

THE NAZIS AND YOUTH

1. SCHOOLS¹

Position in 1933

The teaching profession in both schools and universities tended to be very right wing, as were also university students. The whole education system tended to train children to be very nationalistic, anti-Semitic and suspicious of Weimar democracy. (This was one of the many results of the unfinished revolution.) In addition Weimar did not pay teachers very well, and their pay was cut still further in the Depression, so teachers were very discontented. The Nazis promised to end this and make education the foundation of the new Reich. In consequence they received a high level of support from the teaching profession, and large numbers of Nazis were teachers.

Nazi Attitudes



The Nazis believed that it was absolutely necessary to capture youth, as the way of thinking of the adults was probably too fixed. Hitler repeatedly said that the young would secure the future for his new Germany. The new government acted quickly to get control of education.

However, they did not see teachers as central to their aims. Nazi thinking was anti-intellectual. They believed that 'we think with our blood', that experience was worth more than study and willpower worth more than knowledge. Senior Nazis repeatedly jeered at teachers. Hitler thought it would really be better to use retired army sergeants. Nazi doctrine also emphasised the 'Volksgemeinschaft', i.e. that every 'folk comrade' was equal and class differences should be abolished. They hoped that the new approach to education would achieve this.

National reorganisation

As part of the 'Gleichschaltung' the states gradually lost control of education. In February 1933 a leading Nazi, Bernhard Rust, was made Minister for Culture for Prussia and immediately started to remodel the education service on Nazi lines. In May 1934 he was made head of the new Ministry for Science and Education of the Reich.

¹ German education before 1933

- Education was divided into *elementary*, which ended with the school-leaving age of 14, and '*high schools*' of various kinds which could take you up to *university* (at 18). High schools taught you to examinations which were a bit like our GCSE and A-level. The second, which was the university entrance qualification, was the Abitur.
- Under Weimar everyone who passed the Abitur had the right to go to university, and university places expanded at about 10% per year.
- Parents had to pay fees in state schools. They were about 200-300RM per year, when an elementary school teacher would have a starting salary of 2000RM, a skilled farm worker or an unskilled industrial worker about 1200RM. This puts them at about £4000 a year by modern standards, which obviously means that not many working-class families could put their children through secondary education and get them into university. In fact only about 3.5% of university students were working class.

Nazi Actions

The teachers

- The profession was immediately purged of unsuitable individuals under the Civil Service Law of April 1933. About 500 teachers were purged in Prussia, for example: more senior teachers than junior, and about twice as many female teachers as male. This was not a high percentage (of men, anyway), because teachers
- were mostly pro-Nazi anyway and had been attracted by Nazi promises to pay them better;
- changed sides rapidly: 'What is the shortest measurable unit of time? The time it takes for a primary-school teacher to change political allegiance'.
- The selection and training of teachers were brought under control:
- 60% of teachers in Colleges of Education were purged
- all teachers wanting to be appointed or promoted were vetted by the NS Teachers' League (NSLB)
- teachers were made to go on special indoctrination camps where they did PT and were lectured at.
- The 'leader principle' was introduced into schools during 1933 and 1934, which meant teaching staff lost any right to be consulted on policy. Head teachers made all the decisions.

The students

The Nazis simplified the secondary school system. There were three types of education in high (secondary) schools:

- *Boys* could choose between science, modern languages or classics, all of which could lead on to university.
- *Girls* could choose between modern languages or home economics. Home economics led to nothing but the 'Pudding Matric', which did not lead to university.
- They also reformed admission to higher education:
- The right to go to university if you passed the Abitur was removed, and fewer people went to university.
- The proportion of girls going to university was limited to 10%.

