

5-2010

Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany

David A. Messenger

University of Wyoming, dmesseng@uwyo.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.uwyo.edu/history_facpub



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Publication Information

Messenger, David A. (2010). "Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany." *German Studies Review* 33.2, 434-435.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Wyoming Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Wyoming Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact scholcom@uwyo.edu.



German Studies Association

Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany (Monographs in German History, 27) by Brian M. Puaca

Review by: DAVID A. MESSENGER

German Studies Review, Vol. 33, No. 2 (May 2010), pp. 434-435

Published by: [The Johns Hopkins University Press](#) on behalf of the [German Studies Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20787949>

Accessed: 20/06/2014 12:00

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Johns Hopkins University Press and German Studies Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *German Studies Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Brian M. Puaca. *Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany* (Monographs in German History, 27). New York, NY: Berghahn, 2009. Pp.xiii, 221. Cloth \$90.

Debates about the nature of democratization and denazification in occupied Germany often turn to the role that the German education system played in the establishment and legitimization of Nazism. Whether because of ideological propaganda or the existence of a more structured and elitist system, American observers often concluded, as Henry Morgenthau Jr. did, that German education could never be completely democratic. Brian M. Puaca seeks to challenge that assumption in this book, focusing in particular on what he terms “political education,” the movement to establish practical democratic practices in the life of the school (112).

Beginning with an examination of practices in the American zone under occupation, especially in Hessen and West Berlin, Puaca moves on to demonstrate that the democratization of education was most successful under the Federal Republic in the 1950s and into the mid-1960s. While the greatest change occurred in the *Gymnasium*, he is also clear that the same reforms made their way into the *Volksschule*. While the study highlights the production of new texts and development of a new curriculum, such as the incorporation of contemporary history into secondary schools, what is most striking and original in the argument is the role that student radio and student government played in the process. In a series of chapters, Puaca traces the growth of the Berlin Student Parliament from its early sponsorship, during the occupation, by the RIAS radio station through to its 1961 resolutions on the Berlin Wall, its charitable work in fundraising for senior citizens, and its efforts to educate students as potential voters and political activists (167). Similarly, the growth of the student press, which examined issues as diverse as West Germany’s international position to the relationship between teachers and pupils in the classroom is shown to have provided students with a “practical experience” in democratic life (129).

The influence of American educators with a firm belief in the philosophies of Thomas Dewey shaped the occupation’s policies not only in authorizing the rewriting of texts, but also making sure that these texts encouraged discussion and debate in the classroom, thus lessening the role of the teacher as an authoritarian presence. Having said that, Puaca persuasively argues that it was in the 1950s that the foundation laid by the Americans was taken up by West German administrators and students. In addition to the significance of student government and newspapers, he also cites how different states in the Federal Republic took up the common cause of the rewriting of texts to emphasis individualism and the “everyday workings” of democracy in Germany and around the world (130–31). By the 1960s, this meant that a new generation of educators saw political education and reform not as American-inspired, but rather as a German priority in light of events such as the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Eichmann trial, and the Spiegel Affair (155).

Puaca’s conclusion that a transformation of German education occurred—without substantially altering its structure—has implications beyond just the history of education. Rather he argues for readers to reconceptualize the role that education

had on society, and arguably too he wants us to reconsider what constitutes a good measure of democratization and denazification.

DAVID A. MESSENGER, *University of Wyoming*

Dieter Düding. *Parlamentarismus in Nordrhein-Westfalen 1946–1980. Vom Fünfparteien- zum Zweiparteienlandtag (Handbuch der Geschichte des deutschen Parlamentarismus)*. Düsseldorf: Droste, 2008. Pp. 833. Cloth €88.

Einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland hat Dieter Düding mit seiner umfangreichen Untersuchung zum Parlamentarismus im nach der Einwohnerzahl größten Bundesland Nordrhein-Westfalen zwischen 1946 und 1980 vorgelegt. Auf der breiten Basis publizierter und archiverischer Quellen aus dem Landtagsarchiv sowie den staatlichen, kommunalen und Parteiarchiven sowie von Zeitzeugengesprächen stellt er fundiert den Wandel vom Fünfparteien- zum Zweiparteienlandtag dar. Waren zunächst CDU, SPD, KPD, Zentrum und FDP im Landesparlament vertreten – die KPD war drittstärkste Fraktion – so erfolgte zum Ende des Untersuchungszeitraumes mit der Wahl 1980 eine (kurzzeitige) Konzentration auf SPD und CDU.

Betont quellennah analysiert er detailgetreu in seiner grundsätzlich chronologisch angelegten Untersuchung die sieben Entwicklungsperioden des nordrhein-westfälischen Landtags: Parlamentarismus ohne gewähltes Parlament – der ernannte Landtag (1946/1947), der erste gewählte Landtag im Zeichen des Fünfparteiensystems (1947–1950), die Phase der bürgerlichen Kabinette (1950–1956), die kurzlebige erste „sozialliberale“ Koalition (1956–1958), der Landtag unter wiederhergestellter CDU-Dominanz (1958–1966), Reformlandtag, Landesparlamentarismus und sozialliberale Koalition (1966–1975) sowie der Landtag in der zur Neige gehenden sozialliberalen Ära (1975–1980). Sehr verdienstvoll sind die Abschnitte zur Alters-, Geschlechter-, Bildungs- und Berufsstruktur des Parlaments.

Herausgearbeitet werden in der übersichtlich strukturierten Arbeit deutlicher als zuvor die inhaltlichen Streitpunkte zwischen den Parteien, wie z.B. Kohlebergbau, Sozialisierung, Verfassungsfragen, Schulartikel, Ausschließung der KPD aus der Regierung. Sichtbar werden z.B. die schwierigen Lebensverhältnisse in der Nachkriegszeit, aber auch die Prägungen der in Nordrhein-Westfalen sehr lebendigen parlamentarischen Arbeit durch herausragende Persönlichkeiten wie Konrad Adenauer, dessen vielschichtige Rolle als Landesparlamentarier hier gründlich dargestellt wird, Heinrich Köppler, Heinz Kühn, Carl Severing oder Johannes Rau. Die vielen konkreten Beispiele parlamentarischer Aktivitäten lassen die gerade im Rahmen des Gesetzgebungsverfahrens vielschichtigen Arbeitsweisen des Landesparlamentes klar erkennbar werden. Klar werden die Bedeutung der Schul- und Hochschulpolitik und in diesem Kontext die Rolle der Kirchen. Der Längsschnitt zeichnet die unterschiedlichen Rollen von Parteien in der Regierungsverantwortung oder in der Opposition nach. Düding fragt erfreulicherweise nach dem Verhältnis von Bundes- und Landespolitik