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NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND THE HOLOCAUST IN WEST GERMAN SCHOOL BOOKS*

Abstract: The author differentiates five phases of representation of the Holocaust in west German history books and lessons. Attempts at a serious and broad dealing with the subject in some post-war school textbooks were repressed in the Fifties. The students' movement, intensive research work and increased political attention towards right-wing tendencies brought a change in the Sixties. New didactic methods such as source work and regional historical approaches were adopted, intended to give pupils greater insight into the individual areas of dictatorship and enable them to form their own opinion of the activities at that time. In the meantime, National Socialism is usually the are of German 20th century history dealt with in the most detail. The increasing distance in time to the period in question, the dissolution of the Socialist bloc, reunification and the multicultural nature of school classes have produced new teaching conditions which on the one hand create a greater distance to the subject but on the other hand call for comparison of genocide, war and exile in the present time or from the history of other peoples.

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Not everything pupils are supposed to learn at school is actually learned and not everything learned is memorised. Moreover, what pupils know and what influences their way of thinking is not only learned at school. School-learning is simply one of several factors which form young people's knowledge and consciousness of history. When we start to examine how history curricula and school textbooks deal with the subject of National Socialism and the Holocaust, we are basically dealing with the ideas of educationalist institutions (ministries, textbook authors, teachers) on what pupils *should* learn, i.e. what society would like to have passed on to the following generation. Youngsters are not always prepared to accept older people's ideas - they often discover quite different traditions, which is probably one of the reasons why they do not learn what they are expected to learn, but become interested in other things.

To begin with, a few general remarks on the structure of history curricula and textbooks in the Federal Republic of Germany. The entire sector of education is federally organised, i.e. there is no central Ministry of Education. The syllabuses are issued by the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs of the individual federal states. A „Standing Conference of Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs” ensures comparable requirements regarding the compatibility of the syllabuses and mobility between the federal states for the pupils. The ministries examine whether school book texts comply to the curricula, teaching regulations and constitutional principles.

Usually, approved textbooks are chosen to be used as a teaching basis for the individual class levels. There are a large number of different history textbook series in the Federal Republic of Germany, containing a broad spectrum of didactic approaches, content and focus. It is only possible to offer a condensed overview here, indicating the most important tendencies, without any strong differentiation according to individual series of textbooks.

All syllabuses are constructed to allow a chronological review of history from the earliest time to the present. National Socialism and the Holocaust are therefore automatically incorporated in the process. If these topics are to be left out, considerable effort must be made by teachers. The syllabuses issued by several federal states are directed at dealing with the subject of National Socialism in civics lessons as well

as in history teaching but I will not go into that here. In this analysis I will concentrate on lower secondary level teaching, which contains the last years of compulsory schooling, grades nine or ten.

Roughly speaking, contemporary history teaching in the Federal Republic of Germany can be divided into four phases:

1. The immediate post-war period (occupation and the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany), i.e. approximately from 1945-1952
2. The period of the stabilisation of post-war society - from the beginning of the Fifties to the beginning of the Sixties
3. The period of change, approximately from the mid-Sixties to the end of the Seventies
4. Renewed stabilisation in the Eighties
5. Today's perspective is still open. A new phase must be approached due to the breakdown of the socialist system and German reunification.¹

1. Occupation and the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany

The situation of history teaching was a varied and contradictory one during this phase. The Allies usually set out all history lessons immediately after taking over political responsibility. After 1947, teaching was gradually reassumed, varying from region to region.² However, textbooks were seldom available or were of an experimental nature. The trials of war criminals and the process of denazification provoked public debate, particularly in intellectual circles, on the „historical disaster” that National Socialism represented for German history. The mass crimes were not left out of such public debate, but the question of cause or guilt was often pushed aside - the idea of a „collective guilt” was generally denied. It is doubtful to what extent this discussion was conducted in schools, although it affected young people in particular, who had already been active in National Socialist mass organisations. Syllabuses, which were again regularly issued from about 1947, only reflected this debate in exceptional cases. National Socialism was not always especially mentioned as a subject area. Often it was not clear when exactly contemporary *history* ended. Whenever

National Socialism was explicitly included, the subject of the war was usually predominant. This was quickly reflected in school book texts; in some textbooks half of the chapters on National Socialism dealt with the war, while the subject of mass extermination was often barely touched upon.

There were only a few new approaches towards teaching material, among which the most successful history textbook of the time, „Wege der Völker,” can be counted.³ This book dealt with National Socialism, mentioning mass crime and the extermination of the Jews and also raised the question of the responsibility of bystanders. In contrast to almost all the books that were to follow, the authors of the above mentioned series were not afraid to clearly and morally condemn the persecution of the Jews („the most cruel and humiliating chapter in the history of the Third Reich”). Individual stages of the persecution process, from the Nürnberg laws to the „fundamental destruction of Jewish life” during the war were presented. Nevertheless, the gas chambers were only mentioned in the edition intended for senior classes. Although the book stated that the population in general had not known the true extent of the mass extermination, it emphasises on the other hand the responsibility of large numbers of the population who had supported Hitler until the end.

„Wege der Völker” developed into the most widely used history book at the beginning of the Fifties. This series stood for a new development which could have meant a breakthrough because of the emphasis placed on contemporary history. The last volume for the middle grades covered the period from 1849 to the Potsdam Agreement and the beginning of a new „policy of world security.” Authoritarianism, democracy and dictatorship were the diverging points of reference in German history.

„Wege der Völker” was jointly produced by a trade union-orientated group of teachers from Berlin who received inspiration from socialist tendencies. The book reflects new intellectual approaches which were much in evidence in the post-war period. These, however, did not prove to be enduring following the foundation of the two German states.

