In a radio interview in 1966, Theodor Adorno severely criticized what he saw as the faults of the German attitude toward authority. He claimed that “even in the literature on education—and this really is something truly frightening and very German—we find no sign of that uncompromising support for education for maturity, which we should be able to take for granted. . . . In the place of maturity we find there a concept of authority, of commitment, or whatever other name these hideousities are given, which is decorated and veiled by existential-ontological arguments which sabotage the idea of maturity. In doing so they work, not just implicitly but quite openly, against the basic conditions required for a democracy.”  

Adorno’s diagnosis was characteristic of German educational debates in the late 1960s. It echoed concerns that were common not only among left-wing intellectuals but also in growing segments of the German public. German education, in this view, tended to undervalue critical thinking and maturity (Mündigkeit) and was impregnated by an ideology of authority that counteracted the principles of democracy. Intellectuals in the 1960s saw this “authoritarianism” as the base mentality upon which National Socialism had grown and viewed its persistence in the Federal Republic as a “very German” phenomenon, a vestige of the Nazi period.

Motivated by the diagnosis of a democratic deficit in 1960s Germany, Theodor Adorno delivered a series of radio speeches to the German public. The thread

* This article presents some of the findings of a research project on educational change in France and Germany between 1945 and the 1970s, which has been supported generously by the VolkswagenStiftung. I would like to thank the audiences at the Humboldt-University Berlin, the University of Hanover, the Ruhr-University Bochum, and the University of Göttingen for their constructive feedback on the central arguments of this article. I am indebted to Till Kössler, Emile Chabal, Jörn Leonhard, Sandra Maß, Claudia Gatzka, Efvi Avdela, Kiran Patel, Susannah Brooks, and Matthew Kidd for their critical readings of previous drafts of this article.

running through his speeches was the concept of “education for maturity,” and it was under this title that they were later published. While the German scholar of education Hellmut Becker suggested in the broadcast quoted above that the “non-education of children for maturity” was a “global” phenomenon, Adorno, as well as large parts of German society in the 1960s, interpreted it as a feature characteristic of West Germany. What makes the latter interpretation particularly interesting is the fact that it tends to inform historical accounts of German society in the 1950s, albeit in a modified form. The image of the early Federal Republic in historiography is that of a society marked by “authoritarian” traditions. Studies on postwar German history frequently use the term autoritär to characterize German mentalities, attitudes, and politics, with the mostly implicit and sometimes explicit assumption that an authoritarianism carried over from the Nazi period and hence the prevalence of “authority-fixated attitudes” distinguished Germany from its Western neighbors. Thus, postwar Germans supposedly clung to “authoritarian patterns of behavior”; they were shaped by “authoritarian traditions” and had yet to get rid of “authoritarian structures.” Such judgments are often directly based on contemporary diagnoses, with one of the most cited witnesses being Ralf Dahrendorf, who in the early 1960s had con-


3 Adorno, “Education,” 25. Adorno here concurs with Becker’s statement that this was not just a German problem; however, his phrasing and his earlier remarks in the discussion make clear that he saw it as primarily a German problem.


cluded that Germany was suffering from an authoritarian “overhang.” While historians of the Federal Republic diagnose “authoritarianism” in a variety of aspects of German culture, they usually incorporate the fields of education and child rearing into their analysis. Socialization and political attitudes are often understood as being closely connected. Thus, an authoritarian West German “political culture” appears to be the product of authoritarian educational traditions.

In historiography, the narrative of the “authoritarian overhang” is complemented by the interpretation that a process of liberalization since the late 1950s eroded the ideology of authority, thereby furthering Germany’s democratization and diminishing the differences between German and Western European attitudes and values. But as the author of the concept of “liberalization,” Ulrich Herbert, has noted, at the present state of research we know neither which aspects of this process of transformation were specifically German, nor whether Germany was lagging behind Western European societies with regard to the democratization of political culture, the position of women, the inclusion of minorities—or parenting and teaching styles.


7 When Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba developed the concept of “political culture” in the early 1960s (Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations [Princeton, NJ, 1963]), it had few repercussions on German debates at first, and the book was never translated. See Max Kase, “Sinn oder Unsinn des Konzepts ‘Politische Kultur’ für die vergleichende Politikforschung, oder auch: Der Versuch, einen Pudding an die Wand zu nageln,” in Wahlen und politisches System, ed. Max Kaase and Hans-Dieter Klingelmann (Opladen, 1983), 144–72. Since the 1980s, however, the concept of political culture has come to play a central role in debates about the early Federal Republic and “authoritarianism” among political scientists as well as historians. While authors use different definitions of political culture (with historians often refraining from definitions) and usually keep some distance from the concept of Almond and Verba, most usages rely on the idea of a close connection between socialization and political attitudes. See, e.g., the influential Martin and Sylvia Greiffenhagen, Ein schwieriges Vaterland: Zur Politischen Kultur Deutschlands (Munich, 1979), 22, 32. Wolfgang Bergem, Tradition und Transformation: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zur politischen Kultur in Deutschland (Opladen, 1993), 28.

8 Ulrich Herbert, “Liberalisierung als Lernprozeß: Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte—eine Skizze,” in Herbert, Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland, 7–51, 11. Herbert adopts an analytical distance from the narrative of authoritarianism, as he uses “authoritarian structures” in quotation marks. Furthermore, he explicitly problematizes the difficulty of deciding which aspects of postwar German culture were remnants of National Socialism and which had their roots in earlier common European traditions, and he points to the need for comparative research. See also Ulrich Herbert, “Europe in High Modernity: Reflections on a Theory of the 20th Century,” Journal of Modern European History 5 (2007): 5–20.
This article argues that the idea of an “authoritarianism” that distinguished the early Federal Republic from its Western neighbors must be historicized. Based on a comparison of educational debates in postwar France and Germany, it shows that the idea of a specifically German tradition of authoritarianism rapidly gained ground in Germany from the mid-1950s onward. Particularly with regard to schools, the contemporary obsession with “authoritarianism” in Germany developed into a forceful impulse for educational change. As I will argue, the spread of this interpretation was not based primarily on actual differences between West German educational styles and those of its neighbors; rather, it was the product of a specifically German postwar obsession with the political implications of authority.

The article analyzes changing concepts of authority in postwar France and Germany by focusing on debates about student-teacher relationships in secondary schools between the end of the war and the beginnings of the 1968 protests. Throughout Europe, the postwar years witnessed an emerging massification of secondary education. It was a period of intense debate on the role and function of secondary schools in modern societies, a discussion that had already begun in the interwar period and gave rise to the eventual reforms that attempted to adapt educational systems to the needs of democracies. While the postwar French and German debates about schools were also part of this transnational process of rethinking education, they developed in very distinct ways that were shaped by specific interpretations of their national pasts. The experiences of Vichy and of National Socialism gave rise to reflections about the role of education in democracies and, within that context, about the relationship between authority and democracy. The answers reached, however, differed widely. Understanding their distinct conceptions of that relationship provides a key to understanding the different dynamics of educational change in France and Germany between 1945 and the 1960s.

I. Authority and the National Past

A. Germany: Diagnosing “Authoritarianism,” Making “Democracy”

The beginnings of the image of the “authoritarian” German reach back at least into the nineteenth century, but it was the period of Allied occupation after 1945 that proved decisive for its spread in Germany. American and British reports and memoranda on Germany in the middle and late 1940s described an “authoritarian,” supposedly “Prussian,” tradition of child rearing aiming at “passive obedience” as one of the main obstacles toward the successful democratization of German society. Thus, in a well-known statement, Alonzo Grace, who since 1948 had been the head of the American military government’s Education and Cultural Relations Division, called for the creation of “a democratic philosophy
of education, a democratic plan of school organization, and democratic practices,” because German education until then had “never been democratic.”

Within the wide array of American and British conceptions of reeducation, the idea of a politically problematic tradition of authoritarianism was a recurring topos that shaped Anglo-American thinking and policy throughout the whole period of occupation. A British memorandum in this vein stated in 1944, “The German alternately commands and kotows. . . . At home the father commands, outside he bows and scrapes. The boy assimilates and prizes authoritarianism.” Sources for such interpretations include accounts of German educational practices dating as far back as the early nineteenth century, specifically Horace Mann’s report on the Prussian schools from the 1840s, which officials such as Grace quoted at length.

Throughout their statements on educational reforms, British and American occupation officials continuously criticized “undemocratic” forms of education that emphasized hierarchy, “obedience,” and “subordination.” While they determined that such undemocratic styles of education prevailed in German families as well as in schools, it was toward the schools that they directed their postwar reform plans: an intrusion into family life would have been more problematic, from both an ethical and a practical point of view. In the Anglo-American in-

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9 Alonzo G. Grace, “Education,” in Governing Postwar Germany, ed. Edward H. Litchfield (Ithaca, 1953), 439–40. See also Brian Puaca, Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany, 1945–1965 (New York, 2009), 39. Puaca’s emphasis on innovation and reform in this period has been an important step away from older interpretations of “failure” and restoration.

10 The diversity of reeducation ideas and plans has been stressed by a range of scholars including James Tent, Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany (Chicago, 1982).


13 This was made explicit in the memorandum “Germany after the War,” printed in Pakschies, Umerziehung, 347; for the diagnosis of authoritarianism in German schools
interpretation, “democratizing” schools meant in part opening secondary education to larger segments of the population by remodeling the stratified structure of the German school system. These aims inscribed themselves into the transnational mid-twentieth-century trend of reforming secondary education systems throughout Europe. But while this aspect of occupation policy, as has often been shown, largely failed, British and American occupation policy in Germany also aimed to change the atmosphere within the schools, namely, the relationship between students and teachers. In this vein, the report of the Zook Commission, an American expert group that traveled to Germany in 1946 with the aim of elaborating and expanding reform plans for German schools, called for the introduction of “cooperative class projects, classroom committees, discussion groups, school councils, student groups, [and] community service projects.” The report defined all of these as essential instruments of an “education for democracy”: the “teacher dominated class” should have “no place in an educational system dedicated to the cultivation of the democratic attitude.”

