Operation Better Kids

by Lawrence G. Derthick
Chief, Education Branch
E&CR Division, OMG Bavaria

Since the beginning of the occupation, US Military Government has advocated a three-fold program for reform of the German public school system: free tuition, school books and teaching materials; six years of elementary school for all students, and abolition of the "two-track" system.

Some progress has been made. Bavaria has passed a law granting free text books and tuition, while Bremen has incorporated certain reforms in its state constitution. But no reforms have been effected in the remaining two states of the US Zone—Hesse and Württemberg-Baden.

Elimination of the "two-track" system is the crux of the reform favored by Military Government. Under the pre-occupation system, all children went to free public schools for four years, then by paying tuition a relatively small group changed over to secondary schools for a 10th grade diploma or to prepare for university.

The non-paying students continued four more years in elementary schools for a total of eight years. Then generally their school days were over, because it was almost impossible to qualify for entrance into universities.

Under the proposed reform—advocated the past 100 years by many German educators themselves—the public schools would consist of six years of compulsory elementary education followed by six years of voluntary secondary education. All 12 years would be free to all students.

In the following article, Mr. Derthick cites the most common German objections to reform, and answers each.

Many questions, raised at public forums in Bavaria concerning school reform, follow a common pattern and seem to center around three main issues, namely:

- Involving financial questions, the extension of the elementary school to six years, and the extension of full-time compulsory education from eight to nine years.

- In every forum some German is sure to say something like this: "In Germany today we are a poor and bombed-out country. We would like to have all of these fine things for our children, but we simply cannot afford them; we are not rich like America."

The answers to this objection are numerous, sound and convincing. First, let us consider the financial issues:

- People constitute the most precious resource of a nation. Existing conditions in Germany make it more urgent, not less urgent, to invest in people through education. To the degree that the people can be made more skilled, more creative, and better citizens through education, to that degree will Germany correct adverse economic and social ills.

- This truth is not based upon personal opinion or judgment, but upon a scientific research throughout the world which has demonstrated that the education of people is the most important factor in determining their economic and social welfare.

- Money spent for education is an investment in people which yields a return of many fold, and it cannot be viewed in the light of many other governmental expenditures which permit restrictions and curtailments during hard times. Germany can afford the cost of school reform and she cannot afford to miss making this investment.

2. School reform involves a long-time program and the increasing expenses will be gradual. One cannot view the cost of school reform alone on the basis of existing economic conditions, but should look into the future when the present evidences of economic conditions in general will have matured, thus making less

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burdensome the task of supporting public education.

3. Bavaria is not even giving her children their proper share of the money now available. Little more than five percent of the state's income is spent for education. In many American communities as much as 63 percent or more is invested in education. Thus, the excuse that America is rich and can do these things for her children is not sound in the sense that these American communities simply give more of what they have for their children's sake.

One way to begin the cost of school reform might be to give Bavarian children their fair share of the money already available and certainly, as state income increases, the children should have a greater share.

4. Research on problems of public finance will reveal more adequate methods for supporting public education. We have not had the resources to do more than scratch the surface on this problem, but we have found out enough to know that new methods of taxation, collection, and distribution of funds as between state and local communities will make the educational load easier to carry.

5. In every audience there will be substantial German citizens who will most heartily agree that in the past Germany has been able to develop resources for building one of the greatest military machines the world has ever seen and that a people sufficiently productive to come back and do this a second time are sufficiently productive to finance an adequate educational program and to build school buildings in the place of magnificent barracks.

6. After all, to have an adequate improved production and improved school system only requires children, materials, adults and an organization to use these resources as effectively as they were used to build a great war machine. Children, materials and adults are available in Bavaria in great abundance. The effective organization for utilizing these resources can be achieved once again and for a vastly better purpose.

THE SECOND of the three major issues relates to secondary education, specifically to the restriction of the time allowance for the Gymnasium from nine to seven years resulting from the extension of common education in the elementary school for all children from 4 to 6 years.

Critics of this program contend that this will lower the proud standards of the Gymnasium because the so-called gifted pupils, having entered these schools two years later, will have insufficient time in which to achieve the established standards. For example, because training in Latin for nine years is considered essential to success in the university and in life, it is contended by conservative elements that seven years is too short a time allowance for the proper teaching of this subject.

Most likely it will not be able to convince the most conservative of the people that they are mistaken, but it will be found that the majority will react very thoughtfully to positive answers; some will agree heartily and some will be converted.

Actually, school reform is designed to raise the level of secondary education, not to lower it. There are several good arguments to support this answer. The Nazis eliminated the last year of the high school back in 1938. German committees, working with Military Government, have recommended that this 13th school year be reintroduced as soon as possible.

Therefore, to extend common elementary education two years would reduce the Gymnasium program by only one year and not by two years and would give the children to the Gymnasium at a more mature age when their achievements could be greater. Furthermore, it can be emphasized that the two years during which the children would be retained in elementary school would in themselves be fruitful years and cannot be viewed as lost years.

Another answer for this same issue grows out of the feeling by secondary teachers that they have too many students in their schools who are not really suited for academic studies of the college preparatory type. This is true because of the following conditions: (1) The process of selection is really not very thorough because of the absence of modern guidance and testing techniques; (2) the selection is made too early, at the end of the fourth school year; (3) thousands of students who enter secondary schools are not preparing for the university at all, but for a special diploma which is given at the end of the 10th year.

We want to better this situation (1) through improvement of the procedures of selection for this type of school, (2) through postponement of the selection to the end of the sixth school year, and (3) by the creation of a new type of secondary school for the great masses of the people.

This is an especially popular feature because this proposed new type of secondary school will open up high school opportunities of the kind suited to the needs of those who have been misfits in the old type schools. It will also open the doors to many thousands of boys and girls who have never had the chance of a high school education.

INCIDENTALLY, this proposed new school will most nearly resemble the American high school, and German educators with much enthusiasm have themselves set the pattern for this school and are rapidly completing plans for its organization.

Thus, this plan will certainly raise standards and not lower them; first because a practical secondary education will gradually be made available to all children; second, because the Gymnasium will be freed to do the job for which it is intended.

Many Germans in considering this issue are likewise impressed by the following views: that it is undemocratic to separate the small group of so-called gifted pupils at such an early age and that it tends to accentuate the problem of class distinction; that at the tender age of 10 or the end of the fourth grade it is too early to compel many children to make unalterable vocational choices; that the trends toward a longer period of common elementary education are world-wide.

It is often advantageous to explain that a scientific research project has been suggested which would be (Continued on page 29)