

The Hitler Youth & Communism: The Impacts of a Brainwashed Generation in Post-War Politics in Eastern Germany

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ABSTRACT

The Hitler Youth was Hitler's attempt at securing the next generation of future military, political, and social leaders. The members of the Hitler Youth, both boys and girls, were conscripted from their families and forced into training camps. As World War II drew to a close, these indoctrinated and brainwashed youth were forced back into a society in turmoil. Following the fall of the Third Reich and the division of Germany between allied nations, these young boys and girls greatly impacted the spread and growth of communism in Eastern Germany, due to their political upheaval and involvement in new youth organizations such as the Free German Youth (FDJ).

Keywords: Hitler Youth, Communism, Nazism, Third Reich, Wandervogel, Hitler-Jugend, *Kinderlandverschickung*, Bund Deutscher Madel

Las Juventudes Hitlerianas y el comunismo: los impactos de una generación con lavado de cerebro en la política de posguerra en Alemania del Este

RESUMEN

Las Juventudes Hitlerianas fueron el intento de Hitler de asegurar la próxima generación de futuros líderes militares, políticos y sociales. Los miembros de las Juventudes Hitlerianas, tanto niños como niñas, fueron reclutados de sus familias y forzados a campos de entrenamiento. Cuando la Segunda Guerra Mundial llegó a su fin, estos jóvenes adoctrinados y con lavado de cerebro fueron obligados a volver a una sociedad en crisis. Después de la caída del Tercer Reich y la división de Alemania entre las naciones aliadas, estos jóvenes niños y niñas impactaron en gran medida la expansión y el crecimiento del comunismo en Alemania Oriental, debido a su agi-

tación política y participación en nuevas organizaciones juveniles como la Juventud Alemana Libre (FDJ)

Palabras clave: Juventudes Hitlerianas, comunismo, nazismo, Tercer Reich, *Wandervogel*, *Hitler-Jugend*, *Kinderlandverschickung*, *Bund Deutscher Madel*

希特勒青年团与共产主义：被洗脑的一代在战后东德政治中产生的影响

摘要

希特勒青年团曾是希特勒为确保下一代未来军事领袖、政治领袖和社会领袖所做的尝试。希特勒青年团成员包括男孩和女孩，他们从各自家庭中被招募并强制进入训练营。当二战接近尾声时，这些经过强行思想灌输和洗脑的青年被迫送回一个处于动荡之中的社会。随着纳粹德国的覆灭以及德国被联合国分区占领，这些青年男孩和女孩极大地影响了东德地区共产主义的传播与发展，这归因于他们所经历的政治动荡和参与新的青年组织，例如自由德国青年组织（FDJ）。

关键词：希特勒青年团，共产主义，纳粹主义，纳粹德国，漂鸟运动，*Hitler-Jugend*，儿童下乡（*Kinderlandverschickung*），德国少女联盟

For decades following the Second World War, a deep fascination is rooted in the awe, strength, and effects that the Hitler regime had on the world and on Germany. One commonly overlooked impact is the influence that the Third Reich had on its people, especially its younger generation. These children were members of Hitler's fanatical youth programs, which many viewed as Hitler's bedrock foundation. The group enabled his ability to redeploy rapidly and to replace lost soldiers and civilians

while forming his Reich. These brainwashed and assimilated young men and women were to form the next military and political leaders that would lead the Third Reich into the next millennia. What Hitler did not expect was that in the later years of the war, these young boys and girls would be all that was left to defend his fortress in Berlin. The Hitler Youth was a dark and complicated machine, rooted in propaganda and brainwashing methods. The indoctrination and training that took place in

the Hitler Youth from 1929 until 1945 affected young men and women for decades to come, and following the fall of Berlin in 1945, it was the Hitler Youth that led to increased communist ideals in Eastern and Western Germany.

