

READING

Refusing to Pledge Allegiance

Joachim Fest's father—a devout Catholic and the headmaster of an elementary school—refused to demonstrate loyalty to the Nazis, even after the new law to “restore” the civil service. He remained active in the Catholic Central Party and the Reichsbanner (a pro-democracy group). Fest describes the consequences his father, a civil servant because he worked in a school, faced for his refusal to show loyalty:

On April 20, 1933, my father was summoned to Lichtenberg Town Hall . . . and informed by Volz, the state commissar responsible for the exercise of the business of the borough mayor, that he was suspended from public service, effective immediately. When my father asked what he was accused of, the official responded in a sergeant-majorish manner: “You will be informed of that in due course!” But he was a civil servant, objected my father, to which Volz replied, “You can tell our Führer that. He’ll be very impressed.” . . .

As he was on his way to the exit, all at once the building he knew so well seemed unfamiliar. It was the same with the staff, some of whom he had known for years; suddenly, one after the other, their eyes were avoiding his. At his school, to which he went immediately, it was no different, even in his office; everything from the cupboards to the stationery already seemed to have been replaced. The first person he bumped into was his colleague Markwitz who had clearly already been informed. “Fest, old man!” he said, after my father had spoken a few explanatory words. “Did it have to be like this?” And when my father replied, “Yes, it had to be!,” Markwitz objected: “No, don’t tell me that! It’s something I learned early: there’s no ‘must’ when it comes to stupidity!”

On April 22 . . . my father was summoned again. Remaining seated and without offering my father a chair, the temporary mayor, reading from a prepared text, formally notified him that he was relieved of his duties as headmaster of the Twentieth Elementary School and was suspended until further notice. Given as grounds for the suspension were his senior positions in the [Catholic Center] party and in the Reichsbanner [a pro-democracy group founded during the Weimar years], as well as his “public speeches disparaging the Führer and other high-ranking National Socialists”. . . Under the circumstances there was no longer any guarantee that he would “at all times support without reservation the national state,” as the law put it . . . As he spoke these curt words, he continued leafing through my father’s file and one of the pages fell to the floor—no doubt intentionally,

thought my father. Volz clearly expected my father to pick it up. My father, however, remained motionless, as he later reported; not for one moment did he consider going down on his knees in front of the mayor.

Volz then continued in a noticeably sharper tone. As well as being summarily suspended, my father was required within two days to formally transfer charge of the school to his successor, Markwitz. He would be informed in writing of the details. With a gesture that was part dismissal, part shooing away to the door, the provisional mayor added that for the time being my father was not allowed to take up any employment. Everything proceeded as if according to a plan, said my father, when he came to talk about what happened.¹

Ricarda Huch, a 70-year-old poet and writer, also refused to pledge allegiance to Hitler. She resigned from the prestigious Prussian Academy of Arts with this letter:

Heidelberg, April 9, 1933

Dear President von Schillings:

Let me first thank you for the warm interest you have taken in having me remain in the Academy. I would very much like you to understand why I cannot follow your wish. That a German's feelings are German, I would consider to be just about self-evident, but the definition of what is German, and what acting in a German manner means—those are things where opinions differ. What the present government prescribes by way of patriotic convictions is not my kind of Germanism. The centralization, the use of compulsion, the brutal methods, the defamation of those who hold different convictions, the boastful self-praise—these are matters which I consider un-German and disastrous. As I consider the divergence between this opinion of mine and that being ordered by the state, I find it impossible to remain in an Academy that is a part of the state. You say that the declaration submitted to me by the Academy would not prevent me from the free expression of my opinions. But “loyal cooperation, in the spirit of the changed historical situation, on matters affecting national and cultural tasks that fall within the jurisdiction of the Academy” requires an agreement with the government's program which in my case does not exist. Besides, I would find no newspaper or magazine that would print an opposition opinion. Thus the right to free expression of opinion would remain quite theoretical

¹ Joachim Fest, *Not I: Memoirs of a German Childhood*, trans. Martin Chalmers (New York: Other Press, 2006), 46–48. Reprinted by permission from Other Press, LLC, and Atlantic Books, UK.

I hereby resign from the Academy.

S. Ricarda Huch²

² Ricarda Huch, "'Not My Kind of Germanism': A Resignation from the Academy," in *The Nazi Years: A Documentary History*, ed. Joachim Remak (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1969), 162.