

Letters from the *Labor Service* – between Drill and Family (working title)

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During nearly ten years between the issuance of the Reich Labor Service Law in 1935 and the end of World War II in Europe in 1945, hundreds of thousands of young adults were conscripted into the *Reich Labor Service (RAD)* annually. Their service and the organization in which they performed it were examined in particular with regard to the organization's power-position in the so-called Third Reich and in respect to its conceptual tension between shaping youth and creating economic benefit. Research in organizational history and educational science has also been dedicated to the ideals, theories, and instruments of 'education' in the *RAD*, focusing on the procedures in its camps. The attempt to create a 'New German Man' is also focused on in a dissertation from the field of cultural anthropology. In contrast, the perspective of the young adults themselves is completely underrepresented. Pioneer studies turn primarily to the memoir literature of former leaders in the organization. Larger investigations that focus on the portrayals of 'simple' working men and women do not yet exist. Only individual chapters in biographically oriented works provide some relief.

My dissertation project addresses this gap and examines four letter series with several hundred texts and other life-writing-testimonies of 'simple' labor men and women from the years 1936, 1940, 1942, and 1943. In respect to methodology, it connects micro- and macro-perspective approaches at their interface and operates with close reading as well as an interdisciplinarily informed qualitative content analysis with MAXQDA. The, chronologically speaking, broad range of sources from seven years of the national socialist dictatorship provides insight into individual positioning during different periods of national socialist rule and the *RAD*'s institutional history. On the one hand, my aim is to trace the perspective of the young adults on the *Labor Service*, on the other hand I investigate their positioning within the communication spaces of the national socialist society. Since service in the *RAD* meant at least six months of separation from home for the young adults almost all communication with one's family now took place by letter. This shift to the letter and these letters' similar context of origin in *Labor Service* camps make them highly productive sources. They allow a view 'from below' on youth during the national socialist dictatorship and at one of the regime's educational institutions. Thanks to the characteristics of the genre, insights into the concerns, everyday life and relationships of quite 'normal' families can be given at the same time that the peculiarities of the communication spaces of Nazi society can be illuminated.

Therefore, my investigation shows how reactions to the *Labor Service* meandered between reluctance and acceptance, adaptation and reinterpretation, and demonstrates the significance of writing for such processes. It highlights how the young adults characterized their own role in society and traces the limits of what was possible to be said. The interspace created by letters thus becomes the key to my investigation, which focuses on six months in the lives of four young adults. Six months during which they were subjected to the tightened grip and the disciplining efforts of the National Socialist educational apparatus.