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The role Nazi Germany's Ministry of Finance played in the Holocaust

On 8 November, the special commission of historians who had been investigating the activity of the German Ministry of Finance between 1933 and 1945, presented its initial report. According to the historians, the ministry was co-responsible for the Holocaust. This is another report to have been published over the past few weeks (the previous one concerned Nazi Germany's Foreign Ministry) presenting a critical evaluation of the activity of German ministries at the time of the National Socialist dictatorship.

The commission investigating the Finance Ministry's operations under Adolf Hitler's rule was appointed in 2009 by the former finance minister, Peer Steinbrück (SPD). It was modelled on an identical research group created in 2005 by Joschka Fischer (the Green Party) to analyse the role which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nazi Germany had played in the Holocaust. The commission published the results of its research, which lay the blame on diplomats of that period.

The conclusions presented as a result of research conducted by the historians in the archives of the Ministry of Finance for over a year are clear: Hans-Peter Ullman, the commission's spokesman, stated that the ministry deserved to be called a 'criminal organisation'. It was the institution where regulations were developed to enable the legal confiscation of the property of Jews who were leaving Germany and were being sent to extermination camps, and to derive benefits from conquering other nations. The funds obtained from such legitimised pillage were allocated for war needs and keeping high living standards in Nazi Germany. After the war, the ministry's senior officials avoided serious consequences because they were believed to have been neutral experts in management, planning and accounting.

The commission's report draws attention to a rarely discussed aspect of World War II, namely the impact of the Nazi Party's policy on the financial condition of the German state and home budgets of its citizens. The book *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* by historian Götz Aly, which was published in 2005, raised enormous controversies. Its message is identical to the historians' initial findings, according to which institutions of the then German state, including the Ministry of Finance, took pains to ensure that the war was a highly profitable enterprise for Germany. <ciechan>