

sassinations as old scores were settled. The result of the blood-letting was a Nazi party even more strongly united around Adolf Hitler.

In August of the same year, President Hindenburg died. Paul von Hindenburg had been the grand old man of German politics, holding the office of the presidency, which was along with the chancellorship one of the two highest political offices in the land. Upon Hindenburg's death, Hitler merged the positions of president and chancellor, thus augmenting his power further. In a nation-wide plebiscite to confirm the merging of the two positions, almost 90% of Germans voted in favor of granting Hitler greater powers.

The Nazis now controlled all the major political offices, they had cleaned house internally, and they had eliminated all rival parties. In firm control, they next set about re-shaping all of German society.

## **14. Education**

Political tools such as physical force and authoritarian laws are necessary tools for a dictatorship, but long-term control of a people also requires control of their minds. The Nazis recognized this and made re-shaping Germany's educational system a priority. They already had a good head-start.

When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, about 2.5 million Germans were members of the Nazi Party. Seven percent of the Party's members were from the upper class, seven percent were peasants, thirty-five percent were industrial workers, and fifty-one percent were from the professional and middle class. Surprisingly, in the latter group, the professional and middle class, the largest occupational group represented was elementary school teachers. Hitler and the Nazis thus already had a core group of committed followers in a position to help them shape the minds of the next generation.

### ***The general purpose of education***

The Nazis had a particular kind of youth in mind. As early as 1925, Hitler had written in *Mein Kampf*: “the folkish state must not adjust its entire educational work primarily to the inoculation of mere knowledge, but to the breeding of absolutely healthy bodies. The training of mental abilities is only secondary.”<sup>28</sup>

Come 1933 and power, Hitler repeatedly made it even clearer what kind of healthy bodies he wanted the educational system to produce:

My program for educating youth is hard. Weakness must be hammered away. In my castles of the Teutonic Order a youth will grow up before which the world will tremble. I want a brutal, domineering, fearless, cruel youth. Youth must be all that. It must bear pain. There must be nothing weak and gentle about it. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from its eyes ... That is how I will eradicate thousands of years of human domestication ... That is how I will create the New Order.

Intellectual training was less emphasized than physical training, but it was not omitted. Students were trained in Nazi ideology, studied German history from a National Socialist perspective, learned political activism, and trained themselves to develop a selfless, obedient, duty-oriented moral character. The curriculum was revised, textbooks re-written, and teachers trained as servants of the cause. Early in the Nazi reign, teachers were declared to be civil servants and required to join the National Socialist Teachers League, swearing an oath of absolute fidelity to Adolf Hitler.

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<sup>28</sup> Hitler 1925, p. 408.

### *The Hitler Youth*

In addition to transforming the formal school system, the Nazis put great emphasis on the Hitler Youth organization. The Nazi Party's youth organization had been formed in 1922, early in the party's history, and acquired its Hitler Youth name in 1926. The purpose of the Hitler Youth was to train a cadre of devoted young followers outside the formal school system. Once the Nazis came to power, the formal German school system and the Hitler Youth became complementary training and indoctrination programs.



A Youth and the Führer

Boys could enter the program when they were age six, though official training began at age ten. All members of the Hitler Youth swore this oath: “In the presence of this blood-banner, which represents our Führer, I swear to devote all my energies and my strength to the savior of our country, Adolf Hitler. I am ready and willing to give up my life for him, so help me God.”<sup>29</sup>

Full membership and systematic training began at age fourteen and included the ability to take a physical beating without whining. Brutal fighting sessions among the boys were common and encouraged. As Hitler had put it in *Mein Kampf*, “But above all, the young, healthy body must also learn to suffer blows.”<sup>30</sup> If a boy was unable to withstand the pain or pressure, he was embarrassed in front of his peers. Those who succeeded, though, received accolades, a sense of belonging to a great cause, and useful symbols of their status, such as a special dagger.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Shirer 1962, p. 253.

<sup>30</sup> Hitler 1925, p. 410.

Parallel programs existed for girls. The League of Young Girls was established for girls ten to fourteen years of age. The fourteen-to-eighteen-year-old girls' group of the Hitler Youth was the Bund Deutscher Mädel, or League of German Girls. From seventeen to twenty-one years of age, young Aryan women were members of Faith and Beauty. Instruction focused on home, family, and the duty to bear children. The girls' training was similar to the boys', including wearing military-style uniforms, engaging in soldier-like activities, and learning Nazi ideology and activism.

Although the youth were encouraged to question their parents and their non-Nazi teachers, *within* the Hitler Youth absolute obedience was demanded. Despite this, membership in the Hitler Youth was *appealing* to many young Germans. Summer camps and parades were regular activities for the Hitler Youth. There was also the feeling of camaraderie and the sense of developing a sense of self-discipline, loyalty, and honor. Membership came to be considered to be a badge of honor—and, as the Nazi Party came closer to achieving power, membership even became a status symbol.

In 1932, the year before the Nazis came to power, the Hitler Youth had 107,956 members—or five percent of the German youth population. Within a year, membership had swollen to well over two million members.

In 1936, membership in the Hitler Youth became mandatory. All other youth groups had ceased to exist, been absorbed into the Hitler Youth, or abolished. And by 1939, the year that World War II was to begin, membership in the Hitler Youth reached almost eight million members.

### ***The universities***

The Nazis had also achieved great success with older students, those of university age.

Well before Hitler came to power, Nazi student groups

existed at universities all over Germany. Before 1933, it was common for students to come to classes wearing brown shirts and swastika armbands, and in many cases it was the most intelligent and idealistic university students who were the most activist and outspoken supporters of National Socialism.

The students also had many allies among their professors.

When the National Socialists took power, they prohibited all Jews from holding academic positions—this resulted in the firing of hundreds of tenured Jewish professors, including several Nobel Laureates. To their credit, many other professors resigned in protest or emigrated. But such professors were in the small minority.<sup>31</sup>

A large majority of university professors remained on the job, either silently accepting the new regime or even actively supporting it. In 1933, for example, 960 professors, including prominent figures such as philosopher Martin Heidegger, made a public proclamation of their support for Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist regime.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “But in numbers the *émigrés* were not to be compared with the leading figures in every field of intellectual endeavour who hailed the advent of National Socialism and pledged support to its Führer with every evidence of enthusiasm” (Craig 1978, p. 639).

<sup>32</sup> Shirer 1962, p. 251. Rohkrämer notes the following: “Association with National Socialism was also widespread among philosophers. While twenty philosophy professors were forced out of their positions, about thirty joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and almost half became party members by 1940” (Rohkrämer 2005, p. 171). On Heidegger in particular, given his high profile in the landscape of 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy, “‘Martin Heidegger? A Nazi, of course a Nazi!’ On a purely factual level, this exclamation by Jürgen Habermas is fully correct. Contrary to what Heidegger and Heideggerians have long maintained, historical research has demonstrated beyond doubt Heidegger’s early enthusiasm for National Socialism. Heidegger sympathized with the Nazis before 1933, he actively maneuvered to become rector, he publicly joined the Nazi Party on May Day, and the ceremony around his Rectoral Address included Nazi flags and the singing of the ‘Horst Wessel Song.’ While Jews and political opponents were removed from the university (like his teacher Edmund Husserl) or even forced to flee the country (like his intimate friend Hannah Arendt), Heidegger showed his enthusiastic support for the destruction of the Weimar Republic and for the new regime. He praised the Führer principle for the university sector, while striving to attain