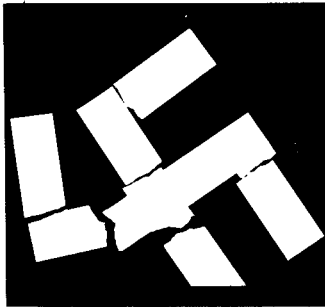

AUTHORS & CRITICS

How Not to Break the Silence

On the Mystery of “the Terrible Secret”—By WALTER LAQUEUR



THIS IS A rather unhappy story of an attempt to discover the identity of an authentic hero of our time more than 40 years after the event and to obtain for him a measure of belated recognition.

The story begins some seven years ago, when I was engaged in research on how the information of Hitler's Holocaust first reached the West.¹ It had been known since the end of World War II that the “mysterious messenger” who carried the information to Switzerland in July 1942 was a prominent German industrialist. But his name had remained a secret. The handful of individuals who had known of his secret (and treasonable) mission had been sworn to secrecy: never, under any circumstances, were they to reveal his identity. Only one of them was still alive 40 years later; and while he was willing to talk to me at great length and with great courtesy, he steadfastly refused to reveal the wartime secret.

The affair greatly intrigued me. I well understood that secrecy had been a matter of life-and-death while the Nazis were still in power. But the insistence on keeping the secret even after 1945 was baffling. After the War, a variety of persons claimed to have opposed Nazism in conditions of great danger, claims which on further scrutiny all too often evaporated into thin air. For reasons I could not fathom, this real hero had wanted to remain anonymous. There was bound to be a reason—a secret within a secret.

I started on a quest which was to last for more than a year, a search which led me into several countries, with countless letters written and phone-calls made. I had a few leads from the beginning. The unknown man was “a major industrialist”, employing some 30,000 people. . . . I knew that he visited Switzerland several times each year, and I also came to know by accident, that his name began with the letter S.

This narrowed down the number of possibilities; but there were still too many of them, and no certainty at all. Every

now and then I believed I had found “the mystery man”; but in the end something did not quite fit, and I had to continue the quest. My persistence baffled my friends. Was it really worth devoting so much time and energy to what, in the final analysis, was only a minor footnote to the history of World War II? I am not sure I had a plausible answer, except that I was annoyed at my failure, that playing the role of an historical detective provided some satisfactions (and that incidentally I made a number of other, minor discoveries). But all the research in the archives, all the inquiries by letter and telephone, proved fruitless. And since most of the contemporaries of my mystery man were no longer alive, the chances of ever solving the riddle seemed dim. I had learned, too, that he was now dead.

One day in Zurich a friend mentioned to me the name of “a great expert in the field of metallurgy” who had also been a major figure in the German business world, a man of many parts—a certain Professor Messner. I contacted him, and he told me without hesitation that Dr Eduard Schulte was the man I was looking for. He had been the head of one of Germany's biggest corporations, producing non-ferrous metals. My meeting with Messner in Zurich took place a few days before my book *The Terrible Secret* (1980) went to press. There was just enough time to mention Schulte's name—together with two or three other possible candidates—in a hurried footnote. Still, I could not be certain that the riddle had been solved.

I HAD OTHER commitments which made it impossible for me to pursue the search. A few years passed. My book had stimulated interest in “the mysterious messenger” and in 1983, more or less simultaneously, two young American professors found confirmation that Schulte had indeed been the man we were looking for. One found the evidence in recently declassified files in the National Archives in Washington (“U.S. Legation Berne”); the other in the *Yad Veshem* archives in Jerusalem.

Soon afterwards Professor Richard Breitman—one of the discoverers, an historian at American University in Washington—suggested to me that we ought to join forces in an attempt to find out more about Schulte. Eventually, perhaps, his biography could be written. I hesitated: I was involved in several other projects. Furthermore, I was not at

¹ See in *ENCOUNTER*, July 1980, my article “Hitler's Holocaust: Who Knew What, When & How?”

all certain that it would be possible to find out much more about an individual who had tried so hard, and quite successfully, to cover his traces.

Would it, in any case, be of sufficient contemporary interest? For all we knew, Dr Schulte had been a quite unremarkable man but for that brief moment of his wartime appearance on the historical stage. In the end, our curiosity prevailed. There was the instinctive feeling that his role *must have been* more important; in any case, his motives and the circumstances of his mission could be of historic interest. It was decided that Professor Breitman would continue his search mainly in various archives; while I would try to find members of Schulte's family (if any had survived), his friends, acquaintances, and business associates—or their descendants. Perhaps enough information could be collected, after all, to compose a more or less detailed picture of the man: what had he been like? how had he received his information? why had he risked his life?

