

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DE - 5
Eberhard The Incurigible:
An Educational Tale

Plockstrasse 8
Giessen, Germany
March 31, 1957

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Before you stands a 60-year-old man in a pepper and salt suit. He has keen blue eyes, thinning gray hair, an Anthony Eden moustache, and a large nose. His complexion is rosy and his stance is that of a man who is used to command. In fact he is accustomed to exercising authority, for he is the director of a private school. He is responsible for the stomachs and souls of 100 boys. Ask him what his theory of education is and he tells you in a fatherly tone: "A child likes to be taken seriously - not too seriously - but he likes to be thought of as an individual. We must allow him to be an individual."

Wipe 20 years from your eyes.

It is 1937. You are in the middle of a crowd on the village square. A hundred uniformed men are drawn up at attention. They are clad in the brown shirts, polished jackboots, and military caps of the National Socialist Storm Troopers. On their arms are the swastikas of the Thousand Year Reich. You and they are facing another man in uniform. He is standing on a platform, a man about 40. He wears the insignia of Obertruppführer (senior troop leader). The occasion for this gathering, he reminds us, is Heldengedenkttag (Heroes Memorial Day). His speech is about German blood, honor, and glory.

Now which is the good guy and which is the bad guy?

Why of course, that's easy. The schoolmaster is the good guy and the Storm Trooper is the bad one. But what if the schoolmaster and the Obertruppführer are one and the same person?

Try another question.

You are the director of a private school. This institution has been in your family for over a century. Your three forefathers were ministers and schoolmasters. You yourself are a staunch member of the Lutheran Church. In politics you lean strongly to the left. You're active in the Socialist Party. Your pacifist sympathies are well known in the neighborhood. It is spring, 1933. The Reichstag Fire is already cold. Hitler has already put the clamps on Germany with his infamous Enabling Act. The Nazi Party is riding high.

What are you - socialist, pacifist, known opponent of Hitler - going to do? This is the terrible hour of decision. Do you decide to quit; your home, your country, your profession, your family tradition? Or do you elect to stick it out; to burn your incriminating papers, shut your mouth, mask yourself in the uniform of the foe, and try to carry on under the rule of terror?

These are tough questions; unpleasant ones. They are the questions which the man in the pepper and salt suit had to ask himself not long ago. And even today he says: "I asked myself many times afterwards whether I acted wrongly or not. I think I acted correctly. My main aim was to keep the school going. But still I asked myself, how far can one make concessions without injuring one's conscience?"

The school director and former Obertruppführer is Dr. Eberhard Lucius. He runs a small school at the village of Echzell, 25 miles southeast of here. Dr. Lucius is not a hero. Nor is he a villain. This century isn't geared for middle-aged heroes. But it has had more than its share of middle-aged villains - especially in Germany. It would have been easy for Dr. Lucius to be one of them. It took a certain amount of courage and a great deal of conviction not to. Perhaps after you get to know him better you will be able to answer the first question the way the Giessen Denazification Court did in 1948 - that Dr. Eberhard Lucius was one of the "good guys."

It was Macbeth who asked: "Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious, loyal and neutral, in one moment?" Macbeth answered himself, no man. These are other times, and Dr. Lucius has another answer to this question. Here is what he has to say about running a private school in the Hitler period:

"I grew up in an anti-Bismarck and anti-Prussian family tradition. In 1924 I joined the German Peace Society, and I was oriented to the left politically. We were all raised in a Christian manner, and I want to make it very clear that this was no 'German nationalist' Christianity, but rather the old Lutheran Christianity which was entirely pacifistic. Thus I wrote to my sister in 1930, 'you can believe me that it is very difficult for me to stand to the left politically and to the right in religious sympathies. But I am convinced that the political left is the only view that is compatible with Christianity.'

"My children were educated to be anti-militarists and pacifists. They were not allowed to nor did they want to have the least contact with the Hitler Youth. Out of our whole family, only one of my sisters was a Nazi, and for this reason I broke all relations with her in 1939 and have kept things that way until this day. My friends, naturally, were anti-Nazis.

"I was (in 1933) a member of the Republican Teachers League, I subscribed to F. W. Foerster's "Zeit" which was banned by Hitler. I took part in Marc Segnier's French Peace Society conference at Bierville. I was discussion leader in a Social Democratic Party group and had supported the S. P. D. for many years.

"These actions, especially if you take them altogether, prove that I was an extremely dangerous, incorrigible criminal.