The early beginnings of the Hitler Youth were not seen by the outside world; only citizens within Germany's borders were privy to its evolution. The organization of the Hitler Youth began in 1920 when Hitler approved the formation of a Youth League that would fall under part of the National Socialist Workers Party (NSDAP).¹ This new youth organization was based off an already established German youth group known as the *Wandervogel*.² This new youth group of the NSDAP had been slowly growing in its earlier years and was eventually banned in 1923 following the Beer Hall Putsch and Hitler's arrest.³ Hitler began running into issues because other youth groups were already formed and thriving in Germany, and the establishment of another youth group did not guarantee interest or membership. With the many social issues surrounding the NSDAP, many people were reluctant to let their children join. Hitler soon realized that desperate measures were needed that would force not only children to join the NSDAP youth organization, but would also coerce parents into accepting the idea and wanting their children to join. This change occurred following Hitler's release from prison in 1924.⁴ The NSDAP had grown exponentially upon Hitler's release, and following the publishing of *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"), parents began to lean towards

Hitler's ideology, following his rise to control of Germany.

The first membership growth came when the first leader of the Nazi Youth Party, Gustav Lenk, urged the party newspaper to publish a "calling" or a demand for service.⁵ This publication, *Volkischer Beobachter*, was influential in convincing parents to allow their children to join and in showing children that their service was truly needed. The newspaper advertisement read:

We demand that the National Socialist Youth, and all other young Germans, irrespective of class or occupation, between fourteen and eighteen years of age, whose hearts are affected by the suffering and hardships afflicting the Fatherland, and who later desire to join the ranks of the fighters against the Jewish enemy, the sole originator of our present shame and suffering, enter the Youth League of the NSDAP.⁶

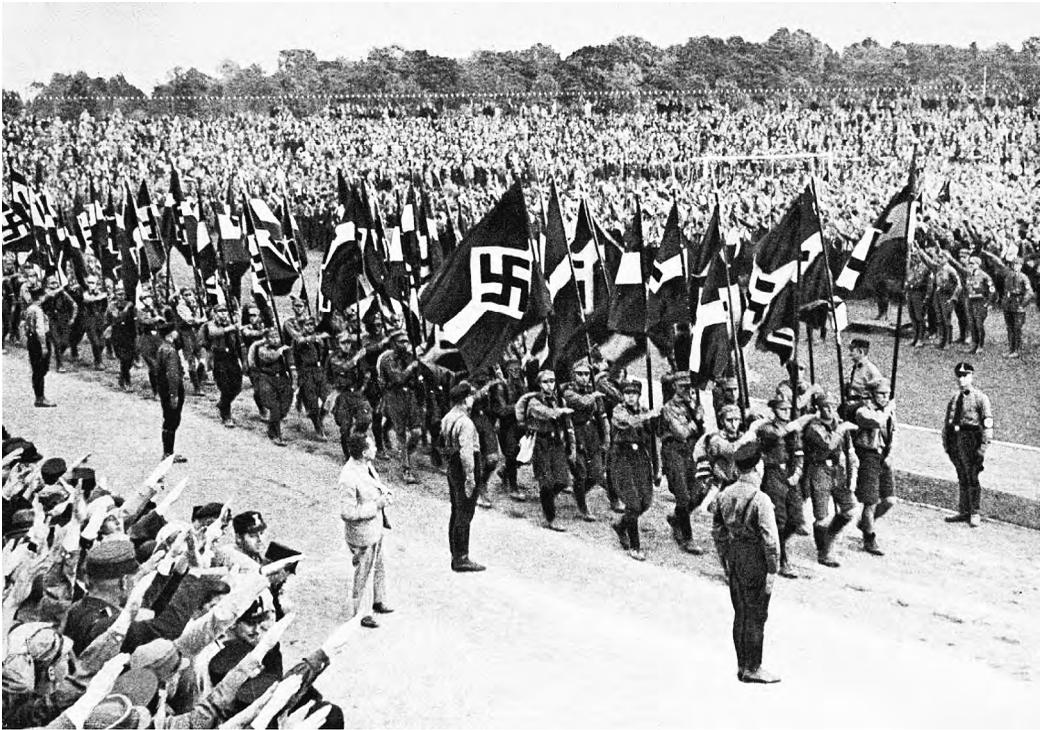
This calling soon sparked fire and motivation in the hearts and souls of young German boys and girls. These children felt that, after years of seeing their parents suffer due to economic decline and job loss, they would be able to make a difference, not only in their households, but also in the Third Reich. The early years of the Nazi Youth Party were paramount to the later success of the Hitler Youth. Following the growth of the party, Lenk published the first Nazi youth magazine, *National Jungstrom*. This new magazine failed, as it

