

Karl Baun 1878–1959

Teacher and local politician in Göppingen

Karl Baun's life began on January 1, 1878, in Schorndorf. During World War I, he experienced the murderous trench warfare in France at the Somme and Verdun. He was wounded and sent to a military hospital. This experience and the horrific images of war turned him into a pacifist. He became a member of the Peace Society ('Friedensgesellschaft').

In 1919, he joined the SPD ('Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands'), was elected to the city council, and became the SPD faction leader in Göppingen City Hall. He also joined the 'Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold' (Black-Red-Gold Imperial Banner), which was formed to defend the republic against its enemies. Mr. Kienle, who was chairman of the Göppingen Socialist Workers' Youth ('Sozialistische Arbeiterjugend') for many years, recalled:

'Mayor Baun was the best man in the SPD. He gave the party a tremendous boost. And he also received the most votes in the local council elections.'

Karl Baun was also successful in his professional life. In 1930, he was appointed principal of the 'Evangelische Knabenschule' (Protestant boys' school, now Uhland Elementary School and Uhland Secondary School). In his private life, he was now a family man with five sons, all born in quick succession except for the youngest, to feed and a small house, built in 1930, to finance.

Karl Baun was a close friend of the (liberal) mayor Hartmann and the painter Baumann. Hartmann described him in a speech of thanks to the municipal council as *'warm-hearted, intelligent, fearless, helpful, spirited, (with) independent judgment, (and) a tendency toward sharp criticism'*.

Karl Baun was heavily involved in youth work, went hiking with young people, and helped build the Boßlerhaus of the 'Naturfreunde' (Nature Lovers).

With the Nazis coming to power, Baun came under considerable pressure: on the one hand, he had spoken out in the local council against the construction of a military airfield in Göppingen, as he was generally opposed to the rearmament of the Wehrmacht. On the other hand, he had warned against discrimination against Jews and was labeled a 'Jew servant' by young people at the time.



School class of 1922 at the Protestant boys' school with their teacher Karl Baun

A former student, Mr. Ventzki, reported:

'There was also a Jewish student named Steiner in my class. His father had been awarded the Iron Cross First Class in World War I. Mr. Baun put a stop to his exclusion. He told us that this student was just as valuable as the others and should not be disadvantaged. We accepted that!'

Baun had good reason to fear being arrested by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp. He therefore resigned from the SPD on March 9, 1933, four days after the Reichstag elections, and relinquished his seat on the local council. He hoped that the Nazis would leave him alone.

But the pressure did not let up. In August 1933, he received a letter from the examination office of the State Ministry:

'Through your work as leader of the SPD faction in the municipal council, you consciously opposed the national renewal of Germany and at the same time hindered the national education of the schoolchildren under your supervision.'

Allegedly, the Nazi mayor Dr. Pack and the Nazi district leader Baptist intervened to prevent Karl Baun from being dismissed from the teaching profession, which would have been a disaster for him and his family. As a result, Baun lost his position as headmaster in March 1934 and was demoted to assistant teacher at a school in Stuttgart. The family man lived alone in Stuttgart for a year, after which he commuted daily from Göppingen to his school in Stuttgart.

However, the Nazis continued to pressure him and threatened to expel him from Göppingen. This would have meant that he and his family would also have lost their own house. Plagued by a guilty conscience – he became seriously ill as a result – Karl Baun joined the NSDAP (Nazi Party) in 1937. He was now offered the prospect of a job in Göppingen. However, admission to the „Partei“ was subject to one condition: he also had to take on an official position.

Karl Baun agreed to become administrator of the NSV (National Socialist People's Welfare Organization). He considered this organization to be 'apolitical'. (The association, which was affiliated with the NSDAP, dealt with social issues such as kindergartens, domestic help, railway station services, and carried out collections for the 'Winter Relief Fund' – although, of course, only 'Aryan' citizens benefited from this).

The Nazis kept Baun waiting. It was not until November 1939 that he was temporarily transferred to the 'Hilfsschule' (special needs school) in Göppingen. Against his will, he was now assigned the role of local group leader of the NSV in the Reusch district. Karl Baun wrote in a letter dated 1946: *'I performed my official duties faithfully and honestly, without joy and with the utmost restraint, as I was always viewed with suspicion by the party. In 1942, despite all the danger, I resigned from my post because I no longer wanted to collect money for the war fund. I feel guilty that I allowed myself to be deceived by Hitler's pseudo-social behavior.'*

Tragically, after the collapse of Nazi rule in 1945, Karl Baun was banned from working and his assets were frozen. In the denazification proceedings, the chairman of the Göppingen local committee of the trade union federation insisted that Karl Baun be assigned to Level II, the 'incriminated'. On the other hand, Baun received broad support from various well-known Göppingen democrats such as architect Immanuel Hohlbauch, former mayor Otto Hartmann, and Konrad Eisig, co-owner of the Netter & Eisig company, who had fled. Ultimately, Karl Baun was classified as a 'follower' in the denazification proceedings – the same level as the Nazi mayor Dr. Pack! – and had to pay a fine of 800 Reichsmarks. In public, he was shunned by his former SPD comrades as a 'renegade' and 'traitor'.

But he did not complain about the verdict against him. No, he admitted his guilt for having worked for the NSDAP. His health deteriorated: he suffered from 'nervous exhaustion' and also lost his sight in his left eye in an accident. In addition, his cash assets were depleted. His concern was for

his wife, whom he wanted to know was taken care of. For this reason, he wrote several letters to the state administration requesting a pension. At the age of 70, after more than 50 years of service, he was finally granted two-thirds of the usual pension benefits. Karl Baun died on May 14, 1959, in Göppingen at the age of 81.

Angelika Taudte