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SD Report on the Attitude of Young People towards the Nazi Party (August 12, 1943)

Supported by the Hitler Youth, National Socialism pushed its way into virtually every aspect of the lives of German youth. By doing so, it sought to create new generations of young people who were both mentally and physically tough and also absolutely reliable in a political sense. In reality, the indoctrination of Germany's young people often served only to underscore the coercive nature of the regime and thus caused growing discontent, disillusionment, and cynicism among some youth, as is evident in the following report by the Security Service [*Sicherheitsdienst* or SD] from August 12, 1943.

The Attitude of Young People towards the Party

I. The attitude of young people towards the Party is particularly evident each year at the admission ceremonies. The available reports on the admission of the 1924 and 1925 cohorts to the Party show in general a positive attitude on the part of young people towards the Party.

[. . .]

But there are reports from almost all parts of the Reich according to which a not insignificant number of young people have an attitude towards admission to the party which leaves much to be desired. The following detailed observations were made:

1. Indifference and a lack of inward commitment. Large numbers of young people see joining the Party not as a particularly desirable goal but rather as "good form", in fact as "a necessary evil".

'The opinion was frequently expressed that membership of the Party was the socially correct thing to do and, in addition, was *a good springboard for one's career*.'

[. . .] 'The young people whose careers do not involve a position of dependence place hardly any value on joining the NSDAP'. 'Young people have a rather indifferent attitude to the Party. Only a very small minority see joining the Party as a mark of distinction. The vast majority regard membership of the Party as a necessity which one simply has to put up with. Thus a young Party comrade remarked: "If one wants to succeed in life one has to be a Party comrade, otherwise one isn't 100%."

'Many young people believe that they absolutely have to be part of the adult world. The comments of an 18 year old that as a Party comrade one had to be admitted to everything and to be able to make a judgment about everything express the attitude of many young people. Occasionally, young people welcome admission to the Party because then "they were at last free of HJ service"; they hoped the Party would not make so many demands on them.' [. . .]
'A characteristic remark by young people is: "I don't care in the least whether I'm admitted to the Party or not; it's all rubbish".

Many reports note that the lack of interest in the Party contrasts with a much greater interest in the *Wehrmacht*.

'Most boys and girls have not the slightest interest in becoming a member of the NSDAP. All attempts by the relevant authorities to get them involved have been in vain. For the boys it's the *Wehrmacht* which is now the thing not the Party.'

'The example is given that now many young people want to become officers because officers are an attractive role model, a desirable goal. The tasks which the block leader and the local branch leader have to carry out in their fields have little attraction for young people; clearly there is nothing which attracts them "to be in on the action" here in the way that a young man wants to be "in on the action" as a member of an elite military unit or a successful football team.'

[. . .]

Summing up, *the majority* of the members of the 1924 and 1925 cohorts are *positively* disposed towards admission to the Party. But the number of young people who are indifferent or opposed to admission is so great that it should not be overlooked [!] [. . .]

II. The reports refer frequently to the fact that a large part of the reason for this attitude of a section of young people is not the fault of the young people themselves.

1. The young people who are now in the HJ experience the Party as a historical fact. They are no longer bound to it by the experience of struggle which would make clear to them that the Party has fought for this state and so has acquired the right to place demands on this state and its people and to demand the right to set the ideological agenda. For many of these young people the Führer is not the representative of the Party but in the first instance the leader of the state and above all Supreme Commander of the *Wehrmacht*. Thus they have no inhibitions about approaching the Party in a critical frame of mind just like any other state institution. *They lack an organically developed relationship of loyalty to the Party* which formed the basis of the old Party comrades' actions. These [party comrades] also saw faults in the Party but nevertheless remained loyal followers. But these young people use the alleged mistakes and flaws of the Party to turn their back on it.

[...]

3. The reserve shown towards the Party is also encouraged by the unresolved Party-Church question. Since a large section of youth, and above all their parents, are still loyal to the Church, remarks aimed at the "sacred beliefs which they have held hitherto" by Party comrades, cadres and HJ leaders have a negative impact. This is particularly the case at the present time because, as a result of the current war situation, young people too notice that the Church pays great attention, for example, to caring for the relatives of those who have been killed, and that the priests give clear answers on questions concerning life and the present time. In addition, rumors about alleged positive remarks about the churches by leading personalities, soldiers who have been decorated etc. have a big impact.

Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes, ed., *Nazism, 1919-1945*, Vol. 4: *The German Home Front in World War II*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998, pp. 118-19.

Source of original German text: Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich. Die geheime Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes des SS 1938-1945*. Vol. 14, Herrsching, 1984, pp. 5603-07.