was seen as a financial liability, and the *Volkischer Beobachter* was seen as adequate for party news and events. Lenk, although a motivated party member, eventually had a falling out and there was a disconnect between the NSDAP and Hitler.⁷ The issue between Lenk and Hitler arose when Lenk wanted to run the youth party the way he saw fit. Hitler wanted to be seen as the supreme leader, and he felt he maintained the final say in any party decisions or actions, regardless if it was a decision that affected the whole party or one that affected the Hitler Youth organizations. This disagreement was a turning point in the early years of the Hitler youth, as Kurt Gruber was brought in to replace Lenk.⁸ Gruber, even though he was technically not the group's first leader, was named so by Hitler during a July 4, 1926 party rally. Hitler had no issues proclaiming someone the "first leader," as it would force that person to be forever indebted to the title, as well as to the Fuhrer. This is also the same day that the Nazi Youth Party was transited to its official and well-known title today, the *Hitler-Jugend, Bund Deutscher Arbeiterjugend* (Hitler Youth, League of German Worker Youth).⁹

The Hitler Youth Party was not off to the magnifying growth that Hitler expected, but that would soon change as Gruber began to use his influence and leadership abilities. The first years of the Hitler Youth had a small membership of 1,000 members, but in 1925 that number swelled to a little over 5,000.¹⁰ By 1930, after only four years as party leader, Gruber had amassed a party membership of over 25,000.

While a significant achievement, it was small compared to when Hitler was named Chancellor and the numbers rose to 108,000.¹¹ Even though the efforts of Gruber were exceptional, he was criticized and chastised for his conflicts with other ranking members of the party. He felt his achievements and efforts were for his own held office, not a joy that should be carried by the entire Nazi Party or the Reich. One particular instance between himself and Ernst Rohm, an early leader of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), was a climax point in the youth party. Rohm felt that the Hitler Youth should be subordinated, with power being passed down by the SA, while Gruber felt the total opposite. The conflict between Gruber and Rohm, paired with the slow initial growth of the new Hitler Youth, forced Gruber's removal from power and saw the introduction of Baldur von Schirach.¹²

In 1929, the Hitler Youth was named as the only officially recognized youth group for the entire Nazi Party. This meant that if your parents were members of the party, then you as children were seen as members as well, or "guilty by association," as many children would soon find out. In July of 1930, the *Bund Deutscher Madel* (BDM), or the league of German Girls, was founded as a sister organization to the Hitler Youth. These early years of growth and innovation within the Hitler Youth were brought to a stop right before Hitler took power, as the German Weimar government temporarily banned the SA, the original storm troopers, and the Hitler Youth. This was eventually canceled when Hitler was named Chan-



Hitler Youth members marching at a Reich Youth Day rally in Potsdam, 1932. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of William O. McWorkman.

cellor of Germany in 1933.¹³ Hitler had been Chancellor for less than a year in December 1933 when the Hitler Youth membership reached 2.3 million.¹⁴ This growth is attributed to the impact of the Schulerbund, which provided a framework for “a sizeable contingent of respectable and well-educated high school students, and established a solidly bourgeois influence over the entire organization.”¹⁵

The Hitler Youth’s second main period of growth and innovation occurred from 1933 to 1939, when membership was mandatory and children began to be sent to work in support of their “fatherland.” The period from 1933 to 1939 was when most of the indoctrination and brainwashing took

place. The birth of leadership schools, training camps, and mandatory summer training saw a small organization, similar to the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, transition into a borderline paramilitary organization. When Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, the exact size and intimidation factor of the Hitler Youth was yet to be realized. In only two short years, Hitler had managed to acquire dictator powers. To do this, he had to pass the Enabling Act through the already Nazi-controlled Reichstag in Berlin, which was an easy task. After doing this, Hitler gained total control over the country. The importance of this development during this period also meant all that official Nazi groups and memberships

now officially fell under the control of the German State.¹⁶ For the Hitler Youth specifically, this meant that the German state and German government could now fund and support the Hitler Youth as the national youth assembly and units. Considering that it was now, according to the law, the only youth organization in Germany, the funding was abundant and undeterred.