One of the reasons which induced me was personal and quite sentimental. As a small boy in pre-War Germany, on my way to my school in Breslau,² I had passed every morning the building in which the headquarters of Giesche—the name of Schulte's firm—were located. Not once had I wondered what went on behind the façade of that impressive building. Perhaps, many years after, there would be an answer for me.

AND SO WE went to work. Breitman searched in the National Archives (and in many collections elsewhere) persistently digging and soon finding traces in various directions, ranging from Averell Harriman (they had common business interests), to Hermann Goering (who wanted money for the struggling Nazi Party), to Allen Dulles who had acted as US legal adviser for Giesche before the War, and during it was one of Schulte's contacts in Switzerland. It is very difficult in this modern world for any person to disappear altogether, however hard he may try. Ubiquitous bureaucracies watch our movements; their records can still be found, and in the most unexpected places.

I was at first less successful. To be sure, there was a widow, Schulte's second wife, living in a hotel on the Dolder, near Zurich. But she refused to see me, having promised her husband never to reveal his secrets. Since I was not certain how much she knew, I simply took no for an answer. But, soon after, the breakthrough came. There happens to be a surviving son. He was my age; having graduated from school he went to work on a farm, was drafted into the German Army, was wounded several times, became an officer—and at the end of the War found himself in Switzerland, where he married an American girl who worked in the US Legation. Many years later he had emigrated to the United States.

As soon as I possibly could, I visited him in the house he had built in the mountains of Southern California, not far from San Diego. He was, I noted, a little suspicious at first; but after a few minutes we found that in fact we had been

class-mates! He concluded that a man who at the age of six to nine had attended the Zawadski School for Boys and Girls in the Kleinburg district of Breslau could not be all bad.

He shared with me his knowledge. It was very detailed—not so much about Schulte the carrier of state secrets, but about the father, the captain of industry, the human being. We walked and talked for hours, on more than one occasion.

I then went to a small West German town in Eastern Westfalia, where I was the guest of Schulte's younger brother—a man in his mid-nineties but still vigorous, alert, and full of stories about “the old days”. (As I write these lines, I am told that he has just died.) Here, too, I was thoroughly looked over; but apparently I inspired some confidence, and I was admitted to the family circle and to the family records. From Arnsberg I went to Lugano, where I spent a day with the former lawyer and diplomat who as an *Abwehr* officer in 1943 had warned Schulte that the *Gestapo* were about to arrest him, and had thus enabled him to cross the Swiss border “with a few hours to spare”. (Allen Dulles's words in a cable to the Office of Strategic Services headquarters in Washington). In Stuttgart, Frankfurt, London, Zurich, Geneva, San Francisco, I met men and women who had known him. One of my most valuable sources I met by sheer accident in Central Park South—next door to the Manhattan hotel in which I was staying.

GRADUALLY A PICTURE emerged of a man who, unbeknownst to his friends, his family, his colleagues, and Hitler's Nazi rulers, had played a role of considerable importance in transmitting information to the Allies—not just about the “Final Solution” in July 1942 but on many other occasions throughout the War. Historical detectives, in their excitement, tend to be carried away and to exaggerate the importance of their discoveries; I tried hard not to commit this mistake. But after analysing and re-analysing the evidence we had gathered, Breitman and I concluded that we had stumbled on a figure of some contemporary importance. If Allen Dulles had perhaps exaggerated the role of “509” (the code number given by the US Office of Strategic Services to Schulte), surely Hitler and Himmler knew what they were doing when they appointed a special investigation team, a *Sonderkommando*, to investigate the elusive “509”. How had a man with sources so close to the *Führer* been active for so long? And how much damage had been caused?

EDUARD SCHULTE was born in 1891 in a Protestant upper-middle-class family in Düsseldorf. At a fairly early age he had shown pronounced gifts of leadership and business acumen. He finished his law degree in record time, but his heart was not in academic studies. He knew that the new generation of captains of industry needed the “*Herr Doktor*”. He lost a leg in an accident, and was unable to serve in the army during World War I; but at the age of 25 he was appointed head of a key department in the German Ministry of Supply—which had been organised by Walter Rathenau. As the War ended he became chief

² See my article, “Homecoming”, *ENCOUNTER*, December 1963.

executive officer of a big corporation, Sunlight—the German branch of Sunlight—and then, in 1925, of Giesche. This German conglomerate was not nearly so well known as Krupp or Thyssen, but it was still one of the most substantial European companies and certainly the oldest (when its history was first published before World War I, three hefty volumes proved to be just sufficient to cover the essential facts).

