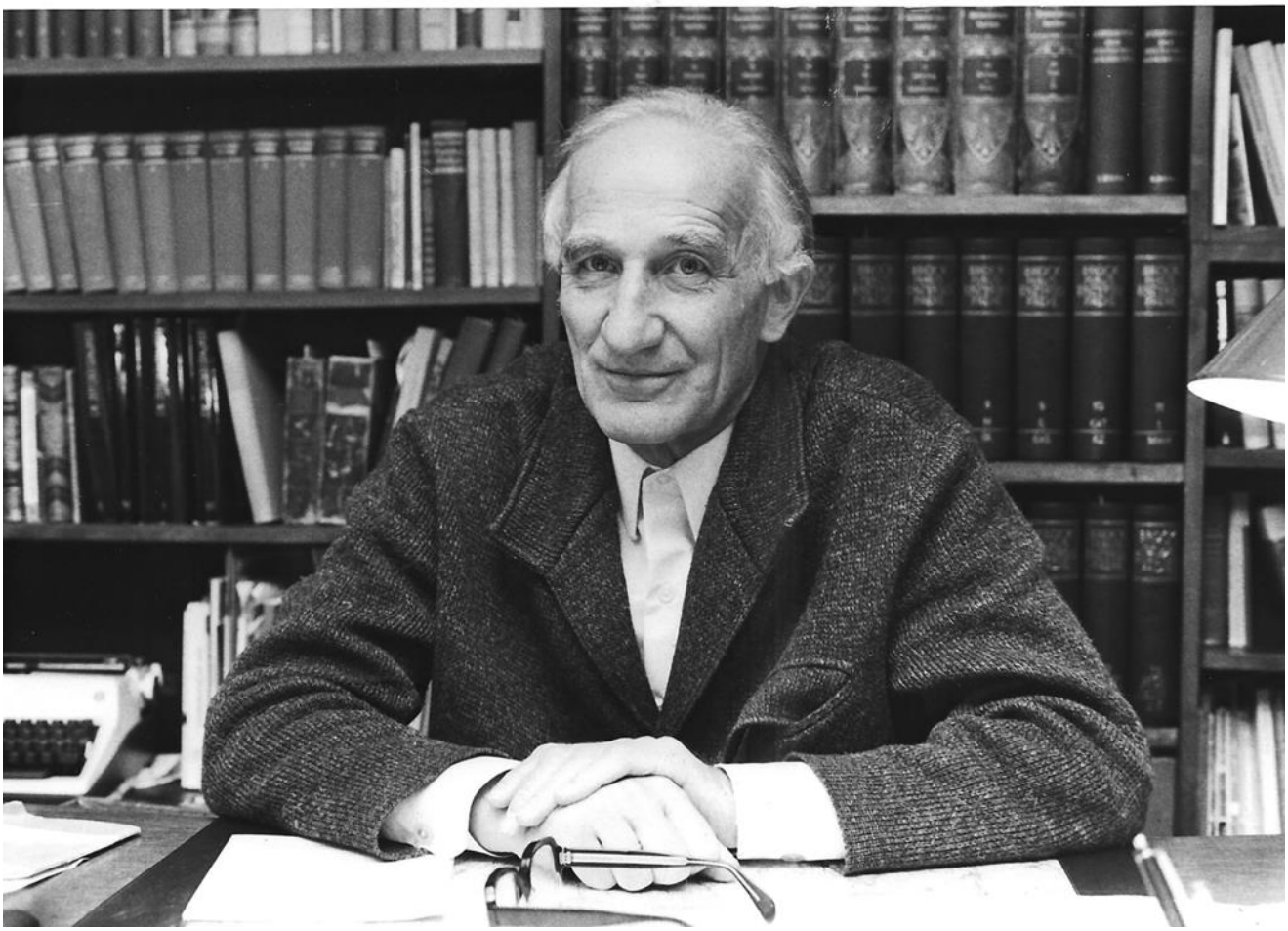
Enno Meyer

His Life and Work



Series: European Personalities

of the 20th Century

European Network
Remembrance
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Contents

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Introduction

Series 'European Personalities of the 20th Century'

In 20th-century Europe, a number of personalities, in various ways, left a significant mark on history not only within their own countries but often also beyond the borders. They influenced both groups and discourses by following unconventional paths, by being ahead of their times and by crossing boundaries through their thoughts and actions. The European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity has turned to personalities who have faded from view yet whose example and ethical leadership remain relevant. Biographical studies of such people offer a personal and approachable way to study history and are thus particularly well suited to conveying the concerns of the network.

Panel discussion at the workshop with Enno Meyer's former teaching colleagues Rolf Pottebaum, Dr. Hans-Jürgen Lorenz and Werner Broll and his former student Uwe Hoffmann (left to right), moderated by Dr. Burkhard Olschowsky.

Enno Meyer Workshop

On the 8th and 9th of October 2015, the Federal Institute for the Culture and History of the Germans in Eastern Europe (BKGE) hosted a workshop on the life and work of the Oldenburg grammar school teacher Enno Meyer. It was jointly organised by the European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity and the Oldenburg German-Polish Society, and it was sponsored by the federal government's Commissioner for Culture and Media. In order to gain the widest possible view of Enno Meyer's many interests and activities and to foster a fruitful exchange between speakers,

contemporary witnesses and the local public, the invitation was extended to academics, colleagues and those who had known Enno Meyer in his lifetime.

Articles About Enno Meyer

The following five articles arose from the workshop and provide insight into Meyer's life and career, his work in schools and his commitment to German-Polish understanding. They also describe the influences on him, and how he in turn influenced and inspired others. We hope that the portrayal a richly varied life given here will help shine new light on an honourable personality, presented both here and on the website of the European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity.

A more extended volume, with additional contributions on the life and work of Enno Meyers, will appear in 2019 due course in the BKGE series published by DeGruyter.

Burkhard Olschowsky

Enno Meyer: His Life in Brief

Enno Meyer was born in 1913 in Oldenbourg, a former royal residence, where his family ran a small retail business. From 1925, he was a pupil at the local secondary school, where his favourite subjects included History and Geography. He also displayed an early interest in toponymy and everything to do with Germans living overseas and their culture. He loved to explore the area around Oldenburg on his bicycle; later, he rode further afield throughout Germany and into neighbouring countries. In the early 1930s, he belonged to the *Jungstahlhelm*, a right-wing, nationalist organisation supported by the Reich army to provide, among other things, military training for young people by circumventing the provisions of the Versailles Peace Treaty.

Meyer's parents' house in Schüttingstraße in Oldenburg's city centre

Remarkably, Enno Meyer managed to resist both the conservative influences on his upbringing as well as the anti-Polish propaganda disseminated through schools in the Weimar Republic. His thirst for knowledge and his keen involvement in his school's History study group fostered his interest not only in the Germans living in the areas that bordered on Poland but also in the Poles themselves, whose language he began to study. From an early stage, he was thus able to develop his own opinions, which differed from those that were officially accepted.

Meyer earned his Abitur in 1933, the year the Nazis seized power, and then began a banking apprenticeship in Osnabrück. Looking back, he observed that he had initially been impressed by Hitler, especially on the 'Day of Potsdam' on 21 March 1933. However, he was not at all in favour of the boycott of Jewish businesses announced on 1 April, even though he knew no Jews at the time.

At the time of his Abitur, 1933

After finishing his banking apprenticeship, he went to Munich to study Geography, History and German Literature. In the Bavarian capital he joined the Rhenania student fraternity. In 1936, he spent the officially recommended East term ("Ostsemester") in Königsberg, during which time he closely acquainted himself with the history and culture of the East. He was shocked by *Kristallnacht*, which he witnessed in Berlin. At around this time, his father illegally took photographs of the destruction of the Oldenburg synagogue. In 1939, Meyer brought his studies and year later his dissertation to a successful conclusion in Rostock.

He decided against taking up teaching in Mecklenburg, and instead followed the advice of his university teacher Prof. Kurt Stegman von Pritzwald and went to work at the German Foreign Institute in Stuttgart. He focused his research on Poland and the Benelux states, and took note, with some misgivings, of the annexation of Poland and the creation of the *Warthegau*, a large administrative area of the German Reich in western Poland.

Meyer during his studies

Enno Meyer was enlisted into the army in 1940 and sent to serve on various fronts. In June 1941, he was posted to the Eastern Front south of Leningrad. He saw with his own eyes how the local ethnic Germans – in this area the Kaschubians – recruited to the *Wehrmacht* defected to the Soviet army in large numbers. He was given the task of questioning the Kaschubian soldiers who remained, and what he discovered made a lasting impression on him:

> "I was shocked by what I heard, for until then I had not realised how the Party and the police had treated the local population, and I had not heard anything about the murders carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* in West Prussia after 1939. I was now discovering these things. The relatives and neighbours [of the defectors, B.O.] who had served as Polish teachers, priests, officers or businessmen, or had been members of particular Polish organisations, were shot without any kind of trial."

This experience was pivotal for Enno Meyer and sparked off his later commmitment to Poland. Having been wounded on the Hungarian Front, he spent the final months of the war in a military hospital in Lauenburg, and as a British captive; he was released in August 1945 and returned to Oldenburg.
In the autumn of 1945, he began working as a teacher, initially in Wilhelmshaven and then, from 1954, at the Hindenburg School in Oldenburg. He soon realised there was a serious shortage of materials suitable for teaching recent history. In 1945, he spotted a book published in Stockholm, *Das okkupierte Polen* (*Landet utan Quisling*; *The Country without Quislings*) by Stefan Tadeusz Norwid-Nowacki. As early as

1949, Meyer made contact with this man, a Pole living in exile in Sweden, and he asked his advice on ‘how Poles and Germans might live as peaceful neighbours...’ Norwid-Nowacki replied: ‘In my opinion, the Germans need to take the risk of speaking of Poland as a normal, free nation, a member of the European community. (...) In all things relating to Poland, the Germans have refused to think logically and objectively.’

