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ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF
F. F. TILLISCH' REPORT OF
NOVEMBER 24TH, 1849, CONCERNING
CONDITIONS IN SLESVIG UNDER THE
ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION

BY

HOLGER HJELHOLT



København 1961
i kommission hos Ejnar Munksgaard

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On July 10 th, 1849, an armistice including peace preliminaries was concluded in Berlin between Denmark and Prussia, suspending the war between these two countries which had been provoked by the revolution of the Schleswig-Holsteiners in March 1848.

According to the convention the duchy of Slesvig was to be administered during the armistice by a mixed commission of three members, chosen by Denmark, Prussia and Britain, the mediator, respectively. The following three were appointed: Chamberlain F. F. Tillisch, Count Botho zu Eulenburg, and Colonel Lloyd Hodges. Slesvig was divided into Northern and Southern halves along a line of demarcation running from the West coast at a point North of Tønder to the East coast South of Flensburg. During the armistice North Slesvig was occupied by Swedish-Norwegian troops under General Malmborg, and South Slesvig by Prussian forces, first under the command of Colonel Lebbin, and later on under Major General Hahn. Both corps received instructions to assist the Commission in its task of governing the country and to maintain law and order.

The Commission was installed at Flensburg on the 25th of August. The regency in Kiel refused to recognize its rule and called upon the government officials of Schleswig-Holstein to sabotage it. In South Slesvig large-scale passive resistance against the Commission was organized, and its attempts to maintain its authority failed as the Prussian military authorities declined to support it, fraternized with the Schleswig-Holsteiners and remained passive spectators when they expelled or maltreated the officials who were sent by the Commission to replace the recusants.

On December 5th, 1849, The Times, in its second edition, brought a lengthy description of the difficulties against which

the Commission thus had to contend. The Danish member of the Commission, F. F. Tillisch, was referred to as the source of the report which was alleged to have been written on November 24th to the Danish Minister of the Interior (M. H. Rosenørn). To place the report, the text of which is given below, in its context, it may be mentioned that some days earlier the Commission had tried to replace the chief of police in the city of Slesvig, Ahlefeldt, who was a Schleswig-Holsteiner, by his predecessor, Baron O. F. v. Eggers, who had, however, been suspended for negligence in the discharge of his office. When General Hahn raised objections on this point, all three commissioners on November 20th went to Slesvig to discuss matters with the General. They dropped the idea of appointing Eggers, but instead, as suggested by Eulenburg, they sent for Mr. J. W. Dubell, a Slesvig barrister, who had previously placed himself at the disposal of the Commission. However, as Hahn would not agree to the conditions subject to which Dubell was willing to accept the office of chief of police, the discussions were abortive. On the same day the commissioners returned to Flensburg, convinced that their government would receive no support from the Prussian military authorities.

The report in *The Times* runs as follows:

Denmark and the Duchies

The following is an extract from a report of M. de Tillisch to his Excellency the Minister of the Interior at Copenhagen, dated Schleswig, Nov. 24:—

“I have the honour, in reference to my letter of the 21st inst., to inform your Excellency that the Administrative Commission has conferred with Colonel Hodges on the measures to be adopted, under existing circumstances, for the purpose of carrying out the armistice. We agreed that it was impossible to depend upon the Prussian troops, and that therefore we could not venture upon sending any new functionaries to that part of the duchy occupied by the Prussians, and that consequently we were unable to take measures against the revolutionary functionaries in such

¹ I am obliged to the London editor of the *Berlingske Tidende*, who has kindly procured a photostatic copy of the article.

a manner as would be necessary in order to secure a legal order of things.

“We further agreed that the whole population in the duchy of Schleswig would be exposed to the most cruel treatment if the Schleswig-Holstein army should invade the duchy, and that therefore such invasion must be most energetically prevented. This is the more important, as it is quite impossible for us to gain any ground here so long as a hostile army of 30,000 men, excellent troops, stands all ready for battle on the frontier, prepared at any moment to invade the country. It is in the nature of things that any men, even the best disposed, dare not submit to or obey a Government unable to offer them any protection, as long as there is no security that the war will not begin again, and that consequently by obeying the Commission they would expose themselves to ruin.

