

“The Family – The Core of the Rebirth of Germany,” Article by School Councilor G. Wolff, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Germany (August 30, 1946)

Abstract

In the face of the profound breakdown of German society from dictatorship and war and the deracination of survivors under the difficult living conditions of the postwar period, the bourgeois Liberal Democratic Party in the Soviet occupation zone recommended refocusing on the family as the core of society. The family was to once again assume the central educational function for the next generation. State measures were supposed to help reestablish an ordered family life.

Source

“The family is a sanctuary not only religiously, but also socially and politically: for the possibility of all organic structuring of bourgeois society is given in nuclear form in the family, just as the oak is in the acorn.” With this central statement, W. H. Riehl developed the idea of the family nearly a hundred years ago in his marvelously vivid book. What the family meant in earlier times still appears to us today in the homey-tranquil paintings of Runge, Ludwig, Richter, or Knaus – it is really worthwhile to immerse ourselves in them during a quiet evening hour. We can also learn something from the numerous youthful accounts of German poets and writers, from Goethe to Kügelgen and Storm and Keller.

Since the days of Riehl, the economic and generative conditions of the family – and with them, the family’s shaping power as well – have changed fundamentally. Sombart, Weber, and Fischer have described this developmental process in their works. Older people are familiar with this loosening of the pedagogical role of the family from personal experience. Now, the Nazi regime, the Hitler war, and the collapse have inflicted deep and painful wounds on the family. No illusory pictures help here; what is called for is a firm look into the eye of gray reality. We must constantly remind ourselves: they celebrated Mother’s Days and took children out of the family through their forced integration into the [military] formations; they distributed Mother’s Crosses and trained young people systematically for war; they arranged mass baptisms and late baptisms and systematically loosened all religious ties. *Führer* speeches sang the praises of the family: *Führer* orders chased away and scattered family members to the winds. The warm coziness of the family was replaced by the cold discipline of the barracks. The blood sacrifice of the war was trivialized by propaganda into the procreation of war children. And now there is no family in Germany without sacrifice and loss. Millions of families are shrunken, mutilated, broken. Millions of German children are growing up without father and mother. The effects of attempts at political numbing and Nazi mass suggestion are still reverberating harshly and severely today; a weakened morality and a lax conscience are causing dissipation and criminality to rise steadily.

What is to be done? Studies of whether this is a transitory illness or a lasting injury offer no help here. What is needed is to do everything possible to give the family a piece of its educational power back. No matter how tight the living space, the house remains the natural community of the child and the place where it is raised. Even in the maelstrom of the present, the family is the biologically given unit and has the power of instinctive education. In daily coexistence every family member experiences integration, accommodation, and subordination.

The undermining forces would like to continue hollowing out our families, also in the present. Threats

come from the specters of deracination, the dissolution of all bonds, the lack of reverence. The terrible loss of men threatens the institution of monogamous marriage. And yet, alongside this shadow there is also light and brightness. See how the returning soldiers are awaited and greeted by mothers and children. Hear the pleas and prayers that rise to heaven from women and young people for those who are still far away. External and internal family care have helped and provided strength in countless dire cases. Anyone who knows how to observe young people also sees, alongside those who are struggling, alongside those who daily circumvent the law, the great majority of others who are still within the firm discipline of their families. The life and work community of the family proves itself in the mutual care of family members for one another. And this family life is at the same time the self-educating growth of the parents.

One thing must be clearly recognized: dying families have a society-destroying effect. Along with the family, every other community dies. The family has proven itself through millennia as a fundamental social construct, because from it flows the power of nature and of life as it is lived. Many other conditions are causally linked to the recovery of the family: work ethic, morality, education, property. Like the human being, the family, too, grows only by doing and acting. Therefore, no weakening of the educational power of the family. Therefore, promotion of all external preconditions of family life through an improvement of housing and clothing, diet and work. Give a new family to those who have become orphaned and alienated from their homeland. Let us give our special attention to the issue of illegitimate children.

And for this it is necessary that all – men and women – fulfill their political duty. When it comes to the woman's productive work, adequate attention must be paid to her nature. All women's work must facilitate and enable the combination of motherhood and work. The burden of raising children must be – at least in part – also a matter of the community. Existing marriages need protection and strengthening and promotion in these difficult days. The question of divorce must not be seen simply as a private matter between adults; rather, it must also be seen from the perspective of the needs and future of the children of the marriage. After all, the final models of education are and always will be father and mother.

That is why the LDP affirms its commitment to the family in its program with binding words: "The family is the primordial and germ cell of the community. As such, it must be restored and preserved; it is the indispensable precondition for the recovery of Germany." With our ballot, we should also profess the importance and strength of the family.

Source: G. Wolff, "Die Familie – der Kern der deutschen Wiedergeburt", in *Der Morgen*, Tageszeitung der Liberaldemokratischen Partei Deutschlands, August 30, 1946; reprinted in Udo Wengst and Hans Günther Hockerts, *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945*, Bd. 2/2: 1945–1949: *Die Zeit der Besatzungszonen. Sozialpolitik zwischen Kriegsende und der Gründung zweier deutscher Staaten. Dokumente*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001, No. 85, pp. 183–84.

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