In front of his class, 1957

For Enno Meyer, Norwid-Nowacki’s words were a call to action. He made contact with historians in Germany and Austria, and with Polish historians both within Communist Poland and in exile. Meanwhile, he was also collecting factual information about the historical relationship between Germany and Poland, in collaboration with Prof. Georg Eckert, director of the Braunschweig International Institute for the Improvement of Textbooks; this became the key ‘Forty-Seven Theses’ on the ‘representation of German–Polish relations in the teaching of history’.
The ‘Theses’ received a generally warm welcome from a wide audience that included historians in West Germany, Polish exiled communities and, remarkably, even residents of Communist Poland. There was widespread praise for Enno Meyer’s courage and objectivity in the way he addressed the many different national stereotypes that bedevilled the history of German–Polish relations. While Meyer had begun his work in a spirit of optimism, during the 1960s historians in West Gemany and Communist Poland made little progress. Mutual trust was as yet scant; moreover, the political environment was insufficiently developed and thus unable to

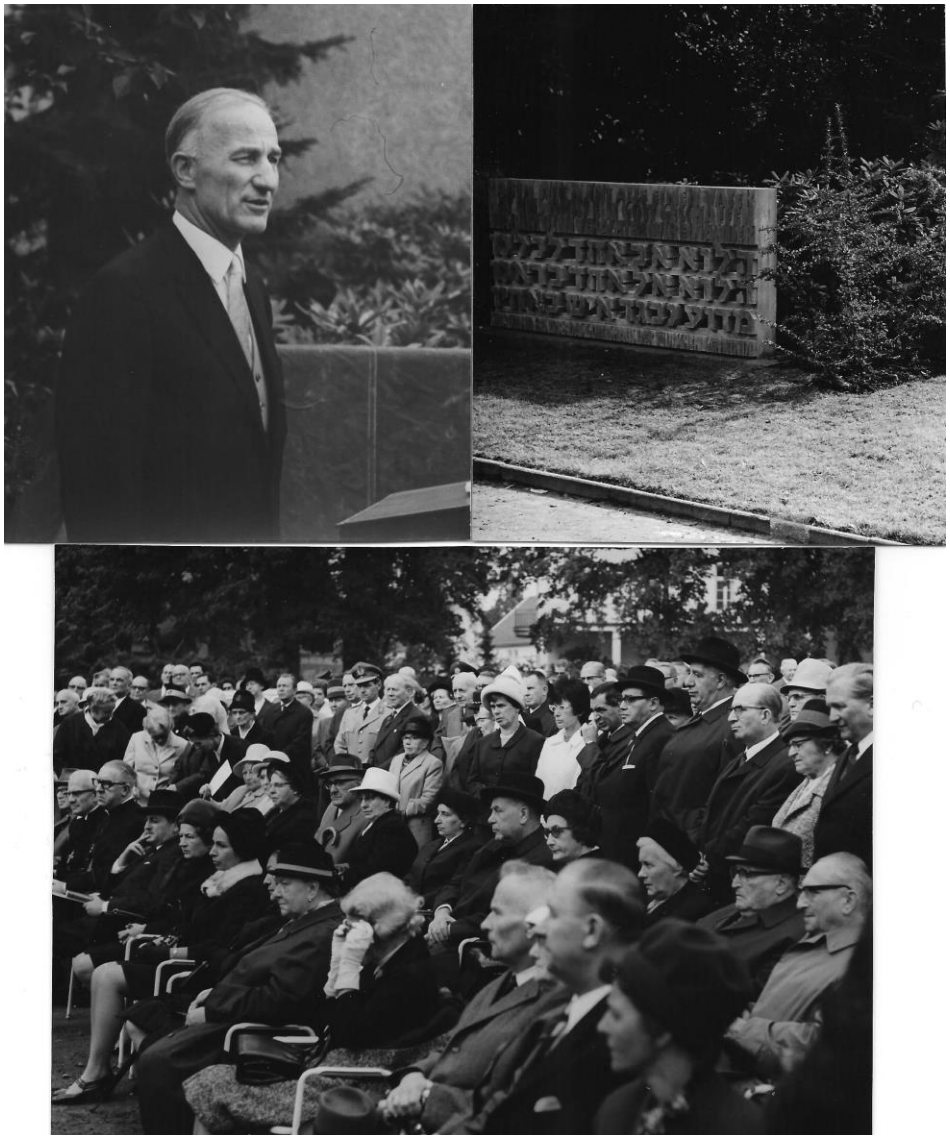
foster the growth of bilateral institutional interaction. Exiled Polish historians were generally not attached to an academic institution (university or similar) that might have provided a framework for their research and enabled them to earn a living. They were certainly not in any position to be writing history textbooks for schools within Poland.

It was thus only in 1972, following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, that the joint German–Polish Textbook Commission was set up. The academics involved on both sides were well aware of Enno Meyer's major contribution. The Commission was composed of and led by teachers in higher education and institution-based academics, and Meyer was the only practising school teacher. There were both disadvantages and advantages to this. He had to fit his Commission responsibilities around his teaching load and other duties at the Hindenburg School in Oldenburg. On the other hand, this enabled him to make his own independent judgment, unfettered by any professional jealousy or resentment from academic competitors. As Prof. Jörg K. Hoensch later reflected:

> "His virtue lay in his relative distance from pure academia, so that he was able to tackle the prejudices and stereotypes nurtured up to that point among teachers, pupils, journalists and those involved in adult education. His calm manner, his dedication to fairness and discipline, his modesty, and the commitment to German–Polish reconciliation that characterised all that he said, all these enabled him to act as a catalyst for a spirit of reconciliation and for understanding between nations."

Beside his work on school textbooks, Enno Meyer was also deeply committed to the history of Jews in the region of Oldenburg, and especially to the history of Holocaust and its local commemoration. As in many other German cities, the synagogue in Oldenburg had been destroyed in November 1938, and the state rabbi, Leo Trepp, and other Jewish men had all been sent to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. Their wives and children suffered the same fate not long after. After the end of WWII in 1945, the Jewish congregation was revived and comprised twenty members. In 1957, Enno Meyer wrote a letter to the local paper, the *Nordwest-Zeitung*, suggesting that the pogroms carried out in Oldenburg under Nazism should be commemorated. Frau Meiners, the leader of the small Jewish congregation in Oldenburg, wrote to him in response and in 1962 this gave rise to the Society for Christian–Jewish Collaboration in Oldenburg. Enno Meyer became its chairman in 1965.

Thanks to the joint efforts of the society and of Meyer, on 10 November 1967 the first memorial to the original synagogue was inaugurated on the Peterstraße in Oldenburg.



The 1967 dedication of the memorial to the Oldenburg Synagogue, destroyed in 1938

There has been much building and improvement in the area since, but the memorial remains one of the simplest and most beautiful. Meyer dedicated his period as chairman of the society to meticulous research into the names of the Jewish families in Oldenburg. It brought him particular satisfaction that on 8 May 1985, after years of research and preparation, he was able to invite all the former Jewish residents who were still alive and able to travel to a reunion in Oldenburg

Reunion of former Jewish residents in Oldenburg, 1985

Enno Meyer's wife Magdalene (Renschhausen) followed up the contacts made by correspondence, thus renewing old friendships and creating new ones. Enno Meyer and his wife subsequently travelled to Israel and New York. In 1980, Meyer was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany by the Mayor of Oldenburg in recognition both of his work with German and Polish textbooks and of his long commitment to improving German–Jewish relations.

Meyer is awarded the Order of Merit
of the Federal Republic of Germany

Enno Meyer was a modest man who hardly ever sought the limelight. He preferred to offer persistent and painstaking dedication to his chosen causes, spending many hours at his desk. In retirement, from 1979 onwards, he continued to work on Polish and Jewish history, but also found time for other matters, and turned his meticulous attention towards Armenian history. He travelled throughout Armenia and published on the history of relations between Germany and Armenia.

Any account of Enno Meyer's life and work leaves the reader astonished at the range of his thinking and of his publications. There are several reasons for this. First, his tremendously prolific list of publications, which he produced alongside his teaching load and his commitment to his wife and four children. Several participants in our workshop recounted how they had valued Enno Meyer as a teacher who provided a wide range of information and factual explanations. Meyer was conservative in his values and personal habits, and yet well ahead of his time in his commitment to promoting good relations with Poland and to the Jewish history of Oldenburg. Any apparent contradictions here probably say much about our limited thinking; they do not do justice to Enno Meyer's independence of mind and the ability it gave him to both think and act in ways that cut through the limitations of convention and physical borders. Throughout his life, it was characteristic of Meyer that he espoused the cause of oppressed social and ethnic groups, who enjoyed his sympathy whether they were Jewish, Polish or Armenian.

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Krzysztof Ruchniewicz

A Pioneer of Reconciliation

In the spring of 1990, I travelled for the first time to Oldenburg to meet Dr Enno Meyer, a retired teacher of history, geography and German, whose life and work were the subject of my master's dissertation, my first piece of scholarly research. I had put months of preparation into this meeting: at the time, it was not usual to undertake research trips to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Any Pole travelling to the FRG needed a visa, and it was not easy for a foreign student to receive a study grant.

As the sixth semester of my history degree drew to a close, I had to choose a topic for my master's dissertation. My interest in German–Polish relations after WW2 dated back to the beginning of my studies, but I was finding it hard to identify a subject that encompassed the phenomenon of German revisionism and/or imperialism. I was leaning more towards something about collaboration, the exchange of ideas and reconciliation between the two nations.

In looking for suitable literature, I came across a collection of sources on German–Polish relations published in 1971 by a German author I had not previously encountered, Enno Meyer. I read it briefly it and found no negative comments anywhere in this interesting publication, and this spurred me on to seek out further works by this author. I found Enno Meyer's small memoir, *How I Came To This Point* (*Wie ich dazu gekommen bin*), and I read it in one sitting.

I discovered in its pages a man who had no connections with Poland and yet had devoted more or less his entire life to researching our history. To me, the most interesting parts of his memoir were the descriptions of his difficulties in devising his theories concerning schoolbooks on German–Polish relations. Soon after, I presented my findings at a master's seminar led by Professor Wojciech Wrzesiński at our historical institute. Our conversations revealed that he knew Enno Meyer, as they were both members of the German–Polish Textbook Commission. He strongly encouraged me to explore the part Enno Meyer played in the establishment of the Textbook Commission, and to try hard to gain a research grant.

A few months later, I received an invitation to visit the Georg-Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig. Professor Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, then vice director of the institute, put me in touch with Dr Meyer. This led to our first meeting in Oldenburg.

At the station, I was met and warmly greeted by a tall elderly gentleman, and not long after I was sitting in a room in his cosy house, which he had built as part of a housing cooperative. His wife, Magdalene Meyer, joined in our conversation and from time to time provided extra information. The room adjacent to the one we were sitting in was his study, lined up to the ceiling with books. A number of piles of papers were stacked on the very large desk. I was at the time a young historian, and this room made a great impression on me. Just by scanning the contents of his study's bookshelves, I could see that my host had an abiding interest in the history of my home country.

