

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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 Birth, Death, and Regeneration:  
 Giessen University, 1907-1945

Flockstrasse 8  
 Giessen, Germany  
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
 Institute of Current World Affairs  
 522 Fifth Avenue  
 New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The great war of 1914-18 took a heavy toll on Giessen University. Thirteen professors fell on the battlefronts from the Meuse to the Dniester - a sixth of the faculty. University clinics were limited by a shortage of doctors and the state-supported institutes tightened their belts for the duration.

The 1918-19 revolution in Berlin which resulted in the proclamation of a Socialist Republic, did not fail to have its effect on provincial states like Hesse-Darmstadt. For that matter, Giessen may be said to have contributed to the Berlin uprising in small part. The Communist leader of the Revolutionary Committee, Karl Liebknecht, was the son of Wilhelm Liebknecht, co-founder of the Social Democratic Party. The elder Liebknecht was a native of Giessen who won his doctorate in philosophy here. In turn, he was the descendent of the 18th century Giessen University mathematician, Johann Liebknecht.

Hesse-Darmstadt, traditionally a stronghold of conservatism, went socialist following the armistice of November 1918. The genial Archduke Ernst Ludwig laid down his scepter. Giessen University, for 300 years a subject of the Hessian monarch's whim, suddenly became the responsibility of an elected state government.

Veterans of the war swarmed into the German universities. During the early Twenties, the Giessen student body swelled to 2,000. For the first time, the academic "class" learned to know the face of poverty. The inflationary post-war period caught the universities in a two-way stretch. For one thing, the middle classes which traditionally provided the universities with material, were suddenly slammed into economic uncertainty. For another, the rising lower classes issued forth an expanding number of young men who sought university educations. Both groups gave impetus to a new academic group - the Brotstudenten (bread students), who had to earn their education by work.

A second but no less profound effect of the galloping 1920's inflation was that on the young Privatdozenten. Up to now, this group had been composed of aspiring scholars who supported themselves with private means until they obtained a permanent university post. Naturally they came from families that were reasonably well-off.

The radical impoverishment of the families which produced Privatdozenten threw hundreds of these young instructors on the mercy of the state. The state, financially squeezed itself, was hard put to undertake their support. In 1920, the Hessian Government attempted to ease the lot of the instructors by increasing their State subsidies. But it wasn't enough.

Nevertheless, Giessen University made strides in the decade following the war. The philosophy faculty was divided into two sections - arts and sciences. Institutes for physiology, animal diseases, art history, economics, agriculture, agricultural chemistry, experimental psychology, pathology, hygiene, and geology were founded. Other institutes were expanded. The medical faculty opened several new clinics. The economics department was greatly enlarged.

All this was notable progress in a nation suffering from economic polio. But Giessen had gone through tough moments before and it was to go through still tougher ones.

It would be mistaken to idealize this period in the university's history. Yet physically and spiritually, Giessen was never in better shape than it was in the Twenties.

For a picture of what German universities had to offer at this time, let's listen to what a distinguished American educator, Abraham Flexner, had to say. This longtime Princeton professor wrote a book called "Universities, American, German, English" in 1930. Almost without exception, Flexner called the German schools the best of the three. The exception was that which he took to the state control over the German universities. He hinted that this might bode trouble in the future. And how.

Still, Flexner's picture of these universities serves a valuable purpose as a guide to what higher education can be.

Said he: "The individual is intellectually saved in Germany... better educated and more highly cultivated than his English and American colleagues."

In his tripartite critique, Flexner called vocationalism or professionalism the great danger to universities. He found this tendency running rampant in America, where "ad hoc" training in journalism, business, and a score of other professions was turning our universities into academic filling stations. In Germany, he said, vocationalism had won a precarious foothold with the increase in Brotstudenten who sought subjects which promised a return in the shape of a "ready livelihood." But this was a lark compared to American colleges.

Flexner continues with a quotation from a German professor: "Specialization that looks to a vocation simply dazes a German student. It is not the business of a university to introduce the student to all future and possible details, but to train him in fundamentals so that he can later solve his own problems."

Here are some of the advantages of the German system which the American critic listed:

1--The revolving Rektorat (presidency) which is occupied by a different faculty professor each year. The Rektor's time for research and teaching is not seriously limited by this short term. University business affairs are handled by a permanent curatorium.