After Hitler had gained this unprecedented control over Germany, a period of immense changes occurred. This era was aimed to convert anything non-Nazi to Nazi and make the country and its people fill any voids in the party that were not yet filled. For instance, the German nation was not comprised of only Nazi party members, so this era became known as the “forced coordination” time.¹⁷ *Gleichschaltung*, as it would later be called, was seen as the standardization of all aspects of social and political life under the Third Reich’s umbrella and scope of influence. This period of “forced coordination” was a period of assimilation and standardization in which youth programs, economic stability, and social programs were all placed under Nazi control. If any organizations refused to become held under Nazi power, they were destroyed or disbanded by law or decree. Public agencies that agreed to come under Nazi rule were instantly taken under the umbrella of power and began to be controlled by the new government.¹⁸ The significance of this regarding the Hitler Youth was that all other youth groups and organizations in Germany were either disbanded or they fell under the control of the current Hitler

Youth leader Baldur von Schirach.¹⁹ This change in policy meant that the Hitler Youth now had no competition, and its ranks grew exponentially. Due to this change in policy, Schirach was able to eliminate over 400 other competing youth organizations throughout Germany.²⁰ This would later impact the post-war years and the children of Germany, as there were no alternatives and every child was a member. In the eyes of some children, since there was no other choice besides the Hitler Youth, then their only option was to assimilate with their peers and join. The banning of other youth organizations also resulting in “bullying,” policies in which current Hitler Youth members would bash and bully non-members until they joined out of a fear of belonging.

The methods that Schirach used to gain control over other youth organizations serve as an excellent glimpse into what the Hitler Youth would later become during the wartime period. In April of 1933, only a few months after Hitler took power, Schirach sent an estimated fifty current Hitler Youth members into the Reich’s Committee of German Youth Associations. This committee was a large organization that represented over six million young German boys and girls. These boys and girls were enrolled and involved in numerous organizations throughout Germany before the Nazi regime took power, and Schirach took them under the Nazi umbrella of influence. He used current Hitler Youth members to enforce the change of authority and hand-off of enrollment.²¹

The last significant change to take place for the Hitler Youth in 1933 was on June 17, when Hitler promoted Schirach to *Jugendführer des Deutschen Reiches* or Youth Leader of Germany.²² This position gave him the ability to answer to Hitler himself, and he was now also in charge of all youth activities in Germany. His first main decision under this new title was to completely dissolve the former Reich's Committee of German Youth Associations, as this committee was now useless and had no youth organizations under its control.²³

One main issue that struck the Hitler Youth during this time of reorganization and reconstruction was that many boys and girls came from other youth organizations that were dissolved in April, May, and June 1933. These new members could not adapt to and cope with the stress and demands of the new Hitler Youth groups and struggled to get up to speed with the already established members, concerning Nazi education, ideals, and physical abilities. The *Reichsführer*, or leadership schools, were established across Germany to help provide further assimilation training for these children.²⁴ These schools were roughly three weeks long and helped teach Nazi racial principles and ideals and German history and foundation and provided rigorous physical training and even weapons marksmanship.²⁵ By the end of August 1934, it was reported that over 12,000 youth leaders had attended these schools, as well as 24,000 *Jungvolk* members as well.²⁶ These schools would soon become the foundation for the "school-age" education that all Hitler Youth members

were provided. Following the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945, the educational levels of these children were low compared to the rest of the developed world. Formal education was replaced with military and Nazi teachings, not the educational skills that these children would need in order to flourish in a developing society. Following the proclamation of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 and reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936, new legislation and orders required all boys and girls aged ten to eighteen to join the Hitler Youth.²⁷ Following this law, roughly 90 percent of all German youth were members of the Hitler Youth or BDM.²⁸