“We have, therefore, decided upon sending a collective note to our respective Courts for the purpose of representing this state of things, as well as to point out the necessity of disbanding the Schleswig-Holstein army, or of adopting such measures on the side of the great Powers as can secure us against an attack of this army. So long as this is not done, it will be impossible for us to carry out the functions intrusted us. This note will be transmitted as soon as possible; but I beg most urgently to request your Excellency that everything in the power of the Government be done before it is despatched, and as soon as possible, to prevent the threatening calamity that may befall us before we expect it: and that certainly will not fail to take place as soon as Baron Blome returns without having obtained what may have been expected of his mission. Our whole position is desperate in the extreme; our hands are tied in every respect; and even the little we still are able to do we are obliged to do with the greatest precaution, lest we should excite the fanatical and revolutionary party, deprived as we are of all means to meet them, and therefore only run the risk of exposing the loyal and defenceless inhabitants to still greater calamities when the revolt again breaks out, probably led by the wildest Democrats.

“M. Dabell[!] declared that he was willing to undertake the functions of inspector of the police in Schleswig as soon as he received a satisfactory guarantee that the Prussian troops would

effectually give what assistance might be required, as that was the only condition under which he would be able to do any good. He told General Hahn to his face, in the presence of Count Eulenburg, Colonel Hodges, and myself, that he neither had nor could have any confidence in the Prussian military, and, without speaking of former events, he alleged as his reasons several facts which, as he pretended, had taken place even after General Hahn had taken the command. The latter felt very much offended by this assertion, and tried to defend the military without success, so that Count Eulenburg, Colonel Hodges, and myself have gained the thorough conviction that we are perfectly unable to do anything in the part of Schleswig occupied by Prussian troops. M. Dabell demanded that the general should permit him, in cases where the assistance of the military might be required, to decide himself when and how they were to be employed and when they were to use their arms; but to this the General would not consent, whereupon M. Dabell declared that he would not accept the office under such circumstances, as he would only endanger his own life to no purpose. I am, therefore, obliged to declare to your Excellency that I feel unable to carry on the Government in a satisfactory way, and still less in a manner becoming the dignity of His Majesty, in whose name we are to govern. The only thing I can do is to remain here and carry on a sham government to the destruction of the country, to the insult of the King's name and the honour of Denmark. I shall not trouble your Excellency with any remarks on the painful and humiliating nature of this position for me personally, but I have considered it my duty openly and frankly to state my opinion, lest the Government might form a false notion of the true state of things here.

“It is, however, not only in the south of Schleswig that we encounter difficulties; they are not wanting either in the north, chiefly occasioned by the opposition of the functionaries to the High Court of Justice, and although they have good reasons for it in the conduct of the court itself, it cannot be denied that the functionaries sometimes go further than is excusable, and that such disobedience leads to demoralization and loosens all legal ties. However, I have no choice but to defend the functionaries against the court as long as it continues in its opposition to the Administrative Commission. It will therefore be necessary that

the High Court be dismissed; but, without considering the many difficulties connected with such a step, not less than with the formation of an entirely new court, with all its officers and clerks, of a new county court and ecclesiastical court, &c., without considering how far we may be able to carry out this measure in the town of Schleswig, as it could only be done by an armed force and with the assistance of General Hahn, because we could not send any person to Schleswig for such a purpose, — without considering all these circumstances, it must be remembered that such a measure is very likely, in the present excitement in Holstein and in South Schleswig, to call forth a sudden outbreak of troubles, and I dare not take such a responsibility on myself, so long as there is no more security than at present, that the loyal inhabitants in this town (Flensburg) and all over the duchy will be protected against such persecution and violence as is certain to be their fate.

“Nevertheless the dismissal of the High Court of Justice cannot be evaded. Count Eulenburg and I perfectly agree on this point; but we have not yet been able to find out how it can be effected without upsetting everything, and yet this it is that, at Copenhagen as well as at Berlin, it is particularly desirable to ward off.