2--The instructor and the professor have teaching freedom in their choice of lecture topics, manner of presentation, formation of seminars, and work with assistants.

3--Students have a good deal of freedom too - in studying where they please, and selecting their teachers. Neither deans nor professors have them on their consciences. The student is regarded as competent to care for himself. No hours of lecture attendance are credited towards his degree. He is examined when he thinks himself ready.

4--The Privatdozent is the "sheerest and purest form of the academic type." He wanders from university to university, absorbing the best of each and avoiding the inbreeding of one school. He has an unsalaried license to teach - making him part of an academic proletariat.

As for the debit side of the German ledger, Flexner points out several perils. He suggests that the rapid growth of "institutes" may indicate a future atomization of the university into Fachschulen (specialty schools). If this came to pass, he says, the university would degenerate into a mere "teaching institution" while the institutes would concentrate only on research. That would be in direct contradiction to Humboldt's principle of the indissoluble unity of teaching and research.

In the matter of state control, Flexner observes that the ministries of education provided almost all funds for the universities. Departments and new professorships could not be developed without state support. The state regulated examinations, appointments, and the budget. Law and tradition were against further interference in university affairs by the state, says Flexner, but "it might become a source of peril."

Finally, he saw a weakness in the German university's disdain for and ignorance of Social Democracy, upper and lower case. Flexner calls the academics "singularly blind" to the political realities of modern Germany. He says the traditionally conservative scholars kept to their "history and abstractions."

Yet all this was mild in contrast to Flexner's scorching indictment of American universities, where students could obtain Ph.D.'s with dissertations on icecream production, the duties of a school janitor, and "Bacterial Content of Cotton Undershirts."

Flexner's challenge to the German universities on the score of social democracy was probably a justified generalization. But Giessen, like many other universities, had some respectable exceptions to the rule.

Among the Giessen exceptions were Ernst von Aster, the brilliant and cultivated philosopher, who ranks high among this century's positivists and nominalists; the social economists, Friedrich Lenz, Paul Mombert, and Ernst Günther; and further, the two instructor-assistents of the latter group, Georg Mayer and Artur Sommer.

Five of these men were fired during the spring and summer of 1933, following Adolf Hitler's seizure of power - because of their anti-Nazi political allegiances. Von Aster was booted out because he was a member of the Social Democratic Party. Günther was prematurely pensioned off because of his socialist sympathies.

Shortly before the turn of the century, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: "An age of barbarism begins; the sciences will serve it." As a part-time prophet, the moribund philosopher seldom came closer to the truth. In the Nazi age of barbarism, science did indeed serve the reigning temper - in Giessen too.

One of the many terrifying words in the new National Socialist vocabulary was Gleichschaltung. Our rough translation of it is "integration," or "co-ordination". It comes from the words gleich (equal or same) and schalten (to direct or to shift). A Nazi synonym for this process was "reinigen" (purify). In 1933, the German universities were gleichgeschaltet by Hitler; that is, they were "shifted" into line with the aims of the New Order; "equalized" in the sense of Humphrey Bogart's old "equalizer" in other words, purified of the anti-Hitler elements.

Before taking a closer look at this wretched process, it might be well to note that a forewarning of New Order was available to Giessen's faculty and students a year before the Gleichschaltung.

Ernst von Aster got a taste of things to come from a student in his philosophy seminar. The Nazi student asked: "What have you got against (Alfred) Rosenberg's Myth of the Twentieth Century?" Aster's shocked retort on the subject of this National Socialist chapbook was: "Justice, tolerance, reason." Said the student: "But that is only a myth of reason which you have no right to place against blood and race."

The Giessen University Guide for 1932 leads off with an article by Karl Vanselow, professor of forestry. It is a diatribe on how Germany fought the whole world in the great war. To the students, he says: "You are to be the academic Führer of future Germans." Professor Vanselow was Rektor of the university from 1931 to 1932.

His successor, Adolf Jess, professor of ophthalmology, commented on the poverty of the middle class and its resultant inability to send its sons to the universities as before. Dr. Jess concluded, "We must not say our enemy is to the left (politically) or to the right. The enemy is outside."