The meeting with Enno Meyer had a decisive influence on my subsequent scholarly career. He made available to me his ample correspondence, thanks to which I was able to reconstruct the efforts made in the 1950s to establish the German–Polish Textbook Commission. The initial impulse came from the publication in 1956 of the 47 Theses on the presentation of German–Polish relations in the teaching of history, and the resulting discussion. During the next few weeks, I travelled to Oldenburg several times in order to carry out further research, and to get to know Meyer better. Meyer's goodwill and trust meant that, as I had hoped, I was able to put together an interesting master's dissertation, which was published at our institute in 1994. I was also appointed as an assistant.

Enno Meyer was born in 1913 in Oldenburg; his family ran a shop. After finishing grammar school studies in his home town, he worked for a time in a bank in Osnabrück. He soon gave this up, however, and went to Munich to study German, history and geography, later finishing his studies in Königsberg and Rostock. In 1939, in Rostock, he submitted an essay on the significance of mining in the occupation of the Sudetenland and Carpathia for his final university examination (*Staatsexamen*). He was offered a position at the German Foreign Institute in Stuttgart the following year. He worked there until he was called up for military service in March 1940. At the end of the war, he was lying wounded and ill in a hospital in Moelln, on the border between Holstein and Mecklenburg.

The war years, and especially his experiences on the Eastern Front, were a turning point in Meyer's understanding of the Polish question. His family had given him a conservative upbringing, but they had not instilled any prejudices against Poland. His early impressions of Poland were gained from school lessons and his own reading. School lessons – and Weimar German society generally – were politically aware and tended to be thoroughly anti-Polish. History teachers taught children to see the establishment of the so-called Danzig Corridor to the Free City and the partition of Upper Silesia as a grave injustice to Germans. Meyer set this negative representation of the events against what he learned from his own reading and in the history working group he belonged to at school. Gradually, he learned to take a critical approach to what he was taught in class. He began to take an interest not only in the Germans who lived in the Polish regions bordering on Germany, but also in the country itself in which they lived. However, in order to get to know Poland better, he needed to learn its language, so he began to study Polish, a language that in due course he would speak with great ease.

His interest in the history and culture of Germany's eastern neighbour grew throughout his studies, and during his work at the German Foreign Institute, which was politically instrumentalised by the Nazis. Meyer's first contact with Poles happened on the Eastern Front in the summer of 1942, while he was serving in the *Wehrmacht*. A group of several Kaschubian soldiers, forcibly recruited into the German army, had deserted to the Red Army, and he had to conduct hearings of the remaining 'national German' soldiers to establish the reasons for the desertion. He discovered a great deal about German policies vis-à-vis occupied Poland. The hearings left a lasting impression on Meyer:

> "I was shocked by what I heard, for until then I had not realised how the Party and the police had treated the local population, and I had not heard anything about the murders carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* in West Prussia after 1939. I was now discovering these things. The relatives and neighbours [of the defectors] who had served as Polish teachers, priests, officers or businessmen, or had been members of particular Polish organisations, were shot without any kind of trial."

After the war, Meyer did not return to his job at the German Foreign Institute but went to work in the Oldenburg education service. From 1947, he worked at the United High School in Wilhelmshaven, and from the early 1950s at the Paul-von-Hindenburg-Gymnasium in his home city of Oldenburg.
The school was experiencing a number of problems that Meyer had to engage with. Teachers were in short supply, the classes were too large and teaching schemes, schoolbooks and other necessities were all lacking. His task was made yet more difficult because in the years immediately following the war, history was the first subject to be removed from the curriculum by the Allies, who also removed all textbooks produced during the Weimar Republic. Once history was allowed back onto the curriculum, the teachers faced considerable difficulties getting hold of textbooks, as the production and publication of new ones was a slow process. To cope with the situation, Meyer felt obliged to prepare the necessary teaching materials himself. He visited libraries and copied extracts from relevant books, and presented information in tabular form. This allowed him to formulate his theses, which he outlined during his teaching.
During his research, he was much struck when he came across a book by Tadeusz Norwid-Nowacki, an industrialist from Poznań and later a commentator on Polish emigration. The book was entitled *The Martyrdom of a Nation: Occupied Poland* (*Martyrium eines Volkes. Das okkupierte Polen,* Stockholm 1945). He made contact with the author and told him how impressed he had been by his work. He wrote to Norwid-Nowacki on 4 August 1949:

> "My home town had 85,000 inhabitants in 1939, but now there are 130,000, of which 45,000 are refugees and displaced persons. As a teacher, I am often asked how we can solve the 'German–Polish question' and improve matters between Germans and Poles. If peaceful relationships are ever to develop between the nations of Western Europe, then an answer must be found to the question, despite the long history of mutual hostility. It seems clear to me that notions such as national honour, historical borders, security, *Lebensraum* and revenge will never lead to peace."

Norwid-Nowacki encouraged Meyer to use his experience as a teacher to explore the issue more deeply. Meyer set himself the task of analysing the content of Polish textbooks in order to present this for discussion. He had no intention of simply adding

one more item to the list of educational initiatives. He was very conscious that he was not an expert in German–Polish matters, and that he would need help from others. He therefore sought to make contact not only with German institutions, but also – and most importantly – with Polish historians from the very start, though for obvious reasons he was only able to do so with Polish exiles.

In August 1953, he got in touch with the Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, which was then focusing on how to portray German–French relations in the textbooks of those two countries. Initially, his discussions with the Institute were not especially fruitful, as the director, Prof. Georg Eckert, thought it too early to establish a dialogue with Poland.

Poland lay behind the Iron Curtain and had a Stalinist regime, so the development of even-handed and unbiased discussions between historians either side of the border seemed unlikely. In these challenging political circumstances, Meyer pursued contacts among exiled historians in order to seek their opinion on his proposed theses on German–Polish relations. Some scholars offered immediate help. The medievalist Prof. Leon Koczy, who was living in Banknock in Scotland, helped Meyer with the theses addressing the medieval period, while the Austrian scholar Otto Forst de Battaglia assisted with the modern and contemporary period. Meyer was also looking for help with his project within Germany. A group of university professors, among them Herbert Ludat, Werner Conze and Werner Markert, were very drawn to his ideas.

In the light of this success, Georg Eckert decided to take another look at Meyer's theses. He gave enthusiastic support to Meyer's proposal to organise a meeting at which his theses would be discussed by specialist German historians. The meeting was held in June 1955 in Braunschweig, and was apparently the first such assembly in post-war Germany to engage with German–Polish relations. It was attended by well-known professors, and these included representatives not only of associations for displaced persons but also of institutes engaging in 'Eastern Research' (*Ostforschung*), such as the historians Werner Conze and Herbert Ludat. Eugen Lemberg and Werner Markert were unable to attend, but were keen to support the work of Meyer and the Institute. These first reactions to Meyer's theses can be seen as a signal success.

In later years, Meyer said of this initial meeting: 'The Braunschweig discussions [...] were down-to-earth and businesslike, and remarkably free of stress. A number of small changes were recommended. I was happy to accept them.'

It seemed that there was now a clear path to publication of the theses – for Meyer the teacher, this was a clear recognition of his expertise and his commitment, uncharacteristic of his time, to overcoming the limitations imposed by physical borders.

Meyer's theses were published in March 1956 and were very well received by German historians in both German states, and by Polish historians both within Poland and in exile. The 47 theses addressed the history of German–Polish relations: 17 on the subject of the Middle Ages, 19 on the modern period and up to the 19th century and 9 on recent history.

In his introduction to the work, Meyer wrote:

> “These theses are intended to inspire. They arose out of the conviction that Germany must become accustomed to seeing Poland as a European nation that – just as other nations do – has its strengths and weaknesses, but that has been visited by more than its fair share of misfortune. This is largely due to the geographical position of Poland, which lies in the middle of the continent and between powerful neighbouring nations.”

Initial reactions were very positive. One reader wrote: ‘I am convinced that every teacher of history should give a grateful welcome to E. Meyer’s insights. Now we very much hope that the views put forward by the author will soon be used to good effect in revised history textbooks in both Germany and Poland.’
Another wrote: ‘Your little book is indeed a courageous and welcome achievement.’
And yet another added, ‘Warm congratulations on your theses. In my opinion they are well defended and well articulated.’
At the first German–Polish seminar in Tübingen in October 1956, the German and exiled Polish historians present intensively discussed Meyer’s publication in the corridors. They proposed that the following meeting should focus on the theses. Over the subsequent months, enthusiastic reviews of the theses appeared among publications by exiled Polish historians. The proposed meeting and seminar, however, did not materialise.
Meyer’s theses on school textbooks elicited not only positive responses, but also some negative ones, which proved a detraction to Meyer’s efforts, and those of the Institute, over many years. Meyer’s long battle with the Johann-Gottfried-Herder Institute over the final version of his theses illustrates the challenges faced by anyone attempting to discuss the history of German–Polish relations during the late 1950s, especially since this touched on matters related to the so-called *Ostforschung* and the institutes involved in this research. It was not the theses that were the problem, but rather who was to have the final say on interpretation. This provided a clear illustration of how difficult it was for the Germans themselves to raise their eyes above the established national perspective and interests, and to aim for a joint consensus. Critical comments from Prof. Gotthold Rhode, a former researcher at the Johann-Gottfried-Herder Institute, were addressed in the revised edition of the theses published in February 1957, and this at least seemed to calm dissent about the content of the theses.
Academics in West Germany were surprised by the interest Polish historians expressed for Meyer’s theses, and this contributed to their growing popularity. Prof. Gerard Labuda, a Polish reviewer, recalled that the West Institute in Poznań had received a proof copy of the planned second edition of Meyer’s theses in the summer of 1956: ‘In the altered political situation in our country, even the Foreign Ministry was encouraging dialogue with historians in West Germany, because Poland was still hoping to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries.’

Other Polish reviewers of the theses, besides Gerard Labuda, included the historians Ewa Maleczyńska, Kazimierz Piwarski and Kazimierz Popiołek. The debate had clearly gotten off to a good start, since Meyer's theses were made the subject of the November 1956 meeting of the German–Polish Historians Commission in East Berlin, attended by historians from both Poland and East Germany. It was decided that the discussion's outcomes would be included in review articles targeted at suitable journals in neighbouring countries of the Eastern bloc. A conference was also announced for December 1957 on the subject of German–Polish relations in textbooks.

Unfortunately, due to differences of opinion between Polish and East German historians, neither the articles nor the conference ever happened. The articles appeared in East German journals. However, far from fostering dialogue across the dividing lines between political blocs, they served to discredit Meyer's writings among historians and other readers in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Georg Eckert, inspired by the popularity of Enno Meyer's theses, brought out a third edition in 1958. The publication included the West German and Polish articles in order to provide at least a partial record of the discussions that were being held at the time. Meyer included revisions and corrections in each edition of his Theses, taking note of critical reactions and of valuable advice he had received. A total of 23 reviews of his work appeared between 1956 and 1960. In the FRG, it was more widely read and debated than other work on German–Polish relations.

