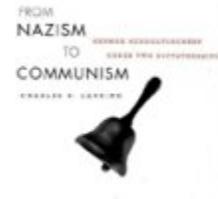


Charles B. Lansing. *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers under Two Dictatorships*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. 307 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-05053-2.

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German Schoolteachers and Regime Change, 1933-1953

Seeking to bring about the ideological transformation of their citizenry, the leaders of both Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic identified the indoctrination of the nation's youth as a vital concern. To this end, both regimes sought to reorient instruction in schools at all levels, with strong emphasis upon character formation. A frustrating obstacle confronting the two dictatorships when they assumed oversight of public education was that the schools were staffed by individuals who had been born into, educated by, and subsequently employed by the very political and social orders which were (after 1933 and again after 1945) to be repressed and superseded. Could teaching staffs, inherited from displaced and now despised regimes, be suitably disciplined, reeducated, and motivated so that they would serve their new employers not only as competent pedagogues but also as genuinely enthusiastic embodiments of the new order? Or if not, how and to what extent in the midst of regime change and societal upheaval could those deemed unsuitable be expeditiously purged and replaced with qualified candidates?

Charles Lansing addresses these questions in his case study of the professional fates of schoolteachers, both elementary and secondary, in the Prussian city of Brandenburg an der Havel in the two decades between Adolf Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933 and the East German uprising of June 1953. In his examination of changes in educational staffing and oversight, Lansing focuses primarily not on the formulation of the regula-

tions and directives handed down from the state's political and administrative centers but rather on the often overlooked but crucial aspect of implementation at the local level. He weighs the successes and failures of efforts between 1933 and 1953 intended to bring Brandenburg's teachers into outward conformity and inward adherence to the changing dictates of the regime currently in power.

Lansing does not detail what originally caused him to focus his attention on Brandenburg, a city he characterizes as representing a mixture of the typical and the exceptional in Germany. Located fifty kilometers west of Berlin, Brandenburg in 1933 had a population of approximately sixty-five thousand and an industrially based economy that featured the manufacture of steel, bicycles, and toys. Expansion of the manufacture of war materials under the Third Reich brought a surge in population, accompanied by a substantial increase in the number of children to be educated. Military defeat brought an influx of refugees, Soviet occupation, and thereafter, inclusion in the German Democratic Republic.

Lansing's study is richly documented. In examining the influence of a rapid succession of regime changes on Brandenburg's teachers, the author draws extensively on the correspondence, memoranda, and reports exchanged between state and local authorities, newspaper reports relating to teachers, and the personnel files of the city's instructors. Using such sources, Lansing analyzes changing patterns in recruitment, dismissals, transfers, demo-

tions, retraining, and reappointment of the city's teachers. In addition, he traces the membership of Brandenburg's educators in the changing slate of political parties and professional organizations open to them and assesses the degree, beyond mere formal membership, of teachers' involvement in and commitment to such groupings.

In his study of Brandenburg's schools under the Third Reich, Soviet occupation, and the earliest years of the East German regime, Lansing identifies recurring gulfs between what was dictated from the center and what transpired at the local level. In particular, he stresses the extent to which during the two decades under study, shortages of qualified teachers repeatedly hampered the full implementation of initiatives intended to purge teaching staffs of educators whose past associations or present behavior raised doubts about their suitability as guides for the nation's youth. Thus, in examining changes in the composition of teaching staffs under the Third Reich, Lansing ascribes more significance to the impact of the manpower exigencies and dislocations of the war years than to the regime's initially ambitious—but soon truncated—plans for both purging and reeducating teachers. In his account of the years immediately following the war, Lansing pays particular attention to the relationship between educators and the postwar teachers' union (Gewerkschaft Lehrer und Erzieher, GLE), contrasting the teachers' generally positive responses to its lobbying efforts in support of their everyday needs with the educators' less enthusiastic reaction to the National Socialist League of Teachers (Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund, NSLB) with its emphasis on heavy-handed indoctrination.

Concluding his narrative with an account of the formative years of the German Democratic Republic, Lansing returns to his recurring theme of the mutability of the majority of the city's teachers as reflected in their readiness to change their behavior to conform to the directives of a succession of altered regimes. After each shift in political power, on the whole teachers who served the previous government proved to be willing to adapt to new directives, implementing the ideologically refashioned lesson plans handed down to them and bringing their classroom behavior into line with altered practices. Their continued employment under difficult circumstances hung in the balance. At the same time, however, Lansing insists, attitudes and customs from the past survived among Brandenburg's teachers, limiting their inner commitment to and enthusiasm for the regimes they served between 1933 and 1953. This limited enthusiasm, Lansing argues, did not mutate into resistance, as demonstrated most notably by the teachers' failure to participate in the 1953 East German uprising. As thousands of Brandenburg's residents took to the streets, the city's schoolteachers opted to remain in their classrooms.

Lansing has written an insightful and informative case study. It will be of interest not only to historians of education but also to those interested in how and to what extent the turbulent changes in Germany between 1933 and 1953 transformed the lives of groups beyond the historical limelight. Additionally, it usefully addresses the recurring question about the balance between continuity and discontinuity in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century.

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