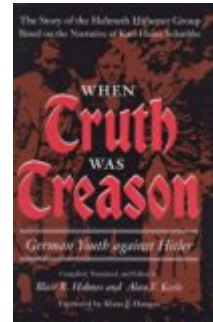


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Blair R. Holmes, Alan F. Keele, eds. *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth Against Hitler: The Story of the Helmuth Huebener Group Based on the Narrative of Karl-Heinz Schnibbe*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995. xxix + 425 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02201-2.

Reviewed by Michael H. Kater (York University, Toronto)  
Published on H-German (April, 1996)



Helmuth Huebener was a Hamburg working-class youth who in the middle of World War II developed the habit of listening to the BBC, transcribing the news he had heard onto leaflets, and having those clandestinely distributed to German mailboxes by three friends, until early in 1942 when the Gestapo caught up with them. The four teenage members of the Huebener group first were held in Hamburg and later tried by the notorious People's Court in Berlin. As the ringleader, Huebener was sentenced to death and executed (one of the youngest Nazi victims); the others received lengthy prison sentences.

The story of Huebener has been related to the editors by a surviving member of the group, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, who after the war made his way to the United States. This particular circumstance, then, is where the problems with the book begin. For while it could have become a useful analysis of working-class youth unrest and other conditions in Nazi Germany, it fails as such because of its built-in biases and skewed vision. Huebener and Schnibbe were no ordinary working-class youths; they were German Mormons. Their story has been retold to two Mormon scholars at Brigham Young University in Utah, and in the book the story is prefaced by an introduction by a Mormon scholar from Queen's University in Kingston, Canada. As it turns out, not counting some documents at the back, only seventy-three pages out of a total of 425 are dedicated to the collective of the Huebener group: page 73 contains the date of the ringleader's execution, and from then on the story becomes solely that of Karl-Heinz Schnibbe. And, though I agree that Schnibbe's fate was a sad one (because of his stay in German penal institutions and confinement thereafter in a Soviet labor camp until his release in 1949), it does not, on the whole, warrant a monographic

treatment under the misleading subtitle "German Youth against Hitler."

Because the three collaborators on this volume are practicing Mormons, as are the heroes of their study (all four but one), they cannot develop the critical distance necessary to come to grips with a delicate subject. As authors such as Christine King, among others, reminded us years ago (in her book entitled *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Nonconformity*, New York: 1982), the small sect of Mormons in Nazi Germany, law-and-order-loving as they were, tended to be collaborators rather than opponents of the Nazi regime. This attitude rendered them similar to other law-and-order-abiding religious sects such as the Seventh Day Adventists and placed them in contrast to sects such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, who refused to acknowledge Hitler's authority.

Any book dealing with resistance by Mormon youths against the Nazi state would have to come to grips with the conundrum of youth revolt for social, political, or religious reasons and the attendant problems of a broken socialization, be it in the lower-class home or in the Hitler Youth. Such an analysis of complex factors is missing from this volume, beyond the stated facts that the parental background of the Huebener clique was a religious, law-and-order one and that Huebener and his friends could not agree with the direction in which Nazi Germany was moving.

Since, within the microcosm of Hamburg either as a major blue-collar stronghold or a typical cell of the German Mormon community, basic evaluations by the editors are missing, the analysis of Huebener's group remains disappointingly shallow—being neither in the con-

text of working-class youth on the one side nor that of fundamentalist Christianity on the other. These problems, particularly the latter, are compounded by the fact that Schnibbe, as a practicing Mormon now living in Utah, has told his story from a subjective point of view to what must have been, in extreme-case scenarios, susceptible Mormon interviewers. Despite voluminous endnotes, they were evidently not capable of utilizing the required social-science skills, through critical editing and

analysis, to render this chronicle objective and historiographically viable. As part of this criticism, the fact that almost half of the actual text deals neither with Huebener nor with the Nazi period, but with the post-1945 adventures of Schnibbe, the hapless story-teller, does not weigh in heavily, but it does raise the broader question why such a book, with its partially misleading title, has had to be published in the first place.

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**Citation:** Michael H. Kater. Review of Holmes, Blair R.; Keele, Alan F., eds., *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth Against Hitler: The Story of the Helmuth Huebener Group Based on the Narrative of Karl-Heinz Schnibbe*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 1996.

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