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# Der Fuehrer, Der Lehrer

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## Abstract

Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist party made many changes to Germany's educational system. They changed overall aspects of education such as its goals and its purpose. They also changed the classroom by rearranging the curriculum and the educational environment. The Nazis originated an enormous movement towards deintellectualization. They taught boys and girls somewhat different lessons and attempted to persuade students to completely give themselves to the Reich; mind, body, and soul. All of the changes in the educational system were constructed to promote the Nazi party and help it prosper.

## Der Fuehrer, Der Lehrer

- I. The general changes in the scope of the educational program
  - A. The changes in educational goals
  - B. The changes in education's purpose
- II. The changes in the classroom
  - A. Propaganda present
  - B. Changes in the academic environment
  - C. The anti-intellectualization movement
- III. The changes in the curriculum
  - A. The changes of emphasis on certain subjects
  - B. The addition of new subjects
- IV. The changes in the school system's structure
  - A. Napolas
  - B. The changes surrounding gymnasium admission
- V. The differences in education geared towards male versus female students
  - A. Male soldier preparation
  - B. Female homemaker preparation
    - 1. The encouragement to bear children
    - 2. The home economics year
- VI. General textbook changes
  - A. Publication restrictions
  - B. Propaganda used
- VII. The Nazi effects on teachers
  - A. The new requirements to maintain a teaching position
  - B. The new responsibilities of a teacher

Children have the most innocent and malleable minds in the world. The ideal purpose of education is to mold and guide those young minds so each student can reach his or her academic and intellectual potential. Not all societies see it this way, however. Some countries use the educational system to poison these minds with political ideologies. This is exactly what happened to Germany's educational system under the control of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists. Hitler and his political party changed almost every aspect of education. Under Hitler, the classroom underwent many changes, along with teachers and the goals of education. There was also a discrepancy between the education provided to boys and girls. The curriculum was entirely different for the two sexes. Changing the system as radically as the National Socialists did posed many problems for Germany. Many would argue that these problems were catalysts for the fall of the Third Reich, however it can also be argued that without these changes the Reich would never have lasted as long as it did.

The goals of education took a journey through the cocoon spun by the National Socialists. The solid foundation and unblemished reputation enjoyed by the German educational system before Hitler was completely uprooted. Instead of trying to teach children the power of knowledge, the new system taught them just the opposite. "The goal of National Socialism...was that a child's future chances be solely determined by his genetic material and his physical and intellectual capacities" (Schoenbaum 55).

The party claimed that one of the educational system's duties was not to see that the children became highly educated but rather to "awaken a common national spirit" (Hitler 238). That spirit was, of course, honor to their country and their Fuehrer. "The very core of the movement's educational program was the preparation for war..."

(Blackburn 102). Adequate preparation, according to the Nazis, consisted of both physical and psychological preparedness (69). Also, the system was geared toward preparing the individual for mass action, not individual action (116).

Hitler did not stop with mere goals. The changes he made in the classroom and curriculum reflected his view that the German youth were lazy (105). The Nazi message was driven home to even the youngest members of the average German family. In the Kinderfibel of the youngest pupils the message was that "God helps those who helps themselves" (70-1). One example of how this message was driven home is a song sung in a Nazi preschool nursery:

"We love our Fuehrer,  
We honor our Fuehrer,  
We follow our Fuehrer,  
Until men we are;

We believe in our Fuehrer,  
We live for our Fuehrer,  
We die for our Fuehrer,  
Until heroes we are" (Hirsch 63).

Even though these children cannot possibly understand the true meaning of such a song, the Nazis began programming them at an incredibly young age.

The Nazis felt the students needed more preparation for action (Blackburn 94). Of course, this preparation was not intended to benefit the students, but rather the state. Children were relentlessly persuaded to offer their bodies to Germany in an effort to transform history (76). They were taught such a sacrifice was noble. A passage frequently read to the German youth displays this

effort most effectively:

"A Confession of Faith

I believe in the German mother who gave me birth.

I believe in the German peasant who breaks the sod for his  
people.

I believe in the German worker who performs his work for  
his people.

I believe in the dead who gave their lives for their  
people.

For my god is my people.

I believe in Germany" (76-7)!

Such a statement implies that when a boy grows up he might be lucky enough to die for his country. The children were taught that to do so would be one of the best contributions they could make to their country.

