

## CHAPTER VIII

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 \*\* STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF GERMAN  
 \*\* VOCATIONAL SYSTEM  
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There is always a possibility of difference of opinion on a problem like this. There are people who consider German Vocational Education System as very efficient and sound, while there are others who are never tired of <sup>ci</sup>criticising it. People talk and discuss about the reforms in German Vocational System. But this does not curtail the merits of the system which has perhaps enjoyed the best position in craft and industry throughout the world. The contribution of the vocational education system in helping West Germany to gain high industrial prestige in the economic world of today is definitely great and yet reforms and changes have become inevitable in this age of innovation and technological progress.

Strength of Apprenticeship

It is generally recognised that sound and systematic apprenticeship training has helped Germany considerably to

gain technical superiority and economic prosperity than most of the other European countries of the West. One of the most important strengths of this system is the close co-operation and joint partnership between public authorities, vocational schools, industries and employers' and workers' unions. Thus, apprenticeship has been accepted as a national responsibility and a supreme duty by all since more than a century.

The apprentice receives practical work-experience by on-the-job training. Here he comes in direct contact of work environment and feels the feeling of a worker. But essentially, he is a student and attends the school once or twice a week. It is found that most trainees enjoy their school time because it provides altogether different yet useful environment than they have in the undertaking. Again this provides a healthy co-ordination between theoretical and practical training.

Again it is this vocational training and educational system which is responsible for transition of adolescents from education to adult work in<sup>a</sup> comparatively very smooth way. It provides great psychological satisfaction to youth as well as to their parents and the youngsters feel the dignity of labour and have full scope for progress in the world of work according to their capacities. There is no gap for disappointment or frustration among the youth-a factor responsible for the stability and progress of the society as a whole.

Moreover, youths are fully protected by various laws and regulations against abusive use by the employers. There are special legislations for each major trade and occupation: details determine the relation between the youth and the employer. The youth has a right to education - along with occupational training - upto the age of 18 and the employer is obliged by law to release him from work for attending the part-time vocational schools. At the same time also it is his duty to attend these classes of related instruction regularly and sincerely. Thus for him, apprenticeship involves a right and a duty both. In the same way, it is also a right and duty to the employers also. They have a right to employ the apprentice and thus have equal opportunities in competitive world, but at the same time a supreme duty to train him in the most efficient and systematic way as they can.

At one time German Vocational Training system was fixed and rigid. It was practically very difficult to come to other line of training once apprenticeship was accepted. The scope for high<sup>er</sup> education was practically nil. But today German system of training has undergone a great change. Through the 'Second Channel' to education,<sup>an</sup> intelligent trainee has a scope and opportunity to higher studies and can reach to the level of university studies by and by. Hence today he has a wide scope for further studies according to his will and abilities.

Moreover today, there is a tendency to combine more and more apprenticeable trades to form a few broad trades and thus avoid overspecialisation. More emphasis is laid to broad 'Basic Training' today.

Again the trade lists change from time to time according to the requirements of the economic sector of the society. Old out of date trades are deleted and new trades find their place in the list. This shows the quick adaptability to the new requirements. The employers are given reasonable freedom of training according to their convenience and at the same time the apprentices receive what is needed for them, as they are also prepared for the final apprenticeship examinations.

As a matter of fact, a big factory or a large commercial undertaking employing several hundreds of workers has both a DUTY and a commercial INTEREST in providing adequate professional training: this point is not even discussed, it is always taken for granted.

In spite of its so called rigidity, the system of training here is greatly flexible. Despite the great volume of laws, regulations and agreements and contracts existing, there is considerable freedom of action permitting the employer and the controlling authorities to adjust training plans and methods to new technical requirements and the demands of new groups seeking training. Moreover, the employers,

sometimes pressed by skilled workers shortage - are more and more willing to make considerable investment in the training of youth.

Let us also remember that apprenticeship is also a 'work-oriented education' for out-of-school youth. This arrangement provides an alternative to rush to higher education. A trade certificate is considered a proof of educational achievement and can be easily comparable to middle or secondary school certificate. Apprenticeship provides a recognised educational standing to all youth which has its own importance from psychological as well as economic point of view.

Again, trade certificate facilitates greater mobility of labour throughout the country as it is recognised as professional efficiency. Moreover, now it has become possible for the youth to change the trade even after training and yet his training is not considered a waste at all - as it has created a certain discipline of mind and training of hands. This has helped in diminishing the importance of one basic weakness in apprenticeship system, that a young person's choice is unduly influenced by the narrowness of the local employment market.

