

# Rebuilding the German Educational System

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THE RE-EDUCATION of the people is the major task in Germany today. This involves the educational reorientation of German youth and teachers. The Potsdam Agreement states, "German education shall be so controlled as to eliminate completely Nazi and militarist doctrines and to make possible the successful development of democratic ideas." America's stake in German education, then, in a broad sense, is the protection of democracy from those forces that threaten the rights of man; and calls for a new, peaceloving, democratic nation in Germany. This aim affects the reform of the educational program on all levels.

At the time U.S. Occupation Authorities took control in the U.S. Zone of Germany the educational program and all means for carrying on the schools had disintegrated. One-fifth of all school rooms had been destroyed; another one-fifth had been badly damaged. The teaching personnel had to be screened to eliminate active Nazis. Libraries and textbooks had to be cleared of writings aimed at upholding and inculcating the Nazi ideology. Universities and teachers colleges were unable to open because of the lack of adequate buildings, library facilities, and

teaching personnel. And children were roaming the streets.

## A Drastic Teacher Shortage

Approximately seventy percent of all elementary school teachers were dismissed under the denazification program. Of the remaining thirty percent, the majority were in the upper age brackets—fifty-six to fifty-nine years of age.

The schools were re-opened on a part-time basis in October 1945. Only 15,000 teachers were available; 50,000 were needed. Emergency training for teachers and for recruiting teachers from other professions was necessary.

Emergency textbooks had to be printed and made available. U.S. policy, as announced, stated that "American textbooks and American teachers would not be put in the schools of the occupied areas." From the beginning, then, the problem of securing an adequate supply of textbooks has involved assisting the Germans in the work of preparing new ones.

## An Encouraging Beginning

To aid in this work the American military authorities have established curriculum and textbook writing centers

in Berlin and in the *Laender* (states) in the U.S. Zone. Similar centers or "source libraries" have been set up in the British Zone. In these centers have been collected sample textbooks, reference books, dictionaries, anthologies of American literature and poetry, books on government and history, professional magazines, yearbooks, research bulletins, films, slides, maps, and other teaching aids for all levels, elementary school through university. Similar collections have been secured from England, Switzerland, France, and other European countries. Many of these books must be translated before they can be readily usable, and this takes time.

German teachers and textbook writers are using the centers for school and curriculum reorganization planning and study. It is felt by American educators on Military Government staff that the centers offer a most effective means of influencing and directing the educational program in the German states.

A major problem in connection with supplying schools with textbooks is the lack of paper to print sufficient quantities to supply the needs of the schools. If paper allocations are met, by fall all elementary schools will be supplied with readers and arithmetics. It is hoped sixteen million textbooks will be printed in 1940. Little is yet available for teachers colleges and universities.

#### **Help Them Educate Themselves**

American Military Government authorities have accepted the fundamental thesis that the occupying powers cannot re-educate the Germans. That they must do for themselves. Military Government officials have been concerned with finding capable, willing German

leaders, advising with them on steps to be taken in educational reform; in the selection of teachers with a high degree of positive, moral, democratic traits and in training these teachers in the best German traditions of education for the development of individual personnel.

While the work of Military Government, in the beginning, was necessarily of a negative nature, positive, progressive direction of the educational reform program is now receiving attention. An educational policy has been developed and the reorganization of the primary and secondary schools along democratic lines is now under way in all states of the U.S. Zone. The trend seems to be to extend the four-year *Grundschule* to a six-year common elementary school, followed by a three-year *Mittelschule* (middle school), and three years of additional secondary education following that.

At least ninety-nine and one-half percent of the children of compulsory school age are in school on a half-time schedule. Eighteen institutions of university rank are open, with an enrollment of 50,000, almost twice the normal number for this section of Germany. As an emergency measure forty teacher training institutions were opened, and approximately 20,000 new teachers have been trained in addition to those recruited from other professions and sources. The denazification program is about completed and some teachers are going back into the schools as the denazification courts have passed on them individually. Steps are now being taken by German leaders, with the advice and counsel of the Military Government educational staff members, to consolidate teacher training institutions

and to put all training on the university level. *It will take ten to fifteen years to train an adequate number of teachers for German schools.*

### The Machinery for Reform

As the work of school reform is carried forward, Military Government officials are attempting to guide the Germans in democratic planning and in ways of working. The plan of organizing for work on school reform in the German *Laender* usually calls for a general committee made up of representatives from all groups in the *Land*—church, political parties, all levels of the educational system, labor unions, etc. The general committee develops policy and reviews reports submitted by sub-committees, recommends measures to be presented to the *Landtag* (legislative body) to be passed as laws putting into effect the reforms agreed upon. From such a committee in one state, composed of one hundred members of representative people of the *Land*, a statement was made as to the purpose of the common school—"to educate for tolerance, international understanding and reconciliation, that is, for real democracy"—which indicates the thinking of this policymaking group.

Sub-committees work on different phases and subjects. Reports are submitted to the American staff in the *Land*. The officer in the subject area represented by the report studies it carefully, presents it to the entire education staff for discussion, then a summary of criticisms and suggestions is made and sent back with the report to the German Committee for further study and revision. Military Government does not tell the Germans *what* to do, but may

disapprove and ask that the proposals be studied, revised, and resubmitted. Reports of these sub-committees go to the general committee for consideration. The General Committee then recommends the laws to be passed to put the proposed reforms into operation.

