

A PROGRAM TO FOSTER
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
IN GERMANY

I. GENERAL STATEMENT

1. THE PROBLEM

The development by the German people of their political independence in a federal structure and along democratic lines, in close association with the free peoples of Western Europe, has from the outset been one of the basic objectives of the occupation. Whether this objective can be realized depends upon the German people. It cannot be imposed by the occupation.

In respect of this objective there are in Germany two trends which are diametrically opposed. On the one hand there is evidence that the large majority of the German people wish to live under a democratic governmental and social structure, to enjoy the individual rights and freedoms which we associate with democracy, and to exercise their rights as citizens in shaping of governmental and political policy. They have a record in German history to support them. Over the century before the first World War there was in many parts of Germany a slow but steady increase in recognition of the rights of the individual citizen to enjoy personal liberty and to participate actively in government. This movement lost ground when economic and social difficulties led to increasing centralization of power and the use of enabling acts under the Weimar Republic, and disappeared completely during the Nazi period. Since 1945 there has been an encouraging revival of interest, reflected to some extent in the political parties, but more especially in the organization of citizens' groups for the discussion of public questions, to seek information on governmental activities and policies, and for active participation in public affairs, especially at the local level.

On the other hand, the weight of the existing German governmental and political system and tradition stands against this development, as it stood against the limited gains of the last century. The larger part of the German people have long lived under and been conditioned to authoritarian forms and practices in government. There has been a widely accepted concept that the state is not the creature and embodiment of the people, but a superior entity of which the people are the servants rather than the master. Adequate information upon public affairs is not readily available to the ordinary citizen, and public opinion usually is of little weight. Authoritarian forms and practices have crept over into non-governmental organizations such as the political parties (even those with a democratic philosophy), business and industry, and to considerable extent the trade unions, and directly affect a large part of the life of the individual German citizen today. As a result, the German people generally lack an understanding of and experience in the exercise of democratic rights and duties. There has been too limited a public and individual interest in political and governmental affairs, partly because such interest ap-

pears to many Germans to be futile under existing political conditions and partly because of a tradition that these are the exclusive fields of those who have been educated for the purpose.

It is evident that there are many individual Germans who are interested in public affairs and who are aware of these conditions and want to change them. As individuals they lack the influence to overcome the entrenched system. The key to success is to arouse public interest in the political and governmental system and its problems, to make the public conscious of those factors which operate against its interests, and to find means by which informed public opinion may be used effectively to accomplish the necessary reforms.

Various groups and associations already organized offer a nucleus for such a movement. Analysis shows, however, that their present interests and activities are too general and lack direction. They need programs which will center their efforts and their potential strength upon specific reforms and which will attract a much wider popular support than those groups now enjoy.

Furthermore, it is vital to interest German youth and persuade them to become active participants. Today the great majority dislike and distrust the existing parties and political system. Very evidently a liberal German political life will never be realized through the older generations alone, and at some stage the responsibility for German public life must pass to the younger generation. If the existing vacuum is not filled with democratic ideals, it will be filled by principles alien to our objectives. Youth's disinterest exists because the German political system appears to them to offer no affirmative solution of the problems which confront them and to bar them from solution of these problems by their own efforts. (See Part II, Program Item 6, p. 19)

Any such programs must be German in character and effectuation. Otherwise they will not attract public support nor will the accomplishments be permanent. Foreign domination of such a movement or the imposition of alien patterns of thought or practice must be scrupulously avoided. But if these limitations be kept always in mind, it is proper to extend aid and advice to German individuals and groups in their efforts to secure reform.

2. THE PROGRAM

A review of present German activity in the fields of politics and government shows a very broad range. These activities are undertaken by:

- a. Local groups organized to discuss governmental problems.
- b. Bund- and Land-wide organizations to support specific programs.