"I was not surprised by the appearance of the Third Reich. I had already recognized the monstrous power of the Hitler daemonic. Thus I wrote my sister in Argentina in 1932, '...Youth everywhere is being encouraged by the Nazis to rebel against their parents and teachers. This will come to a terrible end if this seed of self-rule and lack of authority continues to be sown in the youngsters...'

"The expected terror began in the months of February and March. After the Reichstag Fire and the declaration of the Enabling Act, I knew it was going to be serious. My colleague, Andres, and I burned a great pile of incriminating literature in the furnace. I had two boxes of books and newspapers buried in the garden.

"The mood in the neighborhood was stirred up against me. People talked a lot about my previous support of 'the reds', (at one point some neighbors nearly "marched" on Lucius). By April it was completely clear to me that the school would come to an end unless I joined the Nazis somehow. The legal state had ceased to exist. And everything I had done up to this time had become criminal. One had only to start the stone rolling and I would have been crushed; not only I personally, but also the entire educational work of our institution, which had been in our family for over 100 years. As I thought it over I realized my school would be turned into a veritable Nazi stronghold. Finally I came to the conclusion that rather than try completely hopeless methods of resistance I would fight this evil band with its own weapons. By appearing publicly to join them, I could run my school and my house against the Party. I kept this idea in mind and

in my conscience for the next 12 years. I hated the Nazis before 1933, in the middle of their heyday, and now. Nevertheless I joined the S. A. (Storm Troopers) Reserve.

"I remained hostile to the system. I still employed a Communist kindergarten teacher, Luise Geist; and we hid a party friend of hers for eight days during the late fall of 1933 while he was in flight from the Gestapo. In November she was denounced by one of our own housemaids as a traitor and the Party forced me to let her go. I found a way out. She couldn't go home because her whole family was on the run. Some of them had already been caught. Therefore I took her to a small village in the Odenwald to my brother, a minister. I also took my 5-year-old child, Reinhard, along and employed her further to take care of him. She stayed there until a cousin of mine in Berlin found a place for her in the big city where she could disappear. The Nazi housemaid, of course, remained with us and caused us continuing danger as long as she was there.

"Still another source of danger in our family was my brother-in-law, Mumm. He and his wife had been fanatic national socialists and rabid anti-semites from the earliest days. Relations between this family and us were very tense. (Lucius submitted to demands by the Mums that he give them money for several years)

"Early in 1934 the S. A. Reserve swelled to a huge size. The Sturm had several hundred men. The group in Echzell included a large number who were not Party members. Alte Kämpfer (Old Fighters - the activists who had been with the Nazis from the beginning) were not to be found among us. The S. A. in Echzell needed a new leader, someone with a little military experience who had professional standing as well. As a former corporal, I was chosen in June to be temporary Führer. Taking into consideration the growing dangers, and in the interest of my whole plan, I accepted the job. Also, I regarded this position as only temporary and had already seen that this reserve group, at least the one here in Echzell, really wasn't to be taken too seriously in the political sense. Naturally I made it a point to keep the activities to a minimum, and moreover saw to it that the unit never took part in political actions against Germans of 'other convictions' or against Jews. In the course of the next three years I was displaced two or three times, but was always voted in again because the old men liked to have their peace and quiet and knew I wouldn't give them a hard time. I never went to leaders' school, nor did I attend any Party conferences or Reich sports events. That didn't keep me from being named troop leader. I was obliged to show myself in public five times during the next years.

"The National Socialist State knew well enough that private schools, especially boarding schools, had a far-reaching influence on education. Its policy, therefore, was to keep a sharp eye on them. During the year 1938 I waited every day for the news that I would have to close my school. (At this time the Nazis were preparing to investigate all private schools that had not already been closed, in a hunt for opponents of the regime)

"From 1934 on, the S. A., which had been more or less neutral from then on, didn't rightly know what it should do. It was always searching for 'new tasks'. At last it seemed the right one had been found. The S. A. member should become the 'soldier with the Weltanschauung of the Führer.' In 1938 the pressure began. All leaders were told to make a clear Weltanschauung decision. That meant: quit the church.

"The logical development of this new current led directly to the attack on the synagogues at the end of 1938. This was only partly an attack on Jews; it was also attack on the foundations of the Christian church. I too was called on the telephone the night of November 10, 1938 and ordered by the District Group Leader to take part in the action against the Jews. I refused, naturally, and I was thankful for the call. For then I knew it was possible that some of my pupils, as members of the Hitler Youth, might receive a similar order. Therefore I called the two Hitler Youth leaders into the house immediately. I told them what was going on in Echzell, and asked

them to go to the two paths that lead to the village with the order that no students were to be let through.