In 1947, the goals formulated in this report were transformed into guidelines for occupation policy by way of the interallied directive No. 54, which stated: “All schools should lay emphasis upon education for civic responsibility and a democratic way of life, by means of the content of the curriculum, textbooks and materials of instruction, and by the organization of the school itself.” A British memorandum serving as a detailed interpretation of the directive explained further: “Excessive deference to superior authority” and “a stiff pedagogical disposition to subordinates” were signs of “the anti-democratic spirit, and families, see also Henry G. Pilgert, Community and Group Life in West Germany (Bad Godesberg, 1952), 2–3.


15 This has recently been portrayed as a success story by Puaca (Learning Democracy): Jaimey Fisher (Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War [Detroit, 2007]) deals in passing with American criticism of German authoritarianism in chap. 2, but his focus is in line with the older literature on the Allied efforts to restructure the German school system and on conflicts between American reeducation officials and Bavarian school politicians.


which we are here to combat.”  

The memorandum specified that teachers and headmasters should “awaken curiosity, enjoyment and the power of critical thought” among students instead of placing the highest priority on discipline. In pursuing this aim, they should be open to “informal” methods of teaching such as “well-conducted debates.”

The Anglo-American recipe for a democratic education thus contained two main ingredients: dialogue and discussion, and structures of student participation. The French occupation regime’s reform plans, as well as French diagnoses of German education in general, showed different priorities. French comments on the situation in postwar Germany did share some arguments with the American reports quoted above: specifically, they saw a negative “Prussian” influence resulting in a deformed German schooling system, and they criticized “barbaric” authoritarian tendencies. Yet missing from most French reports was the idea that this state of affairs constituted a major obstacle for German democracy and hence needed to be addressed with the highest priority. Observers such as the French historian Henri Berr and French reeducation officials such as Edmond Vermeil saw the methods of German schools as detrimental to the development of “men” and “personalities,” but they did not label these methods explicitly as “undemocratic.” They wanted the schools to produce “virile, strong individuals,” but they did not speak of “democrats.” While at first glance the different choice of words may appear to be an insignificant nuance, it mirrored the French conception of educational aims within their own country. With regard to concrete reforms, the bulk of official French documents paid little or no attention to participatory structures, teacher-pupil relations, or the supposed virtues of lively debate.

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22 The reports of the director of cultural affairs in the French zone of occupation, Raymond Schmittlein, do feature a limited interest in new teaching methods; see Raymond Schmittlein, “Die Umerziehung des deutschen Volkes: Bericht vom 27.1.1948,” in Französische Kulturpolitik in Deutschland, 1945–1949: Berichte und Dokumente, ed. Jérôme Vaillant (Konstanz, 1984), 169–70. Nevertheless, this topic remained mar-
How, then, did Germans react to the Allied verdict that German society was infected with a “Prussian” authoritarianism that had led Germany into National Socialism? Concerns about “authority” were also prominent within German postwar debates on education. They were triggered to some extent, but not exclusively, by the Allied diagnoses. Contributions in educational periodicals on the topic of “authority” in the postwar years offered a wide array of interpretations that can broadly be divided into two camps. The first important group of authors—including teachers, pastors, and politicians—described the postwar years as a period characterized by a hitherto unknown loss of authority, rather than by problematic authoritarian traditions. Authors within this camp saw the supposed lack of authority as a consequence of the National Socialist regime and of war and defeat.23 This interpretation was widespread among conservative authors but could also be found among pedagogues of other political convictions. While some authors within this camp marginalized the influence of the National Socialist regime by emphasizing the role of postwar turmoil, others argued that the Nazis themselves had destroyed “real” authority. Nazism, as one variant of the argument went, had undermined the authority of parents over their children, a fact that explained the postwar waywardness of youth. In another variant, the absoluteness of authority and obedience in Nazi ideology was seen as having destroyed more traditional and supposedly more “natural” forms of authority.24

A second important group comprised those who argued in support of the notion that a German tradition of authoritarianism had laid the groundwork for the National Socialist regime. This conviction was prominent particularly among Social Democrats, though again this view was not restricted to this group. One example is Adolf Grimme, a Social Democratic minister of culture in Lower Saxony (1946–48) who would later be the general director of the largest public radio channel of the period, the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk. In a speech to teachers in Hamburg in 1945, he expounded in cautious yet pointed words his view of the problematic traditions of German education. There existed, Grimme argued, two types of men: on the one hand, the “subordinate” man, who “dili-
gently carries out what he has been ordered to do, the subject,“ and, on the other, the “autonomous man,” who was able make decisions based on his own sense of responsibility. In an interpretation not unlike that of the Allies, Grimme claimed that German education had traditionally favored the first type, and he too identified the National Socialist regime as an outgrowth of German authoritarianism. Grimme’s viewpoint was not an exception. As Sean Forner has shown most recently, this narrative was prevalent among a considerable number of German intellectuals. These early postwar critiques of German authoritarianism developed largely independently of the Frankfurt School’s concept of the “authoritarian personality,” which in the 1960s came to play a greater role in German debates about the past. What authors across the whole political spectrum already shared in the late 1940s was a sense that authority had become problematic in postwar Germany.

B. France: Renovating Democracy or Remaking the Nation after the Trauma of 1940

In France, both resistance groups and postliberation reformers devoted great attention to the topic of education. It was accepted across political divides that after liberation the country needed to rethink the ways in which it educated its future decision makers. Far from limiting themselves to reflections on the po-

25 Adolf Grimme’s speech was later published in Die Sammlung 1 (1945–46): 65–80 under the title “Vom Sinn der Erziehung heute” (quotes on 75). For a biography of Grimme, see Kai Burkhardt, Adolf Grimme (1889–1963) (Cologne, 2007). Among the critics of the German overemphasis on authority was the minister of education in Baden-Württemberg, Theodor Bäuerle; see Braun, Umerziehung, 125.

26 Sean Forner, German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics after 1945 (Cambridge, 2014), particularly 125–27, 129–30. Forner in a very convincing analysis stresses the commitment of German intellectuals to the idea of participatory democracy as a way of distancing themselves from the supposed authoritarian legacy.

27 The theory of the authoritarian personality had an influence on some postwar German scholars, particularly social scientists, but was largely unknown in wider educational debates until the late 1950s. Regarding a possible influence on American occupation policy, it is clear that the Institute for Social Research under Horkheimer produced various memoranda for the state department and other institutions; see Clemens Albrecht, “‘Das Allerwichtigste ist, daß man die Jugend für sich gewinnt’: Die kultur- und bildungspolitischen Pläne des Horkheimer-Kreises bei der Remigration,” in Die intellektuelle Gründung der Bundesrepublik: Eine Wirkungsgeschichte der Frankfurter Schule, ed. Clemens Albrecht et al. (Frankfurt, 1999), 97–131, 120; see also Emil-Walter Busch, Geschichte der Frankfurter Schule: Kritische Theorie und Politik (Munich, 2010), 110–15. These memoranda did not pay special attention to “authoritarianism,” however, and thus the Allied preoccupation with this topic was not primarily shaped by this influence.

itical or military aspects of French reconstruction after the war, all major French resistance groups drafted plans for educational reform after the liberation. To some extent, these plans mirrored the educational currents of the interwar period and built upon earlier attempts to reform the stratified French system of education and to change its pedagogy. To a limited extent, they also reacted to the contemporary British debates. At the same time, war and occupation, but particularly the defeat in 1940, gave both a new intensity and a new focus to the French reform visions.

In view of the obsession with which both France’s Anglo-American allies and the Germans discussed questions of authority in the late 1940s, it is rather surprising that a concern with authority or obedience was largely absent from French debates on education both during and after the war. The collapse of democracy and experiences under the authoritarian Vichy Régime did not trigger the same reflection on the respective values of hierarchy and subordination or of participation and obedience in education.\(^{29}\) In order to understand this difference, it is necessary to take a closer look at the educational debates among French resistance groups and their interpretation of the most recent past.

Jean-François Muracciole has argued in his convincing account of the French resistance’s educational and cultural concepts that the resistance groups were dazed by the defeat of 1940—a trauma that divided their view of French history into a “before” and an “after” and that imposed itself as a point of reference for all future reflections.\(^{30}\) This also applies to their educational reform plans. They neither addressed the question of whether French traditions had laid the groundwork for the acceptance of the dictatorial Vichy regime nor discussed to the authoritarian educational policies of this regime. Instead, the educational reform plans evolved around the question of how to avoid “another 1940.”