Meyer was being invited to a variety of meetings with teachers, to whom he presented and explained his theses. Alongside his work to popularise his theses, Meyer was writing papers on Poland and on regional history, and contributing articles to journals for the teaching profession. He focused especially on the problems specific to the shared German–Polish border, and on how these were addressed in Polish and German textbooks. His knowledge of the Polish language was extremely useful in this work; in particular, for many years he wrote reviews of new history books published in Poland for the well-known German journal *History in Scholarship and in the Classroom* (*Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*).

For various reasons, it proved impossible to establish a balanced debate on German–Polish textbooks embedded in an institutional setting. It was complicated, it turned out, to establish a commission to bring together Polish historians in exile. In October 1960, a Polish historian living in London, Dr Jakub Hoffman, wrote to Enno Meyer: 'It is hard for us to work effectively with the International Schoolbook Institute. Exiled Polish historians do not have access to Polish schools in which they might be able to address the problems of teaching about German–Polish relations. Also, they are not the people writing the Polish history textbooks.'

For political reasons, historians in Poland were in an even more difficult position. Neither the atmosphere between Poland and the FRG nor the official friendship between Poland and the GDR were conducive to the establishment of a potential textbook commission. The FRG government had refused to establish diplomatic relations with communist Poland. Moreover, a Polish–German Historians' Commission had been set up in 1956 and it effectively undermined any efforts by

Polish historians to establish the dialogue they were hoping for with colleagues in West Germany. The West German Ministry of Culture did not help matters when at its conference of 13 December 1956 – coinciding, therefore, with the ongoing debate on Meyer's theses – it published its 'Recommendations for Eastern Studies [*Ostkunde*]'. The new Eastern Studies curriculum was designed to inform students about the formerly German regions in East-Central Europe, to preserve the memories of their towns and landscapes, and to keep alive a sense of loss. This effectively buried any hope of promoting understanding and collaboration between Germany and Poland. Meyer's theses disappeared from view, and it was not until ten years later, as part of work by the joint German–Polish Textbook Commission in the early 1970s, that they were once again taken up.

These political decisions thwarted hopes of reconciliation and collaboration between the two countries. The realities of the time meant that it was above all political considerations that determined the shape of any relations and contacts between them. It was only at the end of the 1960s that the presentation in textbooks of matters between Germany and Poland once more came to the fore. This was principally due to the changing political situation with the FRG from the mid-1960s onwards, to the Grand Coalition and above all to the SPD/FDP government and the new *Ostpolitik* that it adopted in 1969.

Furthermore, the West German public's attitude towards Poland underwent a significant shift. It found expression in three publications: a paper produced in 1965 by the council of the German Evangelical Church, *The Situation of the Displaced Persons and the Relations Between the German Nation and its Easterly Neighbours* (*Die Lage der Vertriebenen und das Verhältnis des deutschen Volkes zu seinen östlichen Nachbarn*); an exchange of letters between Polish and West German bishops; and a memorandum published in 1968 by a gathering of Catholic intellectuals in the Bensberg Circle.

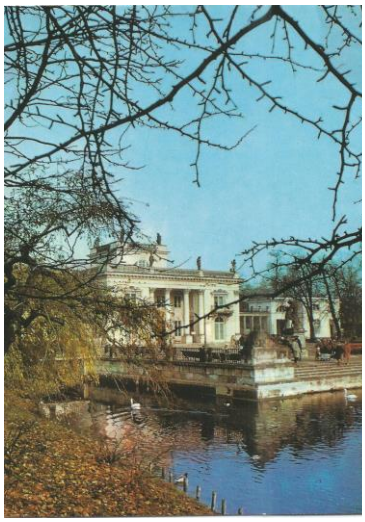
The Brandt/Scheel government's attempts to defuse the political tension between the FRG and Eastern European countries gave significant impetus to reviving the debates on textbooks, as did, on a practical level, an initiative of the Evangelical Academy in West Berlin. Its director, Pastor Günter Berndt, organised a conference from 25 to 27 November 1969 entitled 'Poland in the Curriculum', which was attended by German historians, geographers, scholars of politics, students and teachers. In groups, the participants analysed the content of history, geography and social science textbooks. They reached the firm conclusion that 'the publication of these West German textbooks in Poland may hinder understanding in the present and, in the future, could make it impossible'.

The final resolution of the conference went further:

> "The textbooks and atlases we have examined do not provide an objective explanation of the political, national and social realities in Poland. Significant facts are omitted, and minor details are presented as far more significant than is justifiable. The language used is over-emotional, and promotes an uncritical approach. Numbers, dates, statistics and events are presented in language

> that purports to be factual but in fact promotes a judgmental attitude. This unbalanced presentation is especially clear in the choice of reports and images. The anti-Communist mindset and the presentation of the Polish people as the negative element within a friend-foe schema combine to preserve the attitudes of the Cold War."

In conclusion, they wrote: 'This teaching material serves not to inform but to indoctrinate. Its aim and result is to create an attachment among young people to the former German regions in the East and to maintain the sense of entitlement to them.'
The practical outcomes of this conference were the withdrawal of the FRG government's 'Recommendations for Eastern Studies', and a call to set up a German–Polish conference on textbooks in short order. The conference itself, and its resolutions, were widely discussed in West German society, and as a result a group was set up that later became known as the 'Working Group on Our Polish Neighbours'. The Group was to carry forward the outcome of the conference and work towards bringing about the objectives that had been set.
Prof. Władysław Markiewicz, the director of the Poznań West Institute, heard of this initiative and invited the members of the Working Group to visit Poznań in October 1970. Prof. Gerard Labuda gave a lecture on 'Contentious Issues in German–Polish Relations', and the German guests presented an 11-point catalogue on the history of Poland, which was then discussed by Prof. Labuda.



The 1973 meeting of the German–Polish Textbook Commission in Łazienki Park in Warsaw

In the wake of the conference at the Evangelical Academy, the West German press took an increasing interest in the portrayal of Germany in Polish textbooks, so the Academy organised a second conference from 13 to 15 November 1970 on 'Germany in Polish Textbooks', which was attended by well-known Polish and German historians. Dr Enno Meyer gave the opening address, a recognition of his early and long-standing commitment to the matter.

This conference was followed by Gerard Labuda's lecture on 'The Image of the Germans and of German–Polish Relations in Polish Textbooks' ('Das Bild der Deutschen und der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen in polnischen Schulbüchern'). Władysław Markiewicz then presented his as yet unpublished textbook on citizenship. The book provoked a high level of interest and was praised by participants, not least because it was the first time that a textbook was being openly discussed by both Germans and Poles.

As a result of the plenary discussion and the group work at the conference, the closing resolution included a call to set up a German–Polish Textbook Conference. The West German public, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Bundestag and the governments of the federal states were invited to foster the creation of a German–Polish Textbook Commission. This was set up in 1972, following the restoration of diplomatic relations between the Polish People's Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany.

The creation of the Commission gave Meyer huge satisfaction and confirmed the value of the work he and the Braunschweig Institute had initiated. It represented Meyer's central contribution to the dialogue between Germany and Poland. The Commission paid tribute by dedicating the published proceedings of its 10th anniversary conference to him, and in 1980 the West German government awarded him its highest honour, the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Enno Meyer also worked for many years on ensuring information about Poland and its history was made widely available in West Germany. Prof. Jörg. K. Hoensch has said the following about Meyer's work:

> "The little source books Meyer has published on German–Polish relations played a significant role among the developing difficulties of the early and mid-1970s; his *An Outline of Polish History* (*Grundzüge der Geschichte Polens*) provided a useful introduction and its objectivity awakened understanding among a wide public for particular issues affecting the people of Poland. His merit lay in his relative distance from pure academia, so that he was able to tackle the prejudices and stereotypes nurtured up to that point among teachers, pupils, journalists and those involved in adult education. His calm manner, his dedication to fairness and discipline, his modesty, and the commitment to German–Polish reconciliation that characterised all that he said, these all fostered his role as catalyst for a spirit of understanding and for understanding between nations."

Now that this work for reconciliation has largely faded from general memory, teachers in Poland and Germany alike would do well to take Enno Meyer's work as teacher and scholar as an example on how to challenge national stereotypes and prejudices, and the crucial role that schools have to play in this process.

Dr Enno Meyer died in Oldenburg in 1996, aged 82.

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Wolfgang Jacobmeyer

Without Enno Meyer There Would Have Been No German-Polish Textbook Discussions

A tribute to the memory of a truly remarkable person, if it is to be reliable and appropriate, should focus on the achievements that the writer is best qualified to judge. Enno Meyer, a man whose significance was far greater than he would himself have acknowledged, would have preferred a brief tribute, concise rather than verbose. Too much brevity, however, would not do justice to the complexity of Enno Meyer's achievements, which can only be adequately described within their multifaceted context. When I joined the Braunschweig Georg-Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in 1978, Enno Meyer was just a generation my senior. I had full confidence in him from the start, as well as a growing respect. He was a tall, well-built man with an open, friendly expression, and as a young scholar I hugely appreciated his calm, unhurried explanations of specialist issues. Never, whether in private conversation, in discussions, in meetings or giving a lecture, did Enno Meyer ever waste words or grow prolix. On one occasion in private conversation at a conference, we shared a joke about the Latin concept loquax and those we knew who illustrated it well. Enno Meyer found all the satisfaction he needed in the keen eye and sound knowledge of people and works that he had developed thanks to his professional work as a schoolteacher; these combined with a laconic wit tempered by his friendly nature. Having read my Habilitation dissertation on the fate of Displaced Persons after 1945, he remarked that he would not have been able to write it. Of course, he could have done so, but maybe he would have tackled the task in a different way; I nevertheless treasured his remark.

If in the following text I can show that Enno Meyer was the true originator of the recommendations for German-Polish textbooks, I shall in some measure have discharged my debt to him. The sources I draw on for this are available and familiar to some: his autobiographical remarks made in 1988, his 47 Theses of 1956 and their subsequent discussion in the International Yearbook for the Teaching of History published by the International Textbook Institute in Braunschweig as well as the long history of the German-Polish Textbook Conversations since 1972. My reflections are built on four observations.