#### Weakness of Apprenticeship

Yet the German vocational education system in its present form is liable to frequent criticism. Some people object to the

whole system while others see some defects in some parts and advocate radical changes. The extreme critic sees German apprenticeship as work and routine training and also feels that the whole system is an integral part of German economy. To them the apprenticeship, in a real sense, is a system of low cost labour. The schooling-related instruction in part-time vocational school - is very less.

It is true that at one time apprenticeship was considered as cheap labour and the employer tried to get maximum <sup>work</sup> from him for his personal profit but today the time and circumstances have changed and the tendency to look at him as cheap labour has practically disappeared. On the contrary, it is often said that today the apprenticeship training is becoming <sup>a</sup> more and more costly affair for the employers.

Some people feel that the age 14 or 15 is too premature to make decisions for the career or to choose the trade or occupation. It is generally 'supply' and 'demand' situation that plays a very prominent role rather than the aptitude or interest of the individual.

Some critics point out that this system helps to divide the society into the 'classes' - one whose children will go to secondary schools and university - a minority; and other whose children will go to work - a majority. While others feel that this is the most democratic system as it provides scope and

opportunities to all to get trained and to earn their bread. It ensures the right to each individual to education till the age of 18.

It is also felt that the theoretical instruction in part-time vocational school is not closely related to practical training. Again sometimes it is felt that as the trainees attend the part-time vocational school mostly once a week or at the most twice a week (in relatively few cases) there remains a good gap of time and the students are likely to forget or to lose interest in the continued topics when they come back to the class after a week.

The critics also point out that the existing apprenticeship laws are <sup>not</sup> uniform and deficient. At present vocational training is regulated by a series of tests: scattered provisions in federal laws on other subjects, State laws and above all, countless local orders and apprenticeship regulations established by the chambers of Artisan Trades (Handwerkskammer) and of the Industry and Commerce (Industrie und Handelskammer). It is suggested that there should be a basic law which would give priority to the interest of the nation and of the trainee.

It is also said that much of the apprenticeship period in west Germany is not used for training. An inquiry<sup>1</sup> involving nearly 4000 apprentices in Hessen and Nordrhein Westfalen shows

<sup>1</sup>Wolfgang Lempert/Heinrich Ebel 'Lehrzeitdauer, Ausbildungssystem und Ausbildungserfolg.' (Duration of Apprenticeship, system of Training and Its Effect). Verlag Rombach Freiburg im Breisgau, Auflage 1965, p.315.

a daily waste of time spent on work not related to the trainee's job ( mostly cleaning and transportation ) as follows :

Trainees	Daily Average Time Wasted
2 Salesmanship - shop girls	3.1 hours
- Baker	2.7 hours
- Butcher-mencutter	2.6 hours
- Bricklayer	1.9 hours
- Cabinet-maker	1.9 hours
- Electrician	1.4 hours
- Mechanic	1.2 hours
- Clerk	1.2 hours

The same study also showed that most employers disregarded the number of working hours per day laid down by the youth employment law. But this overwork did not compensate for the waste of time mentioned above. This indicates that not all the time of the apprentices is used for training as might have been expected.

Some critics also point out that the duration of training has become too standardised in Germany, (Three and three and half years) and does not take into consideration individual different capacities to learn. They feel that after careful study and



research, the period of training for some trades should be curtailed as desirable. But the others argue that the time required to give some quantity of knowledge and skills cannot be the only yardstick for determining the appropriate duration of an apprenticeship. We should know that the vocational training is also a process for mental, physical and spiritual development of the individual and the duration of the apprenticeship should be such that an adolescent of average intelligence can achieve the objectives set.

A severe critic pointed out that a typical German apprentice is an individual readily accepting his lot, willing to do considerable routine hard work, sometimes even passive and unquestioning, with a general attitude that an apprenticeship is a kind of purgatory through which one must pass before getting into an occupational heaven. 'I had to go through this,' is sometimes the only justification for the routine, boring uneducative experiences of the apprentices in certain workshops.

Perhaps, it is also felt that too many young persons are trained in trades. Also an apprentice in a production situation can seldom be given his theoretical lessons at the 'Right time' for helping him to master the practical experience.

It is also sometimes felt that there is an acute shortage of teachers and instructors for trainees and it is also found that some of the teachers are badly informed on trades and occupations and their knowledge is mainly theoretical and lags behind the rapid evolution of the Economy.