Debating the causes of defeat, the diagnoses of the various resistance groups spanning the political gamut from the Communists to the conservative wing had a common theme: the failure of the French elites and, in this context, of the French educational system.\(^{31}\) The resistance groups shared this focus on edu-

\(^{29}\) Reflecting the absence of contemporary debate, historians of postwar France have so far not been interested in postwar French concepts of authority, nor has there been much interest in educational change. Terms such as “authoritarian” or “autoritaire” are not used to describe French postwar school education or political attitudes. The best existing studies on French youth are Ludivine Batigny, _Le plus bel âge? Jeunes et jeunesse en France de l’aube des “Trente Glorieuses” à la guerre d’Algérie_ (Paris, 2007); and Richard Ivan Jobs, _Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War_ (Stanford, CA, 2007); for the state of research on school education, see Pierre Caspard, Jean-Noel Luc, and Philippe Savoie, eds., _Lycées, Lycéens, Lycéennes: Deux siècles d’histoire_ (Lyon, 2005)

\(^{30}\) Muracciole, _Enfants de la défaite_, 12.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., chap. 3. Only de Gaulle’s Free French Movement distanced itself from the idea of a failure of elites (ibid., 54).
cation with the Vichy government, which had placed much of the blame for defeat on French schools and educational traditions. Pétain had advocated a return to “discipline” and the “old values” while criticizing the “intellectualism” of French public schools and supporting the Catholic private schools.32

The resistance tracts originating in 1940–41 showed a certain affinity with the contemporary tracts of the Vichy regime in their analyses of French society.33 Both were vehemently critical of the Third Republic and interpreted defeat as a consequence of the moral decline of the French nation. This changed during the years 1942–44, when a consensus emerged among resistance groups that explained “1940” as a failure of French military, administrative, and economic elites—with some variations regarding the focus on administrative or economic elites. The aim of opening French secondary education to larger segments of the population became the core concern of reform plans across the political spectrum largely owing to this interpretation of the recent past. A new, inclusive system of secondary education was seen as a means of providing France with new elites better equipped to face the challenges of the future.34

The so-called école unique had been an important aim of reformers in interwar France, but at that time it had been a project of the left, justified by ideas of social justice. Only after liberation did it take on the meaning of a program of national strength that could gain support across political divides. Fears of population decline, which had haunted France since the late nineteenth century, not only fueled pronatalist policies after the liberation but also informed debates about the educational system. In 1945, Raymond Aron summarized the new consensus for educational reform with the phrase “France needs Frenchmen of better quality.”35 Thus, at the end of the war the dominant view was that the future of French democracy would be contingent on a “democratization” of the school system—“democratization” meaning the process of opening secondary education to larger segments of society. Achieving this aim would prove to be challenging, particularly because of the postwar baby boom in France and the

33 This has been convincingly shown by Muracciole, Enfants de la défaite, 54, 75, 61–62, 148.
34 Ibid., 67–80.
resulting influx of pupils. It remained at the forefront of French debates throughout the 1950s, however, and it showed some results. The percentage of students reaching the baccalauréat more than doubled between 1946 and 1960 (from 4.4 percent to 10.8 percent of an age cohort). By 1968 it had risen to more than 18 percent—very much in contrast to Germany, where the percentage of students passing the Abitur increased only marginally during the 1950s—from 3.8 to 6 percent of the respective age cohort—and where it still stood at a low 9.1 percent in 1968.36

As the focus on “1940,” on defeat, and on the problem of elite recruitment dominated French reform plans, those plans only rarely engaged with Pétain’s emphasis on old values and “discipline.”37 The notion that the future of French democracy might depend on new styles of education, on new teacher-pupil relations, on methods such as an active participation in school life and discussions during lessons remained a minority position both during and after the war. I will argue that the Anglo-American, German, and French conceptions of the relationship between authority and democracy all had concrete repercussions on the development of teacher-pupil relations during the 1950s and 1960s.

II. Reforming Education, Transforming Authority?

A. Disciplined Citizens and Limited Change: School Culture in the Federal Republic during the 1950s

Following their definition of democracy as being dependent on new teacher-pupil relations in schools, American and British occupation administrations in the late 1940s promoted a range of measures that aimed at creating new forms of student participation—the so-called Schülermitverwaltungen (student councils) and Schülerparlamente (student parliaments). In addition, they supported the foundation of student newspapers in secondary schools through measures ranging from freely accessible printing devices to practical lessons for young journalists to financial assistance.38 Finally, they intended to further the use of


37 “Discipline” in schools, families, and as a general trait of the “citizen” was a recurring topos in Pétain’s speeches and writings; see “Réforme de l’éducation nationale,” Revue des deux mondes, August 15, 1940, printed in Pétain, Actes, 485–90.

38 For the implementation of these reforms, see, e.g., Puca, Learning Democracy. For a short but well-researched account of American support for student committees, see Winfried Müller, “Schülermitverantwortung,” in Handbuch der Geschichte des
“innovative” teaching methods, especially the method of debate/discussion, by creating or supporting teacher-training workshops and institutions dedicated to the training of teachers and students alike in the techniques of discussion and group work.39

Looking at the institutional level, the introduction of participatory structures in secondary schools was an impressive success of the early postwar period. By the mid-1950s, almost all German secondary schools had introduced participatory structures. True, there were considerable regional and local variations in the organization and in the extent to which the existing student councils could exert any real influence on school matters. While Berlin had a citywide “student parliament” that discussed matters of school life freely, for example, Bavarian schools reportedly lagged far behind.40 Furthermore, while reforms were meant to influence all kinds of secondary schools and even Volkschulen, they achieved the most progress in the Gymnasien, which were mostly the preserve of upper-middle-class students. Yet it was still impressive that students in most secondary schools elected class representatives who would then usually form a committee to discuss questions of school life. In many schools, the student committee elected a teacher to serve as a liaison and mediator between students and teachers in case of conflict.41

Before evaluating the functioning of these new dialogue structures further, their successful implementation—which stands in stark contrast to the fate of many other allied reform plans—must be explained. The two most significant reasons for this success were the Anglo-American insistence on a “democratic education” and the efforts of a limited but important group of German politicians and pedagogues who shared the aforementioned unease regarding the use of authority in postwar Germany. Other factors such as German traditions of student participation and the political situation in Cold War Germany also played a role.

39 See, e.g., Henry G. Pilgert, The West German Educational System, with special reference to the Policies and Programs of the Office of the U.S. High Commissioner to Germany (Bad Godesberg, 1953), 51; Braun, Umerziehung, 68–75.

40 For Berlin, see, e.g., Eckard Henze, “Partizipation im Berliner Schulwesen von 1948 bis heute—ein Überblick,” in Mitbestimmung und Demokratisierung im Schulwesen, ed. Benno Schmoldt (Darmstadt, 1985), 6–24; for comments on Bavaria, see Pilgert, West German Educational System, 53; and Thomas Ellwein, Pflegt die deutsche Schule Bürgerbewusstsein? Ein Bericht über die staatsbürgerliche Erziehung in den höheren Schulen der Bundesrepublik (Munich, 1955), 77; see also “Endlich Nachricht aus Bayern,” Wir machen mit, April 1957, 14.

but these were secondary compared to the impact of the Allied influence and of German democratic-minded reformers.42

The majority of the German Länder passed laws or directives creating student councils in the period between 1946 and 1949. German education ministries in this realm responded cooperatively to the Allied suggestions, a reaction that stood in contrast to their otherwise strong opposition toward the Allied efforts to restructure the secondary school system. This cooperation may partly have been tactical, a strategy utilized to deflect American attention from the structural, “external” school reform plans. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that introducing participatory structures into the schools was from the beginning not only an American but also a German project, and it became even more so during the 1950s. A significant number of politicians throughout Germany personally agreed with the American intention to reform student-teacher relations as a way of furthering a “democratic way of life” or, without direct reference to “democracy,” with the need to break from authoritarian traditions.43

Many of the legal texts that formed the basis of the new student councils explicitly spoke of an “education for democracy”—in contrast to teachers and headmasters, who in the early 1950s often avoided the term “democracy” and interpreted student participation as a way to teach self-discipline, responsibility, and a sense of community. Student participation, they argued, was a way to substitute “inner authority” for “external respect,” “self-discipline” for “drill.”44 Almost all contributions to the debate on student participation, even from the conservative camp, contrasted the positive connotation of “inner” discipline/authority with the negative connotation of “external” discipline/authority.45

42 This conclusion is supported by the observations of regional studies such as Müller, Schulpolitik; and Zilien, Politische Bildung; for the position that stresses traditions, see Torsten Gass-Bolm, Das Gymnasium 1945–1980: Bildungsreform und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Westdeutschland (Göttingen, 2005), 103–5.
43 An example is the Munich city school councilor Anton Fingerle, member of the conservative Bavarian Christian Socialist Union (CSU), who praised American modes of student self-government; see Anton Fingerle, Selfgovernment in amerikanischen Schulen (Donauwörth, 1948), 3. Another is Theo Fruhmann, an advisor to the minister of culture in Hessen; see Zilien, Politische Bildung, 170. A very convincing account of the motivation of the Bavarian Ministry of Education to support reforms in the realm of student participation is given by Müller, “Schülermitverantwortung,” 397–98. For Hesse, Zilien stresses the conviction of the ministry in supporting reforms in this realm; see Zilien, Politische Bildung, 161–64.
this interpretation had also been common among educational reformers in the early twentieth century, it took on a highly political meaning in postwar Germany. Secondary school teachers and headmasters in early 1950s Germany did not justify the ideals of “self-education,” meaning an internalized discipline that should substitute for external constraints, by referring to psychological, pedagogical, or didactical arguments, as had been common in educational reform programs of the early twentieth century. While these arguments were not completely absent, it is striking that the whole debate about student participation and authority in schools revolved around the aim of educating “citizens.”

Not all teachers in the early 1950s talked about “democratic” citizens, but their concept of the citizen still stood in clear contrast to concepts of the subject. The dominant ideal of the citizen that informed the debates—whether labeled “democratic” or not—was that of a disciplined citizen who adhered to the norms of the community based on his own informed decision. The Schülermitverwaltung was envisaged as creating an atmosphere in which students would voluntarily accept the rules of school life without teachers having to resort to “authoritarian” forms of discipline. It was supposed to promote the students’ capacities to act and think independently, a capacity that was seen as “necessary for future citizens.”