"The developments in 1936 and 1938 had showed me that the internal political situation had gone through a basic change from the period 1933-35. The Nazi struggle against purely political enemies retreated into the background; for these had been decimated and had no more political power. Many of the former opponents who were having a better life gave up their hostility on the basis of the apparent success of the Nazis. Into the foreground of the struggle came the opponents with a different Weltanschauung. I belonged to these just as I had belonged in the beginning to the political opponents. My hostility (to the Nazis) had been discovered and reported to the authorities. Beyond that, the 10th of November had made it plain to me what could be required of the S. A. in the future. A couple of days later the District Group Leader asked me on the street whether I still belonged to the church. I pretended I didn't know what he meant. But it was clear that all the concessions I had made in the past would not save my school now.

"In this situation it was all important that I get out of the S. A. My position was no longer of any use to me. I had to disappear completely for as long as possible. There was only one way. At the end of November, 1938, I went to the family doctor and requested that he find me ill - so ill that I would have to stay in bed a long time. Healthy as a pup I lay in bed and had him visit me in order to make my sickness well known and credible. Shortly after that I was allowed to leave the S. A. for an indefinite period on account of the serious state of my health.

"In choosing pupils I was more careful than ever, and tried to make sure that I took no sons of convinced or active Nazis into the boarding school. At this time I took over all the religion classes. I also gave religious instruction in the fifth and sixth classes although this was specifically forbidden by law.

"I was called up by the Wehrmacht in September, 1939, and served until December of that year. During this time my wife took over the school. Olaf (Lucius' nephew who had been a dayschool pupil at the school from 1932-36) Mumm sent a blackmail letter to us while I was away. He threatened to expose me to the army as a pacifist and to the Party as a 'communist' unless I continued to support his family. (Olaf's letter read in part: "To be hated by enemies of the fatherland is a privilege which no member of the German race should renounce. I don't wish to renounce this right either. We know everything about you, that you hate us. ...I'm giving you one last chance: if you don't take care of our relatives then I'll use every means to fix you....") I wrote Olaf that I wouldn't deal with blackmailers. At the same time I informed a friend in Echzell of what had happened so that he could warn us in case of a raid and could stand up for us. At this time we broke all contact with the Mumms.

"In 1942 I had in the boarding school a boy who was making no progress in his classes. At this time his father was a civil employee in Kiev. He had a lot to do with the S. S. and had become a great world conqueror there. Suddenly, he turned up here, snatched his son and took him to Luxembourg. Later, we learned from the mother that a high S. S. officer had told the father that a boy who went to our school lost all chances for a career in later life. I smelled nothing good in this. Sure enough, the father reported what he had heard from the S. S. man to the Gestapo. Luck was with us again. The Gestapo officials checked about me first with the mayor of Echzell and a policeman in the village who was a friend of mine. The policeman talked the Gestapo out of most of their suspicions. When the investigation finally came, I was prepared for it.

"In April, 1942, we hired a new housemaid. We had failed to make the necessary investigation of her and were shocked one day to find her wearing the Party emblem. This 20-year-old girl quickly discovered what sort of opinions we had here. Immediately she reported this to the Party and added that she couldn't stand my wife, because she wasn't a Nazi. She told her

relatives it was a crying shame that I had been a troop leader in the S. A. and had once led a company. For I was 'a Communist.' We breathed easily only a year later when we got rid of this dangerous snake.

"In the fall of 1944 I was called up to the West Front although the naked existence of the school depended on me. I excused myself on the basis of this shortly before the transport left the village. At this time I was made platoon leader of a local Volkssturm (People's Militia) despite the fact that I was already on the records as a political unreliable. In the meantime the County Leader had found a way to close my school at last. I was ordered to send all my students home because my educational work was now regarded as 'dangerous enemy propaganda.' It was the final destruction of my school.

"Shortly after this the county Stabführer, Fink, ordered me to go with a Volkssturm unit to the East Front. Despite threats of punishment under the wartime law, I simply didn't turn up at the proper hour and sent another excuse just at the time the transport was leaving. In early March (1945) they tried again to put me in a Volkssturm unit, I was warned ahead of time and hid in a secret room until the acute danger was over. Two days before the Americans arrived, I got in touch with the majority of the Volkssturm men in Echzell to warn them about an impending call to arms. I ordered them to hide themselves in the forest so as to escape being mustered.

"Thus I came through the Third Reich miraculously, living from one danger to another. It was fortunate for me that I could take part in various Nazi organizations and that the Party officials - the Nazi Teachers League, the S. A., the Security Police, the Volkssturm, the Gestapo - never gave me serious trouble. And I was lucky also that I was warned many times in the decisive moments by friends.