“It is impossible to form an idea of the difficulty of our position, and I can, therefore, well imagine that it is thought at Copenhagen that many things might be done better; but those who will consider the state of things here, as they really are — the means to which we are reduced by the Convention of Armistice, and the many difficulties this very convention itself offers, will undoubtedly arrive at the conviction that a problem has been put before us which we cannot solve. However, this thankless position may still be maintained for a short while, if absolutely necessary; but it will only prove destructive in every respect. There is one thing I must especially request you to have at heart, viz., that every means be taken to render it impossible for the Schleswig-Holsteiners to invade the duchy of Schleswig; it is not only for the sake of the faithful and loyal Schleswigers that this must be prevented, but also for the sake of Denmark herself; because if once more the country be left a prey to the violence of a fanatic enemy, and the inhabitants once more find themselves unprotected

against outrages and vexations, and that their loyalty to the Danish cause brings them nothing but sufferings and ruin, there is an end to all Danish sympathies; every confidence in assistance and succour from Denmark is gone, and the population will be forced to seek refuge where they can find protection and security. Even this intolerable condition during the armistice is suffered, and will be suffered, with patience, if the people can be secured against a new invasion, but, if such take place, their courage will be irrevocably lost.

“If it is therefore the will of the great Powers to carry out the armistice, and that the war shall not be renewed, it appears to me that this may be prevented by declaring to the Stathalterate, and to the Duchy of Holstein, that an invasion of Schleswig will be considered, on the part of the great Powers, as a *casus belli*; it may be presumed that even the insolent Schleswig-Holsteiners will not venture on such a step. But the honour and welfare of Denmark demand that the inhabitants of the Duchy of Schleswig be not exposed to such a boundless misery as the renewal of the war will bring upon them under the present circumstances. General Malmberg[!] is extremely dissatisfied with the precarious position he is placed in, and he wishes very much to know what the Prussian garrison will do in case of an inroad, — if they will allow free passage to the Schleswig-Holsteiners, or whether any resistance can be counted upon from the Prussian troops.”

Obviously, such a signal confession of failure on the part of the Danish member of the Commission was grist to the Schleswig-Holstein mill, “gefundenes Fressen” so to speak. In fact, translations of the article were printed within a few days in German newspapers, such as the “Hamburger Börsenhalle” on December 11th, and the “Altonaer Mercur”, No. 524, on the 13th. The latter paper had already referred to it on the previous day, and returned to the subject on the 15th and the 18th (Nos. 526 and 528). From these papers it was taken over by Schleswig-Holstein pamphlets such as the “Zustände Schleswig-Holsteins, geschildert in einigen Actenstücken” (Frankfurt a. M. 1850) by Professor P. W. Forchhammer of the University of Kiel, and “Das Herzogthum Schleswig und die Landesverwaltung zu Flensburg im Jahre 1849” (Berlin, 1850) by the titular High Court Councillor

H. K. Esmarch, both of which were published in the early months of 1850.¹

The report is reproduced or quoted in detail in the fourth volume of Rudolph Schleiden's "Erinnerungen eines Schleswig-Holsteiners": "Schleswig-Holstein im zweiten Kriegsjahre 1849—50" (Wiesbaden, 1894), p. 255 ff., under the heading "Bankerott-erklärung des Herrn v. Tillisch vom 24. November". It is stated that the "Berlingske Tidende" of December 14th was of opinion that the report was not genuine, but had been confounded with the collective note sent by the Commission on November 26th to Denmark, Prussia and Britain. Schleiden, however, on pages 257—258 advances the following opinion, "Jeder Zweifel an der Authenticität des Schreibens ward jedoch bald nachher durch die Mittheilung des Barons Blome an die Statthalterschaft beseitigt, dass dasselbe von Kopenhagen an Grafen F. D. Reventlow, den dänischen Gesandten in London, gesandt, von diesem für Lord Palmerston übersetzt und entweder aus Schadenfreude von dem edlen Lord oder durch Tachtlosigkeit des Gesandten in die Oeffentlichkeit gelangt sei".