Many saw this as an important step away from German traditions of military discipline. Already in 1948 the conservative Hessian education minister Erwin Stein claimed in a decree titled “Forms of School Life” that student councils were an instrument to abolish “disciplinary means reminiscent of military customs.” The “drill of a cadet school” was, Stein argued, in no way acceptable in present education. The terms “drill” and “command,” which were associated with military obedience, had distinctly negative connotations throughout the 1950s debate, even among conservative teachers. While most teachers, headmasters, and politicians defined the “citizen” in explicit contrast to the past, others in the late 1940s and early 1950s hoped that student participation would make youths into citizens who would be immune to any ideology—but primarily to that of Communism. In the early 1950s, such anti-Communist...
arguments increasingly informed statements on school policy drafted by American education officials. Among German teachers, these arguments were particularly prevalent in the conservative camp and played a significant role in helping to endorse the idea of student participation to this group. Indeed, many teachers combined both arguments and referred both to the “dangers of Communism” and to Germany’s “democratic deficit” as arguments for (limited) student participation. However, the idea that German youth had to be immunized against propaganda from the East never came to be as central to the debate as National Socialism, even during the 1950s.

Insisting on new forms of discipline did not necessarily imply that students should have greater freedoms. When teachers and headmasters in the 1950s described the Schülermitverwaltung as a way to make students into “citizens,” they tended to define the “citizen” as being characterized by duty, virtue, responsibility, and acceptance of the limits of his freedom. The citizen was someone who subordinated his own interests to that of the community, felt an obligation toward the community, and valued “responsibility rather than liberty.” In this view, participation would change the climate at schools and create a better atmosphere, but it would not give students a significant amount of decisive power.

Hence, it is not surprising that in the 1950s a majority of student councils in the secondary schools had only very limited powers. They often engaged in voluntary work, such as collecting money for charities or sending care packages to East Germany. Teachers and students alike interpreted these tasks as a way of learning to act responsibly in the national community. Student committees often took charge of the decoration of schools and classrooms, helped to organize festivities during the school year, took care of the school library, ran theater or film clubs, and organized various extracurricular activities. Just as often, class representatives were supposed to make their fellow students adhere to the norms of school life, such as taking care of the cleanliness of classrooms.


50 Walter Dederich, “Die Demokratie in der Schule,” Die höhere Schule 15 (1962): 74. These concepts show clear affinities with the theories of “staatsbürgerliche Erziehung” that Georg Kerschensteiner had developed before 1914; see Die staatsbürgerliche Erziehung der deutschen Jugend (Erfurt, 1901), as well as Der Begriff der staatsbürgerlichen Erziehung (Leipzig, 1910). The various new editions of this book—the seventh edition came out in 1950, the tenth in 1966—show the important impact of Kerschensteiner’s thinking.

51 Ellwein, Pflegt die deutsche Schule Bürgerbewusstsein? For partly positive, partly critical comments, see “Schönheitskonkurrenz im Mädchengymnasium,” Wir machen mit, April 1955, 16; and “Vom Sinn praktischer Arbeit,” Wir machen mit, January 1955, 2.
Students’ reactions to the new but limited opportunities for “self-government” were mixed. Many valued the new possibilities and reported that they did change the atmosphere in a positive way.\textsuperscript{52} Furthermore, considerable evidence suggests that the new participatory structures did indeed further the dialogue between teachers and students. By the mid-1950s, many schools had introduced regular \textit{Aussprachestunden}, in which students were encouraged and even expected to voice their suggestions and criticisms. While many teachers abhorred the idea that student councils would present “demands” to the teachers, they got used to the fact that the councils voiced the “wishes” of the students, and this gave rise to new strategies of resolving conflicts in the schools.\textsuperscript{53}

At the same time, teachers and headmasters who were unwilling to grant the students new rights often obstructed or limited forms of self-government. While this was strongly criticized by students, reform-minded teachers, and politicians, it is interesting to note that the mainstream concept of student participation also came under increasing fire from the mid-1950s onward.\textsuperscript{54} A small but vociferous minority of teachers repeatedly argued in teachers’ journals, magazines, and newspapers in favor of making the structures of participation more “democratic”: this implied, in their view, strengthening students’ rights, increasing the possibilities of self-government, and supporting the capacity to voice criticism. They stressed that democracy needed students who were able to think critically, experienced in democratic decision-making processes, and not shy to voice their opinions.

Supporters of this argument often referred to America, which they saw as a model for this kind of democratic education. This was partly due to the fact that the United States had sponsored and organized a large-scale exchange program for teachers through which many German pedagogues had come in contact with American school life. The impressions of these travelers were usually mixed,


\textsuperscript{53} For innovations such as \textit{Aussprachestunden}, see Ellwein, \textit{Pflegt die deutsche Schule Bürgerbewusstsein?}, 227; Herbert Koch, \textit{Handbuch der Schülermitverwaltung in Westfalen: Zusammengestellt und herausgegeben im Auftrage des Vereins “Der neue Schola” e.V.} (Münster, 1959), 32–34.

combining a critical stance toward the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition in American schools with enthusiastic judgments on student-teacher relations and the “education for democracy.” Even in periodicals such as the firmly conservative magazine of the Association of German High School Teachers (Deutscher Philologenverband), the majority of articles that dealt with America in the 1950s portrayed the United States as a role model for a successful education for democracy. In the eyes of German visitors, this seemed to happen by way of more responsibility for the students, structures of participation, and less formal teacher-pupil relations. More than a few returnees declared that they intended to promote such forms in their own schools. This can partly be interpreted as a consequence of their visits. At the same time, the astonishing unanimity with which German visitors praised student participation and democracy in American schools suggests that the guests saw what they hoped to see. The reports of returnees hardly ever commented on problems of discipline, on differences between large cities and the countryside or between North and South—or on racial segregation. In order to promote the reception of such reports and comments, the American military government in Germany founded and financed a periodical directed at teachers that regularly published accounts of visits to America.

“America” thus became an argument for all who wanted to increase students’ rights, expand self-government, and strengthen participation as a way of making students into democratic citizens. The capacity to voice criticism and the ability to take part in decisions regarding the community were considered essential characteristics of a citizen. This was, indeed, a concept of citizenship that contained stronger emancipatory aspects than the mainstream concept of the disciplined citizen. While such ideas were voiced only by a minority in the 1950s, they clearly


57 The periodical was Schule und Gegenwart; see Latzin, Lernen von Amerika, 152–56; for declarations of returnees, see Puaca, Missionaries, 316.
gained ground in the latter half of the 1950s, and increasingly so in the early 1960s. Since the mid-1950s, a growing number of articles in pedagogical journals argued that German education suffered from an “authoritarianism” that had laid the groundwork for National Socialism and that was incompatible with democracy. In this vein a teacher wrote in 1954 that Germans should acknowledge “in which abysmal depths this Prussian Untertanengeist (subservient spirit), this spirit of duty and blind obedience, has thrown us.”

Individual teachers were not alone in returning to the idea of a politically problematic authoritarianism. The topic had been popularized in 1951 by the professor of education Theodor Wilhelm in his very successful book Wendepunkt der politischen Erziehung. Later it was taken up by the equally successful book Autoritär oder demokratisch erziehen? (1955) by Heinrich Roth, an educational reformer who worked in teacher training institutes. The same interpretation was at the core of the report from the Ausschuss für das deutsche Bildungswesen in 1954, a committee consisting mainly of pedagogues that had been founded in 1953 by the Länder governments. The committee was free from state influence, but its unanimous recommendations can be regarded as representative of the dominant current in educational thinking of the period. Evaluating the state of political education in Germany at the time, the committee expressed the strong criticism that German schools had not freed themselves from the forms of the old authoritarian state (obrigkeitsstaatliche Strukturen) and called for more participation in all schools. The public perceived this as the central statement of the report. Historians have interpreted this report as well as the criticism of other groups as evidence for the persistence of an “authoritarian” climate in German school education in the 1950s. While this may be true to a certain degree, the strength of the criticism and the growing consensus that “authoritarian” forms had to vanish from German schools can be taken as evidence that attitudes had changed considerably.

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59 Friedrich Oetinger [Theodor Wilhelm], Wendepunkt der politischen Erziehung—Partnerschaft als pädagogische Aufgabe (Stuttgart, 1951); the book appeared in three editions between 1951 and 1956; Heinrich Roth, Autoritär oder demokratisch erziehen? (Munich, 1955) underwent three re-editions before 1970.
The narrative of a German authoritarianism provided a certain distance from the past. At the same time, defining a culture of “obedience” as the main cause of National Socialism implied only a very limited acceptance of German guilt or complicity: speaking of “obedient” Germans believing in “authority” implied the image of Germans being at most passive followers of National Socialism. Criticizing the supposedly particular German belief in authority was compatible with the prevalent image of Germans being led into catastrophe by a small National Socialist elite; it ruled out ideological conviction, enthusiastic support, and willing complicity as grounds for Germans’ support of the National Socialist regime. The attractiveness of this narrative was partly in this idea of ambivalence.

Still, changes were not restricted only to attitudes. In the second half of the 1950s, more than a few teachers observed a significant “civilization” of school education. Thus, a teacher who was active in the National Association for the Promotion of Participation in Schools (Freundeskreis der Schülermitverwaltung) claimed in 1956 that the “climate” of school education was no longer the one that grandfathers and fathers had experienced in their childhood: “The Pauker,” he argued, using the colloquial term for an authoritarian teacher, “has died together with Himmelsstoß and Schleifer-Platze.” Himmelsstoß and Schleifer-Platze were characters from the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* and the novel and later movie *08/15* (first screened in German cinemas in 1954). In both books and in the film, traditions of inhuman military drill in the German armies of the First and Second World Wars were dramatized. Judging from debates in teaching journals, a wide majority of German teachers in the late 1950s were pleased that such military styles had largely disappeared from school life. Students tended to take a somewhat less enthusiastic view, but even from their side came some positive comments on the change in pupil-teacher relationships by the end of the 1950s.