Giesche was in bad shape when Schulte took over, partly because of a fall in the price of tin (the firm's main product), partly because (after the Versailles Peace Treaty) some of its key holdings were in Poland, and this caused untold complications. Following some deft manoeuvring, Schulte succeeded in saving the company; and he persuaded the US company Anaconda Copper and also a leading British firm (Brandes Goldschmidt) to invest in it. By 1933 Giesche was again going strong; and when, in February 1933, Goering convened a small circle of leading bankers and industrialists to meet the *Führer*, Schulte was among those invited to the meeting in the *Reichstag*. (This was a few days before it burned down.)

Schulte was not a man of deep political interests; and yet, unlike many of his peers, he did not for a moment believe that the Nazis were worthy of support. Being a man of firm beliefs and values, with an acute sense of right and wrong, the more he learned about Adolf Hitler and his followers, the more he came to dislike the *Reich's* new rulers. He was also a man of uncommon common sense and foresight, and even by 1933-34 he had reached the conclusion that "Hitler meant war", and that this horrific war would result in Germany's ruin.

He was, then, a rare bird. A German patriot; a man of wealth; not a drop of Jewish blood in his veins; no pacifist (or masonic) connections; no particular sympathies for Left-wing policies; and yet consumed with a deep hatred against the Nazis. He could have sat out the War in Germany, like so many in the so-called "inner emigration"; or perhaps in Switzerland, where he had frequent business dealings and was a welcome guest. But Schulte was one of nature's activists; his being revolted against passivity. He decided from the first day of the War to do all he could to shorten it, and to pass on to the Allies information about Hitler's impending attacks, about the V (miracle) weapons; about deliberations and changes in the German High Command.

WHY WAS Schulte's mission to Switzerland in July 1942 of such crucial importance? There had been throughout 1941 alarming reports, based on reliable information, from observers in various parts of Eastern Europe that many, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Jews had been killed by special Nazi police units, the so-called *Einsatzgruppen*. But the general impression in the Allied capitals was that these were "mere pogroms", albeit on a larger and more murderous scale than ever before. True, *Ultra* intercepts in Bletchley showed that something far more sinister was going on, but British Intelligence chose not to pass on this information.

Schulte learned through his contacts in Hitler's headquarters that the *Führer* had decided to exterminate within a short time all of European Jewry. He had yet another

source of information. His company had major holdings in and around Auschwitz, and by macabre accident Himmler had recently dined with his local commanders on the outskirts of Auschwitz, in a villa which Schulte's corporation (and its American associates) had had built for their executives.

Schulte took the next train to Zurich and alerted a Jewish businessman, Koppelman, who had acted as a conduit to the Allies on several previous occasions. Koppelman informed Benjamin Sagalowitz, the Press Officer of the Swiss Jewish communities (whom he located with some difficulty in a Lausanne hotel where he was participating in the final rounds of the Swiss national chess championship). Sagalowitz in his turn telephoned young Dr Gerhard Riegner, the Geneva-based representative of the World Jewish Congress. For several hours the two walked the lakeside promenade, debating whether the horrific information was trustworthy. . . . In the end they decided to send a cable through American diplomatic channels. The US State Department intervened, and delayed transmission as long as possible, but Dr Riegner had taken the precaution of sending a second copy of what has become known as "the Riegner telegram" to the Labour MP Sidney Silverman, in London. The Foreign Office was unenthusiastic but reached the conclusion that a communication to a Member of Parliament was privileged and could not simply be shelved. Thus, because of Schulte, the shattering and world-historic news of genocide reached New York and Washington in early August of 1942.

The warning that "the extermination of European Jewry" had been ordered by Hitler was just one of many messages Schulte passed on—albeit the most dramatic one. He was not a spy in the usual sense. No one had ever asked him for information; no control officer was "running" him; he did not belong to any "network"; and he never took a penny for his labours. He transmitted his information in most cases to the man who was in charge of Polish Intelligence in Switzerland, who passed it on to London; later on his contact was with Allen Dulles who had arrived with the famous "last train" from Vichy France (just before the Unoccupied Zone was invaded in late 1942).

