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BACKGROUND CASE NOTE

GERMANY'S POST-1945 AND POST-1989 EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Sonja Grimm
University of Konstanz

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The re-education of the German people overseen by the victorious Allied powers, the inclusion of the causes and consequences of totalitarianism in school curricula and a comprehensive policy of ensuring that the Nazi period remained firmly in the German collective memory were the elements that formed the basis of a viable liberal-democratic post-war consensus in West Germany. Democratic opinions and values progressively took the place of the racist, chauvinistic ideology of the National Socialists, which had proclaimed the superiority of the “master race” and ultimately led to the outbreak of the Second World War. The same means were also deployed politically to differentiate the two German states established in 1949 – the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – in an expression of the division of the country during the Cold War (Anweiler et al. 1992: 63, 440; Füssel 1994: 335).

The most extensive re-education measures were implemented under the American occupation. The Office of Military Government for Germany US (OMGUS), under the US zone's Military Governor General Lucius D. Clay, allocated \$1.03 million to the education program in the period to 1948, while the amount increased to \$48 million between 1949 and 1952 under the Office of the High Commissioner US, Germany (HICOG). In addition, by 1949 rehabilitation programs were already being undertaken in West Germany by more than 50 private American organizations, including the American Council on Education, the labor unions AFL and CIO, the League of Women Voters, and the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations (Rupieper 1996: 200).

At first it was the media that were the principal target of the Allied re-education policy, as they were best placed to disseminate the new ideas quickly (Merritt 1995: 295-300). During the occupation, between 1945 and 1949, the Western Allies resorted to a strict licensing system in order to establish a free press independent of the state. To obtain a license, private publishers had to prove that they had unequivocally opposed the old regime or had at least not supported it (Eschenburg 1983: 137-149). The reports in the licensed newspapers, on the state broadcasting media and in cinema newsreels were controlled by a system of censorship. However, an over-zealous desire to comply on behalf of the Germans themselves often resulted in stricter self-censorship than anything intended by the Western Allies (Eschenburg 1983: 147). In the Soviet zone of occupation, licenses to publish daily newspapers were granted exclusively to political parties and mass organizations. The allocation of paper to publishers was controlled so as to ensure the dominance of the

communist parties (the KPD, or German Communist Party, and the SED, or Socialist Unity Party) (Benz 2009: 148).

The Allied re-education policy also targeted schools, universities and adult education. Primary schools in all the occupation zones were re-opened as early as autumn 1945. However, the thorough program of teacher denazification resulted in an acute shortage of teachers. The recruitment of democratically inclined teachers proved difficult in the Western zones especially in the first two years of the occupation (Bungenstab 1970: 70-73). Furthermore, there were virtually no textbooks available that did *not* glorify National Socialism and militarism. Under the “emergency textbook” program, the military administrators in the Western zones therefore resorted to books dating from the time of the Weimar Republic (Bungenstab 1970: 100-104). This makeshift solution was eventually superseded by newly compiled textbooks permeated by liberal ideas, which were augmented by the publications of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [Federal Agency for Civic Education], founded in 1952 (Fröhlich 2009: 109).

Before the schools were re-opened, all teachers in the three zones occupied by the Western Allies underwent an emergency reorientation program, some of which were better coordinated than others. In these programs, “education teams” sought to inculcate the new democratic ideas by means of lectures and crash courses. Re-education also constituted an important part of teacher training courses, which resumed in 1946. To be accepted onto the courses, students had to espouse democracy in word and deed (Bungenstab 1970: 79-82). In order to enable trainee teachers to experience democracy firsthand and familiarize themselves with the new educational methods, the US authorities introduced a German-American exchange program specifically for students in the field of education (Bungenstab 1970: 84). The program was subsequently extended to students of all disciplines.