Student newspapers, for example, illustrate the significant, though always limited, changes in school life that had taken place since the middle of the 1950s. The Federal Republic at this time witnessed an extraordinary boom in student newspapers. By 1955, roughly two hundred newspapers existed in West German secondary schools—most of them founded after 1945—and by 1961 their number had grown to more than six hundred. Both this large number and the fact that many of these papers not only featured reports on school life but also touched upon political issues made West Germany exceptional when compared to other European countries. Among the reasons for the boom was the Allied,

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and particularly the American, support for student newspapers in the early postwar years, later supplanted by financial support from various German Länder.63

Not all teachers and headmasters welcomed student newspapers in the immediate postwar years, and those who did often wanted to see them restricted to reporting on school festivities and similar events. However, parallel to the increasing acceptance of the Schülermitverwaltung, student newspapers and their interest in politics during the 1950s would become accepted as necessary means of establishing an “education for democracy.” This concern for democracy was the main impetus for Länder governments to support the student newspapers financially. In 1958, even the conservative Federal Minister of Families Franz-Josef Würmeling stressed that both student newspapers and student councils were “helping the youth in our country to learn to think for themselves, and thus to contribute to protecting our young political system from the danger that comes from ‘indignant agitators of the blind, easily led masses.’”64 In 1958, this attitude was already so widespread that a pupil from Berlin asked rhetorically, in reference to political articles in students’ newspapers: “Who would today still deny the pupil the right to a political opinion of his own?”65

Both the individual student newspapers as well as the regional school magazine associations that soon appeared all over Germany opened new spaces for discussion, for an exchange of opinions among students, for dialogue, and for criticism. It was upper-class and upper-middle-class male students who profited most: student newspapers sprang up mainly in the Gymnasien and were often dominated by male students. The degree of their involvement in politics was contentious among teachers, headmasters, students, and politicians in the 1950s, but a range of articles criticizing government policy or taking a critical stance toward the way Germans dealt with their National Socialist past appeared in this decade.66 At the same time, this freedom had clear limits. A majority of headmasters requested the right to censor articles and made use of that right without


great reticence. While the idea that the papers were a valuable instrument for an “education for democracy” was largely accepted by 1960, this attitude still often went hand in hand with a strict idea of control. That was, as we will see, about to change in the 1960s.

B. Aborted Reforms and Myths of the Past in France in the 1950s

Looking at the development of French school culture after 1945 reveals a few interesting parallels with regard to the immediate postwar situation, but major differences regarding the long-term perspective. One of the first actions of the French Ministry of Education in 1945 was to introduce the role of class representatives into secondary schools. In two decrees from June and October 1945 the ministry stated its intention to “transform the school class progressively . . . into a small, organized society in which the virtues of the future citizen can flourish.” The schools were expected to aim toward the education of “free spirits” and “strong characters” and thus contribute to the making of “real democrats.” The decrees justified this reform by referring to the past, albeit in a rather vague way: schools had to participate in the “renovation of democracy” and in the elimination of “the poison of totalitarian regimes” because of the “horrible trials that France has experienced.” It specified not only that each class should elect representatives, the responsables de classe, but also that each year should choose délégués-élèves for the school’s administrative boards. Apart from these new, though restricted, structures of participation, the early reforms also advocated the founding of student clubs and societies, which were envisioned as being run cooperatively by teachers and students together. A ministerial decree in 1948 instructed all secondary schools (both lycées and the various forms of collèges) to support the foundation of coopératives scolaires, which were to be partially self-governed student societies that would create some form of community life in schools. The types of activities that these coopératives were supposed to organize were only vaguely specified, ranging from film clubs to groups to plan school festivities. The general purpose of the coopératives scolaires was somewhat similar to the early German Schülermitverwaltungen, even though the coopératives were nonelected bodies. Both emphasized chari-

69 Printed in Cahiers pédagogiques, February 1959, 136.
70 Ibid., 136.
table work, and both were supposed to promote extracurricular activities such as running the school libraries.72

Just as in German debates of this period, French conceptions of participation in the late 1940s and early 1950s did not involve the idea of students fighting for their interests, nor the idea of legitimate conflicts or protests. The ideal of the disciplined citizen that was at the core of the more conservative German interpretations of the Schülermitverwaltung was generally accepted among French pedagogues. Thus, the tasks of the responsables de classe were defined as promoting a “good spirit” and “good order in the class,” as well as ensuring that their fellow students took care of school materials and of the classroom’s cleanliness.73 The decree on the coopératives scolaires spoke of the “duties that social life brings with it,” of the “responsibility” that it involved, and of the “discipline” that it made necessary. In this way, the language of the decree was quite similar to the German decrees on the Schülermitverwaltung.74

Within the Ministry of Education, there were two main actors behind these reforms: Gustave Monod, who in 1945 was the directeur de l’enseignement du second degré, a former member of the Resistance and a long-term advocate of school reforms, and his colleague Louis François, who had also been a member of the Resistance and who had spent a period of the war in a German concentration camp.75 François had been offered a position in the Ministry of Education by Gustave Monod almost immediately after his return to France. Monod’s and François’s concern with an “education for democracy” in 1945 was at the time a minority position. From 1945 to 1948, only a limited number of articles published in teaching magazines and pedagogical journals discussed the role of secondary schools in an education for democracy.76

The reforms leaned toward new but limited forms of participation in all secondary schools, and those aiming to promote social life in the schools were complemented by a third reform project: the so-called classes nouvelles, initiated in July 1945.77 As with the other reforms, the creation of the classes

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72 For the cooperatives see also Charles Boos, “Aspects de la coopération scolaire en France depuis près d’un demi-siècle,” Revue des études coopératives 44 (1965).
74 Quoted after Prévot, Pédagogie, 29–30.
nouvelles was motivated by ideas of creating new forms of authority, of promoting dialogue instead of hierarchies, and of encouraging active student participation in school life. In total, 750 classes throughout two hundred lycées became involved in these reforms. The basic measures to be adopted in these classes were threefold. First, and at the core of the project, were new teaching methods such as group work and self-directed work on projects with the intention of giving the students a more active role in class. Second, students were expected to participate in all important school board meetings, with participation being defined in a significantly broader way than in the traditional classes. Contact between teachers, parents, and students was supposed to be closer and less formalized. Third, the project aimed at substituting traditional forms of discipline based on control and punishment with rather vaguely defined forms of self-discipline.

The project of the classes nouvelles, which was also initiated by Gustave Monod, inscribed itself to some extent into the discourse of an education for democracy. However, psychological, pedagogical, and didactical arguments about effective learning techniques were of at least equal importance: the concept of the classes nouvelles built upon the ideas of the éducation nouvelle reform movement, which had developed into a considerable force in interwar France. Since the early 1930s, school reformers in France had advocated an “active” pedagogy by claiming that it was better adapted to the needs of children. This argument, which continued to be prominent after 1945, was often complemented by the idea that “active” learning techniques were better adapted to the needs of the modern economy; the latter argument in particular was conspicuously absent from German debates of the 1950s.

The statements of the parents, students, and teachers involved in the classes nouvelles would suggest that the experiment was a success. Many claimed that an atmosphere of cooperation and respect had replaced the traditionally much...
more formalized teacher-pupil relations. Although “self-discipline” did not seem to work everywhere, the tendency to give students a more active role in school life and the creation of a less hierarchical atmosphere were generally judged as positive—not only among those involved but also in the overwhelming majority of pedagogical and teaching journals.\footnote{A large number of positive contemporary reports, letters, and so on, are in Archives Nationales, F/17/17806, Organisation des classes nouvelles, 1945–1951; see also Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, ed., Les quatrièmes nouvelles: Résumé des stages et des entretiens de l’année 1947–1948 (Paris, 1948); for positive reactions of parents see in addition “À l’Assemblée générale,” Collèges, January 1950, 1.}

While these early reforms exhibited significant parallels to the reforms made in Germany, over the long term the two movements developed quite differently. None of the French reforms had any lasting impact on teacher-pupil relations. As to the classes nouvelles, despite their very positive image in French society and despite the protests of many of those involved, the experiment was abandoned in 1952. This was to some extent due to financial problems: the experimental classes had profited from a reduced number of children per class—a privilege that was costly and that caused conflicts with the teachers of the “traditional” classes. However, financial constraints provide only a limited explanation of their failure to induce change. Concomitant with the announcement from the government of the end of the classes nouvelles came the declaration that their methods should, to some degree, be taken up by teachers in the traditional classes.\footnote{Archives Nationales, F/17/17509, Classes nouvelles et pilotes, April 28, 1952; Bulletin Officiel de l’Éducation Nationale, June 5, 1952, 1677–77.} Both contemporary observers and historians of French schools in the 1950s agree that this did not happen to any significant degree, however, nor were any efforts made to extend to all schools the expanded possibilities of participation in decision-making processes that had been characteristic of the classes nouvelles. Indeed, participation hardly developed in French schools in the 1950s.\footnote{André D. Robert, “Une culture ‘contre’ l’autre: Les idées de l’éducation nouvelle solubles dans l’institution scolaire d’État? Autour de la démocratisation de l’accès au savoir,” Paedagogica Historia 42 (2006); Edmée Hatinguais, Les méthodes actives dans l’enseignement du second degré, in Encyclopédie pratique de l’éducation en France, ed. Robert Laffont (Paris 1960), 555–75.} The class representatives were regarded by teachers and students alike as support staff and “extra eyes” for teachers, not as mediators between students and teachers or as spokespersons representing students’ wishes. The envisioned attendance of the délégués-élèves at school board meetings was rarely put into practice, and neither student committees in schools nor the position of an elected student representative for the whole school existed. Whereas in West Germany student committees started to build regional and national networks during the 1950s—organizations that were contested in the beginning, but
well established by 1955—nothing of the sort came into existence in France.84