2. *The period of stabilisation*

The few new approaches towards the structure of curricula and school books were more or less taken back in the second phase. The history textbooks appearing after the mid-Fifties were to a large extent based on forerunners from the Weimar period and regarded the Third Reich as a wrong path taken in German history, denied factors of continuity and backed the widespread opinion that „the people” had been led astray by a small group of individuals bearing sole responsibility. Any crimes mentioned were attributed to this group of leaders, but the extent that had been known since the Nürnberg trials was generally played down. The extermination of the Jewish population was usually dealt with in a few sentences and there were practically no considerations on how this genocide could have been possible. The „Fundamental Aspects of History Teaching” agreed on by the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on 17 December 1953 did not even give particular mention to the National Socialist system of power and rule, and merely spoke generally of „dictators” and the Second World War.

Tendencies towards apology began to increase considerably. One publication, the „Geschichtliche Unterrichtswerk,” stated that „the annihilation of the millions of Jews in the East” was an act unequalled in the history of mankind, but this was followed by the sentence „Hitler knew that his officers and the German army could not be expected to perform such destruction of human beings and so he commanded special troops for the purpose.”⁴ This error of judgement on the part of the authors can only be understood by the fact that they were not only following the opinion held by the general public but the prevailing viewpoint of historical science.⁵ They were certainly also aware that the „Western” Jews were not spared from extermination. The longest text on the extermination of the Jews in this book was a ten-line extract from Himmler's infamous Posen speech from 4 October 1943, in which he justified the attitude of the SS. When it came to details, the murderers' language and way of thinking was prevalent in history textbooks until well into the Eighties. The authors were unwilling to describe the mass murder in their own words or in those of the victims.

As a rule, the Holocaust is presented alongside other themes like occupation and military events. The extermination of the Jews is often not treated in separate paragraphs but seen as a component of warfare

in general. It goes without saying that we do not find any details about Jewish life during or before occupation.

Although National Socialism - sometimes the Second World War was explicitly mentioned only - was part of the curriculum, in practice history teaching usually ended with the First World War or the Weimar Republic. The history teachers (mostly men at grammar schools) had usually served as soldiers during the war and only very few of them had really condemned the system. Many avoided the subject so as not to come into conflict with the official teaching doctrines, whereby they would have had to adopt an attitude of disapprobation and thus question their own actions.

Nevertheless, teachers - not only those teaching history - referred to war experiences, which were often the main focus of memory for parents, too. The adults saw themselves as victims of the system, victims of the Allies' bomb attacks, victims of a system that had sent them to war. There was no change of perspective, practically no-one asked, „Who were the persecuted?” There was no mention of resistance. The question of guilt and collaboration could not be asked in this context.

Nevertheless there were attempts to come to terms with the past, for instance in the protest activities against rearmament and the „emergency laws,” which did not seem compatible with the anti-military, anti-state power lessons derived from history. But the majority of the population wanted to see the consolidation of society and political normality, accepting many unpleasant consequences such as rearmament as the price for Western orientation, which the larger part saw as a guarantee for the rebuilding process, for social and political security. This required distance from the past and not the reflection on it.

3. *The period of change*

With the dawn of the Sixties changing attitudes became apparent. Opinions voiced by neo-Nazi organisations and anti-Semitic attitudes caused the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs to plan a more thorough treatment of the subject of National Socialism in schools. In a resolution of 1953 the ministers agreed on a pattern for the interpretation of National Socialism, namely that of totalitarianism,

thus placing National Socialism on the same level as Communist dictatorship. A parallelisation of the two systems was not carried out in practical teaching however, because the two periods were not dealt with simultaneously but as consecutive government systems - if the Soviet system of leadership was gone into at all in history lessons. The comparative aspect was more a matter for civics lessons.

The historical categories of the young people growing up in the Federal Republic of Germany seem to have been influenced to a great extent by traditional opinions which contradicted the pluralist-democratic present. Studies carried out by Ludwig von Friedeburg and Peter Hübner point out this aspect.⁶ The authors discovered that the prevailing picture of history was characterised by „overemphasising the role of the Individuum, personalised collectives, stereotype ideas of order and anthropomorphic categories of reference.” In terms of National Socialism, this meant that Hitler took an overpowering position as a person with sole responsibility, often appearing as the only active participant.

The higher the level of education, the more the people knew of the various periods and events of National Socialist history, but the categories of analysis did not deepen in terms of reflection and precision. At least senior pupils knew about the policy of extermination of the Jews; exculpation arguments were used in attempts at explanation - the population had not known about the mass crimes, the majority had followed the National Socialists because of their family-orientated labour and social policies. In a survey carried out from 1958 to 1962, Walter Jaide found that pupils were often far more interested in dealing with the subject of National Socialism than the teachers. The majority of young people had a clearly negative opinion of Hitler, certainly again in contrast to their teachers in many cases.⁷ Nevertheless, the youngsters did not share the popular idea of the continuity of authoritative leader personalities with an expansive-aggressive character (from Friedrich II to Bismarck to Hitler), which was so popular abroad. Although they considered Bismarck to be undisputably one of the great men of German history, he was also seen positively as the last great German politician, who could balance the struggle of powers and knew the rules of this game.⁸

From the point of view held at the time, German history took a fateful course after Bismarck, under a Kaiser who was no longer really responsible. In the following downward spiral, the Weimar Republic merely played the role of a continuous-flow heater, paving the way for dictatorship, according to popular opinion. It was thought that Weimar did not represent a break with the past system and was, since its beginnings, not considered as a chance to build the German republic. It was clear that considerable efforts would have to be made to enable teachers to erode the emphasis of such interpretations.

Throughout the Sixties, history textbooks underwent a change in terms of methods and content; for the first time victims were allowed to speak in the reference texts. The persecution of the Jews was more frequently described in all its stages - from discrimination in society to ghettoization and subsequent extermination. The development of specialised academic research contributed to this by individually examining the aspect of resistance and the institutions of persecution.

