

Deutschland is auf (k)einem Guten Weg

Dieter Keb

Stepping halfway out on a limb to tell about half the problems in the public schools

This is an autobiographical book by a man who grew up in the in East Germany. After Germany's reunification he became a teacher in the state of Northrhine Westphalia, bordering Belgium.

He makes himself out to be a competent teacher, and this book is really an account of the difficulties that an honest teacher has to face. The unruly students, drugs sex and smoking in the toilets, and even physical altercations with the teachers.

The school bureaucracy is very much controlled by the party. He does not say which one it is, although one cannot imagine is anything other than the Social Democrats, SPD, Germany's leftist party. Party loyalty is more important than performance in rising through the school bureaucracy.

The upshot is that the teachers are really on their own, with no support in dealing with the students, the parents, or the administration itself. The leadership positions in schools are filled with careerists who are interested in climbing the ladder, but rather cynically neglect the task of educating kids. They assume, all too correctly, that nobody cares.

The first three quarters of the book is nothing but a series of personal accounts accumulated over a lifetime in the classroom. The reader may find it interesting to compare with the similar account from the United States. I recommend [[ASIN:0945700040 The Underground History Of American Education]] by John Gatto. Diane Ravitch's [[ASIN:0684844176 Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reform]] is another, broader take on the problem in America.

One factor that the author does not go into, which surely must play a role, is the ethnicity of the students. Germany has an increasingly multicultural society. The Turkish guest workers have been there for more than half a century. They have never properly integrated, and their school performance, or lack thereof, is well documented. More recently Germany has accepted significant numbers of asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East. When he talks about the louts that he deals with in the school, one has to wonder if they're all German louts or in some measure imported.

In the last quarter of the book he goes beyond the school system to ask questions about the future of the German democracy. Can it continue like this, when the education of the young is in the hands of careerists? Good question, but he doesn't offer many answers. He mainly just says it's an issue. However, looking back at the history of German education, it is hard to find a golden age. It has always been under the control of the state, and hence the political parties, to one degree or another. It is hard to imagine that things were much better under Bismarck, Kaiser Wilhelm or Adolf Hitler.

He does not talk about the leftist influences on the curriculum itself. Considering that the leftist agenda dominates the University system in Germany, and public schools throughout the rest of Europe, it would seem to be a topic worth discussing.

A solution that he does not advocate, but which comes to my mind as reviewer, is homeschooling. The German government maintains tight control over the schools. They do not allow homeschooling. Charter schools are unknown as well, to my knowledge. Germany could afford to loosen up, giving parents more alternatives. However, as Keb implies, the unions and the party are unlikely to allow their power to be diluted in such a manner.

In summary, to an American this book is déjà vu. We know about these problems, there is certainly common in our schools. The book unfortunately does not offer a full picture, and that some of the facets of the problem are probably off-limits, too politically incorrect to bring up. The other shortcoming is that is the author's solution is vague and

simplistic. He longs wistfully for a real democracy. More practical would be to advocate other solutions to educating children rather than a state system. The problems he describes seems to be pretty endemic in state systems.

Notes

There's little biographical information about the author in the book itself, and the search on the Internet isn't any more fruitful. We learn that he worked in your divine best failure, which is the part of Germany up toward the Dutch border, and that he went to school in the 1950s. That would put him someplace in his 70s probably.

He had been a teacher in the in East Germany before reunification and continued in West Germany. This book is about West German education the book is biographical – it confines itself to this author's experience teaching in the German schools. He generalizes his experience in the schools to all of German society.

Nonetheless nonetheless, he is quite circumspect. While he says that the schools and the teachers unions are very political, he doesn't go into much detail. I expect that it is quite similar to the situation with the teachers unions in the United States and most industrial democracies. The teachers are strongly allied with the leftist parties, and they spread a generally leftist message throughout throughout the teaching. This author does say that the curriculum is influenced by leftist thought. In particular, he cites the Frankfurt school, or Kramer, Adorno and others, who are often credited with spearheading the decline of schools in America.

There are certain topics that he does not go close to. It would be worth a readers while to take a look at Philo's Saracens work, Deutschland shot six, for some corroborating background information.

Just for example, the words race, immigrant, Turk, and Arabic do not show up whatsoever in the search of the book. Sarah's and would say that these are highly relevant terms. The author does say that he encountered fatherless children with some frequency, especially among the troublemakers. He is not go further into the incidence of child of fatherless homes, or the demographics. Sarah's in goes into it at length, saying that not only are the Germans not reproducing themselves, but those who are having kids are the less intelligent, and they often do it outside of marriage.