The number of coopératives scolaires grew rather slowly, and they had a real
impact on transforming teacher-pupil relations in only a very limited number
of schools.85

Among the factors that can explain the different dynamics of change in West
Germany and France were structural differences such as the centralized, strict
administrative hierarchy of the French educational system. The ability of the
German Länder to introduce reforms on a regional level proved in several in-
stances favorable to change; Länder governments were often more willing to
undertake experiments. However, the fact that even reforms that were actively
promoted by the Ministry of Education in France—such as the responsables de
classes—failed in the long term points toward the importance of the mentalities
and opinions of the public, of teachers, and of headmasters. As stated above,
interest in creating a “classroom democracy” and in engaging the school for
an “education for democracy” was already a minority position among French
reformers in the early postwar years. After 1949, however, the term “democ-
rency” disappeared almost completely from educational debates, and with it the
idea of an education for democracy. The semantics of “democracy” remained
only in the term “democratization of education,” referring to the expansion of
secondary education; neither students nor pedagogues continued to discuss the
value for “democracy” of participation, of the new forms of authority in the clas-
es nouvelles, or of techniques such as discussion or the coopératives scolaires.
America as a model featured only briefly in French debates, but it still played a
larger role than other foreign models. French and German reformers only rarely
took note of each other, for example, and the debates in the neighboring countries
interacted little. French teachers who wrote in a positive tone about American
schools, however, saw a very different picture than their West German col-
leagues: when French pedagogues did discuss schools in the United States, they
lauded them mostly for the way their educational styles supposedly served the
needs of a modern economy, sometimes for the role of an emotional patriotism
in education, and only rarely for “democratic” styles.86

84 For regional networks, see Zilien, Politische Bildung, 377–78; Ellwein, Pflegt die
85 Charles Boos, “Aspects de la coopération scolaire en France depuis près d’un
demi-siècle,” Revue des études coopératives 44 (1965): 475–76; and, with a positive
view on both movements from a parent’s view, F. Aster, “Éducation permanente: Les
86 Jean Fourastié, “Un aspect de l’Enseignement aux États-Unis,” L’Éducation Na-
L’Éducation Nationale, December 2, 1957, 1–3. See also Jean Cayol, “La communauté,
base de l’éducation civique aux États-Unis,” Cahiers pédagogiques, February 1959, 20–
d124; Jean Capelle, “L’Éducation des Minorités aux États-Unis,” L’Éducation Nationale,
French and German usages of the past in educational debates also differed widely. In West Germany, the idea that authoritarian styles of education had provided the foundation for the rise of National Socialism became a central and effective argument for change. In 1950s France, in contrast, any reference to the past was used almost exclusively by those who defended the traditions of French education. The commemoration of secondary school students who had been killed by the Germans for acts of resistance is a case in point. All commemorative ceremonies during the 1950s adhered to the myth that in French schools, students and teachers alike had stood united in support of the Resistance—a variation of the more general myth of a “nation of resisters” that prevailed in France until the late 1960s. The example of lycéens résistants thus served as proof that the schools had always been successful in instilling the virtues of citizenship. This was celebrated in an exemplary way when the remains of five students of the Lycée Buffon who had been shot by the Germans in 1943 for acts of resistance were transferred into the chapel of the Sorbonne in 1952. At this solemn occasion, the Minister of Education, André Marie, himself a former member of the Resistance, claimed: “If France, even in the darkest days of winter 1943, has known how to show its resistance to the eyes of the astonished world, then it is because its educational system knew how to form men who were not only soldiers, but also citizens; it was her schools that knew how to maintain courage and heroism in the hearts of her children.” As guidelines for the commemoration of the lycéens résistants, the government had instructed schools as early as 1947 to read the final letters of the young “heroes” who had been “animated by the purest patriotism.” The governmental circular printed four letters that culminated in patriotic declamations: “I will die for France,” wrote one of the students; “I know how to die as a Frenchman,” penned another. The resister lycéens were thus portrayed as exemplifying courage, heroism, and an emotional patriotism rather than critical thinking or a critical stance toward hierarchies. At the same time, the important role of female students in

87 Among the large body of literature on French ways of dealing with the Vichy past, see, e.g., Henry Rousso, The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944 (Cambridge, MA, 1991). The myth lasted well into the 1970s; it was first eroded by the film “Le Chagrin et la Pitié” (first shown in 1971) and the controversy around Robert Paxton’s Vichy France, Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944 (New York, 1972).


the resistance was never mentioned in the commemorations; the ideal citizen was imagined in male terms.90

Student newspapers provide another example of the different development of French and German school cultures of the 1950s and of the importance of the political context for these differences. In France, only few student newspapers were founded before 1968, and where they existed, they were generally subject to full censorship even during the 1960s.91 Even in 1972, a student journal that had printed a satirical poem on teachers drew severe criticism, and the incident made it into the school inspector’s yearly report.92 In contrast to the situation in Germany, neither the government nor any relevant social groups in France developed an interest in student newspapers. Hence, there were neither government funds, nor regional networks of young journalists, nor debates about the educational value of journals. In West Germany, the broadly accepted belief that speaking up freely in student newspapers was instrumental in educating democratic citizens caused the Länder not only to support students’ journals financially but also to laud or at least tolerate—within certain limits—their dalliances with political topics. In France, however, politics remained strictly taboo within schools and therefore also in French student newspapers.93

III. DIVERGENT PATHS: EDUCATION FOR DISOBEDIENCE VERSUS EDUCATION FOR COOPERATION IN THE 1960S

A. Germany: From Disciplined to Disobedient Citizens

In the first half of the 1960s, the number of student newspapers in German secondary schools continued to grow quickly, to about 900 in 1966 and more than

90 Further examples for the praise of lycéens résistants as models of patriotism are Jean-B. Piobetta, Éducation nationale et instruction publique (Paris, 1944), 9, 203; Jean Guéhenno, L’Université dans la résistance et dans la France nouvelle: Conférence au Palais de Chaillot, 8 Mars 1945 (Paris, 1945), 5, 6.

91 Due to the lack of contemporary interest in student newspapers in France, hardly any sources on this phenomenon exist; it is telling that the most detailed sources are German reports on the state of the French students’ press. See, e.g., Rudolf Elhardt, Schülerzeitung in Frankreich (Selbstverlag, around 1969); Volker Hummel, Une expérience allemande: La “Junge Presse”: des journaux de jeunes faits par les jeunes, ed. Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse (Berlin, 1967). Both agree that French student newspapers were subject to “total censorship.” See also Jacques Gonnet, Les journaux lycéens. “Je ne veux pas être un mensonge . . .” (Tournai, 1979); Pierre-Bernard Marquet, “Le journal et l’école,” L’Éducation, June 1971, 8.


1,200 in 1969. While most student journalists were still boys from the Gymnasien, both girls and students from the less elitist Realschulen and other forms of secondary schools began to play a greater role. At the same time, attitudes among German politicians, teachers, and headmasters regarding the censorship of student newspapers changed considerably. Between 1955 and 1962, the ministers of culture of four Länder publicly announced that they disagreed with the practice of censoring student newspapers. The mayor of Hamburg, after a case of censorship in a local school in 1963, sent an open message to the headmaster stating that “the mayor does not want this.” In 1964, Hesse was the first Land that passed a law abolishing the censorship of student newspapers. This trend toward greater freedom for the young student journalists can partly be attributed to larger developments within West Germany. In 1959, the discovery of antisemitic slogans in many places of Jewish worship in Germany triggered a wide-reaching public debate about the extent, aims, and means of political education for the younger generation. The Spiegel affair in 1962 had sensitized large sections of the German public to the notion of freedom of the press. Apart from such general developments, however, the students themselves and their organizations also contributed to the changing atmosphere. Student newspapers had already founded a national organization in the early 1950s, the Junge Presse, which regularly and continuously lobbied for an abolition of censorship throughout that decade. In this endeavor the young journalists were supported by the Schülermitverwaltungen. Events such as a discussion about censorship in 1961 organized by the Junge Presse and attended by several ministers of culture attest to the fact that the protest of students against censorship was met openly by politicians. By the mid-1960s, it had become widely accepted in public debates that an “education for democracy” was not possible without granting students the right to speak up freely in the student newspapers—both on school matters and on political matters. The main basis for the arguments of students, politicians, and teachers against censorship was and remained the reference to National Socialism. This attitude was exemplified by a teacher in 1967 who argued

96 In 1962 Der Spiegel published an article suggesting, based on NATO documents, that the German army was only partially capable of defending the country. The magazine was accused of “high treason”; its editorial offices were raided and searched by the police; its editor, Rudolf Augstein, was arrested together with several fellow journalists. The police raids and arrests caused a great public outcry, which is why the affair is generally judged as having had a lasting impact on the value of press freedom in German society.
97 Bartels, Junge Presse, 100.
that even the “transgressions” of students within their newspapers were not to be censored, because they were less dangerous than “to support and promote the opposite, an authoritarian system of education, which, as the past has shown, can easily bring about the worst consequences.”

Even though few Länder passed laws against the censoring of student journalism before 1968, a range of censorship conflicts from the early 1960s shows that critical student newspapers received support from various sides. When students protested against censorship, adult journalists often took their side and, through their support, made the conflicts more visible to a wider public. In turn, the ministries then tended to support the students’ demands. Furthermore, polls among the editors and journalists of student newspapers during the 1960s show that they perceived censorship to be declining rapidly. That a minority of headmasters continued to take a strict stance—a headmaster in Hanover in 1965 burned all 500 copies of a student newspaper that he considered “unsuitable” for publication, for example—needs to be taken into account, but these were exceptions to the general trend.