A breakthrough in textbook design was achieved by the book „Menschen in ihrer Zeit”, which for the first time presented source material.⁹ The authors refer to Auschwitz and give the number of Jews murdered as „more than 4 million.” It is pointed out that „other undesirable” ethnic groups e.g. gypsies, were systematically „wiped out.” The process of extermination was described in the book by a former prisoner and not, as usual, by an extract from the diary of camp commander Höß. The text was illustrated with photographs taken from the ramp at Auschwitz. But the question of responsibility for these crimes remains problematic:

„The victims. It was only much later that people realised what the 'Third Reich' really meant for Germany (...) Fear, mistrust, and the evil they faced had seduced countless people to stay silent, look the other way or even help. Many others heard practically nothing about the monstrous deeds perpetrated. They supported the government in the firm belief that they were doing right and did not realise until much later how shamelessly they had been abused.”¹⁰

All in all, the books remain weak in, what is admittedly, the most difficult part - attempts at explanation. Often they merely point out the irrationality of the procedure or the pathological attitudes of the leaders.

The picture of history only began to change as an effect of the first economic crisis of the Federal Republic of Germany and the students' movement. The generation growing up at this time had not experienced National Socialism (except maybe as children) and questioned the interpretations prevalent in their society; this „break” between the „reconstruction” or war-generation and the post-war generation was by no means limited to Germany only. But here it also affected the dispute regarding the past and not just the debate on the current structures of politics and society, as it was the case in the USA. The representatives of academic youth in particular claimed that the restoration of society in West Germany had required the suppression of the past. Political and ideological security had been given priority over painful self-questioning about what mental attitudes or what power interests made „Fascism” possible in Germany. In general it can be said that the higher the level of education, the more probable it was that pupils were confronted with and actively participated in this discussion.

Historic research was mainly concerned with National Socialist racial ideology as well as the resulting policies of occupation and extermination. An increasing number of contemporary historians who had studied after the war and adopted modern social-historical methods from France and English-speaking countries were lecturing at the universities. History books and history lessons profited from all these factors. Texts now discussed which social groups had helped to maintain National Socialism and what possibilities of resistance and refusal there had been. The extermination of the Jews and other groups was described with what can be regarded as relentless openness, i.e. the texts did not show that they were intended for children who were not asked how they would react to such monstrosities, which, after all, had been carried out by people who were, or could have been, their parents or grandparents.

This detailed treatment of the subject of persecution, including „subjective” sources was particularly evident in the new, but not very successful series named „Zeitaufnahme.”¹¹ In the chapter entitled „Their life was hell. Cause and extent of the extermination of the Jews” the „scapegoat theory” and the Jewish contribution to German culture were briefly touched before the stages of persecution from the boycotting of Jewish businesses on 1 April 1933 to the gassing during

the war were dealt with. The subject of „Resistance against deportation in the occupied areas” was also mentioned.

The increased penetration of National Socialism through scientific research and its detailed treatment in school history books plus a greater degree of public interest eventually caused the Conference of Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs to stress in a new but very generally structured guideline:

„Nowadays too, schools must actively work against uncritical acceptance of portrayals that trivialise or even glorify the Third Reich and its representatives, characterised as it was by dictatorship, genocide and inhumanity.”¹²

In view of the standard of didactic discussion in science and teachers' training, this was rather trivial. Positive ideas orientated towards the future were provided in the more supplementary guidelines of individual federal states such as the decree of the Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs for North Rhine-Westphalia, which states:

„A constructive treatment and discussion of the recent German past should strengthen an understanding of the connection between National Socialist megalomania and its unscrupulous policy of violence, between racist discrimination and genocide, between intolerance towards minorities and 'eradication'... It seems to me that, for us, developing sensitivity towards every form of oppression, segregation and intolerance is a commensurate form of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' (coming to terms with the past). We should set a living example of behaving towards minorities in our society in a manner differing radically from the way that the National Socialist 'Volksgemeinschaft' (community of the 'Volk' or people) treated those whom they expelled as alien to the community.”

Following the syllabuses and textbooks of the time, no pupil could leave school without having gone through several weeks of tuition on the basic elements of the National Socialist political system and its policies of persecution and destruction. Empirical surveys, however, showed that many pupils had no well-founded knowledge and still strongly personalised the Third Reich, i.e. mainly contributing its existence to Hitler, who was either idealised as the leader or isolated as the real culprit.¹³ Innovations and wider knowledge were mainly used in secondary high schools (Gymnasium), which only a minority of pupils attended. In many classes of compulsory schooling, the history lessons ended before the year 1933 could be dealt with.

4. *Securing the achievements*

Many of the controversial issues of the Seventies which were the subject of public debate, became an almost natural component of curricula in the following decade, although in a less radical form.

The Holocaust is now regarded as a topic in its own right. We do not only find comprehensive accounts of the persecution starting with social and economic discrimination in the years after the Nazis' seizure of power ending up with the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Some authors describe also Jewish life in the ghettos, and make the pupils aware of the difficult choice or the dilemma Jewish families were confronted with: to emigrate or to stay and to hope that they could at least survive even in Nazi Germany as they had endured so many times of suffering before. New questions, however, were to be raised when such horrible events are taught to 14-year olds. Can children understand the full extent of terror, violence and inhuman behaviour which denies all the values they should learn to abide by? Can they deal with the emotional impact of descriptions and pictures displaying the gas chambers and corpses in concentration camps? To provide an adequate account of these aspects it is no longer sufficient to simply describe what has happened. The material must be open to questions and to further inquiry. It is not enough just to tell the story or the „truth“. That quite different stories existed and can be presented in a way understandable for young people became apparent not through the writing of new schoolbooks but through TV series.

The American film „Holocaust“ gave public discussions on the past - particularly in schools - a new dimension. The suffering of the persecuted, the willingness of „normal“ citizens to „join in“ without resistance even in the face of the most atrocious crimes, was voiced more clearly than ever before.¹⁴ I personally participated in numerous debates in various educational institutions, where - I believe for the first time ever in public - a genuine discussion between the generations took place. Nevertheless, such discussions came too late as tragically many of the generation who could speak of their experiences with dictatorship were no longer alive. Perhaps this dialogue only became possible when the generation that should have raised protest and offered resistance during the era of National Socialism no longer bore responsibility in the Federal Republic of Germany.