Such study and planning with German committees is considered an effective means of in-service training for school leaders and teachers. With limited American personnel it is difficult to work with all committees as often as is desirable. One way this problem has been met is by bringing in consultants for periods of three months to work with committees, groups, and institutions on such problems as developing the curriculum in the social studies, planning and writing textbooks, developing educational films and radio programs, and testing.

### Democratic Principles Set Up

In the school reform plans, Military Government is insisting on equal educational opportunities for all children. This means the elimination of the dualism which is traditional; the training of elementary teachers on university level, and curriculum changes on all levels, elementary through the university. School reforms will receive Military Government approval only if they take a reasonably forward step in line with the principles laid down by U.S. leaders. These are: equal educational opportunity for all; all teacher education on the university level; the development of a comprehensive educational system to serve all youth; the abolishing of the traditional two-track system under which only seven percent to ten percent of the youth, the eco-

nominally or socially favored, had a chance to get a higher education; emphasis to be placed on education for civic responsibility and a democratic way of life through content of the curriculum, textbooks, teaching aids, and the organization of the school.

### Activate the Exchange Program

Nazi officials cut off educational information from the outside world for over a decade, and the Germans were in a sort of isolation ward, their culture twisted into an evil kind. An army of occupation finds it difficult to exemplify a democratic way of life to a conquered people. Those responsible for directing the educational program believe the best interpretation will come through exchange of educational personnel between Germany and the democratic countries. German teachers are eager to get in touch with educational movements in other countries. This may be accomplished, also, through exchange of professional books and magazines, educational films, radio programs, and correspondence.

It is important, also, that the best educational leaders from America be sent to Germany. A widespread exchange program of persons and of educational materials, it is believed, will prove a most effective method of presenting democratic ideals to the German people. German teachers, students, leaders, have been sent to England, Sweden, Switzerland, and to the United States for periods of study. Assurance must be given, as part of the approval by the German authorities, that such an exchange person will be considered "on leave" from the post held and, upon his return to Germany, will be given an

opportunity to use his knowledge and experience gained from the period of study in improving the German educational program of which he is a part.

Much more needs to be done in this phase of the program. The exchange of persons program is merely in its initial stages. Colleges, organizations of teachers, civic organizations, can make no more important contribution to the program of the re-education of the German people than by making it possible to bring a German teacher to this country for a period of study. It is difficult to get a feeling for the democratic way of life by reading and study. It is only by living and working democratically that a true understanding and appreciation of democracy may be gained.

American educational consultants, working with German teachers and leaders in groups and in educational institutions, have been able to give stimulation and advice, a fresh outlook to German leaders as they devote their best energies to the task of rebuilding the German educational system.

### Prime Factors Affecting Reform

Some problems affecting the progress of the educational reform in Germany are:

**Four-power control**—four different systems of education.

**Economic conditions**—problem of securing food, shelter and clothing. These problems loom so large they overshadow every other consideration.

**Refugees**—approximately two million of them, to be provided for.

**The occupation**—the efforts made by the occupying authorities to rebuild and make democratic the German nation.

**Tradition**—an old country, and most of the teachers and leaders are old people. It will take time to change them.

**Tools**—books, library facilities, films, teachers, buildings, equipment.

**The tense political situation**—in which the Germans must live from day to day. They constantly are faced with the question, "What does the future hold for my country?" The German feels himself a pawn in which the West would make him a democrat, the East would make him a communist, while he wants to return to "the old days of being a true German."

### Vast Scope of the Work Ahead

Things that must be done if the work of aiding the Germans to bring about school reform is to succeed, include the following:

- ▶ The exchange of persons program must be greatly enlarged.
- ▶ Recent textbooks and teaching materials, democratic in character, must be made available in sufficient quantities to supply all the schools on all levels.
- ▶ Democratic school organization must be accomplished.
- ▶ The curriculum in all schools must be prepared with emphasis on the ideas and practices of democracy. Materials are needed to put the Germans in touch with democratic ideals and procedures.
- ▶ A continuous program of in-service training of teachers and leaders is important to reorient and to train teachers now in the classrooms while new teachers are being prepared in the teachers colleges.
- ▶ School reform laws must be passed to implement the *Laender* constitutions and

make possible the changes being proposed by groups now at work on the organization of the schools and of the curriculum.

Real progress is being made by the Germans in spite of the handicaps under which they live, work, and teach—the congestion in schools and in living arrangements, make-shift buildings, lack of coal to heat buildings, lack of textbooks and teaching materials, undernourishment of both teachers and pupils. The German teachers realize that there is wide-spread fear and distrust of Germans by other Nations resulting from bitter memories, and that they must train the youth to the point where they can show to the world that they can be trusted.

The re-education of the Germans, helping the Germans get back into the family of Nations, must be done by the Germans themselves. It is the task of the occupation authorities to find the Germans who can do the job, and guide them in developing educational reform along democratic lines. An effort is being made to build on what was good in the German educational system, but there is ample opportunity for changes in a changing world. This point of view the Germans will have to accept, and work to bring their educational program into line with the trends of the times, with the best educational procedures and principles in democratic countries over the world.



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