By 1967, the “right to criticize” had become a core element of West German definitions of democracy and democratic education. This right was defined broadly, as shown by a conference organized in 1967 by the Land Youth Rectory of Lower Saxony and the Junge Presse, organizations that were financed respectively by the Protestant church and the Land of Lower Saxony. The aim of the conference was to criticize the German school system for providing an “education for conformity.” Neither the church nor the Land protested in any way against the main speakers of the conference, Reinhard Kahl and Michael Lukasik, who represented a radical left student organization. Even though no written records of their speeches survive, it cannot be doubted that they engaged in a radical criticism of the German educational system. Shortly after this event, Kahl, Lukasik, and a group of other students coedited a pamphlet claiming that “ass-kissing and moral cowardice” (Arschkriecherei und Duckmäusertum) were characteristic traits of German school life. The pamphlet essentially painted Ger-

99 See, e.g., the cases described in Wolfgang Schwerbrock, Proteste der Jugend: Schüler, Studenten und ihre Presse (Düsseldorf, 1968), 126–77.
100 “Gymnasiums-Direktor in Hannover verbrennt Schülerzeitungen,” Süddeutsche Zeitung, November 17, 1965, 32. The reason for the headmaster’s outrage was an article claiming that a history teacher in that Gymnasium had laid the blame for the Second World War on Poland.
101 Kahl and Lukasik were active members of the AUSS, the Aktionszentrum Unabhängiger und Sozialistischer Schüler, one of the most active groups that organized protests of secondary school students in 1967–68. Founded in early 1967, the AUSS often worked closely together with the SDS. For the conference, see “Erziehung zur Anpassung,” Wir machen mit, December 1967, 16.
man schools in the darkest colors and characterized them as part of a system of repression run by old Nazis. The debates at the conference were clearly heated. Yet both the financing by church and state and the active participation of an official of Lower Saxony’s Ministry of Culture in the final discussion speak to the fact that the official answer to the students’ radicalism was one of dialogue rather than repression.

A new definition of “democratic education” came to shape the debate about the Schülermitverwaltungen in the mid-1960s. A form of participation that only offered the possibility to practice parliamentary procedure, but that gave little actual rights to students, would come to be seen as undemocratic. By roughly 1966, the terms “rights,” “interests,” and “conflict” were widely accepted as core elements of a “democratic education.” The students themselves were among the main actors who voiced this criticism, but they received support from a significant number of pedagogues and intellectuals whose claims were no less radical than those of the students. Critics of the state of participation in German schools, of censorship, and of “authoritarianism” continued to point to the United States as a model for “democratic education”; however, they generally did not take note of the American protest movements of the early 1960s.

While politicians in the Länder reacted in very different ways, it is obvious that the idea of students “rights” spread in the realm of politics. In 1964 and 1965, the Länder Hesse and Bremen pioneered new guidelines that codified students’ rights in various ways. Hence, headmasters could no longer remove student representatives; schools were obliged to offer the student representative councils a room of their own; regional student committees received official backing and in Hesse were assured of continuous financial support by the Land. Bremen symbolically broke with traditions of governing schools from “above” by integrating the students committees of all Bremen schools into a discussion process before drafting the new decree.102

In the second half of the 1960s, students’ criticisms became even more radical. While teachers as well as students had welcomed the Schülermitverwaltungen in the postwar decade as a way of furthering an “adherence to the rules by free decision,” students now criticized this as an “education for conformity” (Erziehung zur Anpassung), in their view a symptom of a “fake democracy.” Students now claimed that “even well-meaning observers” would hardly consider their committees as “contributing to an education for democracy.”103 In order to support their claims, the young activists again quoted pedagogues, psychologists, and other intellectuals who all agreed with their diagnosis. In


103 Hans-Jürgen Haug and Hubert Maessen, Was wollen die Schüler? Politik im Klassenzimmer (Frankfurt, 1969), 133.
this context, the intellectuals of the Frankfurt School received new attention as their utterances on authority and authoritarianism were in accordance with the general mood of the period. In 1966, Theodor Adorno had stated that in order to ensure that Auschwitz could not happen again, an “education for conformity” must be replaced by an “education for noncooperation.” Such arguments had become topoi by 1968.

Even though the new “fashion of promoting conflict,” also called “conflictitus,” was criticized from various quarters, the idea of the “disciplined citizen,” who was defined by his duty and his commitment to the community, had obviously lost its legitimacy. Instead, “disobedience” was becoming the new core virtue of the citizen—a virtue that schools were supposed to instill into their students. Representative of this interpretation was the graduation speech of a pupil from Frankfurt, Karin Storch, in 1967. She argued that teachers had to educate “crisis-proof democrats” by “rehearsing” disobedience in the schools. Storch contended that in German schools students did not dare to criticize their teachers and that social studies lessons did not aim to develop the students’ capacity for criticism. She argued that the virtue of “disobedience” had been exhibited in the example of German resistance against Hitler, of which she specifically named the July 20 movement and the White Rose group.

While the speech has often been interpreted as a first break with German “authoritarian traditions,” it was, in 1967, hardly revolutionary. It took up the narrative of an allegedly specific German authoritarianism being the main obstacle for the development of democracy, a topos that, as we have seen, had been gaining ground in German educational debates since 1945. Storch’s argument was, in many ways, very German. Not only her diagnosis but also her

104 Theodor Adorno, “Erziehung nach Auschwitz,” in “Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse? Ein philosophisches Lesebuch,” ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Leipzig, 1997), 48–63. Interestingly, Adorno stated in this context that he considered the view that explained the rise of Nazism with reference to the German spirit of authoritarianism as “too superficial”; however, such differentiations were not taken up by the 68ers.

105 The most interesting criticisms of the new trends often came from the ranks of the students themselves; for “conflictitus,” see “Konflikteritis,” Wir machen mit, March 1969, inside back cover.


conclusion that “disobedience” should be a core virtue of every democratic citizen was in the mid-1960s a particularly German interpretation of the relationship between authority and democracy. In French debates of the 1960s and even specifically in the year 1968, only a very small minority held similar views. The reactions to Storch’s speech in West Germany, however, show that her problematization of “obedience” for democracy was, by 1967, widely accepted. She was awarded the Theodor-Heuss-Prize for “exemplary democratic behavior,” and her speech was quickly published by the school board of Cologne, which labeled it as “valuable reading” for the “broad mass of students” and teachers.

Within a year, several journals republished the speech, including the conservative Protestant weekly Christ und Welt. Praising the virtues of “disobedience” became very much a mainstream argument in the West German public discourse at the end of the 1960s. Interestingly, “disobedience” in this context was generally defined as a citizen’s “duty” toward the national community rather than as an individual “right” of young people, and it was considered not a natural trait but one that had to be rehearsed and “instilled” from above.

B. France: Reviving the Disciplined Democrat

French pedagogical debates of the 1960s were characterized by a distinct rediscovery of democracy, a rediscovery that appears to have been stimulated primarily by the Algerian War. The putsch of the generals in May 1958 and the subsequent semilegal transfer of powers to de Gaulle—and with it the fall of the Fourth Republic—triggered debates about the fragility of French democracy and the need for an “education for democracy” in schools. This topic was taken up prominently by the Club Jean Moulin, an association founded by a group of intellectuals, journalists, syndicalists, and academics of various backgrounds as a response to the crisis of May 1958. The club defined its aim as the “defense of the Republic” and argued that France was in need of a “new republican civic spirit.” In 1961, the club published L’État et le Citoyen, a critical

108 Johannes Giesberts, introduction to Karin Storch, Erziehung zum Ungehorsam als Aufgabe einer demokratischen Schule, ed. Stadt Köln, Schulverwaltungsamt, Referat für politische Bildung (Cologne, ca. 1968), without pagination.

109 The speech was published in Christ und Welt, no. 2 (1968); in Aufwärts: Jugendschrift des Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes, August 15, 1967, 8–9 (several letters to the editor were printed in Aufwärts, October 15, 1967, 4); in the magazine Tribüne: Zeitschrift zum Verständnis des Judentums, no. 24 (1967): 2571–75; and in the magazine Vorgänge of the Humanistische Union, December 1967, 431–33.

110 In this sense a whole “pedagogy of protest” developed; see, e.g., Helmut Schelsky, “Erziehung zum Protest?” Die Zeit, December 9, 1968, 202–3; here referring to Hartmut von Hentig, Systemzwang und Selbstbestimmung: Über die Bedingungen der Gesamtschule in der Industriegesellschaft (Stuttgart, 1968).

analysis of the present state of French society and democracy. With regard to schools, it argued that the French educational system had thus far neglected to make the young into “citizens.” “One of the faults of our educational system was neglecting the learning of democracy. . . . There can be no democracy without democrats, and it is the task of the school to form them.” Such a clear and unambiguous commitment to the idea that schools had the responsibility to create democrats was new in French debates. The book received much attention, and all the more because the terror of the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète between 1960 and 1961 added to the impression of a fragile and endangered French democracy. It was in this context that teachers began to discuss the schools’ role in a democracy with new intensity.

While the role of democracy in French pedagogical debates of the 1960s remained less prominent than it was in Germany, the main difference between French and German debates lay elsewhere. In France, notions of what an “education for democracy” meant remained much more controversial than they did in the Federal Republic. A growing circle of authors argued that the place of “civic instruction” in curricula had to be strengthened and that schools had to teach their students the basic facts of the political system, of France’s role in the world, and of French society. The long-held conviction that students were to sharpen their minds only by engaging with classical French literature and philosophy came under increasing pressure. In contrast to the situation in West Germany, however, only a minority of pedagogues and teachers saw new forms of authority and new instruments such as participation, group work, or discussions inside and outside classrooms as core elements of an education for democracy.