Many other changes were made in the classroom that taught students who some "heroes" were. In 1935, pictures were put up depicting four great leaders in German history. They depicted Frederick I, Frederick II, Otto von Bismark, and the fourth face was Adolf Hitler (Schumann 10). Everything became much more serious in the schools. Students were no longer to play while at school (Hirsch 67). Also, students who were not completely obedient were expelled from secondary school (Hovenier 392). Plus, the students were taught that enemies of the state must be separated from everybody else (Schumann 26). They were told that Jews, Gypsies, etc. were the enemies. Thinking these people were enemies made concentration camps, or whatever picture was painted of them, much more acceptable.

Nationalism was an ever-present, ever-driving force. One example

of nationalism is laid-out in the statement that:

"The People's State must realize that the sciences may also be a means of promoting a spirit of pride in the nation. Not only the history of the world but...of civilization as a whole must be taught....An inventor must appear great not only as an inventor but also, and even more so, as a member of the nation. The admiration aroused by the contemplation of a great achievement must be transformed into a feeling of pride and satisfaction that a man of one's own race has been chosen to accomplish it. But out of the abundance of great names in German history the greatest will have to be selected and presented to our young generation in such a way as to become solid pillars of strength and to support the national spirit" (Hitler 239).

This is a very interesting statement considering Hitler, himself supported a mass deintellectualization movement. It was determined that the masses should be taught ideals rather than to apply the properties of chemistry, physics, and mathematics (237). Hitler claimed it to be very dangerous for the masses to have a working knowledge of those properties (237). These students were taught that Jews were reducing the quality of life, yet ten German Jews won Nobel prizes for science in approximately a 25 year period (Shirer 251). No matter how one views that accomplishment, it is highly impressive. It is something the Germans should have been extremely proud of; their own countrymen being so highly recognized by the scientific community.

Hitler viewed, and it was hence taught, that such an accomplishment was something to be embarrassed by because it was done by Jews. It appears from the organization of the educational system that Hitler felt that the masses need not understand chemistry, physics, and math,

just a few, select, die-hard Nazis need explore these subjects. To allow anyone else to do so, it appears would be far too dangerous because, after all, knowledge is a very powerful tool. This tool was one the Nazis had no intention of allowing the masses access to.

One example of anti-intellectualization was the abolition of the special caps that distinguished gymnasium students from regular students (Schumann 18). The gymnasium was a secondary school, a level above the regular students, and it required passage of an entrance examination to attend. In fact, the gymnasium was merely a college prep school. In the past, gymnasium students had worn these caps with pride because of the prestige they displayed. Wearing one of these caps drew attention to one's membership in the intellectual elite. This group was far too dangerous to Hitler's plan for him to allow them to stand out from the rest of society, and the abolition of the caps forced them to blend in with everybody else. There were other changes made to assist in deintellectualization, such as:

"By decree of the Reich's Education Minister, a whole year, the thirteenth grade...was eliminated. Instead of the traditional nine years, only eight years were required to obtain the Abitur diploma. The radical cut of the educational requirement together with the strong emphasis on physical education and the reduction of daily homework in favor of Hitler Youth service have led some historians to the conclusion that conscious and systematic Volksverdummung, 'national stupefaction,' was intended" (20).

There were even changes made in the subjects taught to the students. "Physical education curriculum was changed from two periods per week to five required periods of physical training" (Hovenier



393). In fact, all subjects, in one way or another, were Nazified. Subjects such as art, chemistry, and physics were taught with the purpose of military preparation (Hirsch 68). In math classes, for example, story problems were used to indoctrinate students (Hovenier 394). "Most mathematical problems involved airplanes, bombs, cannons and guns or used historical and racial propaganda" (69).

Other than just molding old subjects to fit their purposes, the Nazis also created new classes that reinforced party ideology. One example of these new classes was racial biology (Mitchell 100-02). This class taught racial purity and was degrading to all races considered inferior. The children were taught in this class that all races other than Aryan should be considered an embarrassment. "One can be proud of one's people only if there is no class left of which one need be ashamed" (Hitler 239). The other races were frequently classified as sub-human and frequently compared to rats. Of course, being that Hitler almost never had an original thought, he and the Nazi party "borrowed" their racial purity ideology. Racial purity can be traced all the way back to literature of the 1850s (Brickman 4). The Nazis are the one society that gave it the most credibility and legitimacy, however.