The 1932 Guide included an article on World War I dead with a posthumous cry from one of the student victims: "Live and strive, and if need be die for the Vaterland." Finally, the theology professor, Friedrich Karl Schumann wrote a peremptory article on "The responsibility of academic studies." Its vocabulary is ominous: Führerschaft (guidance), Führerdienst (service of the leader), Führeraufgabe (task of the leader), Führerprobleme (leader problems), Führerstellung (position of the leader), Führertätigkeit (leader profession), and Führerkrisis (crisis of leadership). Professor Schumann concludes with the regret that there aren't enough Führerpersönlichkeiten (leader personalities) around.

The long night began with hideous gentleness at Giessen University. Soon after Hitler came to power, the new Gauleiter of Hesse, Jakob Sprenger, showed up at the university. From the balcony of the main building, Sprenger told the assembled academics: "What help is knowledge if you can't manipulate a machinegun?" The university offered no resistance, out loud.

"Na Ja" (Oh well), as one professor put it, "we'll be 'Nazis' then." Most of those who didn't, like von Aster, were ruthlessly rooted out. Among the others to go were the Germanist, Karl Viëtor and the philosopher, Walter Kinkel. Professor Viëtor, an outstanding authority on Goethe and Georg Büchner, was married to a Jewess. The Viëtors followed Giessen's Carl Follen to America. He became Kuno Francke Professor of German Art and Culture at Harvard University where he worked with distinction until his death in 1951. Walter Kinkel, another Socialist, was an expert on Kant and a fine humanist. He was bounced in 1934.

On October 13, 1933, a new "constitution" was imposed on the university. The old constitution of 1607, which had served over 300 years with few changes, was no longer valid. Under the new charter, the Rektor was to be chosen by the Reichsstatthalter (federal governor, of Hesse) instead of in the old degenerate democratic way by the faculty council.

Shortly afterwards, the National Socialists fundamentally revised the administrative system of the university. The revision was based on the Führer principle.

Every faculty dean was presented with a Zweiführer (double leader) whose task was to review the actions of the dean. These Zweiführer then passed on their judgements of the dean's political reliability to Party authorities. Zweiführer, trusted Party members, were also introduced in the institutes and seminars. It amounted to legalized espionage. Karl Hummel, the paleontologist, was described by his colleagues as one of the worst of the Zweiführer. He and his wife reported regularly to the Gestapo.

Two years later the Nazis made a further revision. First, the faculty was organized into a Dozentschaft (university teachers group). Its Führer was responsible to the Hessian Gau-dozentenführer, who in turn reported to the Reichsdozentenführer. Second, the administration - deans and curatorium - were reorganized under the leadership of the Rektor, who was responsible directly to the Gauleiter. Finally, the student body was levied into the Studentenschaft, which was led by the Studentenführer. The latter served under the Gaustudentenführer, who was responsible to the Reichsstudentenführer.

The new system was a complete break from the traditional freedom and democracy of the old.

Looking back on the Hitler era today, Giessen University's anti-Nazis point out that the professors who were appointed Rektors by the Gauleiter were not necessarily fire-eating National Socialists. However, they concede that the new system was omnipotent. Moreover, the essential circumstance was that the majority of the professors went along with the new system.

As Sir Walter Moberly observed in his Crisis in the University, "The crime which the Nazis committed against the universities was not only that they made them tools in a wrong cause, but that they made them tools at all." The basic parts of those tools were Germany's professors.

Furthermore, these professors participated in the Nazi thought-crime of denying the value of objective knowledge. As a German put it: "The conception of learning as operating without presuppositions is shaken to its foundations; the ideal of an exact objective knowledge of 'reality' is revealed as a mere illusion." The new realities included "thinking" and "knowing" with blood and race.

The Gleichschaltung had violent effects in some large universities - professors publicly hounded out of office, mass book burnings, and the like. Here, for example, is the text of a letter mailed to the Frankfurt University faculty:

"University Frankfurt, Mai, 1933  
Johann Wolfgang Goethe  
Frankfurt

The student free corps invites the entire faculty to the burning of Marxist and corrupt (Jewish) writings which will take place Wednesday evening, the 10th of May on the Roemerberg. The students, with regard to the great symbolic meaning of this ceremony, would appreciate seeing all professors there. I therefore invite the colleagues to participate.

