An observer attending a meeting of German trade union leaders almost anywhere in the American Zone today would be impressed by the preponderance of grey heads and aging faces among those assembled. It is to help solve this fundamental problem of the trade unions today—the lack of young, qualified leaders—that the old Academy of Labor at Frankfurt University was reopened recently. Closed since 1933, this school formerly trained hundreds of able labor leaders and educators who must now furnish the backbone of trade unionism until young men can take their places.

Most of these older men were also leaders in the years before 1933. During the Nazi regime many of them paid for their trade union activity by long years in concentration camps. Although these confinements and restrictions weakened them physically they immediately joined their fellow workingmen in 1945 when Military Government authorized the reorganization of unions which Hitler had destroyed. It can be understood that these men were called to high posts in preference to younger men better able to carry the burdens of organizing and operating a trade union. For by the end of the war, many of the younger men who in ordinary times would be approaching the age when they would be expected to assume the greatest responsibilities were either dead or in the custody of the Allies. Gradually, many who were prisoners of war were released to return to their homes and working-places. But they are handicapped in their efforts to take the lead in the work of the unions which they have joined. The older leaders may lack youth, but the younger men lack both experience and training.

Forbidden During Nazi Regime

During 13 years of the Hitler government Germans were forbidden to conduct trade union activities. For the youth of Germany during that period, there was no opportunity to take an active part in trade union meetings or to play a role in the protection of workers’ health, safety, or financial interests within the plant.

By Albert A. Mavrinac

There was no chance to gain the experience necessary for good leadership in democratic organizations. At the same time, while there was no opportunity for gaining experience in these practical aspects, there was no way to study the history of trade unionism, or to discuss formally under competent teachers the problems facing organized workingmen.

This situation has been a source of concern to officers of Military Government and to the German leaders themselves. During the early months of occupation these younger men were gaining experience in practical union affairs in their work councils and trade unions. But their theoretical training was being neglected. However, gradually plans for eliminating this gap in training were taking shape, along patterns familiar to many of Germany’s present day union leaders.

First Group of Students

The first long step to provide well-trained and educated union men for the new workingmen’s organizations was taken on Saturday, 12 April 1947 when the Academy of Labor was re-opened at the University at Frankfurt/M.

Sixty men and women are the first students in the new Academy. They come from all parts of Germany: Some 15 are from the British Zone, three are from the Russian Zone, one from Berlin, one is from the French Zone, and the rest are from the American Zone. Their average age is 29 years. Almost all of them have held positions in the last 18 months as shop stewards in their local factories, or as trade union organizers, or as minor trade union administrators. All of them have been selected for this advanced training because they show great possibilities for developing into able leaders. Their expenses are paid by their local unions and they will be reimbursed for the wages which they will lose. In some cases, the employer has assumed a part of the financial obligation.

Training for Union Leaders

The Academy of Labor was first organized in 1921 by the German trade unions as part of the University of Frankfurt. It was planned as a higher-
Education Stressed At Youth Conference

A three-day conference of German youth leaders from all parts of Hesse, the first to be held in the Land in conjunction with Military Government and US Army German Youth Activities officers, concluded at Assmannshausen with a declaration against a “soft drink-and-baseball” type of program for German youth.

The German youth officials, who spoke out for a youth activities plan based on discussion groups, forums, movies, and folk dancing, were assured by American delegates that the US Army is supporting a program aimed at educational rather than sports interest.

Sponsored by the Hessian Land Youth Committee in conjunction with the OMGH Youth Activities Branch, the meeting sought to improve the functioning of Hesse’s 43 local youth councils and lay the groundwork for a summer camping program. Although facilities are available to accommodate a total of 80,000 youngsters for two-week outings, lack of qualified counsellors will force a considerable reduction in this number, while the shortage of food may close the program out entirely.

German delegates felt it inadvisable to undertake any camping activity this summer, unless a daily ration of 2,800 calories can be assured.

The majority of the German delegation expressed opposition to the sponsoring of youth groups by political parties, allowed under terms of a recent MG regulation. OMGH Youth Activities Chief W. Hayes Beall, who outlined the new MG youth code, pointed out that the regulation was merely permissive, rather than obligatory.

Dr. Erwin Stein, Hessian Minister of Education, told of his interest in a widely-diversified youth program with many types of voluntary youth organizations participating. He voiced a conviction that German youth groups must be led by young persons, instead of adults. He commended the MG youth policy and expressed appreciation for the US Army’s contributions.

education training ground for the unions’ future leaders. Each year, from 1921 to 1933, some hundred men and women from all parts of Germany were given college-level knowledge in economics, political science, history, philosophy, psychology, and the fundamentals of trade union administration, organization, journalism, and services.

In 1933, the Academy was closed by the Hitler government. But in the meantime, many of the highest German trade union leaders had studied the year-long course, which afforded not only class-room training but also an opportunity to apply theories in jobs of junior administrative importance in trade union headquarters, newspapers, labor courts, and the offices of governmental agencies. Professors at the University of Frankfurt were used to supplement the staff of four or five full-time professors on the rolls of the Academy. Many of the classes were held in conjunction with the civil university classes. Today again, the Academy is working closely with the University.

In 1933, each student lived as he wished. Today, the heavily-damaged city of Frankfurt requires a pooling of resources. Now, some 35 of the students are billeted in the former headquarters of the Frankfurt unions. Great problems have been overcome to obtain the necessary stoves, beds, bedding, eating utensils, and office equipment. These 60 students in whom the German trade unions are placing great confidence are attending classes at the University of Frankfurt, under very difficult conditions.

In a few weeks, they will be spending some of their time in the offices of the Frankfurter Rundschau, in the bureaus of the Regional Labor Office, or assisting in the Chambers of the judges of the Frankfurt Labor Court. Thus they will be gaining the practical and theoretical experience which German trade union leaders and MG officers hope will fit them to carry on the work of the German trade unions.