The Baron Blome mentioned by Schleiden must be the Schleswig-Holstein politician Adolf Blome (d. 1875) active in reconciling the Danish Government and the Schleswig-Holsteiners. He had connections in Copenhagen and a certain value may therefore be attributed to a statement from him, though not to the extent done by Schleiden at this place.

The "Berlingske Tidende" of December 14th, 1849, No. 296, contains a statement to the effect that "we are able to maintain with absolute certainty that the Minister of the Interior has not received such a letter". The paper goes on to suppose that The Times is probably mixing up the "letter in question" with the Commission's collective note. Having received the English mail, "Berlingske" in its No. 299 of December 18th repeated that "a letter of this kind has not been received by *the Minister of the Interior* (the last words being in italics in the paper), nor are we in a position to state definitely whether a letter bearing such contents has arrived here".

¹ FORCHHAMMER mentions the printing of his small publication in letters of December 10th, 1849, and February 8th, 1850. See Herzögl. Schlesw. Holst. Hausarchiv. Abt. III. Lit. EE. No. 69 c. Schlesw. Holst. Landesbibliothek. Kiel.

P. Lauridsen, the historian, author of "Da Sønderjylland vågnede" (When South Jutland Awoke), wrote a lengthy treatise in "Sønderjydske Årbøger" for 1899 and 1900, entitled "Mellem slagene" (Between the Battles), in which the activities of the Commission are described. He had access to Tillisch's private papers, which in 1899 had been handed over to Rigsarkivet (the Danish Public Record Office), and the treatise draws extensively upon this material. Lauridsen apparently accepts the genuine character of the report, but dates it none too accurately in saying, "In the middle of November 1849 Tillisch had to report . . .". In this connection he makes the following note, "Through the carelessness of the Secretary of the Danish legation, Bjelke, this report found its way to the world paper, The Times, and caused a considerable stir in both camps (see Count Reventlow's letter sent from London on the 6th of December 1849)".

Bo V.son Lundquist, the Swedish historian, also accepts the genuineness of the letter in his doctoral thesis from 1934, "Sverige och den slesvig-holsteinska frågan 1849—50" (Sweden and the Schleswig-Holstein Question 1849—50) (Uppsala, 1934), p. 81. Here he writes in Note 201, "There is no doubt as regards the authenticity of the letter which, for obvious reasons, was disputed by the Danes. It is not among Rosenörn's private papers, Danish Public Record Office." However, Lundquist does not quote any other evidence in support of the genuineness of the letter, besides Schleiden's above-mentioned statement.

With these categorical opinions in mind concerning the authenticity of the report of November 24th, it may appear ill-advised to challenge it. However, it does not exist.

Both P. Lauridsen and Lundquist might easily have proved this on the basis of the records they used (the archives of Tillisch and the Danish Foreign Office). On the following pages I intend to show how "the report of the 24th of November" arose.

On November 21st Tillisch sent A. W. Moltke, the Prime Minister, a very detailed account of the Commissions vain attempt to replace the pro-Schleswig-Holstein chief of police in Slesvig by a loyalist.¹ Two days later, on the 23rd, Tillisch sent another report to Moltke. The letter opens in the following way, "in refer-

¹ Tillisch's private papers, Letter-book A.

ence to my communication of the 21st inst., I do not omit hereby to inform Your Excellency that the Administrative Commission has conferred with Colonel Hodges on the measures to be adopted under existing circumstances in order to make it possible to carry out the armistice”.

As will be seen, this corresponds to the opening sentence of the printed report “of the 24th of November” which goes on to give a translation of the entire letter of November 23rd down to “. . .and would thus only expose the loyal but defenceless inhabitants of the duchy to still greater calamities when the revolt breaks out again, under the control, as is to be expected, of the wildest Democrats”.