Following the annexation of Austria in March of 1938, the threat of war was reaching its boiling point. Hitler had grown his empire, expanded its borders, and grew his military in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles. Alongside these significant changes, the Hitler Youth had also been born, established, and perfected. The anti-Semitic tendencies against the Jewish people had been growing since the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, and the issue of the Jewish question had been around since the early days of National Socialism. The impact that these two facts had on the Hitler Youth led to the events of November 9, 1938, in which the Hitler Youth carried out the attacks on Jewish shops, homes, and synagogues in what is now known as the *Kristallnacht*, or "Night of Broken Glass."²⁹ Over 267 synagogues were burned and destroyed and over 7,500 Jewish-owned business and establishments were damaged and burned.³⁰ Also during this night of Hit-

ler Youth-led violence, over 25,000 Jewish men and young boys were arrested and taken to concentration camps.³¹ Local Hitler Youth members were indoctrinated with Nazi ideas throughout their pre-war training, leadership schools, and average day-to-day Hitler Youth operations. They partook in the violence voluntarily and were never fully instructed to do so.³² The national sense of war, paired with the indoctrinated sense of “Aryan superiority,” led young boys and girls to commit acts of violence that at any other time they would have never considered.

By the end of 1939, following Hitler’s annexation of Czechoslovakia, Hitler Youth membership had swelled to over 7.5 million boys and girls.³³ On March 25, 1939, Hitler issued a new law that required all boys age ten and older to be in the Hitler Youth. Parents who disobeyed this law were told that they would be held accountable and that their children would be forcefully taken from them.³⁴

Only a few short months after the Nazis took control Paris, Artur Axmann took over the Hitler Youth from Schirach.³⁵ Axmann held the same ideals as Schirach and was highly trusted and loved by Hitler for his dedication to the Reich and the Nazi cause. Axmann would maintain his position as the leader of the Hitler Youth until Germany’s defeat in 1945.³⁶ As Hitler began to gain more territories under his control, the demands on the young women and girls in the BDM began to grow. Girls during this time were considered to have limited duties within the Reich, but the girls

in the BDM carried a separate and important role in Hitler’s eyes. These girls were assigned to care for wounded soldiers, work shifts in hospitals, help in schools, and even assist households that had large families and whose men were off fighting for the Reich.³⁷ After Hitler had declared victory over Poland at the start of the war, girls in the BDM, under the title of “Faith and Beauty,” were tasked with forcing native Poles from their homes and ensuring that their evictions went as planned.³⁸ This was the first instance in which the use of the BDM directly impacted the war efforts, and the goals, of the Third Reich.

In the fall of 1940, all Hitler youth boys aged ten and older were required under the new National Youth Directorate to participate in target practice, terrain navigation, movements, and advanced first aid training.³⁹ The new directorate also established the baseline foundation for organizational units within the Hitler Youth. These units followed a military order of leadership, and each branch was based on another branch of already established adult military service. The branches were Marine, Air, Motor, Signal, Patrol, and lastly Model Airplane.⁴⁰ In August of 1940, the training regiments of the Hitler Youth began to take a drastic turn. Hitler Youth members had been tasked with serving as assistants, or helpers, for Berlin’s flak guns, or anti-aircraft guns, but these were merely assistant jobs. However, with the increased bombing of the German capital, paired with the new youth directorate, these jobs became more permanent, and young Hitler Youth boys were beginning to train

with and become permanent members of flak teams.⁴¹

In May of 1942, the first *Weh-
rertüchtigungslager*, or Defense
Strengthening Camps, were built in
Germany and began operation.⁴² These
camps were built to provide three weeks
of training to Hitler Youth boys aged six-
teen to eighteen years old and acted as a
transitional stage between Hitler Youth
membership and Wehrmacht service.
These camps were organized and ran
by the Wehrmacht, which trained each
member on the proper use, care, and
handling of German infantry weapons,
including handguns, rifles, and even
panzerfausts, or German anti-tank
rockets.⁴³ These few weeks of training
were considered the necessary training
for Hitler Youth members before they
served in different branches of Nazi
Germany's armed services. Each train-
ing camp ended with a culmination ex-
ercise, or crucible, similar to war games,
in which each new soldier's skills would
be tested and evaluated.⁴⁴