"When I think what would have happened if I had not been in the Party, for instance, that I would not have been able to keep any of my pupils from entering the Hitler Youth, then entering the Party was worth it. Such considerations permit me to be convinced today that the course I chose actually demanded more courage of me and that I was more successful in the struggle against Nazism than if I had quit the school and refused to join the Party."

The foregoing is a brief resume of what Dr. Lucius told the Denazification Court in the spring of 1948. Other brushes with the Gestapo were recounted as well. Proof was given that Dr. Lucius had close relations with French war prisoners in Echzell and that he once interceded to save a Russian slave laborer from death in a concentration camp. Nevertheless the court found Lucius guilty of being a Mitläufer (follower) of the Party and fined him 2,000 Reichsmarks. Six months later an appeal court rescinded the judgement. The court ruled that Dr. Lucius should go scot-free. It noted that he had forbidden his students to take part in any Nazi activities, that he had ordered his Volkssturm unit to disband before the Americans arrived, and that he was associated with some of the Frankfurt members of the July 20th plot to overthrow Hitler, in 1944.

If Eberhard Lucius' political problems are over and done with, his economic problems are not. He barely makes ends meet. And you can't appeal to rich alumni in Germany.

The Lucius Boys Institute occupies a house built in 1742 to serve as a hunting lodge for the Hessian Landgrave. It nestles cosily next to a silent pine forest just outside of Echzell. Besides the old lodge, the school has a converted barn, a classroom building constructed 20 years ago, and a new addition to the main building. The crowding is something fierce. Seventeen boys sleep in a 40 by 12 foot room; eight in a room 20 by 10 feet.

It costs parents 300 marks per month to send a boy to the Institute - that's about three-quarters of an average German worker's wage. As a result, most of the 100 boys come from reasonable well-to-do families.

The Institute has classes ranging from 5th to 11th grade. One of its advantages is the small size of the classes. None has more than 25 pupils. There are nine teachers - including Dr. Lucius, who puts in 30 hours a week in the classroom. The teachers get to know the students well. There are other merits in this institution. It has a fine sports field. The food is good (80 per cent of the vegetables are grown in the school's garden). And the students themselves say they can concentrate better than in a public school. They ought to - the silence of the place is awesome.

With its age and tradition, the Institute appears to have developed some quaint customs. For example, Dr. Lucius has determined that one room in the \$20,000 new addition will be used only for shoe cleaning. The old shoe cleaning room was next to the laundry - a decided disadvantage. "Maybe people think I'm nuts using 40 cubic meters of space just to clean shoes, but you have to have such things," said the director. Another Lucius Institute custom is for all the boys to march around the dining room after supper. They bow and shake hands with each of the faculty members, who are stationed at strategic points.

The boys are encouraged to take on quite a lot of administrative responsibilities. Older students check out the younger ones at bedtime for clean shoes, hands, feet, and ears. They co-operate on cleaning up tables and lockers. They supervise study hours. While there is no student government organization, each upper classman is assigned to look out for the welfare of a younger one. The students also have their own newspaper, which they mimeograph in a stygian basement cranny. The "Little Tower Bell" is a popular activity because the editors can sneak a cigarette in the privacy of the "newsroom". They have complete editorial freedom too.

However, boys at the Institute live under rather strict regulations as far as leaving campus is concerned. That is, Dr. Lucius simply doesn't permit them to go into the village at all. I asked some of the older students what they had to gripe about at the Institute. "We would like to learn to dance," said Goesta. "The Chief, (Lucius) allowed the upper class to go to dancing school in Bad Nauheim a couple of years ago but they came back so drunk he wouldn't permit it again. I don't think the Chief is up with the times. He learned dancing from his mother and he says that's the way we should learn. Who wants to dance with his mother?" Another said: "We're treated exactly like the boys in the lower grades. We should get a little more freedom, I think." Asked whether they would choose to go to private school again if they had the choice, the boys unanimously agreed they would. "The teachers in public schools are old wooden-heads," said one. "Here you learn to become more self-confident."

Later I asked Dr. Lucius about the lack of student government. He poured me an excellent glass of wine and chuckled. "I'm a bit of a patriarch here," he said. "The boys recognize me as that. It's in my bones now. I get along well this way."

Dr. Lucius is a bit of a patriarch. So were his forefathers. Therefore it was not surprising to see that his 28-year-old son, Reinhard, is grooming himself for role of director of the Institute. It's a tough job. Two weeks ago Reinhard looked a little intense, like one of those grim characters in a German saga - until he put his glasses on. This week he was smiling. He just passed his State teacher's exam.

David Binder
David Binder