This, however, corresponds to the smaller part of the printed report, viz. p. 4 to p. 5 3rd l. from the bottom of the page. Without any kind of transition or explanation the latter report continues, “M. Dabell [!] declared that he was willing”. This section and what follows corresponds to the dispatch of November 21st, where it is preceded by a long description of the attempt to replace the police inspector of Slesvig, after which it continues: “Dubell declared that he was willing to take over the office of inspector of the police if he could obtain a satisfactory guarantee that he would actually receive the assistance from the Prussian troops, which must be considered necessary”. In the sequel the printed report follows the dispatch until “. . .lest the government might form a false notion of the true state of things here”. Having got so far, it leaves out the part dealing with the departure of the Commission from Slesvig, but follows the dispatch from, “It is, however, not only in the South of Slesvig that we encounter troubles and difficulties”. The three final lines of the dispatch, “If Your Excellency would be good enough to inform me whether any decision has been taken on this question, or whether any may be expected, I should be greatly obliged”, are left out.

It is not absolutely inconceivable that Tillisch himself might have formed a new report of the 24th of November to the Minister of the Interior, Rosenørn, from his two dispatches of the 21st and the 23rd to A. W. Moltke, though nothing of that kind is known either from the Rosenørns papers or from Tillisch’s letter-books, and though the character of the printed report is strongly against such a supposition, evidence to the contrary being the

abrupt introduction of Dubell into the report. However, on the basis of letters preserved among Tillisch's private papers, which passed between him and F. D. Reventlow, the Danish minister in London, it is possible to obtain a clear picture of how the report of November 24th came into being, although a few of the letters forming part of this correspondence appear to have been lost.

On December 3rd Reventlow writes Tillisch from London, "From the enclosed transcripts you will see what steps I had already taken, before receiving your welcome lines of November 25th with enclosures, towards which you ask me to turn my efforts, and you will furthermore see that immediately upon receipt of your letter, I have asked for an interview with L. P. [Lord Palmerston] with the intention of using your clear and interesting reports to the best of my ability to further our object, to which purpose I have prepared an English translation of the more outstanding passages."

The enclosures accompanying Reventlow's letter consist of copies of his communication of November 25th to Palmerston, of his dispatch of November 26th to A. W. Moltke (marked No. 106), and of his letter of December 2nd to Palmerston. In the latter he says that yesterday "par la voie directe" he received letters from Tillisch at Flensburg, "qui contiennent des données très importantes pour bien juger tout le danger, dont de la part du parti violent en Holstein se trouve *menacée l'oeuvre de la paix*, et je les fais traduire dans ce moment en Anglais pour Vous les communiquer...". Nevertheless, as mentioned in the letter to Tillisch, it is only "the more outstanding passages" which he is having translated.

On the day after the publication of the "report of November 24th" in "The Times", Dec. 6th, Reventlow writes to Tillisch a few lines to let him know that he has no part in the publication. He encloses a copy of a letter of the same day to A. W. Moltke¹. At first it had been his intention only to beg Moltke to inform Tillisch what had happened, but "par... [the next word illegible] reflexion² I will not for a moment let you be in uncertainty about the fact that I have no part in the blunder that has occurred." However, Reventlow remarks: "Enfin! geschehene Dinge sind nicht zu ändern!"

¹ This copy is not to be found with the letter, but the said copy (or another?) is among Tillisch's private papers, letter E.

² The meaning is of course "on second thoughts".

In the dispatch (No. 108) sent by Reventlow to A. W. Moltke on December 4th he writes among other things that reading the account of the state of affairs in the Duchies which Tillisch had given impressed Palmerston. In the letter to Moltke of the 6th Reventlow now first remarks that Moltke knows from this dispatch that in his last conversation with Palmerston Reventlow had used the reports of Tillisch "of... [the date is not filled in] and the 24th l.m.", for which reason he had ordered the Secretary to the legation, "Kammerjunker"¹ Bielke, to translate into English "the most outstanding passages". Who describes, however, his surprise when in the same evening he found this translation published in "The Times" "as an extract from the report itself of the 24. l.m."!