But certainly many young history teachers were able to strengthen their commitment in this dialogue with the older generation and went on to teach children and tried to show them how quickly people can be harnessed to systems of enforcement.¹⁵ In contrast to the previous stages of development, this new impulse was reflected in a number of pupils' activities. One example in particular was a school competition under the patronage of the Federal President, where children carried out research on the history of their home towns, their schools or on individuals persecuted under National Socialism. This pupils' competition is held every two years. In 1980/81 and 1982/83 it was devoted to the period of National Socialism. By far the highest number of participants ever achieved since the initiation of the competition in 1974 up to reunification took part in the two competitions on National Socialism (12,843 and 5,894 pupils). Children carried out research on the history of their home towns, their schools or on individuals persecuted under National Socialism. They asked mayors, teachers and relatives: „How much did you know, what happened to the Jews in our area, what did you do?“ The textbook authors no longer spoke about „extermination“ in a general way but mentioned the places where many of the Jews and other persecuted groups were murdered. Auschwitz became the symbol of genocide under the Nazi regime.¹⁶

When the Georg-Eckert-Institut for International Textbook Research presented the German-Israeli textbook recommendations in 1985, which were compiled by Israeli and German historians as well as geographers, one could read about the presentation of the Nazi period in German history textbooks:

„The most detailed portrayal in the textbooks is that of the history of the Jews in the modern world. However, the density of information in the survey period is extremely uneven. The ideological defamation and - even more so - the persecution and murder of the Jews under National Socialist rule stand quite unmistakably in the foreground. The fate of Jews during this period is neither hushed up nor trivialised. The intensity of reporting in general has increased considerably in comparison with earlier textbooks. This manifests itself not only in the scope of the portrayal and in a consistently very broad documentation of text and picture sources, but also in the way that - especially in the more recent works - the persecution is no longer dealt with as part of Hitler's biography but is placed more strongly in its social context. The crucial question of responsibility and co-responsibility for the persecution of

Jews is posed more sharply than in earlier textbooks, even if it does not always receive a clear enough answer.”

Some shortcomings, however, mainly concerning the authors' perspective were criticized:

„Persecution is described in most of the books in the sequence of state measures, often, however, using self-styled terminology or the terminology of the National Socialist era, intended to play the matter down.”

This means words such as „Reichskristallnacht”, „destruction”, „extermination”, „Final Solution.”¹⁷

Even today, warnings must be issued with regard to such terminology even though there are now books on the market which have found a new language better suited for pupils' needs. It is also true that today criticism aims at didactics rather than at specialised knowledge.¹⁸ The amount of information on the subject of National Socialism now offered in school textbooks is perhaps too much for many pupils to deal with. The dry style and highly rational argumentation are other factors which prevent pupils from developing a high degree of emotional involvement with the subject - which is certainly often the authors' intention. Most textbooks point to a separate section containing source material but it is unclear to what extent this material is actually used during the course of the lessons. Trying to „prevent undue pressure”, which is a lesson learned from National Socialist indoctrination, has led authors to present National Socialist history in great detail but in an extremely emotionless manner.¹⁹ This was certainly a suitable method of gaining access to pupils still in conflict with a generation of parents who had lived in the Third Reich, when both sides were full of emotion, feelings of guilt, accusations, justification, and in need of de-emotionalization. Today this situation has completely changed and such an approach does not comply with the educational needs of a generation who is no longer confronted with eyewitness accounts and personal experience of this period in one's own family.

For many teachers it was impossible to teach this subject without emotion. However, they did not want to create the impression that they were politically prejudiced or that they wanted to force their own negative opinion of the NS system on their pupils. Therefore they often started their lessons by describing the processes of mass extermination

in a realistic manner so that the students had no other choice than to speak out against such an inhuman behaviour. This approach, however, often prevented any controversial discussion and did not allow students to forming their own opinions.

5. *Contemporary history = post-war history?*

To me there seems to be no question that the majority of today's pupil generation has at least a basic knowledge of the Third Reich and is aware of the fact that millions of Jews and other ethnic groups were murdered. It is true, however, that the time in which this took place is becoming increasingly strange and distant to the pupils. To many of them it is incomprehensible how a civilised society could be in favour of organised mass murder. These pupils no longer see National Socialism as a part of their own world, as a part of contemporary history. To them, this period belongs to history like the Kaiserreich or other phases of German development, with which they feel no involvement. They find it difficult to compare the barbarous activities of the National Socialist era with racist behaviour of today.²⁰

The living conditions the youth of today tries to secure or develop are mainly connected with the economic rise of Western Germany, if a historic perspective is attributed to such wishes at all. This is the only historic background against which pupils in Western and Eastern Germany want to see the future of a reunited Germany. New history syllabi of several federal states seem to follow this development by concentrating on the time after 1945 during the last year of compulsory schooling. National Socialism and the Weimar Republic are then dealt with in the context of 19th century history.

We need new didactic approaches aimed at fulfilling the requirements of today's pupils. American curricula generally approach the subject of the Holocaust in comparison with other examples of genocide - far more than in German textbooks they try to establish common factors and conditions, to find similar historic events in order to penetrate the distance and feelings of strangeness towards history.²¹ For the fields of German historical science and didactics, the use of comparison as a means of elucidating the holocaust was taboo for a long time. Mass murder was viewed as an occurrence so monstrous and unique that it could not be explained in terms of comparison. This

was an adequate approach only as long as we had the feeling that National Socialism belonged to our time and had happened in the German society our parents or grandparents had belonged to - but the chain of memory has torn over the generations. The conflict between the National Socialist and post-war generations has itself become history and it is becoming increasingly difficult to make the pupils of today realise that this is not just history but contemporary history, the history of our and their time. Today mass murder is happening in Cambodia, former Yugoslavia and other parts of the world, brought to us in immediate proximity by the media every day.