The next camps to be established
in the Third Reich also had a drastic
impact on the war effort and the home
front. These new camps, known as
Kinderlandverschickung, or Hitler Youth
KLV, were initially formed in order to
be summer camps for children of work-
ing-class Nazi families.⁴⁵ As the war in
Europe progressed, these camps were
eventually turned into destinations for
displaced children. These children could
be sent to the camps if their homes were
destroyed, their parents were killed in
the war, or even if their parents were
just fighting in the war. From the peri-

od of 1940 to 1945, roughly 2.8 million
German children were sent to these
camps.⁴⁶ As the schools in each of these
children's hometowns were destroyed
by bombs or other methods of war de-
struction, parents had no choice but to
send their children away as their only
resort for grammar education. Little did
these parents know that conditions in
these camps were harsh at best and that
little formal education took place, as the
camps were meant to "act as a laborato-
ry for raising loyal Nazi Citizens."⁴⁷

Following the crushing Nazi de-
feat at Stalingrad in 1943, Hitler and
his military leaders were in desperate
need for able bodies to fight for his Re-
ich, and his only option was to look to
the Hitler Youth. A recruitment drive
was born, pulling thousands of seven-
teen-year-old volunteers into a new
unit in July and August 1943.⁴⁸ During
this period, over 10,000 young men had
volunteered to join this new unit. Little
did they know that this new unit would
be the Twelfth SS Panzer Division *Hit-
lerjugend*.⁴⁹ Alfons Heck, an *HJ Führer*
Member, joined during this recruit-
ment drive and obtained his training
in the winter of 1943. Heck described
his initial military training as being dif-
ferent from the standard Hitler Youth
training:

rifles were nothing new to us—
from the age of 10, we had been
instructed in small caliber weap-
ons—but this was different. We
spent most of the day on the
rifle range, handling the stan-
dard Wehrmacht carbine with
its sharp kick, as well as the 08

Pistol, the 9mm handgun our foes called the Luger. We also learned to throw live hand grenades and fire bazookas at dummy tanks. Finally, during the last two days of the course, we were introduced to the MG-41, a machine gun capable of firing 1000 rounds per minute.⁵⁰

By the spring of 1944, the Twelfth SS Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend* had completed their training in Belgium. Their first battle occurred after June 6, 1944, with the allied invasion of Normandy.⁵¹ The Twelfth SS Division was stationed at one of three reserve divisions that were emplaced to push back the allied advance once they had made landfall. As the allies advanced, the entire Hitler Youth group was overrun, as it lacked the leadership, training, and ability to hold back the advance. By the end of their first month in battle, over 60 percent of the HJ group, an estimated 12,000 soldiers, was physically unable to fight, and 20 percent, or 4,000 soldiers, were killed or missing in action.⁵² By September 1944, the concept of the Hitler Youth divisions had reached its end, as the Twelfth SS Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend's* ranks held 600 remaining survivors, with an estimated 9000 lost.⁵³

The final years of the war were plagued with Hitler's Project Werewolf and the *Volksturm*, or People's Army, which he hoped would help Germany fight to the end. In September 1944, the *Volksturm* formed under the command of Heinrich Himmler to fight for and defend the fatherland.⁵⁴ Every single non-disabled man from the age of six-

teen to sixty years old was forced to join and train on all weapons, including the tank-busting panzerfausts.⁵⁵