The Western Allies did not succeed in implementing a comprehensive education reform during the occupation or in unifying the structure of the school system in West Germany. Their failure to do so was due to the resistance of the governments of the individual *Länder*. The introduction of *Gesamtschulen* [comprehensive schools] called for by the American military administration was vehemently rejected principally by the *Gymnasien* [high schools] and church schools (Bungenstab 1970: 93). The federal, *Land*-based political system that the Western Allies were seeking to establish resulted in a diverse range of school types within the education sector. The progressive schools policy of Hesse, which favored a differentiated style of comprehensive school (*Einheitsschule*) with six years of primary education contrasted starkly with the reactionary hostility to reform that prevailed in Bavaria, where they insisted

on the four-year primary school model and the wholesale retention of the elitist secondary school system (Benz 2009: 138-139; Tent 1982: 111). The content of school curricula and the number of hours devoted to each subject differed accordingly. In 1955, the *Länder* at least agreed on a tripartite secondary-school structure, in which four years of compulsory primary schooling were followed by attendance either at a *Hauptschule* (five additional years), a *Realschule* (six additional years) or a *Gymnasium* (nine additional years), with these three types of schools existing in parallel (Baumert et al. 2003: 55).

Notwithstanding their structural differences, however, the *Länder* of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) were unanimous on one point: as early as 1950, the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* determined in the “Principles of civic education in schools” that schools must not be appropriated by any single ideology, but that information about the state should be imparted to pupils, in order that they might play an active role as citizens (Anweiler et al. 1992: 380). In 1962, these principles were supplemented by the “Guidelines on the treatment of totalitarianism in teaching”, in which confronting the issue of totalitarianism was declared to be an important part of civic education. Teachers working in all the different kinds of schools were urged “... to familiarize pupils with the characteristics of totalitarianism and the main features of Bolshevism and Nazism as the two most important totalitarian systems of the twentieth century” (Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder [Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder*] 1962: 2-4).

The public debate on this resolution in turn became an important lesson in “civic education” for the people of West Germany. From this point on, not a single pupil would leave school without being confronted at least once, and often several times, with the subject of National Socialism and the Holocaust. Many of the *Länder* recommended that pupils should visit at least one memorial to the victims of the Holocaust during their time at school (Ehmann 2000: 176). When the Social Democratic/Free Democratic coalition government led by Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt (1969-1974) came to power, if not before, active confrontation of the past was complemented by participative teaching methods and democratic forms of organization of teaching and schools. In this way, a lack of understanding of democracy was addressed through practical experience of democracy in action (Ehmann 2000: 184).

In the Soviet zone of occupation, a single school system with standard structures and teaching materials was imposed from the spring of 1946. The standard model introduced by the Soviet military administration comprised eight years of primary schooling followed by

four years at secondary school or three years at a vocational school. The aim of the reform was to foster the children of industrial and agricultural workers, while abolishing the privileges of the middle classes (Benz 2009: 136; Füssel 1994: 340). The one-sided emphasis on teaching Marxist-Leninist ideology resulted in a significant deterioration of the quality of teaching (Füssel 1994: 342). The ideologization of the education system in the interests of the official communist regime continued until the collapse of the GDR, although it was tacitly opposed by the majority of the population (Anweiler et al. 1992: 378-379).

The reopening of the universities was confronted with similar problems to those encountered in the school system: staff and course content had to be vetted and administrations rebuilt. Professors who had been discriminated against by the Nazis were recalled to their posts. On the whole, however, the Allied military administrators adopted a predominantly hands-off approach to the reform of tertiary education. Regulatory powers were largely handed over to university principals, and the chance to undertake a fundamental reform of study courses went begging. On many campuses in the western zones, structures dating from the Weimar Republic were brought back in, while the concept of the workers' and peasants' faculty was imported into the Soviet occupation zone (Bungenstab 1970: 125; Stallmann 1981). The latter enabled skilled workers to gain access to higher education without taking the *Abitur* examination (Baumert et al. 2003: 60).

