

Prussian Ministry for Science, Art, and Education, “Necessary Reforms in the Secondary School System” (August 1933)

Abstract

This excerpt lays out the views of the Prussian Ministry for Science, Art, and Education on how to reform the secondary school system. The ministry’s considerations revolve around the idea that school instruction must sharpen young people’s awareness of “their German nature and their close ties to the *Volk*,” that is, to the people or nation, understood in racial terms. To achieve that goal, the ministry recommends greater efforts to disseminate “racial-biological knowledge,” an increased emphasis on “training the body and training the will,” and the study of “subjects representative of German culture.” The document suggests that the intentions of a racially and ideologically driven National Socialist education policy had become clear by August 1933 at the latest.

Source

Liberal ideas about the absolute value of the individual human being, the coming of a supranational [*überevölkisch*] human community, the omnipotence of reason, and the necessity of formal, subject-oriented general education have led in our school system to theorizing that is foreign to everyday life, internal confusion, and external fragmentation, which together paved the way for national disintegration and ultimately also assumed economically insupportable forms.

Every era creates educational institutions that correspond to its ideas. Thus, the era of new humanism gave rise to the classical-language *Gymnasium* [a university-preparatory secondary school] based on the conviction that the supranational culture of antiquity could be accessed through intellectual mastery of the Latin and Greek languages. Decades of scientific and technical progress created *Realanstalten* [occupational-technical secondary schools], and the culturally directionless times toward the end of the previous century saw the establishment of various types of *Realgymnasien* [university-preparatory secondary schools emphasizing modern languages and science] as the “golden middle path,” until finally a reawakened cultural awareness sought to make itself felt in [other secondary school forms known as] *Ober- und Aufbauschulen*. No era, however, decided to eliminate any of the past school types, because in the end all these time periods built on the same foundation of liberal thought and therefore did not possess a standard by which the value or worthlessness of a material, a method, or a school type could be judged. In contrast, the *völkisch world view* proclaims, in accordance with the principles expressed by the *Führer* in his book *Mein Kampf*, that biological-organic thinking and action must also form the basis for education.

Accordingly, neither the individual person nor humankind can provide the standard for education; only the racially and biologically understood national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*] can do so. All educational work must serve it. All education, therefore, must always look beyond the education of the individual to the national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*]. Whoever serves this community also piously serves the individual. But a *Volk* can only exist if its members are healthy in body, spirit, and mind alike, and if the first two [i.e., body and spirit], which are more important for preserving the *Volk*, do not atrophy on account of an excess of mere knowledge and formal

intellectual training.

Whether and to what extent educational materials are taught in school depends on the extent to which they are suitable to raising young people's awareness of their German nature and their close ties to the *Volks*, and to translating that awareness into the will to act. The importance of material for a particular profession and the question of its formative power [in this respect] can only be seen as secondary considerations. Consequently, subjects that do little to serve this primary objective or only serve secondary objectives must be pushed aside in the new German schools and cannot hope to hold sway in the great number of learning institutions.

Specifically, the following principles must be applied:

1) (see immediate measures I and II) The most important foundation for all schooling is racial-biological knowledge. It is to be inculcated indelibly in students and must permeate all other subjects as the basic principle of instruction.

Training the body and training the will—especially in physical education—will thus be given the attention they deserve in comparison to the training of the mind, which has been almost the sole focus of schooling up to this point; and henceforth education for the *Volks* will be given priority over the education of the individual as the highest goal. Here, schools will have to work hand in hand with other, similarly oriented educational communities, above all the National Socialist youth organizations.

2) (see immediate measures III and IV) For spiritual and intellectual training, subjects representative of German culture, i.e., German, history, geography, drawing, and singing, in addition to biology, will be the central focus in all German schools as the core subjects mandatory for all students at all levels. Instruction in these subjects will extend back to the time of Germanic-German prehistory and early history, when our essential nature was still free of the strongly corruptive influences of foreign peoples. At the same time, the study of the past only has value to the extent that it is related and applied to the present in such a way that it awakens the will to act for the advancement of the community. This principle also applies to foreign materials and subject matter. Accordingly, only the cultures and languages of peoples racially similar to us can be seriously considered as educational subjects.