Those French pedagogues who wanted the schools to engage in “making citizens” now looked back to the reforms of the late 1940s. An example of this trend was an interview with Louis François, one of the main initiators of the early postwar reforms, published in *L’Éducation Nationale* in 1960. François here argued that the aims of the early reform had not been successfully put into practice—a diagnosis that was shared by many other articles in the 1960s. In 1965, a special issue of the *Cahiers pédagogiques* titled “Democracy at School” quoted extensively from the 1945–48 reform texts and lauded their intention to make “real democrats,” but it took a decidedly pessimistic stance with regard to

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their implementation. A number of authors contended that the responsables de classe had not been given any real responsibilities and in actuality were only used as teachers’ aides. By the mid-1960s it was widely agreed that the class representatives since the 1940s had not gained a better standing but had become even more insignificant.

Compared to Germany, the demands of both teachers and students who lamented the state of participation in French schools remained significantly less radical until 1968. The vision that was most often voiced in the 1960s was still that of the disciplined citizen. Heads of schools or teachers who advocated the extension of participation continued to speak of “freely accepted duties,” of creating a “dialogue” between teachers and students, and of replacing “passive obedience” with an “acceptance based on comprehension.” The movement of the coopérative scolaires grew in importance and numbers during the 1960s, and their aim of cooperation between students and teachers embodied the hopes of many reformers.

Even as late as 1967, an article in *L’Éducation Nationale* that criticized the lack of civic education in French schools advocated an education “for cooperation, for the acceptance and practice of the necessary disciplines that come with life in a community.” At this same time in Germany, the language of acceptance, duty, and community had lost all legitimacy in the debates about an education for democracy. None of the terms that dominated the debate in the Federal Republic—such as “disobedience,” “conflict,” and “interests”—were present in French debates before 1968. Even when French students took to the streets in 1968, “cooperation” and “dialogue” remained central tenets, in contrast to the dominance of the terms “noncooperation” and “conflict” among their West German colleagues.

While in Germany the democratic citizen during the 1960s was increasingly equated with the critical citizen and democratic education with an education encouraging students to speak up freely, these ideas played hardly any role in the contemporary French discourse. Significantly more often than their West German colleagues, French pedagogues argued against the idea of a connection

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between methods such as discussion or participation, on the one hand, and democracy, on the other. Thus, in 1962, the school inspector R. Lhotte vehemently criticized the application of theories of democracy to the field of education. The “democrats,” he argued, feared “excessive authority” and wanted to privilege “group discussions” as a teaching method; and yet, he asked, “Do the psychiatrists not teach us to fear [authority’s] absence?” Such positions received ample support. The notion that a democratization of society depended on the dismantling of hierarchies in education remained marginal until 1968. True, those who criticized authoritarianism in French schools referred more often to “democracy” than they had in the 1950s, but the connection was still never seen as self-evident even among this group. When French teachers bemoaned the consequences of an “authoritarian” education, they generally did not see a problematic “spirit of obedience” as its result, but rather its opposite, namely, “a scary distrust of all forms of authority.”

This conclusion also resonated in the works of several American political scientists who, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, sought to explain the French style of political conflict. William R. Schonfeld, a young Princeton graduate who was to become a professor of political science, argued in his doctoral thesis that the “authority-laden” style of French secondary education provided a key to understanding why the French reacted with “organized insubordination” in periods during which they perceived the state to be acting against their goals. Furthermore, and more generally, he argued that this could even explain the ineffectiveness of political authority in France. The French, in his view, oscillated between obedience and revolt, and this unstable behavior was created at least partially by the forms of authority used in education. The most prominent argument that the prevailing authoritarian forms of education in France created an attitude of constant opposition toward all forms of authority, however, is in the *Essais sur la France* of the French-American political scientist Stanley Hoffmann. Hoffmann argued that French schools taught “obedience,” but that this obedience remained only superficial and did not crush the “capacity of rebellion” inherent in French students. The contrast between Schonfeld’s and

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122 Hoffmann, the son of an Austrian-Jewish mother and an American father born in Vienna in 1928, had spent his school and university days in France before starting a university career in the United States. By the time the “Essais” were published, he had already made a reputation as specialist on international relations as well as on France. In 1968 he founded Harvard’s Center for European Studies.
Hoffmann’s interpretations of authoritarianism in France and the American and German conclusions about German authoritarianism is striking.\footnote{Stanley Hoffmann, \textit{Essais sur la France: Déclin ou renouveau?} (Paris, 1974), chap. 5. See also the interesting reflections on this topic by Andrieu, \textit{Pour l’amour de la République}, chap. 1.}


In Germany, however, the self-image of the authoritarian German had by then gained so much ground that psychologists who discussed the recent American studies lamented the fact that these studies did not comment on the degree of authoritarianism in Germany, viewing it as a scholarly shortcoming.\footnote{Reinhard Tausch and Anne-Marie Tausch, “Sozialklima und soziale Interaktion in deutschen und amerikanischen Schulen,” \textit{Gesellschaft-Staat-Erziehung} 11 (1966): 274. They referred to C. Karr and F. Wesley, “Vergleich deutscher und amerikanischer Erziehungshaltungen,” in \textit{Bericht über den 24. Kongreß der deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychologie} (Göttingen, 1965), 310–14.} Very influential in West German discourse at this point were the publications of the psychologists Reinhard and Anne-Marie Tausch, who were strongly convinced of a specifically German authoritarianism. To support this view, they quoted at length American opinions from the early postwar period and conducted comparative research on the interaction of teachers with students in American and German schools. From a scientific point of view, their studies were highly problematic. For example, in one study the sample of American teachers that had been observed was composed primarily of young, female teachers, whereas the sample of German teachers was dominated by older, male teachers.\footnote{Anne-Marie Tausch, “Merkmale des Erziehungsverhaltens deutscher und amerikanischer Lehrer,” \textit{Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie} 18 (1966). See also Tausch and Tausch, “Sozialklima”: nn. 7 and 10 in particular reveal highly problematic samples.} Undisturbed by the small and arbitrarily selected samples or by the fact that the observations in the United States and
those in Germany were made several years apart, Anne-Marie Tausch concluded that German teachers reacted in a more “autocratic” way to students than did their American colleagues. This interpretation was eagerly taken up by the German public. The Tauschs’ studies were frequently referred to, and their “shocking” results were interpreted by students as well as sociologists as evidence for “authoritarian-dictatorial traditions” in Germany that made German students into “faithful subjects of authority.”\textsuperscript{127} The narrative of authoritarianism had become too useful for critics of schools, universities, and hierarchical structures in institutions and society to be surrendered easily.

IV. Conclusion

The image of the \textit{Kaiserreich} as an “authoritarian” society has long been modified, and National Socialism is no longer interpreted by historians as based primarily on a spirit of obedience. It is thus somewhat surprising to what extent the image of postwar Germany as a society permeated by the traditions of “authoritarianism” still lingers in current interpretations of the early Federal Republic. This article has suggested that “authoritarianism” was a forceful narrative in the 1950s and 1960s—a narrative, however, that should not too readily be accepted as a description of reality. Even one of its main contemporary witnesses, Ralf Dahrendorf, has in recent years distanced himself from his earlier belief in the “authoritarian overhang.”\textsuperscript{128} This is not to deny that German education in the 1950s was in many ways based on rigid hierarchies and strict concepts of obedience. The idea of students’ “rights” and a belief in the legitimacy of conflicts emerged only in the 1960s. However, as this comparison has shown, rigid hierarchies and strict concepts of discipline in schools were not particular to Germany. Rather, a quickly growing unease with hierarchical forms of authority resulting in a dynamic process of change and “liberalization” in schools is what appears to be special in the German case. This process began with the Anglo-American Allies’ idea that “German authoritarianism” was a major obstacle to democratization. That diagnosis helped to bring about a range of important reforms in school education that, in the long term, were to change the atmosphere in German schools. These changes were supported by a continuously growing part of German society that concurred with the interpretation of National Socialism as an outgrowth of German authoritarianism. By the 1960s, the image


of the “authoritarian German” who was unfit for democracy had become widely accepted in German public discourse and developed into a core argument for educational change. Problematizing “authoritarianism” as politically dangerous culminated in the late 1960s in a specifically German trend to define “disobedience” as a new core virtue of the democratic citizen; and it was essential in bringing about a broad range of new rights for secondary school students.

The comparison with France shows the particularity of the German debates. In France, neither pedagogues nor politicians interpreted the dictatorial Vichy regime as one based on the “authoritarian” attitudes of the French people. While a small minority of reformers in the late 1940s had intended to make schools into institutions that would educate students for democracy via participation and discussions, this aim never gained many supporters. During the 1950s, French debates about educational change were dominated by psychological and economic arguments, none of which, however, generated an impetus for reform comparable to that in West Germany. When a new concern with education for democracy emerged in France in the 1960s, its leitmotif remained that of the disciplined, dutiful citizen. Obedience in itself never came to be seen as incompatible with democracy. At the same time, hierarchy and strict discipline in schools were interpreted as generating a spirit of opposition rather than “authoritarian” characters among students. The idea of an “education for disobedience,” even after 1968, never took hold in France. It was thus in many ways the different interpretations of the relationship between authority and democracy that allowed the educational cultures of Germany and France to grow so much farther apart by the late 1960s than they had been in the early 1950s. Looking at the fields of authority, democracy, and education, there is no tendency toward convergence between France and Germany between 1945 and 1968—quite the contrary.