Surveys show that the majority of young people today are strongly rooted in the present; their political conviction, moral opinions and expectations for the future hardly arise from reflection on the past - only a small minority are consciously involved in the historic experiences of their parents or grandparents. Thus the general didactic requirements of history-teaching in Germany and other Western European countries do not differ as strongly as they used to, as this shift in the consciousness of time is taking place in other modern industrial societies as well.²²

But is this result not contradicted by the existence of neo-Nazi groups gathering beneath Nazi symbols, proclaiming anti-Semitic slogans and spreading hate of everything „non-German?“ It would be too simple to assume they do this through lack of knowledge about the significance of National Socialism. They prefer to see it as a sign of the times when Germans were privileged over other members of society regarded as „inferior“. They would like to re-establish these times and feel threatened by economic insecurity and incalculable competition on the job market, which no longer guarantees well-trained youngsters employment, as it had basically been the case from the Fifties onwards. When social benefits are cut and chances for living jeopardised, the members of neo-Nazi groups are trying to find criteria to protect themselves in a society in which all people are equal by constitutional law.

On the one hand, globalisation and the dissolution of the blocs have proved valid social-political patterns to be outdated and without a place in a society which apparently has no borders. On the other hand, German reunification and the reconstruction of the states that had pre-

viously been under the control of the Soviet Union seem to offer a different model - a truly traditional pattern of political identity which has survived the big changes in the political landscape: namely nationalism.

Thus young people in particular question the principle of equality in our society by attacking people who still have to find a way of adapting to this national society and whose social position is not yet strengthened. These young people feel resonance from some parts of our society. Their orientation on the Nazi history provides legitimation as well as the ideological framework and organisational structures required for their activities. To them it is not a question of imitating National Socialism or reviving it as a complete system because that would be contradictory to modern ways of living, which are desirable even for neo-Nazis or at least their less organized supporters. An imitation too closely to the historical ideal and over-strict organisation would probably even endanger acceptance among youngsters of the same age group. Therefore these groups adopt an extremely selective picture of the past, they imitate what seems worth imitating to them. History lessons alone can do little against this, as the neo-Nazis are in favour of exactly the passages from history which should have a deterrent effect and deny all those which appear too monstrous. This means that they can combine anti-Semitic activities with statements of their own that no Jews were gassed in Auschwitz. It is not a lack of knowledge of the facts that is the problem, but getting the desired moral message across.

Why do young people choose National Socialism for their purposes? Firstly it is probably because it is the most recent historic example of nationalistic ideology. On the other hand it is long enough ago not to mobilize the protest of large groups of affected individuals. However, I believe that they have misjudged this factor. It is evident that among the general population as well as the political-economical leaders and intellectuals in Germany the defensive attitude towards nationalist, racist thinking and activities is so great that the hoped-for social acceptance of xenophobic actions has not taken place or at least not to the desired extent. Thus a degree of learning from history has taken place, even though it has not reached society as completely as could be hoped for.

It is important to recognise the specific reasons that even today lead a small minority of youths to orientate towards National Socialist ideologies. Dissatisfaction with the present situation is probably a greater reason than identification with the historical model. Dealing with neo-Nazism and right-wing radicalism should therefore incorporate the situation of the followers of such ideologies and not just try to show the catastrophes caused by National Socialism. The extensive research on right-wing radicalism, xenophobia and neo-Nazism currently carried in Germany is included in teaching material for these subjects.²³

In my opinion, the greatest chance for intensive teaching on the subject of National Socialism for the future does not lie in trying to convert those already belonging to neo-Nazi groups, but in strengthening the defensive attitude of the others.

The evaluation of National Socialism has perhaps become more strongly polarised among pupils than in previous decades. Until now there seems to be no question that the majority of people not only knew about the criminal character of the regime but also rejected it completely. Today pupils associate expressions such as „war and pointless destruction,” „murder of Jews and gypsies” far more often with National Socialism than the harmonising stereotypes of „work for all” or „safety and order” which were still used in the Fifties to explain the acceptance of National Socialism in its time.²⁴ Young people today are far more aware of the terror of this era than its so-called „good sides.”

Gerd Steffens, teacher at a German Gymnasium, perhaps has the good fortune to teach in a particularly favourable class situation but his opinion of his students probably reflects the majority of pupils at west German Gymnasium schools:

„Moreover, genuine national motives are not so widespread among the pupils. On the whole they are more universalistically than ethnocentrically orientated, more cosmopolitan than national. The Gulf War, for example, affected them more than their own national reunification and questions of ecology, peace and mass poverty in the Third World, i.e. questions regarding humanity, bring more to bear on their view on life than national feelings. Maybe this is why it seems to some of them to be unfair that they have to live with the memories of National Socialism despite having no inner relationship to national claims.”²⁵

Some perceive National Socialism as a historic burden which they have inherited but are not responsible for and which, particularly abroad, makes free communication and the ability to declare themselves to be Germans very difficult. Such examples, recently given by numerous students at an international conference in Lübeck, show that this period of history remains tangible even if the chain of generative experience seems to be broken.²⁶

For it is the media and the peers abroad and not the contemporaries that confront students with the subject. Purely factual and informative lessons are not of much help in dealing with such „transferred” or assumed feelings of guilt, which are directed in anger and recriminations against the „Nazi generation”, but hardly lead to a deeper understanding of how „completely normal people” could become willing servants of state terrorism. In comparison to the Seventies and Eighties, young people of today are more prepared to generally condemn the generation of those who „joined in” National Socialism without any further examination of the subject as these young people mainly have a preconceived judgement that this generation is guilty in general. In this respect the younger generation's view on the Holocaust differs a lot from the beliefs their grandparents had. They acknowledge widely responsibility for the horror of the Third Reich but reject personal guilt.²⁷

This attitude became clear in the public discussions on Goldhagen's ideas, which were better received by young people than the former generation of 1968, who were facing him as critical experts on history. Together with Goldhagen, the young people were prepared to draw a line between National Socialism and the post-war period, to which they - and Goldhagen - belong. This division of time is just what the 1968 generation do not want to recognise as a borderline as they had not agreed to unquestioningly regard the threshold year 1945 as a new beginning. They tried to discover personal and structural continuity and were not prepared to accept the idea that the mere transition from one political system to another had changed people from completely normal perpetrators to completely normal democrats. Thus the varying relationship to the generation of perpetrators remains characteristic for patterns of judgement, especially in view of the after-effects of National Socialist rule.