3) (see immediate action V) German national heritage must be the only subject for as long as possible, so that [this heritage] is already present in the souls of young people as an inalterable force when their gaze is directed to non-German things. Foreign materials are to be added only gradually and are to be selected according to the degree of their kinship with German culture, and only secondarily according to their general educational or professional value. Educational materials on German heritage must therefore completely dominate Grades VI-IV (1-3) in all secondary schools. And only materials on the English—as the world people [*Welt-Volk*] that is closest to us racially and culturally—are to be added in moderation (4 hours per week). This situation can and must persist in the vast majority of secondary schools until the school-leaving examination [*Reifeprüfung*], making it possible in the main type of secondary school, the *Oberschule*, to obtain a graduation certificate with only one foreign language. It is a prejudice to believe that advanced education, which serves as the qualification for scientific achievement, can only be attained through immersion in multiple foreign languages.

[...]

To initiate the required changes in the secondary school system, we consider the following immediate measures to be urgently needed:

I) *Biological foundation:*

- 1) There should be *two hours of biology* instruction for *all* secondary school grades, if necessary, at the expense of mathematics, the other natural sciences, or foreign languages. Hereditary studies; racial and ethnic studies; individual, national and racial hygiene; and genealogy and demography are to be taught in the upper four grades.
- 2) For *those graduating this year*, immediate attention should be paid to introducing students to the foundations of these biological laws and to their manifestations. In the coming school-leaving examination at Easter 1934, each student will have to demonstrate knowledge of these important foundations of life.

II) *Increased physical competence:*

- 1) *Monthly hikes* are to be carried out in all schools without exception. Every half-year a 2-3 day hike is to take place. The hikes are less for teaching purposes than for bodily care and the cultivation of personal and national will. The greatest possible level of simplicity, self-help, and communal life are therefore imperative. The hikes, especially those lasting several days, are to be conducted in close association with the SA [*Sturmabteilung*], the SS [*Schutzstaffel*], the Hitler Youth, and its youngsters' group [*Jungvolk*], since youthful community spirit and a determination to achieve national policy goals coalesce to an outstanding degree in these groups. These groups can be given extensive freedom in arranging and conducting the hikes.
- 2) *Freedom from homework* is to be strictly enforced on those days following work-free afternoons and hiking days. Allowances are also to be made whenever possible for events held by the groups cited in 1). Having students make up missed homework though increased workloads on other days violates the spirit of this regulation and is therefore not allowed under any circumstances.
- 3) If a student is a member, or even a leader, of one of the above-mentioned groups, and participates with eagerness and success, then this is to be deemed as a special accomplishment in the total evaluation of his personality (promotion, school-leaving examination, tuition waiver, subsidies, etc.).

III) *Cultivation of Germanic-German cultural heritage:*

- 1) The *old-Germanic cultural heritage* passed down to us (prehistoric objects, legends, fairy tales, beliefs, customs, river names, etc.) is to be especially cultivated; above all young people should be familiarized with the surviving works of early Nordic literature.
- 2) Every *walk through history* should begin with prehistory: the ancient sites, and the nature and life of the Indo-Germanic core. The journey through the rest of history has to begin with *the Nordic homeland*. In the future, the history of the Orient, Greece, and Italy should not be viewed from the perspective of these countries and peoples themselves but should be represented in the context of the conflict of the conquering Nordic master races with foreign races and peoples. This eliminates the break in our history instruction, intolerable from the standpoint of the *Volk*, that unjustifiably occurred in the transition from Roman to German history.
- 3) As part of the emphatic cultivation of German uniqueness, *German script* is to be used exclusively from now on in all subjects—except for written papers in foreign languages—and the use of foreign words in speech and writing is to be avoided. Here, too, the teaching staff will set a good example and make an effort in every official record—including in the correction of student work—and in the classroom to employ German script and language free of foreign words.

[....]

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