SCHULTE HAD TO ESCAPE from Germany in November 1943, following an almost fatal mishap. Dulles had asked him to put on paper his ideas for post-War reconstruction. But the secretary in Schulte's office had a German boyfriend who belonged to the SS (he was attached to the German consulate in Zurich); and she passed a carbon copy on to him. Influential friends in the *Abwehr* High Command got wind of his impending arrest, warned him, and after a dramatic escape Schulte found himself in Switzerland. He was a master of dissimulation. He faked a severe heart attack, had to be hospitalised, and after that pretended to be so ill that he could not be moved. He was evidently not "a defector", but apparently a desperately sick man stranded in Zurich.

This masquerade helped to save his wife and the highly-placed friends who had, over the years, helped him to gather his information in the Third *Reich*. By that time the *Gestapo* knew that he had been "disloyal to the Régime" but they still

had no inkling of the full extent of his activities. Although they suspected that “509” was indeed Schulte, there was no conclusive evidence. He had obliterated his traces so well that there was no way of proving him guilty—except through an admission under torture. Since he was so ill and outside their grasp, the *Gestapo* had to postpone the interrogation to another day—and that day never came.

WHEN THE WAR ENDED Eduard Schulte was asked by the Americans to return to Berlin, to serve as head of a group of German economic advisers to the military government. In the normal course of events he would have become the first Minister of Economics in a new German government. But Schulte had no political ambitions; and being a rich man he did not need a civil servant’s salary. He refused to accept money for his work in Berlin; he simply saw it as his duty to help his country in the hour of total disaster, the *Jahr Null* which he had sadly predicted.

But his work in Berlin soon came to an abrupt end. Every German without distinction had to undergo official investigation by the Allies—this was the period of the famous Questionnaire, the *Fragebogen* (about which Ernst von Salomon wrote a best-selling book). One American investigator, new to Germany and Nazi affairs, made a shattering discovery. During the War, in the course of official correspondence with some Berlin Ministry, Schulte had signed a letter “*Heil Hitler*”. Surely such a man was a fanatical Nazi and had to be purged? It was pointless to explain that during the Nazi era the use of “*Heil Hitler*” was obligatory in official correspondence. The investigators knew better. They even tried (unsuccessfully) to identify Averell Harriman and other prominent Americans who had been in touch with Schulte as “suspected Nazi collaborators”. At this stage Schulte was so disgusted that he decided to leave Germany forever.

He settled in Switzerland, found some happiness in a second marriage, and dabbled in various business ventures—more as a kind of occupational therapy than because he needed the money. He died in 1966, a few days before his 75th birthday. It was a very quiet and private funeral, with only a few letters of condolence. There were no wreaths from the Allied governments, or from Bonn, or from Israeli and Jewish institutions. I am sure that Schulte would not have wanted it any differently. He had done his duty; he did not seek recognition.

AFTER SOME HESITATION we decided to call our book on Schulte *Breaking the Silence*, for this had been his intention when he came to Zurich in July 1942 with the monstrous information which both the Allies and the Jewish institutions found so difficult to accept. It proved to be a prophetic title in more senses than one. Our book appeared in the United States early in 1986. As so often in such cases, a few weeks after the publication date we received important further evidence from the Swiss state archives and from individuals (which we would have dearly liked to have used when

we were writing the book). If it did not materially affect our story, still it confirmed it; and there were also additional details shedding more light on the motives and the behaviour of this extraordinary man.

In October 1986 the book was published in West Germany and in Britain. The reception in America was, I must confess, slightly disappointing. True, there were letters both from friends and from readers unknown to us, saying that they had been “deeply moved” by the story. There were even a few long-distance phone calls from Hollywood. After all, there had been in the *Reich* a great many Kurt Waldheims—and very few individuals who had risked their lives trying to oppose the régime. The reviewers were respectful, but most did not quite know how to handle this particular piece of history. There was a certain uneasiness. Was it really an authentic story? There had been so many forgeries—including, indeed, the so-called Hitler diaries. How could one know for sure? There was no way a reviewer could “check it out”, and so they were cautious in their comments. German-language readers were not very different—with a few important exceptions (the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*). One American reviewer, himself the scion of a rich family, wrote that he could not *really* understand Schulte’s motives. The man had been, after all, a passionate hunter, and perhaps he had been afraid that after the War, in an impoverished Germany, he would no longer be able to pursue his hobby? An academic noted that it had been wrong to put, in a few instances, quotation marks around what should have been indirect speech. How very true, and how very pedantic.