School books and lessons are now by no means the only media and often not the most important media which transmit not only impressions to young people but also knowledge and emotional access to the subject of National Socialism. The great historical debates on the place of National Socialism in German history and the comparability of the Holocaust with the crimes of Stalinism have given the subject a prominent position in the media, the reporting and presentation of which is then again dealt with in schools. Pupils, however, are often only superficially aware of these offers. They feel they are confronted with the subject in nearly all media and that after a certain time they know enough about what happened. At school they show an attitude of rejection when the subject is to be dealt with „yet again.” Then it is important to find a particularly interesting approach, leading from questions or showing that individual pupils judge the actions of the persecutors and the persecuted differently or have received conflicting information about the subject. The vast amount of supplementary teaching material published in recent years, which go into the individual aspects of the subject in more depth, offering regional access as well as that of personal history, are suitable for dealing with such questions as they allow a higher degree of identification than school text books, which often have to present their material at a relatively general level.²⁸

Such a detailed treatment includes, for example, personal research in archives, exhibitions and museums or even interviews. These often cannot be managed in the course of regular lessons, so the subject is dealt with in long-term projects or projects involving several school subjects. The concentration camp memorials, which have developed their own educational departments over the past few years, are growing in importance. These educational centers are run by qualified, knowledgeable personnel, mainly teachers transferred from school service for a limited period, who offer an exchange of information on their work with school classes and have learnt to deal with the particular questions asked by students. In addition, several institutes for further education have specialised on the subject. The best known is the Fritz-Bauer-Institut in Frankfurt, which reports continuously on practical teaching experience and theoretical concepts for educational work.

Most of these teaching concepts still presume that the Holocaust has to be dealt with as being a part of recent German history. Dealing

with this subject needs no particular justification, but does it not require special didactic considerations with regard to teaching aims and methods? In contrast to many other countries, particularly the USA, no intensive discussion on this has taken place here in Germany. When asked with what aim they teach this particular subject, teachers often reply that humanistic values are to be strengthened in young people and a repetition of what happened is to be guarded against. Although these aims can certainly be agreed with, they contain two theoretical dilemmas:

1. Especially when dealing with the Holocaust as a unique and hitherto unheard-of occurrence and not seen in comparison with other forms of genocide, there is little point in assuming any danger of repetition. In any case, when dealing more closely with the subject, the students are too overwhelmed at what happened to be interested in precipitate parallels or extrapolations in the future.
2. The subject first confronts the radical denial of humanistic values. Taken seriously, it deals with the destruction of human civilisation in a highly civilised country. Dealing with the Holocaust does not create trust in human values but shows their fragility; only in this way can teaching encourage students to actively combat any endangering of humanistic values that may occur.

It is certainly worth establishing in the course of closer investigation under which social and intellectual conditions and at what age young people are able to endure and positively redirect such uncertainty. School as an institution is possibly limited here and this should more clearly become the focus of scientific discussion.

The idea that teaching on the subject of the Holocaust could be disorientating instead of clarifying has been examined by Gerd Steffens in his own lessons. He discovered that the pupils' interest increased during the lessons and that any possible uncertainty was answered through additional questions and the desire to know more.

In some federal states, children have to deal with the subject for the first time in the fifth or sixth grade in lessons on „The World and the Environment.”²⁹ Authors of school textbooks for this age group generally avoid direct allusions to the extermination of people. The effects of persecution are dealt with through examples of resistance and individual fate. The higher the age group, the greater the lack of specific didactic considerations regarding the introduction of National Socialism, which is very often being dealt with simply because it is the

chronological period in question. Such an approach could ask too much of pupils as well as the imperative allusion to the current significance of the subject, which is again evident in the discussion regarding compensation for enforced labour. If one approach remains too factual, the other could prevent open discussion and exert too much moral-political pressure on pupils. What would be a suitable *introduction* to the subject could be lacking as a reason and bring the way of dealing with the subject under the compulsion for decision on a current political question. Of course one of the aims of the result should be to increase ability to judge the after-effects and remaining burdens of National Socialist injustice.

The context of lessons on the persecution of the Jews has altered with the change in German society. More and more frequently, teachers at seminars and congresses are reporting that they have to take into consideration the multicultural nature of their classes. Those belonging to other persecuted minorities ask to what extent their fate is dealt with in lessons in Germany. To a Kurd, whose nationality is hardly mentioned in lessons whenever the subject of Turkish or Ottoman culture and history is to be dealt with; to refugees from the war-torn areas of former Yugoslavia parallels are much more quickly apparent or the impatient question of why the Germans always accentuate the persecution of the Jews. Does this call for greater inclusion of comparative aspects of history or at least to begin with them?

Since reunification one can hardly speak of generally similar conditions for the teaching of contemporary history. Knowledge of the history of persecution, patterns of judgement and the emotional occupation of the National Socialist past are too different in the east and west to render it wise to presume the same kind of questions and methodic approaches.³⁰ Coming from outside after numerous courses of further education in east and west Germany, Chaim Schatzker issued an early warning against simply transferring west German teaching methods to east Germany with good educational intentions. The main terminology had different connotations, e.g. „anti-Semitism” would mean practically nothing to east German pupils, so that a comparison of National Socialist discrimination with anti-Semitic statements or attitudes after 1945 would be meaningless. „Anti-Zionism”, on the other hand, would appear to many to still be justified today and would be translated as „anti-Israeli” or „anti-imperialist” and would not be

associated with an anti-Jewish attitude. The particular starting conditions and the comparatively small amount of knowledge about Jewish-Israeli history in eastern Germany was taken into consideration, among other factors, by the *Sächsische Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung* when they developed courses in cooperation with the Israeli Embassy on the subject of „Judaism and the State of Israel” or „Anti-Semitism, xenophobia and right-wing extremism.” These measures have been supplemented by extracurricular and outside activities such as school twinning arrangements with Israeli educational institutions and school competitions. This brings us to the following article, which deals with the teaching of the subject of National Socialist persecution of the Jews in the GDR.