Parade time: from the university to the Roemerberg Wednesday evening at 8 p.m. with music. The fraternities will take part in uniform as well as the S. A. battalion.

The Rektor: Krieck."

Ernst Kreick was also the author of such high-minded sentiments as: "Absolute academic freedom is absolute nonsense" (1932), and "We perceive and acknowledge no truth for the sake of truth, no science for the sake of science," (1935). This from what Madame de Stael called the "land of poets and thinkers."

Giessen had no book burnings. The verboten books were simply shut away. However, other trappings of the Nazi state were procured. Already in the fall semester of 1933, a course in heredity - National Socialist style - was offered.

The new Rektor for 1933-34, Heinrich Bornkamm, wrote this for the University Guide: "Everyone will have to relearn what the university means, from the ground up." The old concept of the university as a "house of knowledge" would have to give way to the "new task of making the Volk conscious in the deepest manner of its community sense." The 34-year-old theologian concluded: "We are the intellectual Sturm company of the new Germany."

The Guide continued with a word from Adolf Hitler about "race sense," Volk, aryanism, and "great tasks." Next came an essay by Dr. Carl Walbrach, a Giessen graduate who was represented in earlier guidebooks with his genial historical articles. This time, Walbrach turned up with recollections of his glorious days at the front in World War I. He went on to praise the new student storm troopers, urged the students to learn more about their "biological inheritance", and demanded that everyone honor Horst Wessel, the Nazi bully.

Walbrach also commented: "The researcher must be aware of his era. . . The S. A. student is a political soldier in the fight for the German Volk community."

A professor of pediatrics, Johann Duken, wrote about the new "Teaching Office for Political Education." The aim, said Duken, was not to create a "professor of National Socialism," but rather to bring student and instructor together - "recognizing of course that the Storm Troops, the S. S., and the Hitler Youth are the first and best educators of our Volk."

Still another Guide article praises the Nazi reform of the university constitution. This one was by Professor Otto Behagel, the chemist son of Giessen's great Germanist. He concluded: "To maintain, strengthen, and defend the Volk is the new duty of the professors."

Early in 1935, the National Socialist course in heredity was extended. Medical students were required to hear lectures on "race hygiene." At the same time, a section of the University Eye Clinic was transformed into an "Institute for Heredity and Race Research." The director of this "scientific" establishment was Dr. Heinrich Kranz.

Kranz was a run-of-the-mill eye doctor who had attempted to gain entrance to the medical faculty in the early Thirties. He wasn't up to snuff, and the highly competent director of the eye clinic, Professor Jess, rejected Kranz. The young doctor set up a practice in Giessen and consoled himself by joining the Nazi Party. Then Kranz cut his eye teeth by ingratiating himself with Gauleiter Sprenger, who was now known as "Jakob the First."

According to a Giessen geneticist, Kranz didn't have the vaguest idea of what race or heredity were all about - in the scientific sense. But that only made him all the more qualified for Nazi-style "research" in the subject.

The 40-year-old Kranz describes his Institute in the 1937 University Guide as being allied with the Gau administration - "a happy combination of political and scientific work in the field." Institute courses included "enlightenment" lectures for students and politicians. Kranz boasted about working with the police, public health authorities, hospitals, and employment offices. One might assume from this that the Institute aided the Nazis in tracking down non-aryans in Upper Hesse. As for research, Kranz and company toured Hessian villages measuring skulls in hopes of finding lots of Nordic "long heads." Results of this research were added to the "Heredity Archive" - a "priceless collection of racial-biological material." In this same year, Kranz was named assistant professor, a position for which he had no academic qualification.

The 1937 Guide also contained an essay by Dr. George Sessous, a plant scientist, who noted that the Agricultural Institute had acquired new significance with the Nazi Blut und Boden (blood and earth) policy.

During this period, many university installations were expanded. A few were closed.

An Institute for Agrarian Politics and Agriculture was opened. The veterinary surgical and children's clinics were enlarged. A Pharmacological Institute was founded. The Anatomy and Physics Institutes were expanded. In 1938, a whim of Hitler and Heinrich

Himmler was favored, with the establishment of an Institute for Rune Research. The Nazi leaders had long felt that study of ancient Nordic runes would strengthen the Germanic Volk soul.