Curriculum (a) Standard Schools

- Progress in changing the curriculum was slow, but in 1933 many of the textbooks used in Weimar were pulped. They were not replaced until many years later.
- Some subjects changed radically, especially German, history and biology, which were all remodelled to suit Nazi doctrine. Religious education was at first emphasised but later phased out. PE became much more important, increasing from 2 periods a week to 5, and PE teachers became very important figures in schools – almost like unofficial deputy heads. Boxing was compulsory for boys in secondary schools.
- Children were taught that they had a duty to choose healthy marriage partners and have lots of children, but sex education was banned.
- Children were sent to work on farms for a number of weeks per year (except in the examination year) and had to do a 'land year' after they left school at 14.

Curriculum (b) The new Nazi élite schools

- The Nazis intended to train a new élite to rule their new empire. For this purpose a variety of new kinds of school was created.



Figure 1: A classroom chart entitled "German Youth, Jewish Youth," published in a textbook on heredity, genealogy, and racial studies. Alfred Vogel, *Erblehre, Abstammungs, und Rassenkunde in bildlicher Darstellung* (Stuttgart, 1938)

1. The National Political Education Institutions (Napolas)

These were created in 1933. They were boarding schools, and pupils (who were nearly all boys) were accepted only if they had good recommendations from their local Party. Education was at secondary level but the academic content was low because pupils spent a great deal of time on PE and military training. Most Napola graduates went into the armed forces. Fees were kept low.

2. The Adolf Hitler schools

Set up in 1937 the AHS were run by the Hitler Youth, and pupils were selected at 12 years old by their local DJ (German Young Folk) branch. Again the education offered concentrated heavily on indoctrination and physical training, with the result that the academic level was low.

3. The Castles of the Order (Ordensburgen)

These were four super-luxury institutions where young men were trained to be Nazi leaders. They had magnificent facilities (one had the biggest gym in the world) and offered an extremely hard training, including war games with live ammunition where you got run over by real tanks. Although the facilities were good students were treated very harshly (e.g. having to run for miles before breakfast to bathe in an icy stream). You were intended to get into one of these institutions by finishing in an AHS (at 18) then doing two and a half years of labour service, then serving in some other job for four years. In fact most of the students were ex-full-time Nazi officials. Not many of them (about one in ten) had passed the Abitur.

Assessment

- Education was a policy vacuum, because the top leadership did not take it seriously. Bernhard Rust was weak and did not fight off competition to make decisions: accordingly almost everyone poked his finger into education – the DAF, the Hitler Youth, Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry, Hess and so on. Consequently policy moved very slowly, frequently contradicted itself and often did U-turns. The new élite schools were not controlled by the Ministry of Education.
- For various reasons (low status and pay, constant harassment, better jobs available in the army or civil service) the number of teachers declined and not enough young people wanted to enter the teaching service. By 1938 there were 17000 fewer elementary teachers than there had been under Weimar. The government responded by
 - reducing the standards for entry
 - employing unqualified teaching assistants.
- Fewer students got through academic education: by 1939 the grammar-school population was reduced by 20%. Girls decreased in number even more (from 35% of the grammar school population to 30%).
- The standards they reached were lower. Universities started to send first-year undergraduates back to sixth forms for refresher courses. Secondary schools complained that they could not get students through their syllabuses because they had to spend time teaching them things they had failed to learn in elementary schools. The Army complained that young men applying for commissions 'display a simply inconceivable lack of general knowledge'.
- The education given in the new special Nazi schools was described as 'entirely inappropriate for the education of a modern élite'.
- The retention of school fees meant that although fewer children went to high schools and university, they were still middle and upper class. Exactly the same proportion of working-class children went to university at the end of the 1930s as did at the beginning (3.5%). The Nazis' claims to eliminate class differences were to this extent a failure.

Conclusion

- Generally, there was increasing anxiety about low academic levels, which became sharper after war broke out. The Nazi emphasis on physical training and practical experience over academic

- study did not turn out to be a good way of educating the people who were going to rule the new German empire or run the enormous industrial and military system which was needed to win it.
- The system did give opportunities to some students who did not come from the middle or upper classes. Thirteen per cent of students in Ordensburgen were working class, for example (twice the level for grammar schools). A new proposal to prepare children without the Abitur for training as teachers would have opened up a career in teaching to other classes. But these improvements (if they were improvements) were marginal. On the whole, Germany remained middle class.
 - The down-grading of the teaching profession made it very difficult for Germany to recover from the downturn in educational achievement.
 - But towards the end of the Third Reich the system did begin to recover, as more and more emphasis was placed on academic achievement.