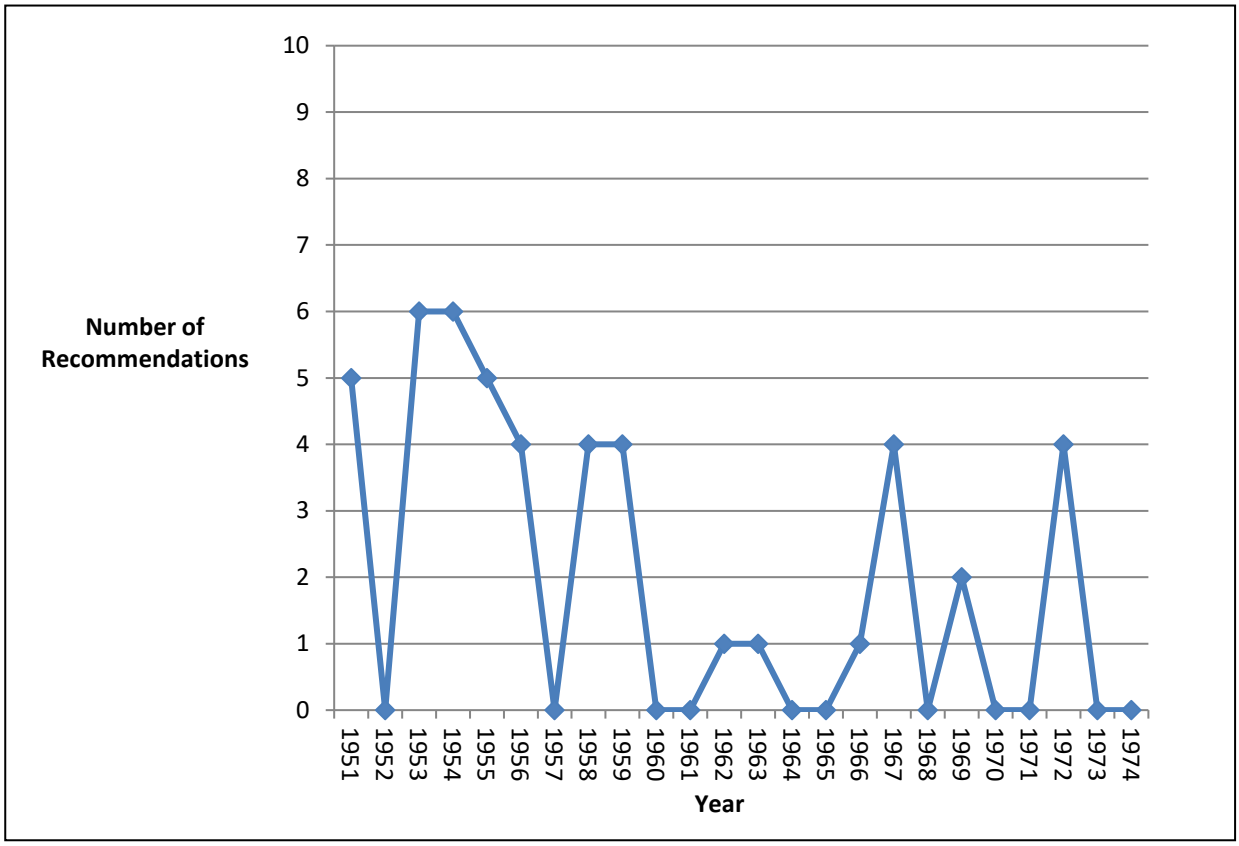
First Observation: Unique Selling Point

In 1953, Enno Meyer conveyed to Professor Dr Georg Eckert, the director of the International Textbook Institute, his criticism of the way that German-Polish history was presented in textbooks. In September, Eckert replied that he and his academic 'alter ego' Ernst-Otto Schüddekopf were extremely interested in German-Polish relations, and had been wondering for some time what they might do to address this problem. There is no specific research project or evidence for the interest of these two Braunschweig scholars, either in the sparse documentation available or in the thematic smorgasbord of the contents pages of the International Yearbook. The Braunschweig Institute was social democratic in character, and its left-wing political

sympathies would not readily have encompassed much research on the subject of Poland. It is far more likely that Enno Meyer, an outsider from Oldenburg, would have instigated the Braunschweig Institute's interest in Poland. Once inspired to take up the cause, however, the Institute ensured that work on German-Polish textbooks carried on for over fifty years, until long after the deaths of both Eckert and Schüddekopf, and it thus gained a reputation for energy, stability and authority, and in the longer run its status as a public agency.
Enno Meyer was a lone ranger, not a founder of institutions. He had no ambition to make large waves through what he did. Nevertheless, his modest and unassuming work made it clear that the study of the history of relations between Germany and Poland was crucial on the grounds of scholarship, pedagogy, politics and morality, and this furthermore enabled the Institute to become profitable.

Professor Georg Eckert

Second Observation: Convergences
Since 1951, alongside his existing teaching position, Georg Eckert had been leading the Braunschweig 'Institute for International Improvement in Schooling', which in 1975 acquired its present name, the 'Georg Eckert International Textbook Institute'. It was an unusual enterprise, one that could only have come about in the circumstances unique to the post-war period. It had no constitution, no legal support, no budget, not even its own staff. It was sustained by an idealism inspired by internationalism, by improvisation, by a multitude of ideas and work contacts, by one-off financial donations, by selfless and enthusiastic collaboration and by a working method that was haphazard rather than systematic. Had the organisation been set up in the normal way, it might never have got off the ground. The recommendations it published, however, provide a coherent self-portrait of the Institute, whose output seems to have been somewhat sporadic.



In spite of this apparently chaotic character, however, the Braunschweig team successfully adopted the League of Nations concept of 'recommendation' and evolved a four-fold standard definition. Recommendations were to be:

- seen as normative rather than descriptive
- bilaterally devised
- jointly agreed
- disseminated through the Institute

All this was somewhat different from the original grounds for Enno Meyer's interest in Poland. His purpose had been not only to meet the needs of his current occupation – the pragmatic requirement to develop his own teaching programme in Oldenburg – but also to satisfy his lifelong and persistent thirst for knowledge. However, here we should focus not on specific aspects but on the general ones. There are clearly useful links between Oldenburg and Braunschweig. Enno Meyer's historiographical achievement is that his 47 Theses examined history in a way that avoided a convoluted and political, morally and factually complex representation of German–Polish relations. The Braunschweig scholars, experts on neither Poland nor school teaching, were alerted to this work by an outsider. Moreover, Enno Meyer's concept of theses made sense to them. In the early days of the Braunschweig team, 'theses', like their close synonyms 'agreements' and 'decisions', were a familiar idea, until this semantic diversity became absorbed in the standard word 'recommendations'.

Meyer had already made a significant – and perhaps under-recognised – contribution to his collaboration with the Braunschweig Institute in his survey of methods for international comparative textbook research. Working alone, he had investigated the German-Polish Textbook Conversations of the late 1930s, had developed his theses by analysing textbooks, had identified and corrected grave errors in both German and Polish textbooks and had systematically sought out and made contact not only with German scholars and research institutions but also with exiled Polish scholars, who although not currently in employment were nevertheless the ones he was able to get in touch with. This must have made a very positive impression on the Braunschweig scholars. He had also, without any encouragement from Braunschweig, developed and refined his three types of theses so that he could use them not only to classify his findings when examining textbooks but also to draw up a workable programme for improving them. His theses aimed to:

- avoid mistakes in German textbooks
- supplement the deficiencies of German teaching and
- avoid mistakes in Polish textbooks

Any assessment of his achievements in this field and his significance to the work of the Braunschweig Institute makes it clear that he produced a blueprint for the future implementation of recommendations. Perhaps more importantly, moreover, he clearly described in detail what Klaus Zernack termed the ‘dilettante depiction of Poland in German school history books’, and above all he identified the intellectual, moral and subject-specific challenge that would have to be taken up in any future discussions on textbooks. This represented a quantum leap.

Third Observation: Reconciling Methods

There is a clear progression from the 1956 Theses to the 1976 Recommendations. The 47 Oldenburg Theses were condensed into 26 Braunschweig Recommendations. What differences and similarities are there between these two documents?

They may well be explained by the different working methods used in each case, which in turn arose from the different circumstances in which they were written. Enno Meyer formulated his theses while working closely with textbooks; the later work of the Braunschweig Commission drew on textbooks, but from a more detached point of view. Throughout, they laid less emphasis on pedagogical and subject specialist expertise. As a result, the recommendations were formulated from a more generalist scholarly perspective. It is a tribute to the coherence of Enno Meyer’s preparatory work that no inherent contradictions arose between Meyer’s detailed insights and the more general analysis of the Braunschweig Commission. The relevant findings of the theses tended to be distilled into the recommendations. For this reason – and not only because Enno Meyer chose to use the historical present tense – his theses come across as a historical narrative, whereas the recommendations read as a scholarly lexical article.

We can identify two abstraction processes as the theses were commuted to recommendations. The first process was one of contraction. Theses 10, 12 and 14 (concerning Pomerania and Silesia), for example, were combined to create Recommendation 4. As the principles were not affected, however, the change is of no major significance. On the other hand, the second process involved the exchanging of explanation for perspective. As an example, we can compare Thesis 11 and Recommendation 3, both short passages. The content of the two is similar, but the emphasis is different:

Thesis 11: 'The German rulers made no attempt to annex parts of Poland into their empire'; Recommendation 3: 'The tribute paid by Polish princes to the Emperor did not in any way imply the annexation of Poland'.

This clearly shows that Enno Meyer's thesis aimed to convey events in narrative form, whereas the Recommendation presented the key issue in what would now be described as constitutional terms. The thesis is couched in direct language, whereas the recommendation emphasises legitimacy rather than mutuality. Both approaches are defensible and indeed compatible, as they both fit the facts presented.

Fourth Observation: Differences

Some of the significant differences between the theses and the recommendations are due to the bilateral working methods of the Textbook Commission. Enno Meyer, working on his own, was not constrained by the need to come to an agreement with others. The bilateral workings of the Commission, however, involved multiple delays before agreement could be reached on some of the recommendations, such as Recommendation 4 (Silesia and Pomerania) and Recommendation 6 on the role of the Teutonic Knights. In both cases, the national bodies disagreed on general historiographical principles and resisted mediation. For the Teutonic Knights, the Commission was able to agree on a detailed syllabus organised in part chronologically and in part systematically. Enno Meyer's Thesis 16 on the 'Collapse of the Teutonic Order', on the other hand, was able to bypass the debate obstructing the recommendations. His narrative technique focuses on telling the story of the Order, thus avoiding the need for general principles.

A second set of differences have their roots in the political circumstances. In spite of his keen interest in history, Enno Meyer was not a political animal, and he drew up his theses at a time when Poland was not the focus for political disagreements in the way that it was in the 1970s, when the recommendations were being formulated.

This contrast is evident in the general style adopted in the two texts. The theses are written in timeless, well-expressed and balanced language, whereas the recommendations are couched in language unusually marked by contemporary events. This gives the clear impression that it is more important to study a period of history when it is recent. This statement is of course politically emotive rather than defensible historiographically. And such recommendations had consequences.