He has a good riff on computers and technology. He says that the principles in the schools where he taught virtually demanded that teachers use technology. They held it against a teacher if he used the textbook as the primary medium of the instruction. It should be a stand and deliver lecture and multimedia, with the textbook taking up third-place. This is because it is too much of an expectation to place on child that he would read.

He notes that the students no longer have to pay for the textbooks. They treat them with no respect, as a result of which a textbook generally doesn't survive more than a single year's use. The students carry them around but they don't use them.

He cites some studies that he conducted informally and others have conducted on a more formal basis that the children who do not learn from reading the textbook simply do not learn. There was a lot of expectation placed on multimedia learning, especially computer learning. It has turned out that students who cannot read the material simply don't get it.

He says that he was challenged by students who told him that they didn't need to learn how to read, or to understand formulas or understand the material presented in the books. They could always look it up on the Internet. It turns out that they cannot. No, even if you give them access to the Internet unless I have a background understanding they cannot make sense out of what they find on the Internet.

When the author was growing up, school leaders were very active in the community. They were involved in singing clubs, cultural organizations, they were community leaders. Now there outside of

offense or almost all political, tied to their work in the schools.

As an aside and let me offer that VM that Diane Ravitch, and John got so, to history and American schools, comment on the vast influence the German schools had in the formation of American public schools in the latter part of the 19th century. In particular they point to the discipline of the German schools and the three tracks, which remain in evidence in German schools. That would be the lead track for the college-bound, the general track, and the apprentice track for children headed for the trades.

He says that the schools are incredibly political. The principals may be the mayor of their city, and give no time whatsoever to their job as a school principal. However, they consider this necessary.

What is not said is which political party. It seems strikingly clear that he's talking about the social Democrats.

20 just to recap previous chapters. The teacher in the classroom is the fall guy. The principal of the school should be responsible but usually manages, is successful in shifting the responsibility and the blame to the teacher. In the case of disagreements with the parents, they say to the teacher, simply work it out.

There were fairly extensive sections on the problems in the halls. They cannot maintain discipline in the halls, there's a lot of graffiti and noise. They simply cannot control it. The kids especially use the toilets for smoking, drugs and sex. The administration is unwilling and unable to control it.

In my words not his, the teacher has all of the responsibility without the authority. They cannot discipline the children.

The children are sassy, insubordinate, and they can resist to physical violence.

I compare this with United States, where such things go on all the time. In the United States there is an undeniable racial than dimension. I suspect that is the case in this account, but the the author studiously avoids mentioning race.

Chapter 21 talks about the stool pigeon that the principal had named, see no evil hear no evil type of person who would rat out the teachers.

He speaks about the quirks of some of his fellow teachers. One of them with a status symbol freak, with women on the side. Another was an alcoholic. These don't add much to the story. Chapter 23. The student tried to blackmail him. The student and that he was not tenured and was honorable. The administration showed no courage. Chapter 24. The teachers were held responsible for the students progress. If not enough pupils past, it was a matter for the principles attention. Principal had to decide whether the exams were fair or not. This great deal of pressure to pass the students. In one instance the student complained there was no toilet paper. The course is no toilet paper – the students tore it up. The student went right to the principal and complained, and the principal's response was that the teachers should always make sure that they have reserved toilet paper just in case.

And I'm using an anecdote the head of the school, the "old man" went through the school very publicly picking up soda cans and so on that the students had thrown around in order to demonstrate his concern for neatness. The students laughed at him and as soon as he was gone they made a point of throwing all the more soda cans around for him to pick up.

25. Substitute teaching. He says that substitute teaching is especially difficult. There were mandatory

field trips to Berlin and Bonn. The students goofed, didn't sleep, etc. etc. They took alcohol on their class trips. He learned later, and wiser that more experienced teachers simply do not take class trips. It is simply not worth the effort for excursions, visiting farms, skiing, building tours, museums and industrial complexes, theater and courts. More trouble than it's worth.

Chapter 26 is about a principal's school headmaster who was never there. He got in the jobs through party connections. He was busy with his other businesses, and never to be found in the school.

Professional development was often left to the greenhorns. Experienced teachers were ignored again.

Knowledge in the field of instruction was not valued. Why should it be, when the students are not learning anyhow? Russian? Mark anyhow? At any rate, teachers who happen to know their subjects were not appreciated.