But I must record that most newspapers and periodicals chose to ignore it. For the liberal Left, an industrialist was an unlikely hero. Had he been of working-class origin, we might have fared better. For the German Right he was little better than “a traitor”; however repulsive Nazi rule had been, a good German simply should not have collaborated with Germany’s enemies. Reception in Jewish circles was equally lukewarm. There were doubts whether the story was really true; it did not fit existing stereotypes. What had been the real motives of this unusual German? And why had he refused to claim any credit? Large excerpts from the book were published in the Israeli press; someone even suggested that a street in Tel Aviv be named after him. Or perhaps a small forest be planted in the hills? After a few weeks the idea was dropped. There was apparently a long queue of meritorious applicants for street names and forests who had helped the Jewish people or the state of Israel in one way or another; and Eduard Schulte’s prospects in that distinguished company were not very promising.

MOST EXTRAORDINARY was the reception in Britain—where the book did not receive a single major review (with the exception of *The Economist*, an Anglo-American rather than a British periodical). True, the BBC had devoted a long radio programme to Schulte when the story first broke, a year before the book came out (they even sent a correspondent to California to interview his son). But not a single British national newspaper reviewed *Breaking the Silence*. In the

light of literary experience, I find this unusual. Authors have no divine right to expect attention for their books, but they are bound to ask themselves what the reasons for their failure might have been. Relating the story of an unknown hero many years after the event is not an enterprise of world-shaking importance. Still, at a time when Britain's Sunday newspapers were publishing long excerpts from new books relating for the tenth time the life story of Anthony Blunt, and for the twentieth time the Blake affair, when day after day there were long reports on the front pages from Australia about a book on Roger Hollis that had as yet not even been published, how was one to explain the absence of even a single line to report a story which, if nothing else, was of a certain human interest?

It could have been mere "accident". I discussed the problem with some friends, and they mentioned similar recent experiences. There was the affair of the "Griffin", alias Paul Rosbaud. A distinguished American scientist had recently uncovered the identity of the man who had been Britain's most important scientific source in Germany—the man who had passed invaluable material to the Allies throughout the War. Rosbaud settled in London in 1945 and (together with Robert Maxwell) founded the Pergamon Press, but their collaboration did not last long. The book has now been translated into ten languages, including Norwegian; but no British publisher has showed interest. (I understand that the tenth publisher who was approached has just, very sensibly indeed, decided to publish the book.) Then there was the case of the definitive biography of Chaim Weizmann by Professor Yehuda Reinharz, a professor at the University of Michigan, which was published by Oxford University Press in New York and London. The author received several important awards in the United States and his book was highly praised. In Britain, however, not one review, despite the fact that Dr Weizmann had been a British citizen, had taught at a British university, had made an important contribution to the British war effort, had been a confidant of leading British politicians; and, generally speaking, had been an ardent Anglophile all his life.

There were other such cases, and they pointed to several conclusions—that parochialism is on the rise (admittedly not only in Britain), that interest in events which lie 50 years or more in the past is strictly limited, unless the books refer to some prominent Establishment (or anti-Establishment) figure in politics and literature. Above all, the lesson seems to be that a meretricious interest in scandals, disasters, and debunking has become considerably greater not only in the press but in publishing as a whole. Eduard Schulte was not a saint but he was, on the whole, what the Russians used to call "a positive hero": the rare figure of a man standing up for his beliefs and willing to risk his life. In an age in which there is much greater interest in traitors, collaborators, and similar villains, perhaps editors and publishers are right: perhaps the stories of good people do tend to be boring. We should pay more attention to Shakespeare: "Men's evil manners live in brass, their virtues we write in water. . . ."

But I still am persuaded that a debt had to be paid. Even though we failed to get full recognition for Eduard Schulte, the messenger of a tragic truth, I am glad we wrote this book.

AUTHORS

Harvey Tyson's article is based on remarks made to "Challenging the Censors", a World News Media Action Conference (organised by the World Press Freedom Committee) held recently in London.

A. S. Byatt's story is included in her collection *Sugar and Other Stories*, published in April by Chatto & Windus, who also published her novels *Still Life* (1985) and *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978).

Allen Curnow's latest book of poems is *The Loop in Lone Kauri Road*, published last year by Auckland University Press and Oxford University Press.

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Walter Laqueur is a Professor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University and Chairman of its International Research Council; he is also co-director of the Institute of Contemporary History in London. His numerous books include *A World of Secrets* (Basic Books and Weidenfeld, 1986), *Germany Today* (Weidenfeld, 1985), *Young Germany* (Transaction Books, 1985), *The Pattern of Soviet Conduct in the Third World* (Praeger, 1983), and *The Terrible Secret* (Weidenfeld, 1980). *Breaking the Silence* was published last year in London by The Bodley Head and in New York by Simon & Schuster.