

POST-WAR YOUTH ORGANIZATION

Trade union youth groups are only one of many youth organizations in every German city. The churches, political parties, hiking and sport clubs all have their youth sections. In addition international organizations like Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and YMCA have their local units, and in the American Zone of Germany, the army's youth program, GYA (German Youth Activities Program) plays an important role. At the suggestion of U. S. Military Government, Youth Councils or Youth Parliaments (Jugendringe, Jugendparlamente) were organized shortly after the war in German cities of the U. S. Zone to bring all youth organizations together to work on common problems and thus to prevent their isolation from one another. Some of these city Youth Councils have achieved a genuine cooperative relationship among their member groups, while at the other end of the scale some serve merely as forums and clearing houses where information is exchanged but where sharp political and ideological differences have stood in the way of positive, constructive effort. In these latter situations, trade union youth usually finds itself in a minority which is regularly outvoted. In the former, labor representatives have been able to achieve status and leadership within the community's youth movement.

The post-World War II German youth movement bears no relationship to the pre- and post-World War I youth movement (Jugendbewegung). The latter originated as a spontaneous rebellion of youth against German authoritarianism and middle-class conventions, and continued as a youth-conscious, youth-directed movement. The present day youth movement by contrast consists of a series of youth sections of parent organizations, differing from the main organization chiefly in the age of their members and in the organization of a program presumably adapted to this age representation. To varying degrees, present day youth groups are self-governing, but they are not independent. They are, in fact, the result of an effort by many German institutions not to die out with the present generation.

The normal continuous growth of German organizations was cut into by the twelve years of the Nazi regime and by the physical loss of a large part of the generation which is now between 25 and 40 years of age. This loss in time, manpower, and in continuity has given a frenzied quality to the recruitment of young people in the present-day "youth movement" and a more than zealous attention to their training.

The present organization of trade union youth is no exception to this general line of youth organization development, but an additional factor, special to the labor movement, has affected the union groups. Before 1933, union youth groups chiefly served the purpose of stimulating vocational interest among young workers. The mass youth organizations for these boys and girls at that time were chiefly the youth sections of the Socialist and to a lesser extent the other parties which had some worker membership (Communist, Center, Socialist-Labor, etc.). This reflected the political affiliation of the trade unions of that period. The trade unions today, in contrast to those of before 1933, have no political or denominational ties, and because working youth shares the general indifference of all German youth to political party affiliations, it can be interested in an organization like trade union youth which is part of the labor movement but without political party affiliation.