Democratizing Textbooks

— Efforts to Erase Nationalism

NATIONALISM is patriotism with a superiority complex. Some say that it is back in Germany; others maintain that there is an evident ferment in the direction of democratic thinking about democratic ideas. With generations of training and indoctrination in the nationalistic spirit — a spirit that reached a climax in the late 19th century — one would be fairly naive to expect a people to change in the space of three years.

Unbridled nationalism usually buries its roots in the dishonest school textbook. And since 92 percent of all children 14 years of age or over receive little more than an elementary education, it is easy to see how, if boys and girls study "slanted" textbooks, the thinking of a whole country may move toward vicious self-glorification.

Two serious errors may be made in a discussion of nationalism: (1) That it represents a universal spirit generated centuries ago. While there is a long history of nationalism in Prussia, the general trend was not seriously evident until about the time of the Franco-Prussian War. (2) That no effort ever has been made to substitute honest and essential patriotism for nationalism. This, also, is an error, for excellent textbooks were produced during the short period of the Weimar Republic. Likewise, hundreds of teachers aligned themselves with organizations dedicated to the development of a more effective learning experience for children and youth.

WHAT IS TAUGHT, how it is taught, and who teaches it is more important to the German educational reconstruction program than

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boy asked him for a gulden (old Austrian coin worth about 48 cents). The emperor, evidently shocked by the boy's immodesty, asked him whether a kreutzer, a small coin (worth about half a cent), would not be enough. The boy explained that his mother, a widow naturally, was ill and that he was on his way to the doctor. The doctor, however, would not come unless a gulden was paid in advance.

The emperor asked the widow's address and after he had given the boy the money, he proceeded to the

Photographs illustrating this article were taken in the demonstration school of the Stuttgart Pedagogical Institute (Teachers' College) where teachers study modern teaching methods and receive guidance from MG specialists. The photographs are by Madeline Winkler, photographer of the Educational Service Center.

and prejudice that contribute to the nationalistic spirit.

There is danger of over-simplifying this problem by presenting superficial evidence. But a few brief excerpts from German textbooks at least may indicate the importance of the problem. For example, "Kaiser Franz-Joseph" as "Physician" is a story contained in practically every Lesebuch since 1872. It describes how "Our Gracious Highness, the Emperor Franz Joseph" while riding one day was accosted by a street urchin. The


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consisting of father, mother and 4 children.

Part one describes the outbreak of the war and the drafting of the father. The parting was naturally touching. The main emphasis was laid on the fact that everybody was proud to the point of exaltation that the father of the family was to go and avenge the insult inflicted upon the Holy Fatherland by the French and the English.

Part two dealt with the situation on the home front during the war. From reading that essay, one might have thought that there was nothing more glorious than living on turnips and potatoes and going without meat and fat. The letters of the father to his family spoke of heroism and victories. The wish to return to his wife and children obviously never entered his head; the Fatherland comes first. Once he came home on leave, duly decorated with the iron cross, but he returned to the front.

In the third part he was killed. The grief among his family and friends was greatly alleviated by the fact that he fell fighting for the glory of the Reich and while killing the French. This was the conciliatory spirit of the textbooks in 1925.

In the same book, under the general heading "Weltkrieg (World War)" there was also a poem called "Germany and the World," written by Ernst von Wildenbruch. Its number of verses runs into two pages, but they are only variations on the first one. It goes like this:

Wenn ich an Deutschland denke
Tut mir die Seele weh'

Weil ich rings um Deutschland
So viele Feinde seh'.

The Lesebuch for grade schools under Hitler contained the same nationalistic spirit. It did not have to be changed. That part remained the same as in the books of 1872 and 1925. But instead of sob stories and scenes of family life there were stories of how little Fritz became the leader of a Panzerdivision (armored division) and of Hans, who excelled in the Hitler Youth and became an aviator. Automobiles, motorcycles and airplanes invaded the pages which until then had known nothing faster than the horse and buggy.