Beyond the basic public schools, were more advanced and goal-specific schools. These are the gymnasiums and the National Political Training Institutes. The National Political Training Institutes were commonly abbreviated to Napolas (Schoenbaum 265). There was, however, a distinct difference between gymnasiums and Napolas. In 1936, Heissmeyer, a regional Party functionary, declared that the Napolas were different from the gymnasiums in that gymnasiums were designed for "proven Party members with the limited aim of supplying future leadership for the Nazi 'State and movement'" (265).

He also proposed that the Napolas were designed to benefit rural and poor people (Schoenbaum 265). Heissmeyer also stated that one of the target areas for pupil recruitment was any area previously recruited by the Catholic Church (265-6). The logic behind this appeared to be that if the Catholic Church could find potential future leaders in those areas, so could the Nazi party(256).

The Napola schools had a rich history. Several of them used to be Prussian military academies (Schumann 17). Their popularity and the demand for Napolas grew rapidly. "By the end of 1938, the number of Napolas had increased from three to twenty-one, including four in Austria and one in Sudetenland" (Schoenbaum 266). They also were very well respected. "Outside the normal school system was a new system of Nazi schools, variously intended on incubators of future Party, SA, or SS men..." (265). To put it more simply, the Napola were basically the academies for the future elite (265). Every good Nazi family wanted their sons to have the "prestige" of being party members or serving the party in some way. Enrolling their sons in Napolas almost guaranteed them of this so-called privilege.

Originally these schools were run by a combined effort from the SA and the SS and the Ministry of Education, the Hitler Youth, and the Army all played minor parts as well (265). By 1936, however, these Napola schools were under the direct control of the SS (265). Entrance to these schools was usually obtained by a recommendation from a school teacher. "Any Volksschule teacher was eligible, in fact encouraged to recommend candidates in 1937, and Napola staff were authorized to review gymnasium applicants" (265).

The level directly below the university is the gymnasium. One man speaks of his experiences in the gymnasium as follows:

"The next two years, from 1937 to 1939, my life moved on two

tracks: school and Duetsches Jungvolk. By far the most demanding and time-consuming part was school. We attended six days a week, five or six hours per day from 8:00 in the morning to 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon. Three to four hours of homework was the norm, and later there was even more. The curriculum was demanding: German, mathematics, and English were the main subjects, given five hours per week; history, geography, biology, religion, music, art, and physical education were the minor subjects given each two hours per week. Later in the higher grades, Latin, physics, and chemistry were added. Art, music, and especially religion we did not take very seriously" (Schumann 19).

This statement was, of course, before physical education became one of the main subjects utilizing five hours per week rather than just two.

The educational curriculum was different for boys and girls. There were some similarities, however. Both male and female education had a strong emphasis on physical training (Blackburn 107). In fact, boys and girls were taught that they could only play certain roles in the German society. "Boys were to become soldiers and girls the mothers of soldiers" (Hovenier 393). These statements could easily reflect Hitler's views of women and how weak and incompetent they are at anything other than housework and raising children.

For boys, military service was unavoidable in Nazi Germany. Hitler claimed that only "universal military service could save Germany..." (Blackburn 126). This service was considered to be the culmination of the National Socialist male's education (126). This service was so important to the Nazis that they even accommodated it in the school day by rearranging and reducing the requirements of a

normal school day. For boys, it was proposed that shortening the scholastic portion of the school day would allow time for more important and practical skills such as physical training and decision making (Hitler 237).

For girls, the system was almost completely different. "Hitler in Mein Kampf devoted about eight and one-half pages to the education of boys and six lines to the education of girls" (Hovenier 395). It was taught that Nazi women had four responsibilities: "cooking, clothes, children, and church" (Blackburn 106). This was preached to the female students incessantly. After all, if the men were supposed to be out fighting, someone needed to be at home raising the future generation of Nazis. "Girls were required to take domestic science which included all phases of housework, cooking, care of children and sick people, sex education, marketing, nutrition, etc" (Hovenier 395).

There also was ideology concerning pregnancy and giving the Reich more future Nazis. Selective breeding ideology was used to manipulate young girls' minds. "If for a period of only 600 years those individuals would be sterilized..., humanity would not only be delivered from an immense misfortune but also restored to a state of general health..." (Hitler 227). It was also preached through the educational system that women with any defects or illnesses should not bear any children because the defects would surely be passed down (227). If the girls heeded this warning, it is possible that certain genetic imperfections might be eliminated, which is exactly what the Reich wanted. What they did not want was the possibility that new genetic weaknesses and lowered immunities could also be a result of selective breeding.