However disgusting it might be for him, Reventlow continues, to inform the Prime Minister of this indiscretion, "I owe it to myself and the highly responsible office which I fill to declare that this publication has taken place without my knowledge, my will or my consent to it". He asked Moltke to inform Tillisch of the fact. Besides he wished wholeheartedly that as Moltke and Tillisch were "satisfied", Bielke, whom he himself had been active to get to London, should not be caused to feel too much the consequences of his indiscretion.

Reventlow added as an extenuating circumstance for Bielke that Bielke had never intended the report to be published but only to be used as material for a "Leading Article", furthermore, that the discretion of the person to whom it was communicated had for a long time been proved and that he had served the cause of Denmark with energy and success. Of course this was not, however, any excuse for Bielke not to consider that the document in question "far from being his was not even my property", and in all such cases he ought to obtain his, Reventlow's, consent to "the use of the legation's or my own private information and documents". Indeed Bielke admitted that it was so.

It is difficult, Reventlow finally stated, to say whether the publication will be detrimental or favourable, "but in any case it would be most dangerous on that account to ruin any pro-Danish feelings of "The Times", which certainly has only inserted the report in its columns in the opinion that it would be injurious to our opponents..." Should Palmerston be aware of the matter,

¹ A Danish nominal title (approximately = 'Groom of the Chamber').

Reventlow would of course tell him that he had no part in the publication.

Tillisch took the publication calmly. After he had received Reventlow's letter he wrote him the following day, December 13th, that his communication "did not exactly please me, but I agree with you that we must now only say *geschehene Dinge sind nicht zu ändern*. I have to-day written to Count Moltke that as far as I am concerned I do not attach much importance to the matter". The same day he informed Baron Pechlin, our peace mediator in Berlin, of the fact through sending him a copy of Reventlow's letter of the 6th to A. W. Moltke. In the letter of the 13th to Moltke Tillisch wrote that he had just learnt from a note of Reventlow, "that through an indiscretion part of my reports to Your Excellency of the 21st and 23th l.m. has got into. . . "The Times". As, however, there is nothing in the said reports but what I can defend in every regard, as far as I am concerned, it is of no importance that this publication should have taken place, although of course I should have preferred that it should not have happened." He had told Colonel Hodges that the publication had taken place without the knowledge and the will of the Danish Ambassador. "Incidentally the Colonel did not attach much importance to the matter after he had perused the Article in question."

It appears from what has now been said that the report of November 24th to Rosenørn, the Minister of the Interior, does not exist — in spite of the above-mentioned Swedish declaration, that "no doubt exists. . . about the authenticity of the letter". However, the contents of the report are to be found in the letters of Tillisch of November 21st and 23th to A. W. Moltke. Still it must be noted that both in regard to the coherence and owing to some errors that have got in through the translation historians cannot be advised to be content with the document with "the most outstanding passages". The remark on p. 5 l. 3: "that the whole population in the duchy" in fact differs from the remark in the dispatch: "that the whole loyal population in the duchy". P. 5, l. 8: "as a hostile army of 30.000 men, excellent troops" is of a more concise character than the expression of the dispatch: "so long a hostile army ready for battle of about 30.000 men, according to all reports excellent troops. . .". Some small words as "certainly", "rather", etc. are omitted in the translation whose

expressions therefore seem more categorical than those of the reports. In mentioning the question of the formation of a new High Court (p. 7, l. 8) is omitted "because it should also be necessary to establish the new High Court here in Flensburg". The last four words "from the Prussian troops" are meant to correspond to the words of the dispatch "on the part of Prussia".

If we are interested in the history of our South Jutland and in the treatment of this history in German or foreign literature, we are often inclined to say with the poet: "we only heard the clatter of the galloping horse that carried the lie to the nations". However, although "the report of November 24th" has certainly been abused by Germans, we have in this case to recognize that it was a Danish blunder and a Danish statesman's exaggerated use of extreme terms that caused this. Whether we historians must have to wonder that the authenticity of the report has not been doubted for more than a hundred years I shall leave in abeyance.



Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab

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3. HJELHOLT, HOLGER: On the Authenticity of F. F. Tillisch' Report of November 24th, 1849, Concerning Conditions in Slesvig under the Administrative Commission. 1961 3,00

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