2. UNIVERSITIES

Position in 1933

German universities, even more than German schools, were already very right-wing before 1933. In March 1933 300 university professors signed an appeal to the German people to vote Nazi. So were university students. In 1931 there were antisemitic riots in universities all across Germany. By that time 60% of university students were members of the Nazi Students' League.

Nazi Attitudes

The Nazi Party 'tapped a strong vein of idealism' with its emphasis on strong nationalism and volkisch equality. It also offered university students the prospect of a good career, which they did not have during the Depression.

Nazi policy, however, was as hostile to universities as it was to schools. 'From now on it is not up to you to decide where something is true, but whether it is in the interests of the National Socialist Revolution' said the leader of the National Socialist Teachers' League, speaking to Munich professors in 1933. 'You old men with beards and gold-rimmed glasses and scientific faces are really worth next to nothing' as Julius Streicher remarked to a university audience in 1935.

Nazi Actions

Teachers

- Like school teachers, university teachers were purged. Students boycotted some teachers immediately Hitler became Chancellor. Subsequently significant numbers of university teachers were sacked (15%, about one-third on racial grounds, half on political). Twenty Nobel Prize winners were included. A particularly high proportion of physics lecturers went, including Einstein. As a result Germany 'lost the world leadership in natural science which she had previously enjoyed' (and possibly lost the war?).
- Like school teachers, university teachers were vetted by the NS Lecturer's League (NS Dozentenbund: NSD). Ultimate control of appointments and promotions lay with the Ministry of Education.
- Like school teachers, they had to go on compulsory indoctrination camps, run by the SA.
- The leadership principle was established in each university.

Students

- The government established control over selection for university by abolishing the automatic right to university entrance for holders of the Abitur. A quota was established for each state, which reduced the number accepted and gave the states power to select according to Nazi criteria (e.g. Jewish students were immediately reduced to 1.5%).
- All HE students had to be members of the DS (Deutsche Studentenschaft), the Nazi Students' League.

- All students had to undertake compulsory PT, military training and indoctrination. They all had to do four months of Labour Service (where they were made to mix with other sections of the population) and two months in an SA camp, with 3 hours a week of compulsory sport.
- They were given the Ten Laws for German Students' (1934: see Noakes & Pridham vol II, p 442).

Curriculum

- New courses were set up in race, eugenics, and military studies.
- There was some pressure on academics to conform to Nazi ideology (including a very nasty row about 'German physics'). But generally this was not pushed very far, because Nazi ideology was so vague that it was easy to avoid making detailed alterations in university courses (except for the above, and pre-history).
- Some university lecturers left the country or lost their jobs. But on the whole the universities co-operated quite well (e.g. senior staff in departments of medicine did not protest against the compulsory sterilisation and euthanasia programmes).

Assessment

- By 1939 the number of students entering university had declined by nearly 60%.
- Some universities had reduced the standard required for degree examinations, mainly because the amount of drill and time off for camps, etc reduced the amount of time and effort spent on studying.
- Low pay, low status and political insecurity had led to a shortage of applicants for teaching jobs in universities.
- As with the schools, the tide had already begun to turn by the end of the Nazi regime, with increasing emphasis on high academic standards. But serious damage had been done.

3. YOUTH

Position in 1933

German children joined very large numbers of youth organisations. Many of them were organised by adults like the Church youth clubs. The Nazi Party had its own youth organisation, the Hitler Youth (HJ: Hitler Jugend). This was rather small (it only included 1% of all children in youth clubs). However there was an important 'free' youth movement, organised by the youth themselves. This had a long tradition in Germany, descending from the 'Wild Birds' (Wandervögel) of the Kaiser's empire. It involved hiking, camping, community singalongs, and a strong dislike of contemporary (adult) politics.