There were incentives to bearing children for the Reich. One was to simply avoid humiliation. From day one, Hitler preached that it

was reprehensible for a healthy woman to avoid bearing children for the Reich (Hitler 227). Another incentive was the very low cost of having these children. "The state provided well-funded prenatal care, state nurseries and programs for children from 2-6 years" (Hovenier 394). As mothers, these women were encouraged to mimic their Spartan predecessors (Blackburn 106). The mother was expected to "demand that her son seek death in battle rather than to accept the disgrace of retreat..." (106).

There were also carefully constructed ways to keep women from registering with universities. Basically, the government stalled and deterred them. One of the main ways they were stalled was through the "Home Economics Year" (Schoenbaum 188). This program consisted of the girls, instead of advancing in education, taking positions for no pay in the area of domestic service (188). In fact, the employer providing the position only needed to supply the girl with room and board and health insurance (188). The employer was also provided a tax break for creating the position (188).

The "Home Economics Year" program definitely had its intended impact on female enrollment. When these women were through with their service, however, many of them did continue their education by enrolling in the university. "By 1939, enrollment in the university finally increased to 11.2 per cent of the total" (189). Women began studying different fields than before, also. "At the same time, the ratio in pharmacy increased from 28.1 to 38.5 per cent, in physical education from 22.8 to 52.2 per cent and in journalism from 20.7 to 27.9 percent" (189). Apparently the program did not do an effective enough job in deterring these women from enrolling in the university. They came back from their service and enrolled in very unusual courses for women at that time in Nazi Germany.

There were still more changes in the German educational system, however. Most school textbooks at the beginning of Hitler's reign were ideology-free (Schumann 11). However, they did not stay that way for very long. "The Nazi regime gained total control over the preparation of textbooks in 1939" (Hirsch 67). After that, it became a more ever-present tool in the texts. As of 1941, the German School Press was the only legal textbook publishing company (67-8). Of course, the German School Press was controlled by the Nazis. The themes of these textbooks were straight party propaganda. "The theme of competition and struggle was developed further in the books of readings for intermediate age pupils" (Blackburn 71).

Although competition and struggle were the Nazi themes, not all forms of competition were approved of (71-2). One such disapproved form of competition is discussed as follows:

"The virtues of business competition sometimes conflicted with those of National Socialism, and the texts generally depicted the late nineteenth-century industrialization of Germany as the triumph of the forces of mammon. Despite the nation's becoming 'continually richer' during the time of Wilhelm II, the frantic 'dance around the golden calf' robbed individuals of their 'inner worth'" (72).

The "mammon" mentioned in the preceding passage refers to the growth of Jewish power (72). The whole National Socialist view that the industrialization of Germany was a negative event rather than an improvement in the average lifestyle seems somewhat baffling. Granted, the Nazis despised the Jews and did not want to see anything accomplished by the Jews as an improvement in the country, but without this advancement Germany would not have been able to compete with other countries.

The textbooks distributed by the Nazis told interesting stories while depicting either the perfect Nazi or misrepresenting the historical importance of certain events. Either method improved on the Nazi image and influenced children to act as the characters did or admire the war heroes depicted. One book in particular, Guck in die Welt depicted a young boy named Werner. Werner was a boy who:

"...enjoys gymnastics because he is so good at it...Once he was first in his row. The instructor called: 'attention, ready, go!' Werner had not been so attentive. Much too late he dashed off. Then Werner's row lost. The next time Werner made everything right. He ran energetically and finished much before the others" (Blackburn 71).

Werner's story teaches the students to always be ready for action and to stay focused. It also shows the emphasis placed on competition.

Another example of propaganda used in textbooks is a particular primer. The primer was straight propaganda. It portrayed Hitler as the savior of Germany. "In this story, Hitler saved starving children by employing their fathers and providing Germany with a new highway system" (Schumann 11-12). The highway system mentioned was the Autobahn. The obvious message in this primer was that Hitler would save Germany and that he cared about the welfare of children. It is true that he cared about the welfare of children, however, his reasoning behind this facade of a caring Fuehrer was that in a few years these children would be old enough to fight for and bear children for the Reich.

History textbooks provide the most evidence of Nazi slanting of historical events. Hitler's service to his country in World War I was highly emphasized in history textbooks (Blackburn 98). They portrayed him as a national hero (98). This was only after he seized power that

he received the hero status from the texts. History textbooks portrayed the German over-all feelings of self-pity and hope at the conclusion of World War I (Blackburn 99). Dietrich Klagges was one of the main Nazi history textbook writers (38). Klagges felt history's meaning consisted of five principles:

- "1. Life is struggle.
2. The individual is nothing without the Fuehrer.
3. The folk is the future.
4. Compatriots are comrades of fate.
5. The blood is the most valuable inheritance" (38).