Polish national political issues were also exacerbated by the bilateral connections within the German-Polish Textbook Commission, and therefore influenced the wording of the recommendations. In 1939, Enno Meyer had been able to formulate

his Thesis 43 as ‘Germany and the Soviet Union agreed in a secret treaty to partition Poland’; the recommendations, on the other hand, omitted any mention of the Hitler–Stalin Pact for political reasons. The public debate about the recommendations was conducted somewhat insensitively, at some cost to the debaters’ academic credibility. The critics were admittedly influenced by factors beyond academia, and especially by the desire to shift the blame from the Germans to their Soviet allies, suggesting that Hitler would never have unleashed the war had he not agreed on the pact with Stalin. Nevertheless, the decision not to mention the Hitler–Stalin Pact was an error for a multitude of scholarly reasons. These included the self-imposed sense that once the recommendations had been published, it was necessary only to provide key factors to their various audiences; a sensitivity towards Polish colleagues; a desire to preserve harmony; worry that the Herder Institute in Marburg, whether by accident or design, had not been included; all honourable motives but, as we have seen, costly ones.

None of this proved problematic for Enno Meyer’s theses or the status they gained within the academic debates on German-Polish textbooks. Even today, any reader will learn much from them and gain respect for the author. For myself, my life has been enriched by my acquaintance with Enno Meyer.

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Thomas Strobel

How Significant Was Enno Meyer to the Joint German–Polish Textbook Commission?

'Meyer argued convincingly on various specific issues in the working groups, but in the plenary sessions he generally only spoke when presenting his well-founded textbook analyses; these were highly valued by his Polish colleagues, but were attacked on many sides because of the realistic conclusions he drew.'[1]

This assessment by Jörg K. Hoensch, Professor of East European History at Saarland University from 1972 to 2001, identifies some key aspects of the important contribution Enno Meyer made to the German–Polish Textbook Commission.

This article will focus particularly on two sets of questions. First, what role did Enno Meyer's 1956 Theses play in the activities of the Textbook Commission? And second, what aspects of content did Enno Meyer emphasise in the work of the Commission and what was his position in the organisational structure?

The Joint German–Polish Textbook Commission was set up in 1972 under the auspices of the Polish and German UNESCO Commissions; its task was to remove not only factual errors but also surplus political and ideological material from the history and geography books of both countries. Those involved were also expecting to foster a deeper level of dialogue between the specialist scholars in each country. Textbooks offered a good way into the dialogue, as they were shaped by the two opposing political systems and moreover had considerable significance in terms of both social policy and the politics of history. The scholars working on the project had to gauge the extent and feasibility of any changes, and there was also the possibility that others from different specialisms, and indeed from the wider political and public realm, might become involved.

The Consequences of the 1956 Theses

It was by no means a foregone conclusion that the Textbook Commission would be set up in 1972, nor that its existence thereafter was secure. As early as the 1950s, Enno Meyer had initiated attempts to establish a dialogue on textbooks between historians in the Federal Republic and in the Polish People's Republic. Other important participants included Gotthold Rhode, Georg Eckert and Gerard Labuda, and these were all involved in the German–Polish Textbook Commission that began its work fifteen years later. Enno Meyer's 47 Theses 'On the Presentation of German–Polish Relations in the Teaching of History' were significant for two reasons: first, because of the weight of history on either side and the almost total lack of contact between historians in the Federal Republic and Poland, and second, because Meyer himself – apart from his contact with the International Schoolbook Institute in Braunschweig, which published the Theses – was not constrained by institutional affiliation or by holding a university position. Meyer's Theses were much in demand, and the International Schoolbook Institute published a second edition, followed by a third edition in 1960. At the time, Meyer was much taken up with

revising the Theses, and he incorporated remarks from German historians during the summer of 1960. The impetus to set up an institutional framework for the dialogue about textbooks owed much to the difficult political context of the Cold War and the deepening rift that followed the Polish Spring of October 1956.

In 1960, Enno Meyer repeatedly pressed the International Schoolbook Institute to publish his revised Theses and to set up a conference for interested German and Polish historians. Georg Eckert's assistant Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf responded in May 1960: 'It is highly likely that there will be delays and the Poles will simply not come if we don't also invite historians from the German Democratic Republic, but this is something we can't do. Discussions will therefore have to continue in writing only, which we much regret.'[2]

Indeed, there was no further movement until November 1970, when Günter Berndt, the director of the Evangelical Academy in Berlin, hosted a conference entitled 'Germany in Polish Textbooks' and Enno Meyer attended. The conference was part of a series of seminars organised by the Evangelical Academy and the Poznań West-Institute on the subject of German–Polish issues in textbooks; until then, they had concentrated on German history textbooks, and Enno Meyer was able to move the discussion on with his analysis of Polish history textbooks. Meyer was unhappy with the polemical criticism of West Germans, with the fact that existing school textbooks thwarted attempts at rapprochement with Poland and with the *Ostkunde* recommendations of the Ministry of Culture's 1956 conference, which were repeated in a report after the conference and shortly afterwards published in a booklet entitled 'Poland: A Horror Story'. He was keen that the public debate in Germany about the need to amend textbooks and the efforts to convene conversations between West Germany and Poland about textbooks should get under way, initiated by the West German and Polish UNESCO Commissions and with the support of the foreign ministries of the two countries. Shortly before Christmas 1971, Georg Eckert hosted a preparatory meeting of the German participants in Braunschweig, during which Enno Meyer and the West Berlin geographer Wilhelm Wöhlke spoke about the drafting of Polish textbooks. At this point, Enno Meyer was not one of the figures taking a lead in the work, but acted instead as assistant and adviser.

As it happened, the official textbook conversations between West Germany and Poland, approved and enabled by the two countries and by UNESCO, began in February 1972 and coincided with the Federal German debates on the ratification of the Warsaw Pact that gave official recognition to the Oder-Neisse border. The Textbook Commission focused on the history of relations between the two countries, and treated the sensitive issues with particular care. This was evident in their most important publication, the *Recommendations for Textbooks on History and Geography in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Polish People's Republic*, which was published in both countries in 1976/1977. The book was the fruit of collaborative work lasting several years, and dealt with the sensitive points throughout the history of German–Polish relations; it included 26 recommendations on history and seven on geography. Apart from a few omissions (such as the secret additional protocol to the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and Katyń) and some formulation

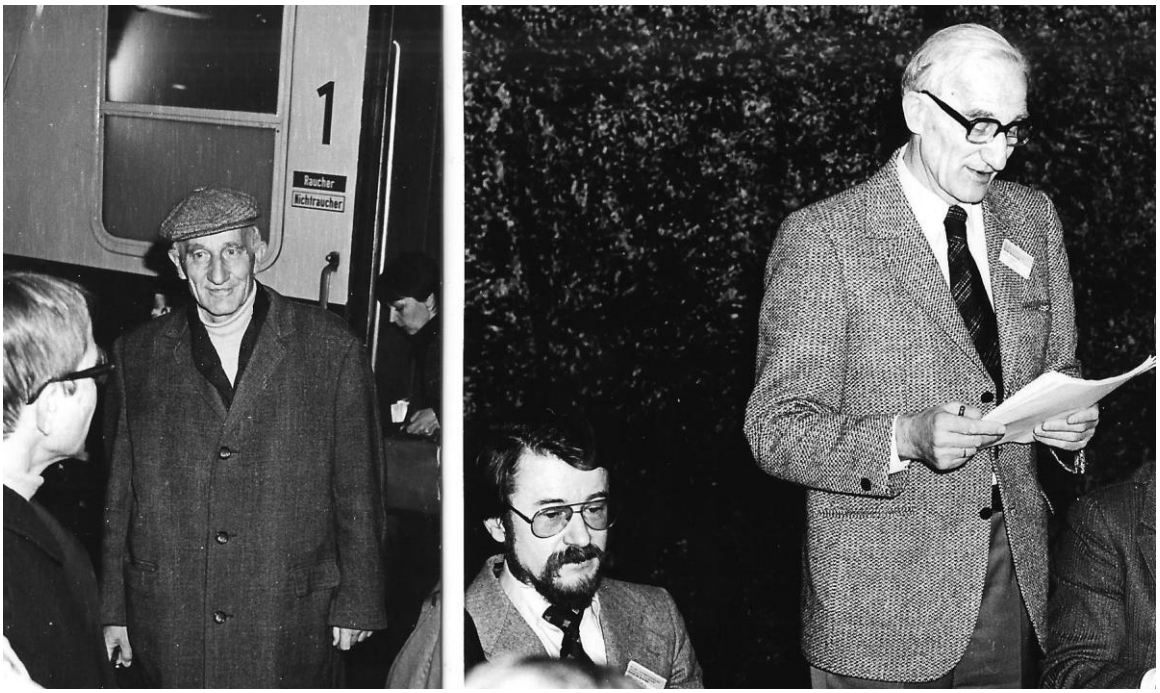
compromises (the Teutonic Knights, the interwar period, the expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe), the document was remarkable in that it was not a ‘catalogue of differences’ but instead achieved a fusion of German and Polish narratives.

The background to the decision that the recasting of the recommendations should, from the start, be a core part of the work of the Textbook Commission – which in the early years was still known as the Textbook Conference – is somewhat shrouded in mystery. No links with the Franco–German textbook conversations have been clearly identified. The discussions with France, however, had shown that it was possible to draft joint recommendations, and that it had been fruitful to adopt a chronological approach, leaving the most difficult episodes of the shared history of the two countries to the end of the process; this experience must have been useful in guiding the dialogue between Germany and Poland. Enno Meyer had always hoped that his 47 Theses, published in 1956, would serve as recommendations for textbook authors, and the participants in the textbook conversations saw them as a useful precedent. By the end of February 1972, the Textbook Conference had published 14 recommendations covering Antiquity up until the Second World War; in April, they expanded them to 17 recommendations. Over the next four years, the Textbook Commission worked on the general recommendations; the most challenging topics, it emerged, were the Teutonic Knights, the expulsions and above all, in recent history, the issues surrounding the ‘German Question’.