Nazi Attitudes

"What we look for in our German youth is different from what people wanted in the past. In our eyes the German youth of the future must be slim and slender, swift as the greyhound, tough as leather and hard as Krupp steel. We must educate a new type of man ..."

- This was Hitler's view of youth. He (and other Nazi leaders) placed a higher value on what children *did* than on what they *studied*. Consequently the youth service was probably seen as at least as important as schools (and possibly more so).

The Nazis wanted to offer youth a vital part in the new Germany, and they wanted them to be enthusiastic, since they feared their parents would not be. To do this they tried to liberate youth from their parents, very much in the 'Wild Birds' tradition. First, as usual, they needed to get control.

Nazi Actions

- In July 1933 Baldur von Schirach, leader of the HJ, was appointed Reich Youth Leader and told to co-ordinate all youth organisations (except the Catholic Church's youth clubs, which had to be left alone for the time being as promised by Hitler in the Concordat).
- By the end of 1933 the HJ had absorbed all the non-Catholic youth organisations. Membership was not compulsory but heavier and heavier pressure was put on children and parents (teachers were

encouraged to help in this). Eventually membership of the HJ was made compulsory by a law of March 1939 (which also brought an end to the independence of the Catholic groups).

Age	Boys	Girls
6-10	The Little Fellows	
10-14	The Young Folk Deutscher Jungvolk (called 'Pimpfen') (DJ)	Young girls League Jungmädelsbund (young girls' league) (JM)
14-18	Hitler Youth Hitler Jugend (HJ)	League of German Maidens² Bund Deutscher Mädel (league of German maidens) (BDM)



Youth leaders

The principle adopted by the Nazis was 'youth must lead youth' – they were hoping to copy the popularity of the 'free' youth organisations they had absorbed – and this meant that leaders were selected from among the members (and often were not much older than the children they led). This led to many jokes, such as the one about the policeman who found a ten-year-old sobbing in the street. Asked what was the matter the child said 'I'm lost'. The policeman asked him where his home was. The child replied 'I don't know, I've just been on a leadership conference'.

The curriculum

This was typical Nazi stuff. There was a lot of singing, marching, camping and adventure, with all sorts of leisure activities and music. There was also a great deal of drill and practice with lethal weapons. (A Pimpf was presented with a dagger when first joining, and they progressed through air rifles and small-bore rifles to machine guns.) Indoctrination was constant with endless references to German heroes and the importance of bravery and self-sacrifice. HJ members were also required to work together with their comrades – competition was encouraged but not between individuals; team sports were encouraged, individual skills less so, and they were made to pool their lunch boxes so everyone could have a share. There was a strong emphasis on the 'Volk' – all children were equal, social classes had been abolished and middle-class children mixed with others. Some children saw the HJ as a route to power – a career in the new German empire which was expected to be set up (I want to be a Gauleiter in Africa). And in fact the government did see successful graduates of the HJ as candidates for the new élite (e.g. it accepted them for the special Nazi schools). Especially if you were not very successful academically this would be seen as a good alternative to a traditional career path. All HJ members swore an oath to the Führer.

Assessment

This is very difficult to assess, and very mixed.

Good points

² And also the Glaube und Schönheit (faith and beauty) organisation for girls from 17 to 21.

- Many children loved the HJ (probably the younger, the more likely to be enthusiastic) and some of the activities they arranged would be regarded as excellent today. Similarly on the face of it there is no harm in training children in leadership, responsibility to their fellows and co-operation.
- Many were genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of abolishing class and treating all children equally.
- The HJ undoubtedly gave many children (and probably especially teenagers) some feeling of independence from the authority of their parents.
- This was one of the few ways in which girls could take up responsible positions and learn leadership.