Several branches of knowledge suffered cutbacks under the Nazis. Among them were economics, sociology, and psychiatry. And in 1938, the university's forestry department was closed down.

The witches' sabbath - or as a great Austrian critic called it, "the third Walpurgisnight," - had darkened down on the German universities. Here and there, little lights of resistance glimmered. At Giessen, professors like Wolf Ankel, the zoologist; Karl Bechert, the physicist; Hugo Hepding, and Gerd Tellenbach harbored their antagonism to the Third Reich. They met in private to read foreign newspapers, to listen to the B. B. C., to exchange thoughts. More they could not dare.

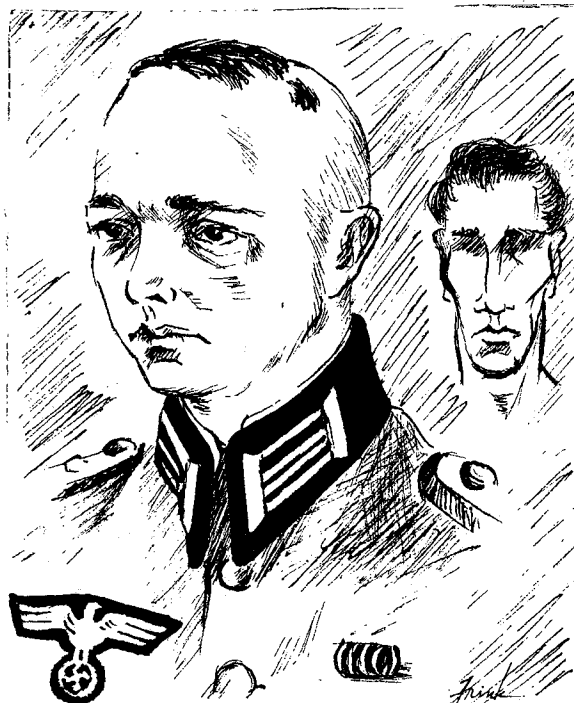
Soon after German Panzer columns smashed into Poland in the fall of 1939, Giessen University was shut down. Like so many institutions, it had been hard hit by the sudden call-up of reservists, physicians, and students. By January 1940, things had settled down enough so that the university could reopen - this time with a new Rektor, Heinrich Kranz, known to his Party buddies as "Henner."

Most of the other professors were not unhappy at seeing the upstart eye doctor in this traditionally honorable position. For Heinrich Kranz was not an evil man - just an ambitious weakling. In fact he occasionally used his good standing with Jakob the First Sprenger to protect individual professors from further Nazi incursions. Rektor Kranz stayed in office until 1943, when he was called to Frankfurt.

The next Rektor was Professor Alfred Bruggemann, distinguished physician, widely-recognized researcher, and Nazi fellow traveler. He served from 1943 to 1945.

Here is Dr. Bruggemann's story of how he was "elected" Rektor:

"It was a disappointment for me to be named Rektor. I rejected the idea at first. Then Kranz came to me and asked 'why'. I told him, 'I have too much to do . . . I can't stand the Gauleiter' - an irascible man. Kranz said, 'You can't refuse. It's an order.' I said: 'If you promise to help me with the Gauleiter, I'll do it.' I'd had trouble with the Gauleiter before because I hadn't operated on a Party member's child. Kranz did help me. He was not a bad man - never common. He attained a lot with the Gauleiter. Ninety per cent of the professors were glad because of what he could do for us."



Rektor Kranz, with a "nordic" type skull



In 1944, the war came closer to Giessen University. The two mass air raids on December 6 and 11 flattened 60 per cent of the university's establishment.

When the American troops rolled into the city five months later, the university was already a basket-case. In April, 1945, Rektor Kranz and the former Zwieführer, Hummel, were reported dead - Kranz a suicide and Hummel killed with a last-ditch Volkssturm unit in the Vogelsberg area. Dr. Brüggemann was seized as a war prisoner and carted off to prison.

A year later, the wounded but still living university was ordered to "commit suicide" by the new State Government. Just as in 1624, the Academia Ludoviciana died - thoroughly. But, as Professor Wolf Ankel later remarked: "Giessen University had already begun to die in 1933."

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