in accordance with Point 10 of § 58 of the Criminal Code, he had been sentenced to 10 years of labor in a correction camp. He asked for paper and pencil so that he might appeal to the Attorney General of the Army but was given to understand that he had been adjudged *in absentia* ("*durch Fernurteil*") and that the sentence could not be appealed. What a punishment for removing most of the Foreign Office records to places where they were safe from seizure by the Soviets!

At the end of a Calvary of many months, Ullrich arrived in the correction camp of Abes, 80 miles south of the notorious Workuta camp. There, for a period of 7 years, he did hard labor at an average temperature of -4° , which in winter went down to -67° , without receiving a cent. Prisoners had to work outside the camp, unless the thermometer dropped to below -40° . How he, a man of but average physical strength, survived these terrible years seems a miracle. He kept his spirit up by singing or whistling Bach cantatas. Since in the camp he was deprived of mail privileges, his family and friends had given him up.

Released on February 17, 1955, he reached Berlin on August 28 and, at its Zoo Station, had his "first encounter with the Western world." The widow of Friedrich Meinecke, dear to all of his former students, received him like a son. Shortly thereafter President Heuss, who happened to be in Berlin and remembered Ullrich from former days, took him on his official plane to Bonn where old friends and colleagues gave him a warm reception.

There followed the "sad story of adjusting to conditions one could not quite comprehend," a short period of recovery in a German spa, and the tackling of the endless formalities through which a repatriate had to go and which almost cost him "the rest of his mind." Advanced to the rank of *Legationsrat* I. Class, Ullrich reassumed his position as head of the Political Archives in May 1956. Reorganizing its holdings, which were being returned to German custody, now became his main task.

His duties at the Archives left Ullrich no time for the research and writing he had hoped to do. Before the war, he had published a number of works in the field of military history. Of a popular rather than a scholarly character, they included a short biography of General Field Marshal Hermann von Boyen (1936), mainly based on an earlier biography by Meinecke that had established him as one of the great historians of our time, and a book entitled *Das Kriegswesen im Wandel der Zeiten* (1940), which 2 years later was translated into French. As a concise and thoughtful history of warfare, it could serve well as a text for a short course in military history. Characteristically, the book stops short of Hitler's coming into power. At first sight, it may seem strange that an urbane and thoroughly peace-loving person like Ullrich showed so much interest in military history. One does not have to be a militarist, however, to cultivate what after all is an important part of historical development, and under the Nazis it was clearly a field in which one could move without getting in conflict with the ideology of the regime.

Though nobody could take exception to his writings, it does remain difficult to understand that Ullrich, a conscientious objector in the broader sense of the word, was permitted during the Nazi period to remain on the staff of the Foreign Office and that he was appointed head of its Political Archives. True, there were still officials of the pre-Nazi period in leading posts of the Office, men who were willing to shield Ullrich as long as they could. In addition, his personality must have furnished him some kind of protective cover. With caustic remarks that could be interpreted in different ways and

with a sparkling wit that cast him in the role of a professional jester, he succeeded in getting away with an attitude that might have cost others their jobs and possibly their necks. It was said of him that he was not taken seriously. Nevertheless, to remain faithful to his convictions and faithful to old friends who, in the eyes of the regime, had become untouchables, demanded great courage on his part.

In all probability, Ullrich never regained all of his health and strength after he returned from his long ordeal. Seemingly recovered after a long stay in the hospital, he died unexpectedly on Christmas Day 1965. It is a happy thought that his last years were brightened by the warm glow of a congenial marriage. His widow, who became a dear friend of Ullrich's friends, must find comfort in the admiration and love that her husband earned so abundantly. And archivists of all times should remember respectfully his resistance to the forces of evil, his fortitude during years of extreme hardship, and his serenity, his cordiality, and his sense of humor—qualities that, during his lifetime, endeared him to friends and colleagues.

ERNST POSNER
Arlington, Va.

Essential Man

Un bon Archiviste qui réunit à la connoissance de ses fonctions la probité, la fidélité, la discrétion, est un homme essentiel, à qui l'on doit faire un sort capable de l'attacher inviolablement à un emploi de confiance qu'il remplit si bien. On doit lui accorder des grâces, avancer sa famille lorsqu'elle s'en rend digne, lui faire envisager une retraite honnête, surtout lorsqu'en s'acquittant des soins assidus de son emploi, il s'attache en outre à former des élèves qui puissent lui succéder. Si le Gouvernement n'a pas ces attentions pour de bons & fidèles serviteurs, il court grand risque d'être mal servi.

—*Dictionnaire universel des Sciences morale, économique, politique et diplomatique, ou Bibliothèque de l'homme d'État et du citoyen, rédigé et mis en ordre par M. Robinet, censeur royal, tome sixième* (Paris, 1778). The paragraph quoted appears in "une instructive définition du rôle de l'archiviste" discovered by Pierre Piétresson and printed in *Gazette des Archives*, n.s. no. 47 (4^e trimestre 1964).

The Goals

Science can give us goods, goods we need, but the humanities—art and literature, poetry and history, law and philosophy—must give us the goals that we have.

—President LYNDON B. JOHNSON, at the Swearing In of the Chairman and the members of the National Council on the Humanities, Mar. 3, 1966 (2 Weekly Comp. Pres. Docs., p. 313).

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