In February of 1945, Project Werewolf, also under the command of Heinrich Himmler, was organized to train young boys as spies and saboteurs.⁵⁶ The concept of Project Werewolf was to train elite members of the Hitler Youth as spies and advanced commandos in order to infiltrate and take advantage of enemy lines.⁵⁷ The training programs instituted by Project Werewolf taught young Hitler Youth members how to conduct sabotage using tins of Heinz Oxtail Soup and garments comprised of Nipolit explosives.⁵⁸ The majority of these elite members did not receive adequate training and were captured or killed before they were ever able to carry out their missions. As the war drew to a close, and the allied advance towards Berlin was realized, Hitler retreated to his bunker while young boys and old men defended his beloved city. Hitler eventually committed suicide on April 30, 1945, shortly after awarding young Hitler Youth members the Iron Cross for defending Berlin. Soon after Hitler committed suicide, the former Hitler youth leaders, Baldur von Schirach and Artur Axmann, abandoned their Hitler Youth members and fled from the allies, attempting to avoid prosecution. As the war drew to a close, thousands of young boys, girls, men, and women were abandoned by everyone and everything they thought they were fighting for. Project Werewolf by the end of the war saw the assassinations of the mayors of Aachen and Krankenhagen.⁵⁹

The Hitler Youth started as a positive influence on German children and evolved into a machine of military training, propaganda, and forced cooperation. As Germany began to rebuild after defeat, these children were forced back into society, the majority as seasoned soldiers, and most barely old enough to read and write. The real question remains, what happened to these young men and women as the war drew to an end? Many were left without parents, a home, or means to provide for themselves. As the Allies drove into Berlin and Germany was split into an Eastern and Western Zones, the training and indoctrination that the members of the Hitler Youth had gained were now used to enact underground political groups and clandestine operations that would affect the growth of communism in various post-war zones of Allied occupation.

After the collapse of the Third Reich, the years of occupation and forced denazification that took place all over post-war Germany proved to be far more difficult than the allied forces had initially thought. The attempts to bring Nazi leaders to trial for their war crimes and their crimes against humanity continued for decades, and some even to this day. The children of the Hitler Youth were still children, at best young adults, when Germany fell to the Allies. They were not seen as “military leaders,” or even “soldiers,” since their roles in military operations or political rallies were seen as more symbolic than necessary. Many allied leaders argued that the use of children by Hitler in order to defend his Berlin Fortress

was a last-ditch effort, and the children fighting indeed were of no harm. Little did these children realize that as the occupation continued in the late 1940s, mainly from 1946 until 1949, former Hitler Youth members would cause turmoil not only in post-war Berlin, but more importantly, in Eastern Germany.

The fall of Berlin and the subsequent fall of the Third Reich and Nazi Germany left hundreds of thousands of Hitler Youth members without homes and without families to return to. Their homes were destroyed or their parents were killed during the war, or for most, both. The Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany (SBZ) was comprised of a population of hundreds of thousands of East German children who were former members of the Hitler Youth or BDM.⁶⁰ Following the collapse of Nazi power, the Hitler Youth was in shambles, lacked all significant leadership, and was later banned from existing under policies, laws, and jurisdictions by the allied occupation forces. These former youth members steadily transitioned from the Hitler Youth or BDM into the new youth movement in East Germany known as the Free German Youth (FDJ).⁶¹ This transition from “brown shirts” to “blue shirts” is considered by historians to have played a pivotal role in the construction of the communist state in East Germany, rising from the very children who once fought for the failed Nazi State.

The collapse of the Hitler Youth and the growth of the FDJ were not as streamlined and peaceful as many would believe. Many firsthand accounts state

that the transition “appear[ed] to have been a remarkably trouble-free process, but in reality, refusal to assimilate or join was met with conflict from numerous diverging political groups.”⁶² Many past Hitler Youth members refused to join the FDJ, since their former youth leaders in the Hitler Youth held leadership roles in the new organization. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) formed in April 1946 from the merger of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) and the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD).⁶³ The SED viewed the FDJ as a “‘ideological mish-mash’ housing ‘the same rabble’” as the Hitler Youth.⁶⁴ The issues that faced a post-war Germany and the impact that the indoctrinated Hitler Youth had on post-war politics stem from two major themes of the time. The denazification process aimed to reeducate and purge the four main occupied zones during the late 1940s, also known as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or the attempt to overcome the shameful Nazi past in the West after 1945.⁶⁵ The issues that surrounded the Hitler Youth and the FDJ were more prominent in Eastern Germany but were not present in Western Germany; many historians argue that a difference in political and social occupation, due to the division of occupied zones, is mainly to blame for this shift in historical perspective.