Enno Meyer’s Principal Concerns About Content, and His Position Within the Structure of the Textbook Commission

At the 1973 third German–Polish Textbook Conference in Braunschweig, Enno Meyer took the lead in the analysis of the representation of the Germans in Polish textbooks. The proceedings were audiotaped, so there is a record of his explicit criticism of the negative representation of the Prussians, of the Federal Republic as militaristic and revisionist as well as of the absence of any reference to the Jews in Polish historiography. Given that these conversations were being conducted within the Commission, Georg Eckert, the German chairman, diplomatically steered the conversation away from relatively direct criticism and onto safer ground. Enno Meyer nevertheless kept responsibility for this section of the agenda for meetings of the Commission for several years. Klaus Zernack summed it up as follows:

> “Fundamentally, we were clear that it was always best to leave the tasks related to teaching and textbooks in safe hands, as they then only took up a small amount of time in the expert discussions; generally, Zbigniew Kulak examined the German textbooks from the Polish point of view and Meyer examined the Polish ones. This pattern of mutual examination was a key principle from the very start, and it is amazing that they were able to sustain it throughout their work. For this core task, as reported at each conference meeting, we ensured it was in safe hands rather than leaving it to the younger participants.”[3]



Meeting of the German–Polish Textbook Commission, Poznań, 20–23 November 1978: Enno Meyer arriving at the station, and during the session.

Given the paucity of the documentation available, it is not possible to describe in detail Meyer's contributions to the negotiations on the recommendations between 1972 and 1976, but bearing in mind Jörg K. Hoensch's assessment quoted above, it seems clear that from 1977 onwards, over several years, Enno Meyer provided expert evaluation of Polish textbooks, either during meetings of the textbook conference or in internal briefings for the Georg Eckert Institute and the foreign ministry. He often observed that the result was 'slender', and that 'improvements to the history textbooks that had been suggested in conversation were not carried out'. This was a challenge to the Polish political personalities involved, who maintained that they had implemented the recommendations' changes. In October 1981, Enno Meyer wrote to Karl-Ernst Jeismann, the director of the Georg Eckert Institute, about a recently published Polish history textbook:

> "I am incensed that this should happen after nearly ten years of textbook conversations! We are backsliding into the darkness of chauvinistic nationalism: the Polish are being self-congratulatory and represent the Germans as having been murderers, robbers and tyrants for a thousand years, and the Russians as friendly and helpful. And in the image of a physically violent Prussian primary school teacher, the likeness to Bismarck is certainly not coincidental."[4]

Polish studies also proved that it was not until the late 1980s that the image of the Federal Republic as a militaristic and revisionist enemy finally vanished from Polish textbooks, having been merely watered down during the 1970s. Meyer had put his finger on the problem, and at the time his accurate criticism achieved its object. Thanks to his complaints, the textbook *Historia* by Gustav Markowski was withdrawn from use. When the new Polish chairman of the Textbook Commission, Antoni Czubiński, praised the new Polish history textbooks and sharply criticized the German ones at a conference in Loccum in 1985, Enno Meyer contradicted him publicly.

The discussions also turned to another area that he thought important: when it came to communicating the aims of the Textbook Commission to a wider, non-specialist public, Enno Meyer was one of the few participants who was not only a Polish speaker but also an experienced teacher; he was by inclination more right-wing in his sympathies, and – like Gotthold Rhode – was also able to persuade those among the expellee population groups who were critical of the Textbook Commission. It was therefore no coincidence that it was Enno Meyer who wrote a letter to the Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, in May 1983.

He informed the chancellor about the attacks on the Polish chair of the Textbook Commission, Władysław Markiewicz, who was removed from office a year later for internal Polish political reasons; he also called on Kohl to ensure that the new CDU-FDP Federal coalition government should give more explicit support to the continuation of the German–Polish textbook conversations. Within the Commission, Enno Meyer was seen as conservative, but not as politicised; Gotthold Rhode, in 1977, adduced this as a decisive point in his favour when he recommended Meyer to Hanna-Renate Laurien, the Minister for Culture in Rheinland-Pfalz, as a suitable candidate for the newly vacant position of director at the Georg Eckert Institute. Meyer was not appointed, among other possible reasons because he lacked an academic position.

Overall, however, the Textbook Commission both valued Enno Meyer and acknowledged his contribution. This was borne out, for example, when Włodzimierz Borodziej called him a ‘living legend’, and Czesław Łuczak identified him as a ‘true friend of Poland’. His persistence and thoroughness were highly prized; so was the contribution he made to good communication both within the Textbook Commission and in the public sphere. They also valued his defence of the legitimacy of different points of view and opinions in discussing historical matters. Looking back over his career, however, there were ways in which he was not fully appreciated and indeed, at some points, was undervalued. Some described him as ‘passive’, ‘seldom speaking up’, and Marian Wojciechowski called him ‘a monument to the German point of view’; the responses to Krzysztof Ruchniewicz’s 1990 survey about Enno Meyer among members of the Commission included some remarks suggesting that the academic specialists in the Textbook Commission were very conscious of prestige and university affiliation. Was it due to his age, or perhaps the fact that he was a practising teacher rather than a university professor, that Enno Meyer was not a member of the committee– in other words, not part of the inner circle – from 1977

onwards? He took part in the Commission's conferences until the mid-1980s, but his speeches became ever less frequent.

One of Enno Meyer's fundamental convictions was that 'textbook conversations should address textbooks, not the results of scholarly research'.[5] He was one of the few members of the Commission who persistently and faithfully insisted that its work should be closely linked with the practice of teaching. In a fitting tribute to Enno Meyer's hopes and expectations, the Textbook Commission has once again taken this to heart and since 2008 has left the recommendations behind and is now designing and creating a joint German–Polish history textbook.

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1 Jörg K. Hoensch, *Antworten auf die Fragen von Herrn Krzysztof Ruchniewicz*, Wrocław, n.d., p. 4. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz (Wrocław) made available to the author the comments by members of the Commission that he had received when compiling his master's dissertation in 1990. Cf. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, 'Enno Meyer a Polska i Polacy (1939–1990). Z badań nad początkami Wspólnej Komisji Podręcznikowej PRL – RFN', Wrocław 1994 (Prace Historyczne VII), Wrocław 1994.

2 Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf to Enno Meyer, 4.5.1960, K. Ruchniewicz's documents.

3 Author's interview with Klaus Zernack, 8.7.2003.

4 Enno Meyer to Karl-Ernst Jeismann, 19.10.1981, Bundesarchiv, N 1445/150.

4 Enno Meyer to Karl-Ernst Jeismann, 19.10.1981, Bundesarchiv, N 1445/150.

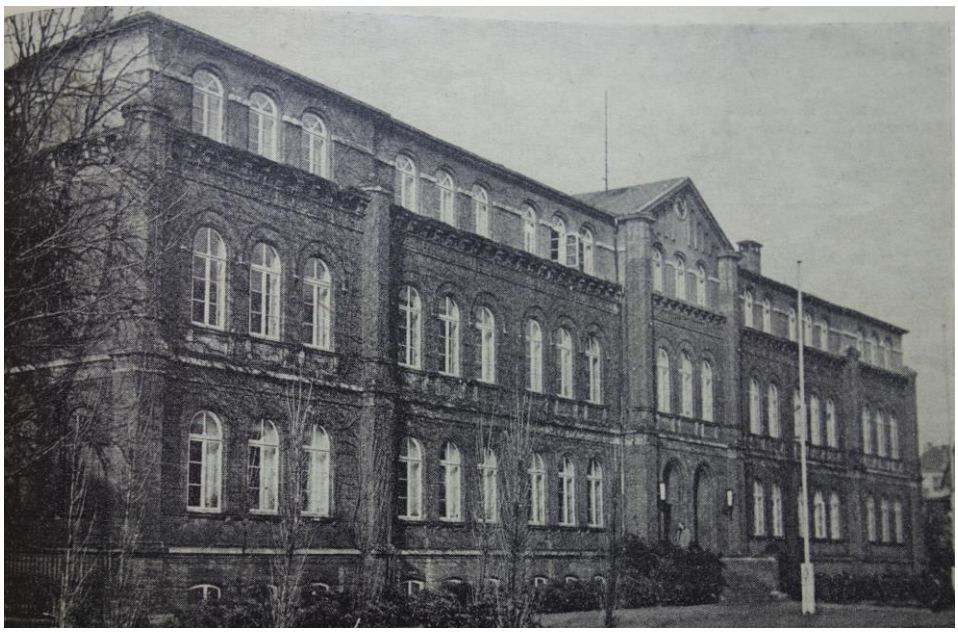
Burkhard Olschowsky

Enno Meyer as Remembered by His Colleagues

This essay is based on research in the publications of the Hinderburg School (Hindenburg-Gymnasium) from the 1950s to the 1970s, and on interviews with Enno Meyer's former teaching colleagues, Werner Broll, Dr. Hans-Jürgen Lorenz. Rolf Pottebaum and Matthias Schachtschneider.

The City of Oldenburg and Teaching at the Hindenburg School

The town of Oldenburg largely escaped destruction during the Second World War. Following the war, Oldenburg welcomed about 42,000 refugees and displaced persons from the former eastern provinces of the German Empire, increasing the population to over 100,000 and bestowing up Oldenburg the status of a city. The Canadian occupation forces used the Hindenburg School as their local headquarters until the autumn 1946. A short time later, the northern section of the school was requisitioned to serve as a refugee transit camp; combined with the shortage of fuel and furniture, this meant that teachers in the immediate post-war years were only able to provide very basic teaching. Space remained a challenge for a few years yet, and the increasing pupil numbers, caused by the sudden population growth, only compounded the difficulties.



The Hindenburg School in the 1950s

In 1954, Enno Meyer came from Wilhelmshaven to teach history, German and geography at the Hindenburg School. At the time, the staff included some older colleagues who had taught at the school since the beginning of the Weimar Republic, some who had served in the armed forces during the war and a few of the so-called *Flakhelfergeneration*, young men who had manned the anti-aircraft batteries as boys

at the end of the war. Enno Meyer was one of the middle age group, those who had been drafted into the *Wehrmacht* during the Second World War. His experiences on the Eastern Front had given him much food for thought, especially Nazi Germany's racist policies towards the Poles and the Jews. This had a major influence on his political thinking after 1945, though he kept his opinions largely to himself. Even in the school, he did not talk about how his war experiences had sparked his interest in Poland. Indirectly, however, these experiences played a huge part in shaping his work as a teacher. Unlike many other educators in the Federal Republic during the 1950s, he wanted to enable his students to develop a critical attitude towards National Socialism, and to give them a balanced understanding of the history of relations between Germany and Poland. He therefore looked for teaching materials on the recent history of Poland, and sought to contact Polish historians both within Poland and in exile.

Most of Meyer's colleagues at the Hindenburg School knew very little of this particular interest of his. Somewhat untypically for a member of the middle generation of teachers, he got on well with the younger staff members Rolf Pottebaum, Hans-Jürgen Lorenz and Werner Broll, especially since, like himself, they were teaching literature and history. He was by nature open to new ideas, though he would not adopt them without careful consideration. That would have run counter to his culturally conservative instincts.