These principles were implicitly Nazi in orientation. The textbooks also treated Hitler's seizure of power as "the greatest event in history" (85).

In an effort to idealize the soldiers of the past, "the Nazis institutionalized the model of the political fighter and promoted self-sacrifice and hardness in the schools" (115). The Nazis even used history textbooks to propagate their hatred of Jews. "The history texts hammered out the theme that the Jews opposed such virtues as 'loyalty, manliness, sense of sacrifice, ...'" (143). The texts were not the only medium used to transmit their distorted historical recollections. "History instructors were told to stress the 'historical mission of the Fuehrer Adolf Hitler' and to weld a 'normative affective emotional bond' between their pupils and the charismatic Fuehrer" (75).

History teachers were not the only teachers influenced by the Reich. Hitler's complete overhaul of the educational system could be a mere manifestation of his mistrust of teachers. Possibly he just did not trust them with his country's future leaders. In fact, Hitler often accused teachers of being incapable at success in any other



field (Blackburn 25). He believed that the instructors were jealous of the bright students and reacted negatively towards them (25). His instructions were quite clear. "Nothing short of a complete transformation of academic life could banish the nonsense that impeded effective instruction" (25). Hitler appeared to seek revenge against his old teachers who did not recognize his self-proclaimed talents (105).

There were many expectations for Nazi teachers. "The ideal National Socialist teacher was not a knowledgemonger concerned solely with the intellectual development of pupils; the foremost requirement was his ability to develop personality" (94). At the time, Nazi teachers did not receive extensive training (94). The university professors, however, were required to have specialized knowledge (94). Soon, even the teachers were forced into party membership. "In the winter of 1933, teachers of 'non-Aryan' or Jewish descent were relieved of their positions (Hirsch 66). Hitler even devised a method for himself and the Nazi party to be thought of at the beginning and ending of the school day. Teachers were required to begin and end each class with "Heil Hitler" (Hovenier 393). In fact, the Nazi party's presence was unavoidable.

Teacher membership in the party consisted of three requirements. The first being that the teachers were indoctrinated by the National Socialist Teachers Union (Blackburn 94). The second was that all teachers in the Reich were required to take an oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler (Shirer 249). Third was that regular physical training was required for all teachers below age 50 (Hovenier 393). These requirements were enforced and met swiftly. "By 1937, 97 percent of all teachers belonged to the National Socialist Teachers Union..." (Hirsch 66-7). "By 1938, over 65 percent of all teachers had been to

compulsory indoctrination camps which consisted of physical training" (Hovenier 393). The other 35 percent are a bit of a mystery regarding why they did not attend the camps yet.

The Nazi educators were also expected to monitor their classes and pluck-out those considered impure (Blackburn 117). The university professors were not left-out when it came to party membership. A National Socialist Association of University Lecturers was even created to ensure the loyalty of the university professors (Shirer 249). It makes complete sense to want their loyalty, however, considering they were the ones instructing the brightest of the bright Nazi young adults. Since university attendance was a privilege in Nazi Germany, those students were more likely to be selected for party leadership positions in the future. A less than loyal professor could potentially undo everything the Reich had worked so hard to accomplish with these young people.

In fact, the party was very careful about to whom they issued teaching licenses. Teaching licenses were issued only after the candidates were found to have strong Nazi political views (249). The party also intervened in the teachers' personal lives by forbidding certain activities. One such activity is reserve service. In an effort to keep everything uniform, the government refused to allow distinctions between teachers who were also members of the reserves. In fact, the government even threatened to relinquish all of them from their teaching duties if they also had a reserve commission (Schoenbaum 60). Even what they taught was dictated. Some of the requirements of teaching certain subjects were limited to allow the teachers more time to spend instructing students in National Socialist philosophy (Blackburn 94).

Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist party completely

transformed the German educational system into a fine-tuned, Nazi-producing machine. Instead of focusing on producing well-developed minds, they focused on producing soldiers ready to die for their country. For years young, innocent minds were drilled with Nazi propaganda disguised as knowledge. The students are the true victims of the educational system in Nazi Germany. Many of these people are still alive and still trying to either forget or replace with truth what they were taught by the Nazis. These people were robbed of their youth and brainwashed to believe wholeheartedly the propaganda of a political party doomed to fail.

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