

# Revolution by Stealth

*Germany's formerly excellent education system is being subverted.*

By Knut Mertens

Towards the end of 1995, the government of North-Rhine Westphalia issued a memorandum entitled 'The Future of Education — The School of the Future.' This document marked a significant change of direction for German education. The wealth of empty phrases and meaningless platitudes mask some concrete proposals. In future, according to the plans set out in the memorandum,

- Pupils are to direct their own learning;
- 'Subjects' are to be dropped in favour of 'problems' such as 'peace and war' or 'majorities and minorities;'
- Students will mark their own work;
- Standardized testing will be eliminated; and
- Whole-class teaching will give way to individualized learning.

North-Rhine Westphalia is one of the 'Red-Green' (leftist) German provinces. Germany's standing in various international comparisons has been steadily worsening over the years, and the students in the Red-Green provinces showed up particularly poorly in the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS).

As a result, the ministers responsible for the schools in these provinces now admit that they must do something about the low standards of attainment. Unfortunately the ministers, evidently unaware of the experience of other countries who have already tried child-centred reforms, are harking to the siren call of 'progressive' advisers. Who are these ideologues?

Numbered among the authors of the North-Rhine Westphalia memorandum are Marxists such as Hans Guenther Rolff and Per Dalin, as well as entrepreneurs such as Reinhard Mohn of the Bertelsmann Foundation and Hilmar Kopper of the Deutsche Bank.

Hans Guenther Rolff is one of the leading lights of school reform, being every bit as influential in conservative Bavaria as he is in North-Rhine Westphalia. He is also a prominent member of the international Marxist movement.

Nowadays, Rolff doesn't talk openly about his activities in the early seventies when he was advocating comprehensive schools on the grounds that they would facilitate anti-capitalist structural reforms. At the beginning of the eighties, Rolff declared that changes in the schools should be seen as 'struggles about shares' between different class interests.

In Baden-Wuerttemberg, which is governed by the Christian Democrats in coalition with the Free Democrats, Rolff works closely with Reinhold Miller. Miller favours using psycho-techniques, such as psycho-drama, to destroy the native culture.

Much in favour are so-called interaction games. The instructions for the teachers say: "It is important that you speak the directions slowly and in a suggestive manner."

**The pupils are told: "Just imagine that you have a small cigar box (...) Now take your first infant school teacher in your hand and squeeze him so that you can lay him in the cigar box (...) Take a policeman and lay him in the box (...) Now take a judge who wants to question you about something and lay him in the box. There is always plenty of room in the box (...) Now put one of the members of this group in the cigar box (...) Who else would you like to lay in the box? Put them in, there is plenty of room (...) Have you forgotten anything? Squeeze whatever you want and stick it in the box."**

The inventors of this new form of pedagogy instruct their followers to uncouple young people from the values and norms of middle-class culture and harness them to the class struggle and revolution.

Teacher training in Germany is dominated by this new ideology. For example, in spite of the worrying TIMSS results, the requirements for aspiring maths teachers have been lowered. After all, since pupils are expected to create their own knowledge appropriate to their interests, they no longer require teachers with expert subject knowledge.

Many experienced teachers are still doing an excellent job, but more and more of them are being trampled underfoot by strategically-trained raiding parties of mostly-young recently-qualified teachers. The raiding parties, supported by the school supervisory boards, bring in external advisors and turn the school upside down, sometimes remarkably quickly. They are carrying out a plan formulated in early 1996 for the reform of the schools in Baden-Wuerttemberg.

In North-Rhine Westphalia, there has been much protest. The Civil Servants' Union warned that "All the experiences which the teachers in the former East Germany accumulated before reunification emphasize precisely the importance of preserving the teachers' freedom to choose their teaching styles and of setting strict limits on interference by political parties or other interests."

But no amount of criticism has brought any change of direction. Clearly, the ideologues behind this care only about pursuing their destructive political agenda.

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