Zusammenfassung: Der Autor unterscheidet fünf verschiedene Phasen der Darstellung des Holocaust in westdeutschen Geschichtsbüchern und im -Unterricht. Ansätze einer ernsthaften und breiten Auseinandersetzung, die in einigen Schulbüchern der Nachkriegszeit angelegt waren, wurden in den fünfziger Jahren zurückgedrängt. Erst die Studentenbewegung, intensive Forschungsarbeit und verstärkte politische Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber rechtsradikalen Tendenzen brachten in den sechziger Jahren einen Wandel. In den Siebzigern setzten sich neue didaktische Methoden durch wie Quellenarbeit, regionalgeschichtlicher Zugang, die die Schüler befähigen sollten, in Einzelbereiche der Diktatur einen tieferen Einblick zu nehmen und sich ein eigenes Urteil über die damaligen Handlungsweisen zu bilden. Inzwischen bildet der Nationalsozialismus in der Regel die am ausführlichsten dargestellte Epoche der deutschen Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Die zunehmende zeitliche Entfernung, die Auflösung des sozialistischen Blocks, die Wiedervereinigung und die multikulturelle Zusammensetzung der Klassen haben neue Unterrichtsvoraussetzungen hervorgebracht, die einerseits eine größere Distanz zum Thema schaffen, andererseits aber Vergleiche mit Erscheinungen von Völkermord, Krieg und Vertreibung aus der Gegenwart oder aus der Geschichte anderer Völker nahelegen.

Résumé: L'auteur distingue cinq phases de présentation de l'Holocauste dans l'enseignement et les manuels scolaires d'histoire ouest-allemands. Les quelques manuels d'après-guerre qui traitaient ce thème de façon sérieuse et approfondie ont été écartés dans les années cinquante. Ce n'est qu'à partir des années soixante que s'amorce un changement, dans le contexte du mouvement étudiant, de travaux de recherche soutenus et d'une vigilance politique accrue envers les tendances d'extrême droite. Au cours des années soixante-dix, de nouvelles méthodes didactiques s'affirment, comme le travail sur les sources ou sur l'histoire régionale. Ces nouvelles approches doivent permettre aux élèves de mieux saisir en profondeur certains aspects de la dictature et de forger leur propre jugement sur les méthodes et comportements nazis. A l'heure actuelle, le national-socialisme est en règle générale la période de l'histoire allemande du XXe siècle la mieux représentée dans les manuels scolaires. Le temps, qui nous éloigne toujours plus de cette époque, l'effondrement du bloc socialiste, la réunification des deux États allemands et la composition multiculturelle des classes d'école ont généré de nouvelles conditions d'enseignement qui créent une plus grande distanciation par rapport à ce thème, mais permettent aussi de mieux faire le rapprochement avec les guerres, expulsions et génocides perpétrés aujourd'hui ou dans l'histoire d'autres peuples.

Endnotes:

¹ Falk Pingel, „Geschichte unserer Zeit — Zeit für Geschichte? Geschichtsdidaktik und Geschichtswissenschaft in ihrem Verhältnis zur Zeitgeschichte in den Westzonen und in der Bundesrepublik“, in: *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für Geschichte* (1990), vol. XIX, pp. 233-258.

² Ulrich Mayer, *Neue Wege im Geschichtsunterricht. Studien zur Entwicklung der Geschichtsdidaktik und des Geschichtsunterrichts in den westlichen Besatzungszonen und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1953*, Köln 1986.

³ *Wege der Völker. Geschichtsbuch für deutsche Schulen*, edited by Arbeitsgemeinschaft Berliner Geschichtslehrer, vol. I-VIII, Berlin 1948-49, here vol. IV and VIII.

⁴ *Geschichtliches Unterrichtswerk für höhere Lehranstalten*, edited by Robert H. Tenbrock et al., Mittelstufe, 4 vols., Paderborn 1957, here vol. IV, p. 153.

⁵ The „Geschichtliche Unterrichtswerk, volume 4, p. 96,“ presented Hitler's anti-Semitism in a wrong perspective, which could easily be slightly directed against foreign countries in the pupils' eyes: „Hitler's National Socialism was aggravated by his having grown up close to the German-Czech border and experiencing all the ethnic problems arising from the bitter, intolerant battle against Czech nationalism.”

⁶ Ludwig von Friedeburg and Peter Hübner, *Das Geschichtsbild der Jugend*, München 2nd ed. 1970 (1st ed. 1964); cf. Rudolf Raasch, *Zeitgeschichte und Nationalbewußtsein*, Berlin 1964.

⁷ Walter Jaide, *Das Verhältnis der Jugend zur Politik. Empirische Untersuchungen zur politischen Anteilnahme und Meinungsbildung junger Menschen der Geburtsjahrgänge 1940-1946*, Darmstadt 2nd ed. 1964, pp. 93.

⁸ On the topic of Bismarck also see the Jaide chapter 4 A) „The Unforgotten Bismarck.” Pupils of today have less regard for Bismarck and associate less with his name.

⁹ *Menschen in ihrer Zeit*, Geschichtswerk für Realschulen, 6 vols., Stuttgart 1965-66, here vol. 6, pp. 64.

¹⁰ „Menschen in ihrer Zeit” (p. 64) speaks of „the pointless racial hatred of the National Socialists” and in *Die Reise in der Vergangenheit. Ein geschichtliches Arbeitsbuch*, Hans Ebeling, revised edition by Wolfgang Birkenfeld, 4 vols., Braunschweig 1970-73, here vol. 4, p. 137, there is mention of „Hitler's pathological mania.”

¹¹ *Zeitaufnahme. Geschichte für die Sekundarstufe I*, ed. by Siegfried Graßmann, 4 vols., Braunschweig 1978-82, here vol. 3, pp. 7. See also the detailed textbook analysis of Chaim Schatzker, *Die Juden in den deutschen Geschichtsbüchern*, Bonn 1981, pp. 157; confer also Martin and Eva Kolinsky, „The Treatment of the Holocaust in West German Textbooks”, in: *Yad Vashem Studies X* (1974), pp. 149-216.

