



**David Phillips.** *Educating the Germans: People and Policy in the British Zone of Germany, 1945-1949.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Illustrations. 392 pp. \$128.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4725-0955-0.

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In our age of (mostly failed) fast-tracked democracy-building schemes, it is sobering to revisit the sustained process that followed World War II and turned Nazi Germany into a solid democracy. The Allies believed that education could play a key role in the democratization of Germany, and devoted significant thought, money, and government support to the revamping of the entire German educational system. The scope of this book is the British occupation zone in north-western Germany—the most damaged by the war and the most populous of the occupation zones, with twenty-two million people. The author draws on a rich collection of sources in the British National Archives, other archives in England and Germany, and interviews and correspondence with British officers who worked with the education branch of the Control Commission in the British zone.

The conundrum facing policymakers in the zone was that the denazification of Germany was to be followed by reeducation and democratization in the midst of the devastation of the war, in a country divided among Allies who disagreed on their plans for the future of Germany but still had to coordinate their occupation programs. Furthermore, as David Phillips shrewdly puts it, if the population of Germany was to be reeducated for democracy, it was soon clear that the four Allied

forces understood the process of reeducation quite differently. The entire enterprise rested on the (unclear) answer to the question whether any nation has the right to impose its values over another. Overall, the British approached the reeducation of the Germans far more self-consciously than the Americans or the Soviets did in their respective occupation zones, mindful of their own “incurable ... instinct of ‘ruling the natives for their own good’” (p. 49). The Allied occupation was supposed to foster democratic practices autocratically, under the guise of a form of benevolent despotism, and Phillips shows how initial British ideas about reeducation gradually evolved into a “policy of education by example, and of facilitating democratic government” by “gentle advice and quiet suasion” (p. 21). Consent on the part of the Germans to be reeducated in the direction of democracy was deemed crucial to the future of Germany, just as much as economic prosperity was deemed crucial to consent.

Some early educational policies for Germany had emerged in Britain during the late stages of the war, and, by the start of the actual occupation, they were clearly articulated (chapter 1). The implementation of these ideas was left to the employees of the education branch, who also had to find solutions to the very practical problems they faced, while respecting international law, particu-

larly during the pre-surrender stages of the occupation. In parallel with these official efforts operated unofficial (and often unwelcome) enthusiasts, such as S. H. Wood, the founder of German Educational Reconstruction, an organization that engaged German expats in the efforts to rebuild education after the war.

The education branch was a complex operation “bedevilled by bureaucracy, uncertainty, duplication, understaffing and general frustration” and plagued by a difficult relationship between the military and the civilian staff, and by messy communication lines between London, the occupation zone, and Berlin, and between British and German authorities (p. 54). Chapter 2 chronicles the mundane tasks that came with rebuilding an educational system from rubble. The first main challenges were to find Germans who were prepared to carry out Allied orders and to establish new administrative structures in a country where most skilled administrators had been Nazis. Other challenges were to repair buildings and provide furniture and materials, and to find textbooks, food, clothes, and other basics for the children. Given the devastation of the country, it is impressive that some schools were reopened as early as June 1945. Not many well-qualified civil servants in Britain flocked to the job of reconstructing Germany—a recurrent theme across the eight chapters of the book—so the reader has to sift through a dizzying carousel of individuals shuffling in and out of positions in the British occupation zone. The onset of the Cold War added another layer of complications to reconstruction efforts, due to the ideological differences between the Eastern and Western Allies, which translated into different expectations—from the material comfort of the pupils to attitudes toward private schools or religious education.

Using graphs, tables, and many anecdotes about British officials at work, Phillips chronicles the struggles to find qualified non-Nazi German teachers to serve the thousands of students and