Robert Ley, Reich leader of the Party organization, once said, "We begin with the child when it reaches the age of three. As soon as it begins to think, a little flag is placed in its hands." Day nurseries, of course, were taken out of the sphere of education and welfare about 1933, for it was disclosed that "effective welfare work cannot be done on a personal (meaning volunteer) basis." These day nurseries not only relieved working mothers of their responsibility but they provided the first stage in the Nazi educational pattern. These were special uniforms for all, pictures of Nazi leaders, flags, heroes on the walls, toys of a military nature and there were songs like this:

Unseren Fuehrer lieben wir
Unseren Fuehrer ehren wir
Unseren Fuehrer folgen wir
Bis wir Maenner werden.

An unseren Fuehrer glauben wir
Fuer unseren Fuehrer leben wir
Fuer unseren Fuehrer sterben wir
Bis wir Helden werden.

One more illustration of the use of textbooks to perpetuate and strengthen the nationalistic spirit is in "Wir Lernen Lesen" (We Learn to Read), a first reader. There is an illustration of a bomber squadron and

Translation:

1 When thinking of Germany
     It grieves me to the heart
     Because around Germany
     So many foes I see.

2 We love our leader,
     We honor our leader
     We follow our leader
     Until we are men.
     We believe our leader,
     We live for our leader
     And die for our leader
     Until we are heroes.
an "ack-ack" gun and a story entitled "We March to War" which goes like this:

"When the Fuehrer commands, we soldiers go to war. Our Fuehrer does not want to make war at all, but the enemy forces him to do so. There is no staying at home for a true soldier. I want to go as well.

"We have to travel and march a long way before we come to the frontier. Beyond it is the enemy. You cannot see him but he fires a few rounds at us everyday. We lie flat on the ground or behind a bank so that no shots can hit us. Then we creep up to the enemy and storm his positions. We rush forward so fiercely that the enemy is frightened to death. They leave their trenches and run away. Behind us the cannons are firing. Or a tank drives right into the enemy ranks. If they cannot get away, they put up their hands and surrender."

This is a first reader. After a school education based on this kind of content, there is reason to believe that formidable problems confront world education forces if this spirit is to be changed here and wherever it prevails. It is clear evidence that the educational reconstruction of Germany is not a matter to leave until material reconstruction and economic recovery are no longer problems.

It perhaps is not important in this discussion to indicate the formula which ordinarily is used in school textbooks to accomplish the desires of a governmental centralized ministry of education or any group desirous of promoting, strengthening and making permanent a particular spirit in a people. It is of some consequence, however, to indicate procedures which are in progress in attempting to create in the German mind a belief in the natural rights of man; a willingness and fitness to participate in a peaceful world order.

Only six aspects of the program bearing on the problem of content in the materials used for classroom instruction are presented here.

I. The Educational Service Center—
is an institution which I fully believe will become permanent in Germany once its value has been recognized and especially if we are able to support it either by government aid or voluntary contributions for the next three years.

This is a center in which one of the functions is to bring the best teachers together in committees to develop manuscripts for textbooks and materials for classroom use. In many cases parents and other lay members of the community serve on these committees. Much useful material has been produced. Over 600 titles and 17,000,000 copies of books have been made available to German schools thus far.

But this service center is more than a curriculum center. Through it, there will be developed a Child Guidance Center and a center for the study of human behavior and child development. This effort can result in the centering of the teaching act on the child and community as well as on the subject. In other words, a more effective learning environment can be developed and less emphasis on teaching as generally practiced is needed.

II. Seminar Social Science—The social sciences have had a tremendous setback in Germany. As a matter of fact, little attention has been paid to these fields. It is expected that, through an American foundation, a seminar will be organized out of which should come a sound development in the social science field.

Some of the scholars will have to be trained in other countries where social science has received attention. This is basic in the rewriting of history in many countries.

III. Comparative Education Conference—This month a comparative education conference is to be held at which 100 leading German educators will meet with 50 of the best experts in education and culture in European countries, Great Britain and the United States. This conference will indicate the educational progress which has occurred in all of these countries; also the dissatisfaction that many still feel in their system and the desire to continue improving the education of the people.

IV. Identification of Democratic Elements—In a country which has contributed so much to education in the past, one is somewhat at a loss to explain the reaction of the German people to the reforms proposed at the time of the Weimar Constitution. It indicates the resistance of the teaching profession itself to any kind of change, but there are tremendous potentialities within the teaching profession. German educators' desire to move ahead already has resulted in: the development of a society for...

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