The years 1945 to 1947 saw a drastic transformation in the process and policies that surrounded East German youth. The Nazi Regime, as a whole, was drastically anti-communist. The reverse migration of communists that occurred in the spring of 1945 forced the East

German population, which was in ruins from the Nazi defeat, to rebuild upon a foundation that was mainly based in communism. This forced the youth to adapt and transition in order to become functioning and successful members of a post-war society. The former children and youth looked back with pride and respect at the accomplishments that the FDJ and other youth communist groups made during this time. The Niethammer project of the 1980s and the Institute for Contemporary Youth Research (IzJ), a project of the 1990s, found that interviewed past members were proud of and ecstatic toward their contributions to the post-war rebuilding in the late 1940s.⁶⁶ According to mindset of this youth, their hard work and political “conformity and assimilation” enabled a crushed nation to rebuild, forming a relationship between the communist leadership and the entirety of the Hitler Youth Generation.⁶⁷ With that being said, “the incorporation of so many ex-HJ and ex-BDM members into the GDR (German Democratic Republic) party and state apparatus, including the FDJ, can be regarded as a success, one first made possible by the collective amnesty granted to the Hitler Youth generation in the autumn of 1945.”⁶⁸ The assimilation of post-war German Youth into the new political organizations, with their communist tendencies, was not overshadowed by the understood impacts that the Hitler Youth had on the early post-war years in East Germany, especially concerning Project Werewolf.

In post-war Eastern Germany, the acceptance of prior Hitler Youth members into new political factions

was not the only impact that Hitler Youth members had on rebuilding. In order to paint a more vivid picture of post-war life and operations in East Germany, the exploration of Henrich Himmler's "Werewolf Soldiers" is required, as is an understanding of the impacts that these young soldiers had on the social, political, and economic lifestyle of East Germany. After Germany was defeated in May 1945, the Werewolf Militia groups, which on average were comprised of three to six men, refused to give up.⁶⁹ Werewolf groups were still in operation as late as October 1945; even as late as February 1947, a small group was defeated by a Polish-led militia.⁷⁰ Werewolf groups had two significant impacts on post-war Eastern Germany and on the spread of communism. First, they continued promulgating pro-Nazi ideas, frequently raiding towns and villages and carving swastikas and other symbols onto commonly seen landmarks.⁷¹ Second, their reluctance slowed down the spread of communism, as the war of the past had not entirely ended, and political opinion on the defeat of Nazism continued to swing back and forth.

Some Hitler Youth at the end of the war refused to abandon the training they had received. The political landscape of post-war Europe held a lot of resentment and unsettled feelings. The forceful push of communism from the east paired with the force of democratic ideas from the west plunged Germany into turmoil. The construction of the Berlin Wall set a permanent foundation that impacted the European sector for decades to come. Germany was soon

seen as a tumultuous area, a nation state with differing political ideas and social feelings. The division of Germany played a major role in the increased feelings of the Hitler Youth, and the growth of the FDJ. If Germany had not been divided, then the political mismatch between the Western zones, occupied by the United States and Great Britain, and the Eastern Zones, occupied by the Soviet Union, could have easily resulted in another war. The former Hitler Youth members saw this political division as a time to take charge for Germany, the failed Reich, and their fatherland.

In conclusion, boys and girls formerly in the Hitler Youth and BDM played a drastic role in the growth, spread, and acceptance of communism in post-war Eastern Germany. The indoctrination and training that took place in the Hitler Youth from 1929 until 1945 affected young men and women permanently for decades to come. Following the collapse of Berlin in 1945, it was the Hitler Youth that led to increased communist ideals in Eastern and Western Germany. Former Nazi youth members were able to add fuel to the fire of communism and continued to adjust and assimilate their training and ideals into the newly formed alliances of the FDJ. Finally, by continuing to act in Werewolf groups, which wreaked havoc across Eastern Europe, they carried out assassinations, looted, and continued to force Nazi ideas on people who were trying to let go of the past. The Hitler Youth acted as a catalyst on numerous fronts, at times helping communism, and at other times halting the advance of progress entirely.

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