Meyer mentored Rolf Pottebaum as a student teacher from 1954 to 1956. He told Pottebaum quite early on about his special interest, and when they were published he gave him a copy of the 47 Theses on German–Polish relations. Hans-Jürgen Lorenz was another teacher that he soon took into his confidence, as he worked with Enno Meyer in the teachers' library of the Hindenburg School. Meyer had already started to modernise this library. He invited Lorenz to help him, as the library was in urgent need of alterations, and this enabled him to devote more time to his exchanges with Polish historians. Lorenz thus gained greater insight into Meyer's interest in Germany's eastern neighbour. Werner Broll was a junior colleague in the history department; in a private conversation, Meyer told him about his work in the German Foreign Institute in Stuttgart between September 1939 and March 1940.

Those who knew him at the Hindenburg School describe his friendliness towards both colleagues and students and his eagerness to explain things, but also his tendency to keep his distance. He was precise in his teaching and provided a wealth of information, but his classes could be rather like lectures and go over the heads of the students. His keen scholarly interest focused above all on historical questions and relationships – on occasion, Rolf Pottebaum commented, his lessons could have benefited from a bit of 'didactic pruning'. In German classes, he approached his teaching from the history of literature and through explanation, rather than through the interpretation of the works studied.

Among His Colleagues

Enno Meyer was highly respected among his teaching colleagues for his helpfulness, his practical nature and his expertise in the subjects he taught. He was valued by

older and younger colleagues alike, in part no doubt because of his modesty, which made him reluctant to stand out among the teaching staff. His frequent election to the staff council of the Hindenburg School bears witness to his colleagues' high opinion of him. Matthias Schachtschneider, who taught with him between 1962 and 1966, described him as well-bred yet modest and impartial; Meyer's interest in Poland was, he said, somewhat unusual at the Hindenburg School, which was conservative in nature, as evidenced by the long-running discussions about its renaming.

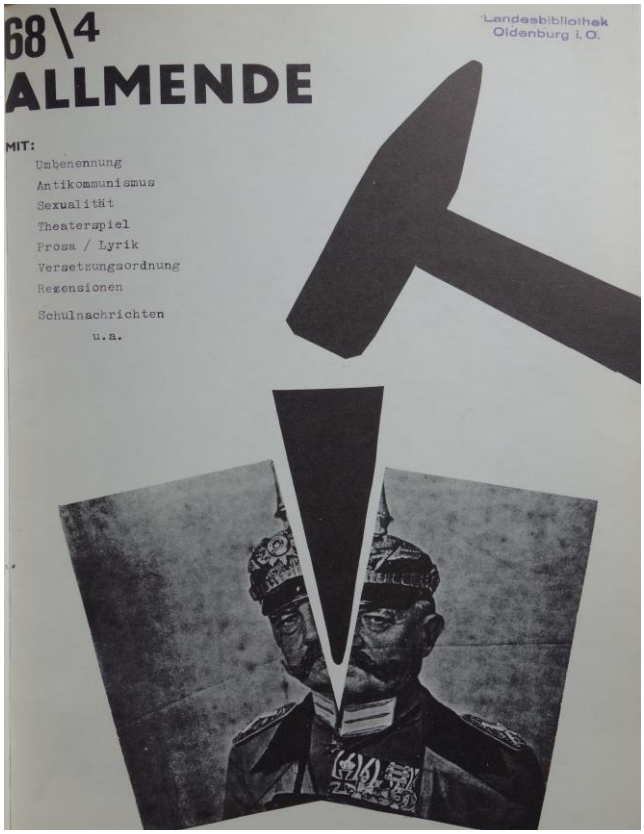
In class, 1957

Enno Meyer complained about the dire shortage of suitable materials to teach recent history in general and National Socialism in particular. In order to overcome this deficiency, he used books and studies from a variety of sources, including Polish authors. Werner Broll joined the staff at the Hindenburg School in 1958 and shared Meyer's interest in teaching about the Nazi era; he made particular use of the articles published in the *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich. Reactions to the two teachers' particular concern varied. Some students, especially those interested in history, paid careful attention during lessons. Others confronted the teachers with very direct questions about National Socialism, and around 1960 it was clear that the questions were coming from their parents. Indeed, the father of one student approached Werner Broll to ask him to show more kindness and consideration to the Nazi generation. It was Werner Broll who encouraged Enno Meyer to join the CDU in 1970. However, after a short while Meyer decided to discontinue his membership. He probably left because he disapproved of the Christian Democrats' attitude towards the Brandt-Sheel government's policies towards the East.

The Discussions About Renaming the Hindenburg School

From 1957, there had been debate among the teachers, and between teachers and students, about renaming the school. This debate heated up in 1968. The stumbling block was the name of the second president of the Weimar Republic, Paul von Hindenburg. Over the course of 1968, the debate became an outright argument between the students and the teachers.

There was a frank exchange of views in the December 1968 issue of the student newspaper *Allmende*, which from that year was being published independently of the school management.



Cover of the school magazine *Allmende*, no. 4, 1968

Wilfried Huismann, the student who served as chief editor of *Allmende*, remarked that

> "a problem must be discussed, and the renaming of the Hindenburg School is a problem (or we wouldn't be talking about it now). It would be criminal to nip the discussion in the bud, and would only lead to heightened tension. A discussion might well clear the air. For this reason, the theme of this edition of *Allmende* [December 1968, B.O.] is "Renaming". The magazine is appearing in spite of vigorous opposition from a group of alumni. [...] If we were not to make the magazine available for discussion of this highly topical matter, we would not be fulfilling our task to provide editorial objectivity, and it could be seen as withholding information and discussion material. It should also be

> pointed out that the great majority of both teachers and students are in favour of renaming the school."

The editorial board of *Allmende* suggested that the school be named after Bertold Brecht, arguing that he was 'an artist and a moralist who had brought German poetry to worldwide fame once more, in spite, depressingly, of never being given the recognition he deserved in this part of his home country'. The school magazine editors failed in their campaign to adopt Bertolt Brecht's name, but the debate raged on and two Oldenburg names were considered: those of a teacher, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), and the philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969). Theodor Heuß (1884–1963) and Otto Hahn (1879–1968) were also suggested. Some of the teachers in the history faculty argued for keeping the name 'Hindenburg School'.
Heinrich Wöhrmann, who taught German, history and English, had argued early on that the school magazine's editors should not make the renaming the theme of an issue. When they ignored his advice, he wrote a strongly-worded plea in the magazine that the name Hindenburg should be retained:

> "As a German, I am ashamed that this deep disagreement between teachers and their students should be taking place just at this time, when we are commemorating the events of 50 years ago with a sense of satisfaction and of patriotic pride. We are debating whether the school should still take its name from the man who was the most senior general in the First World War, who brought the German troops home safe and retained his top leadership position until July 1919, who gave his strong support in 1918 and 1919 when Friedrich Ebert was establishing the Weimar Republic and struggling with radical forces, while also defending German borderlands from threats from Poland."

The history and German teacher Manfred Rohlffs, who acted as adviser to the student editors of *Allmende*, also wrote a contribution to the issue. He argued, in the light of scholarship critical of Hindenburg, that it was time to demythologise the 'Great German' on the grounds that he had publicly asserted that the German army had remained undefeated on the battlefield but been 'stabbed in the back' – and in doing so had sanctioned a falsification of the facts that had serious consequences. Rohlffs was therefore unconvinced that the school should continue to bear Hindenburg's name.
Enno Meyer was the third teacher to contribute to the *Allmende*'s issue theme. His article addressed the most sensitive episode in the former president's career, his appointment of Hitler as Reich Chancellor. He asked:

> "Would another, in 1933 and in his place, have acted differently? It is unlikely. Hindenburg was obeying the call to serve the Res Publica, even at the risk of endangering his reputation, of making a mistake, and of being judged by history. All this did indeed happen. However, he deserves our respect, for not

> many are willing to selflessly serve the general good in times of need, whatever it may cost them."

It is worth noting here that Enno Meyer argued for keeping Paul von Hindenburg's name, invoking his alleged virtues of 'integrity, loyalty and trust'. The words were less those of Meyer the historian than of Meyer the contemporary, who as a politically interested school leaver had witnessed and carefully observed Hitler's 1933 power grab. Yet Meyer's judgment thirty years on is still surprising, even though it was well known that Hindenburg and Ludendorff had been fully aware in 1918 that they had lost the war, and yet refused to take responsibility for it during the armistice negotiations with the French Maréchal Foch. They preferred to push this responsibility onto men such as Matthias Erzberger. Labelled the 'November criminal', Erzberger paid with his life when he was assassinated in August 1921.

In 1969, a majority of the general school council chose the name Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium and small committee of eight teachers was appointed, under the chairmanship of Enno Meyer, to steer the name change process. The Oldenburg city department for school administration, however, refused their application. It was not until 1988 that the name of the school was changed, following a decision of the city council, and it became the Herbartgymnasium.

Teacher and Researcher

Following the resumption of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic and Poland, the German-Polish Textbook Commission was set up; it soon became clear that Enno Meyer, justifiably described as its guiding spirit, was the only school teacher among a membership of university teachers. He would occasionally make reference to this with a certain pride, though tinged with regret that he had not been able to follow a university career after 1945. It is clear, however, that as a teacher he had been free from institutional pressures and academic jealousies, and this had given him the independence and freedom to develop his theses. Moreover, his long experience of class teaching had endowed him with precise knowledge of where the lacunae in the content of history syllabuses were to be found.

The remarkable aspect of his career was his deep and wide-ranging commitment to Polish history, which he maintained alongside his regular teaching duties. In 1970, Enno Meyer was teaching at Oldenburg's evening school in order to supplement his earnings and provide for his wife and four children, for it was not until the last decade of his working life that grammar school teacher salaries improved appreciably.

In the 19th century and to a certain extent still in the Weimar Republic, it was not at all unusual for a working grammar school teacher to be engaged in active scholarship and to publish this research. Indeed, grammar school teachers were often more inclined to write works popularising scholarship and wide-ranging digests – and were arguably better qualified to do so.

Some of Enno Meyer's published works

Another such teacher was Bruno Gebhardt, who in 1891/1892 first published his *Handbuch der Deutschen Geschichte* (*Handbook of German History*), which is still recommended as useful to every student of history.
Enno Meyer, who after 1945 dedicated himself to scholarly research alongside his school teaching, was a significant exception, especially since his published works were not on educational or pedagogical subjects but were dedicated to the study of German, Polish and German Jewish history. With courage, determination and empathy he produced well-researched yet succinct works on complex issues. He has earned lasting admiration for this work as well as for his important commitment to dialogue between (West) German and Polish historians.

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