¹² *Zur Auseinandersetzung mit dem Holocaust in der Schule. Ein Beitrag zur Information von Länderseite/On the Treatment of the Holocaust at School. A contribution from the Länder, Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, (Bonn) 1997, p. 53.

¹³ Dieter Boßmann, „Was ich über Hitler gehört habe...”. *Folgen eines Tabus. Auszüge aus Schüler-Aufsätzen von heute*, Frankfurt/M. 1977.

¹⁴ Falk Pingel, „Nationalsozialismus im Geschichtsunterricht - Neue Perspektiven seit 'Holocaust'?", in: *Geschichtsdidaktik* (1979), 4, pp. 306-318.

¹⁵ Christel Hopf et. al., *Wie kamen die Nationalsozialisten an die Macht: eine empirische Analyse von Deutungen im Unterricht*, Frankfurt/M. 1985.

¹⁶ Joachim Lietzke, *Alltag im Nationalsozialismus: die Kriegsjahre in Deutschland. Schülerwettbewerb um den Preis des Bundespräsidenten*, Hamburg 1985; *Remembering the Holocaust. Some experiences of the German President's history competition for young people*, Körber Foundation, Hamburg 1995.

¹⁷ *Deutsch-israelische Schulbuchempfehlungen. Zur Darstellung der jüdischen Geschichte sowie der Geschichte und Geographie Israels in Schulbüchern der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Zur Darstellung der deutschen Geschichte und der Geographie der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in israelischen Schulbüchern*, Braunschweig 1985, Frankfurt/M. 1992 (2nd enl. ed.).

¹⁸ Eva Kolinsky, „Geschichte gegen den Strom. Zur Darstellung des Holocaust in neuen Schulgeschichtsbüchern”, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 13 (1991), pp. 121-145; Falk Pingel, „Jüdische Geschichte in deutschen Lehrbüchern”, in: *Geschichte lernen* 6 (1993), pp. 4; Walter F. Renn, „The Holocaust in the school textbooks of the Federal Republic of Germany”, in: *Holocaust Literature*, Westport(CT) 1993, pp. 481-520.

¹⁹ Meanwhile, an opposite trend can be identified, see Bernd Mütter and Uwe Uffelmann, *Emotionen und historisches Lernen. Forschung - Vermittlung - Rezeption*, Frankfurt/M. 1992; Peter Malina, „Auschwitz: Betroffenheit statt Einsicht: Schulbuchtexte als Indikator öffentlichen Geschichtsbewußtseins“, in: *Materialien zur Geschichtsdidaktik* (1995).

²⁰ Herbert Hötte, „Museumpädagogische Arbeit mit Jugendlichen im Dokumentenhaus KZ Neuengamme“, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 6 (1984), pp. 173-185; Bernd Mütter and Falk Pingel, *Die Ideologie des Nationalsozialismus. Unterrichtsmodell und Arbeitsbuch für die Sekundarstufe II*, Bochum 1988; this book deals with the links between fascist ideology and modern right wing movements.

²¹ Harald Freiling, „Der Holocaust als Thema amerikanischer Schulcurricula“, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 11 (1989), pp. 255-282; Randolph L. Braham, *The Treatment of the Holocaust in Textbooks. The Federal Republic of Germany, Israel, The United States of America*, New York 1987; this book was the first to offer an international comparison.

²² A west-European comparison can be found in the proceedings of a seminar edited by Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste e.V.: *Rencontre Pédagogique Internationale. Le mémoire d'Auschwitz dans l'enseignement. Problèmes et perspectives, Bruxelles, 4-8 novembre 1991 / Internationales Pädagogikseminar. Die Erinnerung an Auschwitz im Unterricht. Probleme und Perspektiven*, Brüssel, 4.-8. 11. 1991. Die Beiträge.

²³ Karl-Peter Fritzsche and Matthias Härtung, eds., *Der Umgang mit „Fremden“. Eine deutschdeutsche Schülerbefragung zum Thema Schulbuch und Fremdenfeindlichkeit. Eine kommentierte Auswahlhilfe von Unterrichtsmaterialien*, Hannover 1997.

²⁴ Cf. Bodo von Borries, „Vorstellungen zum Nationalsozialismus und Einstellungen zum Rechtsextremismus bei ostund westdeutschen Jugendlichen. Einige empirische Hinweise von 1990, 1991 und 1992“, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 15 (1993), pp. 139-166; Kurt Pohl, *Bildungsreform und Geschichtsbewußtsein*, Pfaffenweiler 1996, cf. pp. 226 „Wissen und Einstellungen im Bereich Nationalsozialismus“.

²⁵ Gerd Steffens, „Die nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen und der Völkermord. Bemerkungen zur Unterrichtspraxis in der Bundesrepublik“, in: Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste e.V.: *Rencontre Pédagogique Internationale. Le mémoire d'Auschwitz dans l'enseignement. Problèmes et perspectives*, Bruxelles, 4-8 novembre 1991, p.124.

²⁶ *Time to Remember - Zeit des Erinnerns*, Lübeck, 9-11 November 1999.

²⁷ Thomas R. Henschel, *Young German Europeans divided memory in a united Germany*, unpublished presentation at the conference on „European Historical Conscientiousness: Empirical Evidence and Experience“, Essen, 13-15 January 2000.

²⁸ *Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich*. Thematische Auswahllisten von Unterrichtsmaterialien, Nr. 25, Georg-Eckert-Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung, Braunschweig 1999.

²⁹ This subject deals with geography, history, civics and even biology in an integrated manner.

³⁰ Siegfried Wolf, „Antisemitismus und Schoah als Unterrichtsgegenstand in Ostdeutschland - ein Fragment“, in: Thomas Lange (ed.), *Judentum und jüdische Geschichte im Schulunterricht nach 1945*, Wien 1994, pp. 125-139.