The Report<sup>1</sup> on Vocational Training and Occupational Prospects in the Federal Republic from series of articles published in STERN, a famous German Magazine, on vocational training and its future requirements points out that the present system of vocational training cannot meet the demands of the foreseeable structure changes. According to this Report, 'Today only about 15 percent of industrial and trade apprentices receive systematic training in apprenticeship workshops combining harmoniously theory and practice. Generally speaking, only large scale industries are now able to provide training of this type. In the craft trades particularly, 60 percent of apprentices are merely cheap manpower. On an average 2 to 3 times as many apprentices are trained in handicraft trades than are needed as skilled labour in this sector. This compels many of them to seek employment on large scale industry, where normally they can only occupy semi-skilled jobs.'

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<sup>1</sup>Bauer, L., Von Kornatzki, J. Lutz, B. 'Report Über Berufssichten und Berufsausbildung in der Bundesrepublik'. Der STERN Hamburg, Vol.16, No.52, of December 1963 to No.6, 9th Feb. 1964.

Some Observations

It may be noticed that the basic pattern of apprenticeship is highly traditional in its general structure. Some of the laws and regulations which govern the relationship between the employers and the apprentices are twenty five to fifty years old. Obviously there have been some changes but the training regulations, the trade descriptions, training syllabi and examination standards have changed little. The old administrative pattern has also remained largely unchanged. This is perhaps due to the fact that the German mind is generally against any hasty experimentation with vocational training as it affects the whole national economy. Consequently majority of them advocate that there should be balanced development and gradual changes in the existing system rather than risky experimentations. Since in-plant apprenticeship has proved fairly satisfactory, many members of the German Parliament, during the debate on the subject in 1964, supported the present system which combines in-plant training and related instruction in the vocational schools. Yet those who are in the field are conscious about the needs of the reforms. The extract from the 1965 Annual Report of the Government Commission of Experts on over-all economic development points out that the traditional system of vocational training, based on in-plant training and related instruction in part-time vocational schools is now open

to criticism.

One more important feature of the present day apprenticeship in Germany is the increased interest shown by industrial and commercial employers, by employers' organisations, and by associations of artisan craftsmen and other bodies representing business interests, in promoting the training facilities and improving the methods of training. Moreover, many large undertakings have established their own vocational schools and training shops for basic and advanced training, either independent or in co-operation with others.

Again, many vocational schools have been accepting a new role. Some of them have introduced new courses for giving basic practical training to apprentices. Others have arranged courses in which apprentices receive systematic further training in particularly all the important aspects of their work. Also modifications in the syllabi of related instruction have rendered related instruction a more efficient tool in support of the skill training process. This is the direct result of close co-operation between the vocational schools and local business.

The European Economic Community, of which West Germany is also one of the members, is showing more and more interest in vocational training and research in this field. The International Labour Organisation also shows keen interest in promoting

vocational education and training programmes. It is also observed that now more and more emphasis is laid on Basic training rather than narrow specialisation. Apprenticeship is increasingly taking up the role of a system of work-oriented education for out-of-school youth.

Training by stages is also becoming more and more popular and some of the large undertakings are already experimenting with the scheme. Also group training schemes and group training workshops are receiving more and more encouragements. A need for retraining and further training of adults is also recognised with accelerating technical and economic changes.

It is also felt that the time available for training has decreased because the annual working hours have been shortened without introducing a corresponding prolongation of the period of apprenticeship. Working conditions have also changed and so have the conditions of training. Today technical development essentially requires more of the judicious blend of pedagogically well-designed basic training at vocational school or in a training workshops, alongwith carefully planned related instruction and controlled work experience. This can be provided only by a well-balanced apprenticeship programme.

There is also some anxiety among the employers because of ever-increasing costs of training. Some experts fear that there is a risk that higher training costs may gradually diminish the employers' interest in apprenticeship training programme. The

The pressure on the public authorities to take over a large share of the training costs is likely to become correspondingly stronger. It is also observed that the traditional distinction between 'males' jobs' and 'females' jobs' is fast disappearing. More and more girls are coming forward for vocational training. Wider opportunities will have to be provided for girls for entering apprenticeship programme in still larger numbers. The problem of training and retraining of the working mothers will also need greater emphasis.

In short, the vocational education and training programme including apprenticeship in West Germany will have not only to retain its traditional central position in the training of the youth but also will have to expand into new areas of economic activities for a rapidly increasing number of adolescents.

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