

Frankfurt university winds down research on National Socialism

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If the Goethe University in Frankfurt gets its way, future teachers will no longer receive instruction in the history of National Socialism. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from the recent attacks by the university's education department on the Center for Research on National Socialist Pedagogy.

The head of the Education Department has decided that student attendance of lectures on National Socialist pedagogy will receive little or no official recognition. Students in the teacher training program will no longer receive any credit points, while students in the master's program in education will, in future, receive only half as many credit points as previously. The credit points correspond to the "certificates" that were previously awarded to students as proof of their academic achievement.

The short statement from the department and the Academy for Educational Research and Teacher Education does not deny depriving student teachers of credit points. In a bureaucratic manner, it refers to the "joint agreement of all German states," produced at the Culture Ministry Conference on Teacher Education. According to this agreement, topics studied have to concentrate on "instruction, training, diagnostics, and school development." National Socialist pedagogy, which is ascribed the status of a "special topic," is considered a "requirement neither in Frankfurt nor in other German or international institutions of teacher education," the statement reads.

The Research Center for National Socialist Pedagogy was set up four years ago as a pilot project at Frankfurt University. By 2013, it had worked out a two-semester course of study aimed at providing all student teachers and pedagogy students with a knowledge of National Socialism, its crimes and ideology. This course of study has now been carried out successfully three times.

The lectures were always well attended and were

frequently overflowing. Professor Benjamin Ortmeyer, who leads the research center, made comparative analyses of pedagogical writings during the period of National Socialism, and researched topics such as National Socialist propaganda against the workers movement and the enforced conformity of opinion (*Gleichschaltung*) of the Frankfurt University during the Third Reich.

Ortmeyer invited Theresienstadt concentration camp survivor Trude Simonsohn to one of his lectures. Another time, he spoke about Josef Mengele, the concentration camp doctor at Auschwitz-Birkenau, who had written his doctoral dissertation in Frankfurt on "race research" and about whom the professor has written a book (*Beyond the Hippocratic Oath: Dr. Mengele and the Goethe University*).

The past four years have clearly shown that the course of study on National Socialist pedagogy answers a growing demand. The study of the Third Reich by prospective teachers is all the more important, since the German university and media establishment has evinced a clear trend towards downplaying the role of National Socialism and the lessons of the World War II.

This historical revisionism is closely connected with the revival of German militarism and the aggressive foreign policy of the German government. For example, Herfried Münkler, who teaches political science at the Humboldt University in Berlin, said at the beginning of the year in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: "It is barely possible to conduct a responsible policy in Europe based on the notion: We are to blame for everything." Münkler argues openly for German hegemony in Europe.

Münkler's colleague Gunther Hellmann is also pushing for a new foreign policy strategy on the part of the German government. He wrote a book for the Munich Security Conference in 2015 and promotes the new white paper of the armed forces on the web site of the Defense Ministry.

Consequently, it cannot be viewed as accidental that the university management refuses to secure the Center for Research on National Socialist Pedagogy in its curriculum. The department has cut even the modest funding that it had previously provided to the academic staff at the research center, who subsist largely on third party funding provided by the Hans Böckler Foundation, which is close to the trade unions. The presidium will temporarily provide funding, but this is only guaranteed until May 2016.

One of the topics that the research center has already examined illustrates how important the continuation of its work would be. This topic is the enforced conformity of opinion (Gleichschaltung) and the role of the university rector, the infamous Ernst Krieck. In 1939, Krieck wrote, “as in the city of Frankfurt, so also at its university, Marxist ideology and the Jews of a foreign type penetrate and advance. During the epoch of systems, ever more Jews and supporters of Marxism gained academic chairs. ... All these elements must be wiped out. ... At the same time, the student body will also be purified of them.”

The passage can be found on a panel in the exhibit that was created by students at the university for its 75-year anniversary celebration in 1989: “The brown seizure of power. University of Frankfurt 1930-1945.” The exhibit documents the book burning, suppression and expulsions, “race research and hereditary biology,” and every kind of active support that the Goethe University gave to fascism.

The exhibit plates are still hanging in the old cafeteria building at the Bockenheimer campus. Their days are numbered, however, since the university moved to a new location at the Westend campus five years ago. Although the hundred year anniversary of the university was celebrated with great pomp last year, there was no comparable effort or expense put into examining its National Socialist past, and no concrete plans have yet been made to move the exhibit to the new location.



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