Problems

- Some children (or more likely, teenagers) were put off by the endless drill and barked orders, the emphasis on immediate obedience and the insistence on Nazi doctrines.
- There was some bullying of middle-class children at first, as farmers' and workers' children took seriously the regime's statement that now everyone was equal. (However this may have decreased during the later years as middle-class children started to occupy all the leader positions.)
- The HJ was segregated by sex (and sexually repressive).
- Generally, the whole system seems to have worked better at the beginning than towards the end (the late 1930s and the war years).
- Juvenile crime dropped at the beginning (21,500 in 1932, only 16,000 in 1933) but then rose again. In the years 1937-42 the proportion of crimes committed by juveniles went up by 200%.
- As the HJ became bigger (it was the biggest youth organisation in history by 1939) and you were compelled to join, it lost any atmosphere of freedom and became rigid and institutionalised.
- As unemployment dropped and the government appointed more and more officials and army officers more and more of the best youth leaders got other jobs and were replaced by inferior quality people.
- And some people who had been leaders before 1933 either got too old or, in some cases, were purged for being insufficiently Nazi.
- The effect of the youth service on schools was damaging.
 - There was a strong anti-intellectual atmosphere to the training, which came all the way down from the top (Baldur von Schirach, and also Hitler). In spite of occasional HJ protestations otherwise, this caused many HJ members to acquire a contempt for school, and teachers. Especially children who were leaders were often very difficult to manage in school, and some had to be given extra lessons to catch up.
 - HJ activities also caused children to be tired in lessons, or simply interrupted schooling to a damaging extent
- Indoctrination in the HJ often caused friction within families, as it meant children were more enthusiastically Nazi than some parents. Some parents also disapproved of the HJ (especially parents of girls, as the BDM was suspected of encouraging sexual laxity).



Rebellion

The same tendencies which produced the Wandervögel were bound to reappear. Nazism, though it claimed to appeal to youth (and genuinely did put young people forward before the old) was actually prudish and authoritarian, just the qualities likely to alienate teenagers. The first generation of youth after 1933 probably took to the HJ because it seemed like rebellion; but with the decline in quality of leadership and growth in rigidity during the late 30s this was less so. The result was that by the end of the 1930s thousands of young

people were breaking away and setting up their own youth gangs – the new Wandervögel. The outbreak of war increased this tendency.

The whole movement came to be called the 'Edelweiss Pirates', though individual gangs had their own names. The members of these 'free' youth groups tended to be over 14, i.e. have left school and have jobs (and therefore some money). They spent weekends and longer holidays away, on camping trips or hiking to further destinations. The gangs usually included both boys and girls, which was an improvement on the HJ, and sexual experimentation was not frowned on. They made their own rules. There was a strong musical element (as there was in the HJ) but they often sang songs disapproved of by the regime (which had rather fixed ideas about the sort of music – volkisch – they wanted children to play) or used songs with changed words.

When they were not away on trips they went around together and sometimes engaged in political activity. At worst this involved attacking HJ patrols. They might also (after the war broke out) get hold of Allied propaganda leaflets and push them through doors. In a few cases they were contacted by the Communist underground. In any case the whole atmosphere of the Edelweiss Pirates was anti-authority and anti-government.

The 'Swing Youth'

Some older teenagers took to English or American music – jazz, or fashionable Western dances disapproved of by the regime: 'swing' or 'jitterbugging'. Government reports on such groups pictured them as criminal types (they were photographed for race textbooks looking very evil). They were accused of promiscuity including group sex, but basically committed the sin of enjoying themselves in ways not organised by the Party, and in ways which were not exclusively German. The government used the Gestapo to track down rebellious youth groups. In 1944 twelve Edelweiss Pirates were hanged publicly in Cologne.



Tasks

Use this pack to complete your worksheet on "Youth in Nazi Germany" and use it to answer the following question:

"With what degree of success did the Nazis control women and young people between 1933 and 1945?"

Credits

The text of this pack is taken from the excellent website

<http://www.edifice.co.uk/Germany%20home%20page.htm>