HITLER YOUTH

The Role of Women in Nazi Germany

Citation: C N Trueman "The Role of Women in Nazi Germany"

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Women in Nazi Germany were to have a very specific role. Hitler was very clear about this. This role was that they should be good mothers bringing up children at home while their husbands worked. Outside of certain specialist fields, Hitler saw no reason why a woman should work. Education taught girls from the earliest of years that this was the lifestyle they should have.

From their earliest years, girls were taught in their schools that all good German women married at a young age to a proper German and that the wife’s task was to keep a decent home for her working husband and to have children.

One of the earliest laws passed by Hitler once he came to power in 1933, was the Law for the Encouragement of Marriage. This law stated that all newly married couples would get a government loan of 1000 marks which was about 9 months average income. 800,000 newly weds took up this offer. This loan was not to be simply paid back. The birth of one child meant that 25% of the loan did not have to be paid back. Two children meant that 50% of the loan need not be paid back. Four children meant that the entire loan was cleared.

The aim of the law was very simple – to encourage newly weds to have as many children as they could. There was also a more long term and sinister aspect to this : as Germany grew she would need more soldiers and mothers; hence a booming population was needed with young boys being groomed into being soldiers and young girls being groomed into being young mothers. If “lebensraum” was to be carried out, Hitler needed the population to fill the spaces gained in the eastern Europe. This attitude of deliberately boosting your nation’s population was finding favour in western Europe and not just in Nazi Germany. France, in particular, feared that its population was falling too quickly and banned abortions and contraception.

Such was the desire to increase the German population that in 1943, a law was discussed among Nazi leaders that all women – married or single – should have 4 children and that the fathers of these children had to be “racially pure”. Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, was particularly keen on this idea. If a family already had four children, the father from that family had to be released to father more children outside of his marriage. This law never came into being as even the Nazi leaders realised that this law would create social anarchy.

Women were not expected to work in Nazi Germany . In Weimar Germany there had been 100,000 female teachers, 3000 female doctors and 13,000 female musicians. Within months of Hitler coming to power, many female doctors and civil servants were sacked. This was followed by female teachers and lawyers. By the start of the Second World War, very few German women were in fulltime work. However, such was the skills shortage in Germany, that in 1937 a law was passed in 1937 which meant women had to do a “Duty Year”. This meant that they could work ‘patriotically’ in a factory etc. to help the Nazi’s “Economic Miracle”. The marriage loan was also abolished in this year.

As housewives and mothers, their lives were controlled. Women were not expected to wear make-up or trousers. The dyeing of hair was not allowed nor were perms. Only flat shoes were expected to be worn. Women were discouraged from slimming as this was considered bad for child birth. Women were encouraged to have a well built figure as slim women, so it was taught, would have problems in pregnancy…….Women were also discouraged from smoking – not because it was linked to problems with pregnancies – but because it was considered non-German to do so.

August 12th had been the birthday of Hitler’s mother. On this day each year, the Motherhood Cross was awarded to women who had given birth to the largest number of children. The gold cross went to women who had produced 8 children; silver was for 6 children and bronze was for 4 children

In Nazi Germany it was not considered a social problem if an unmarried woman had a child. In fact it was encouraged. The Nazis established Lebensborn’s which were buildings where selected unmarried women could go to get pregnant by a “racially pure” SS man. These were not buildings that were hidden away in some back street. The government openly publicised them and they had a white flag with a red dot in the middle to identify them to the public.

A common rhyme for women then was:

“Take hold of kettle, broom and pan,

Then you’ll surely get a man!

Shop and office leave alone, Your true life work lies at home.”

“In the Germanic nations there has never been anything else than equality of rights for women. Both sexes have their rights, their tasks, and these tasks were in the case of each equal in dignity and value, and therefore man and woman were on an equality.” Hitler in 1935

“The mission of women is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world. This is not at all as………unmodern as it sounds. The female bird pretties herself for her mate and hatches eggs for him. In exchange, the male takes care of gathering food, and stands guard and wards off the enemy.” Joseph Goebbels, writing in 1929.

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