addresses the dearth of civil workers in England willing to move to Germany to assist the process (chapter 3). Training the trainers was a key priority for all parts of the British zone, as was finding ideologically acceptable textbooks. All efforts were underpinned by pre-occupation assumptions and negative stereotypes—British and American—about the German character, the German “soul” and its ability (or inability) to regenerate. These beliefs inspired the initial harsh policy of non-fraternization with the Germans right after the surrender, a policy that was to be, however, abandoned in the British sector by September 1945. At the same time, the British remained acutely aware of the need to alter deep cultural trends in order to obtain lasting results in Germany. While the views of some of the British officials who had to oversee the reconstruction “wandered between justifiable contempt and sympathetic understanding,” the overarching concern of the British occupation was that the German youth was living in a “mental vacuum,” “confused, disillusioned, nihilistic, distressed, rather than straightforwardly Nazified,” and that the battle for the future of Germany was to be “carried out in their minds” (pp. 123, 124). Education was broadly understood; aside from reforming schools to encourage vocational training as well as denominational education (this thorny issue is discussed at length in chapter 5), the British zone encouraged the establishment of youth clubs, an educational radio broadcast targeting the young, and, in the case of universities, summer classes; between 1946 and 1948, hundreds of British academics, including prominent scholars, traveled to Germany and taught hugely popular university vacation courses.

Opening, operating, and then reforming German universities raised the same issues—material and ideological—as primary and secondary education had (chapters 4 and 6). German universities were opened by the end of 1945; however, by the time control was handed back to German authorities, many of the original problems were not

yet solved. There was a shortage of writing paper, there were no books, and the cities were in rubble. The British often found themselves appointing ex-Nazis, either as a result of insufficient checks on their past or because there were not enough qualified people to staff university offices and maintain them operational. Some German professors had been left in exile during Nazism, some had tried to find refuge in their research, and others had cooperated with the regime either quietly or enthusiastically—all of which is described by Phillips as a perfect “case study of how not to respond to tyranny” (p. 225). In 1947, the Association of University Teachers issued a report calling for the complete overhaul of German higher education, followed by a commission appointed in 1948 by the military governor of the British zone. Restructuring the Senate and Faculty Councils was recommended to be given priority, in order to grant more power to the younger generation. Another suggested change was the introduction of new courses of study and new faculties (departments). The desire for reform was however counterbalanced by the need to maintain a degree of stability until the point when “changes could be agreed through decisions by elected German authorities” (p. 203). The process was a success; its main gains were to enshrine the public function of the university as a purveyor of “truth through research and teaching *in the service of man*” and to open the German academic space to ideas coming from outside the country (p. 251).

The same concern with opening the German ideological and cultural space to European and global ideas shaped the initiatives described in chapter 7 (“Culture, Adult Education, Women’s Affairs”). This chapter demonstrates that the scope of the “education” to be bestowed on the Germans in the British zone extended to the public sphere, including the reconfiguration of gender roles. The British gradually reintroduced newspapers, book publishing, theater, concerts, public libraries, and film in the zone, while intentionally avoiding a clear propagandistic tone. Cultural activities were

initially subjected to censorship, but the practice was relaxed in early 1947. Public broadcasting was established as early as May 1945, first with significant assistance from the BBC, later by creating a regional radio authority. British information centers, named Die Brücke, showcased British life and society to the Germans, serving as cultural hubs across the zone. Interestingly, the British did not purge public libraries of problematic books, focusing instead on limiting the publication of new ones. Adult education centers (Volkshochschulen), disbanded en masse by the Nazis, were reopened, and German authorities were tasked with running these centers in accordance with specific needs in their areas—mainly offering evening lectures, vocational training, and some courses in liberal studies. Women’s organizations, modeled after British institutions, were put together and focused on encouraging democratic thinking and civic responsibilities among German women, who were viewed as crucial agents of change in the new Germany.

Given the enormity of the undertaking and the dire situation in which Britain itself was at the end of the war, the accomplishments of the British occupation in the realm of education are outstanding. Rebuilding Germany was done at a steep cost to the British taxpayer at a time when most Britons were struggling themselves. Some politicians, among them Winston Churchill, voiced skepticism about the value (strategic and financial) of this educational involvement in a defeated nation. Yet the projects continued, their defenders explicitly tying them to the shared Allied objective to turn Germany into a viable democracy. Ultimately, the Occupation Statute gave German authorities as much self-government as feasible, successfully guiding, rather than forcing, them on the path to reform.

The painstakingly researched book sheds a welcome light on the immense human and material British investment in reshaping German educational and cultural life. Even if the larger story

occasionally gets lost under the wealth of details and the rather haphazard structure of the book, Phillips's monograph will undoubtedly become an indispensable read for any scholar interested in the role of education in occupied Germany.

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