Overall, although the Western Allies' re-education program in the media and education system undoubtedly laid the foundations for the long-term democratization of West German society, the short- to medium-term outcomes were less effective than had been hoped. There is a consensus among present-day commentators on this point (Bungenstab 1970; Herz 1982: 29-35; Lange-Quassowski 1982: 99-101; Piel 1996). In their study *The Civic Culture*, first published in 1963, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba show that although the people of post-war Germany did regularly exercise their right to vote, their attitude towards politics was otherwise rather passive and they tended to place their trust in the competence and efficiency of the administration (Almond/Verba 1989: 312). Germans were less interested in politics than in outcomes, i.e. in the extent to which their needs were met (Almond/Verba 1989: 363; see also Rupieper 1996: 211).

Compared with the licensing of the media and the re-education measures, far more effective results were achieved through the early involvement of German civil service personnel in autonomous municipal administrations (Benz 1981), the clever drafting of the Federal Republic's constitution (known as the Basic Law) based on liberal-democratic principles and the comprehensive protection of fundamental and civic rights (Habermas 1992),

the incorporation of West Germany into the Western alliance system (Jarausch 2004: 134-135) and the contrast between the undesirable model presented by the gradual Sovietization of the GDR and the positive example of the “American way of life”, which acted as an inspiration to the younger generation in particular (Jarausch 2004: 135). During the first two post-war decades, these factors indirectly but effectively favored the development of shared basic liberal convictions in West German society. Criticism of America’s policy on Vietnam, dissent over reform of the tertiary education system and conflict with the parental generation that had kept silent for years about its own role in the rise of Hitler and the Nazi regime ultimately culminated in the strikes and protests of the “Generation of ’68” (Frei 2008; Wehler 2008: 310-315). These symbolized the social transformation that had taken place in the course of the 1950s and early 1960s.

The confrontation of Germany’s authoritarian past was subsequently continued through a wide-ranging policy of remembrance both within and outside educational institutions. The former concentration camps are now open to the public as information centers and meeting places. Many locations have memorials to the victims of the Holocaust, such as the prominently sited Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, inaugurated in 2005. The subject of National Socialism features regularly in the media, in both documentaries and fictional accounts, especially on important anniversaries such as *Kristallnacht* – the Night of Broken Glass – on 9 November, the end of the war on 8 May or the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp on 27 January. In addition, large-scale public debates have contributed to the process of coming to terms with the past. Special mention in this regard should be made of the “historians’ dispute” about the manner in which Germany should take responsibility for the past (Habermas 1987; Nolte 1987), and the discussion of Germany’s war guilt that followed the speech delivered by Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker on 8 May 1985, the fortieth anniversary of the German surrender (Pearce 2008).

The collapse of the socialist-communist GDR in 1989 followed by German reunification in 1990 highlighted the enormous structural, political, economic and social differences between the two Germanies. In the east, one result was the need for fundamental reform of the school system. In essence, the reform involved introducing the key features of the Federal Republic’s system, albeit adapted to suit the specific circumstances prevailing in the GDR. Thus, instead of the tripartite secondary education structure found in the west, the east has a two-track structure, comprising the *Gymnasium* (12 school years in the GDR rather than 13) and the newly introduced *Regelschule* (10 school years), which combines *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* under one roof. This has enabled the new Federal *Länder* in the east to respond

flexibly to changed educational demands (Baumert et al. 2003: 71). Marxist-Leninist content has been removed from school curricula and university courses and replaced by the values of liberal democracy. The process of coming to terms with the socialist dictatorship is ongoing.

Reunification did not give rise to any specific educational reforms in the western part of Germany. It was only Germany's poor showing in the Programme for International Student Assessment (the PISA study) in 2000 and 2003 that kick-started a wide-ranging debate on the competitiveness of the German school system and the need for across-the-board modernization. Serious infrastructure problems can be expected in the future not only as a result of east-west migration of families and well-educated young women, but also as a consequence of the decline of approximately 50% in annual birth rates in the five eastern *Länder* (Baumert et al. 2003: 66). International observers consider that reforms are needed with regard to the integration of immigrant children and the early selection that occurs after the fourth school year, which places children from educationally deprived backgrounds at a disadvantage.

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