German Politicians Observe US Elections

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THE QUIETNESS of the US elections, the accessibility of top political leaders, the democratic character of state universities and the great number of large automobiles were few of the impressions four German political leaders brought back from a recent visit to the United States. The four made more than 70 official contacts, including conferences, interviews, broadcasts and meetings.

The four men, representing the two major political parties—Social Democratic and Christian Democratic Union—in the US Zone, left last October for a 30-day visit to observe the national elections and political and economic life in generally in America.

They were Dr. Werner Hilpert, chairman of the CDU in Hesse and Hessian deputy minister president and finance minister; Erwin Schoettle, chairman of the SPD in Wuerttemberg-Baden, Stuttgart publisher and member of the Bizonal Economic Council; Waldemar von Knoeringen, chairman of the SPD in Bavaria, and Ernst Mueller-Hermann, deputy chairman of the CDU, Bremen.

Arrangements for the trip were made by the Civil Affairs Division, Department of the Army, and the Civil Administration Division, OMGUS, which provided the escort officer. Many former Military Government officials, now living in the United States, personally assisted in making the trip a success, as well as State Department, newspaper, radio and political figures.

The trip took the delegates to many eastern and mid-west cities including Boston, New York City, Washington, Minneapolis and Detroit. Election day was spent observing the process of an American election in Rochester, N.Y.

The first reaction of the Germans was surprise at seeing cities with no bomb damage. They also were impressed by the number and size of automobiles in the United States. A member of the party attempted to count them on a main street but finally gave up. In a broadcast later, he confessed he was particularly amazed at the size of the ordinary cars, remarking that in Germany such autos would be owned only by very rich people or officials of Military Government.

The accessibility of political leaders, even in the heat of the presidential campaign, was a source of wonder and satisfaction to the Germans. Political figures were generous with their time in explaining the issues and mechanics of a national election.

The Germans remarked about the quiet way in which elections were conducted, adding that there seemed to be more excitement after election than before it was held, in contrast to elections as conducted in Germany. The fact that the election took place on a week day rather than on a Sunday seemed peculiar to them.

Generally, they were unwilling to comment either before or after the elections, saying they regarded this as an American matter and not some-

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Louis Wehle, Rochester businessman, shows the German political leaders a photograph of himself and President Truman shaking hands. Mr. Wehle entertained the Germans at his hunting lodge. (Left to right) Ernst Mueller-Herman (Bremen); Dr. Werner Hilpert (Hesse); Waldemar von Knoeringen (Bavaria); Mr. Wehle; Erwin Schoettle (Wuerttemberg-Baden), and Mr. Kelly, escort officer and author of this article. (Photo by Campbell, Rochester, N.Y.)

JANUARY 11, 1949
thing about which they should express opinions.

However, they were in accord on the idea that it would be less damaging to their interests and to the workings of the Marshall Plan if there were no time lapse between elections and the day when the President and the new Congress took office in 1949. They regarded a Congress friendly to the Administration as favorable to European recovery.

On the subject of German recovery, they stated that as yet there were not too many signs of the workings of the Economic Cooperative Administration, but believed this undoubtedly was due to the fact that it had not yet emerged from the pipeline. On many occasions all the members said they based their hopes on a European recovery rather than merely a German recovery. Their sentiments indicated thinking along broader lines than might be expected, and did much to create a favorable impression.

Newspaper interviews were frequent and everyone in the party developed "flash bulb blindness" as a result of the many photographs taken. The newspaper interviews were not of first class quality, even though reporters were briefed beforehand on the background of each member of the party. Although at least three of the Germans had traveled extensively and, therefore, had seen cities of no small size, the visitors were continually asked their impressions about the tall buildings in the United States.

The reporters showed more interest in Lise Koch (principal in the recent controversy over the reduction of her war crimes sentence), and whether the Germans were ready to take up arms against an enemy, than they were in German recovery or progress in setting up a stable form of government.

Probably the poorest interview was in Washington. Misquotes on the Russian situation were so common during the first few days that the Germans were very cagey afterwards and would make only the most conservative statements or refuse opinions altogether.

The attitude of the American people was friendly and helpful. This can be accounted for partly by the fact that the non-Nazi background of the group was stressed in a paper prepared and distributed beforehand to each person meeting the party. This fact also was given good publicity by the newspaper reporters, one of the helpful things that can be placed to their credit.

Particularly gratifying was the interest shown and the cooperation offered by former members of Military Government. Among these were Mr. Henry Parkman, who had been governmental administration adviser, CINCEUR, and director of CAD, OMGUS; Mr. Richard M. Scammon, chief, Political Activities Branch CAD; Mr. Saymour Bolton, Political Affairs Branch, CAD; Mr. William Kelmsley, Manpower Division, OMGUS; Dr. Carl Friedrich, governmental affairs adviser, OMGUS; Lt. Col. Robert Philpott, area commander, OMG Bavaria; Mr. Lawrence Dawson, formerly of UNRRA, now with the State Department; Mr. William Draper, Jr., Economics Adviser, CINCEUR and director of Economics Division, OMGUS, and now Undersecretary of the Army.

AFL and CIO officials, jointly and individually, were very cooperative in giving the visitors time and entertainment as well as explaining the part organized labor plays in the United States.

In Concord, Mass., they were very much impressed to learn that the head of the board of selectmen was a man who had not been born in the United States. Dr. Hilpert remarked that this gave him renewed hope that refugees and expellees could be absorbed into the German population to take their rightful place in the political parties. Upon viewing a bullet hole from the Revolutionary War, carefully framed for posterity, Mr. von Knoerigen told the selectmen that if they were short of bullet holes in Concord, he would gladly ship them as many as they wanted from Munich, where they were badly overstocked.

The idea of a state university, where people of ordinary means are offered higher education, was revealing. They expressed great interest in the setup of the University of Minnesota, contrasting conditions there with the difficulties of German students in obtaining higher education, excepting those favored either by wealth or family position.

All four of the group spoke at the faculty luncheon given by the president of the university, each reporting that he had learned information that could be taken back to Germany and used to advantage.

Perhaps the two high points in the trip were Washington and Detroit. In Washington, they were impressed with the city itself, and with the people they met at the Pentagon and in the State Department.

In Detroit they visited the Ford plant at River Rouge. The plant employs about 90,000 persons and is delivering some 5,700 cars a day. To see a car start at one end of the production line as just a frame and emerge at the other end as a completed vehicle interested the visitors particularly.

Altogether, the trip successfully accomplished its purpose. There is no doubt that many impressions of the United States were corrected by the sights and the contacts these political leaders made. The visit should result in greater understanding and cooperation as they discuss with other Germans what they have seen of the organization and production of the United States.

Institute Established

An Institute of Public Affairs has been established by Military Government in Frankfurt to serve as a center for visiting professors, public officials and other experts who come to Germany as a part of the Military Government exchange program; a center for developing in-service training for civil servants; a distribution center for political and social science literature from the United States and other democratic countries; a reference and a research center in the fields of social sciences, public administration, and community organization; and a center to further the development of institutional services in the field of public health and public welfare.