MGO Teaches Democracy

— Reorientation at the "Grassroots"

Article

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RECENTLY a Military Government officer (MGO) received a visit from a local German district official who, having just been caught in the clutches of a local town meeting, appeared before the MGO with a worried look on his face and seemingly quite distraught.

"What is wrong?" the MGO asked.

"Ja, was ist diese 'reorientation' which you are having?" he wanted to know.

The MGO smiled, asked the official to take a chair, and then proceeded to give the official a little briefing on the purposes of town meetings, public forums and discussion groups. As it went on, the look of worry on the old man's face gradually gave place to an expression of shock, until finally the old man, unable to contain himself any longer, burst out with the retort:

"Ja, but the people—they are becoming too educated!"

In that single statement this official, in all seriousness and obviously unaware of its implications, voiced one of the greatest indictments against that ideology which has become traditional among German officialdom, and which Military Government has undertaken to eradicate.

BUT MORE IMPORTANT, the incident constitutes the best indicator of the effectiveness of the work which the MGO's are doing in the field. When German officials begin to complain about their constituents being in the political "know," then our mission in Germany is being achieved.

It is no easy task to implement this program called "Reorientation." When it was reported that during the month of October, more than a half million Bavarian citizens participated in town meetings, public forums, discussion groups and film showings, it was easily seen that many MGO's had sacrificed personal comfort and worked far beyond the normal hours of duty in order to make that possible.

Again, when the Markt Oberdorf MGO announced that the held a town hall meeting in Oberguenzengurenburg with 600 persons present, that meant the two and half hours which he spent at the meeting were small as compared to the time and effort spent in preliminary preparation, in arranging publicity, and in urging county officials to attend.

Then there was the case of the MGO who, in an effort to solve a difficult housing problem, held nine town hall meetings without a total of more than 1,200 in attendance. Dare one venture the thought that Straubing may one day spearhead a revolt for true democracy? Yet, this was merely one of many cases where MG representatives in the field have been demonstrating their devotion to the cause of a democratic Germany.

AT THE SAME TIME, there has been growing evidence that their efforts to stimulate community discussion are bearing fruit in community action. To support this, have been two notable examples:

Recently a town-hall meeting was called in Marbach, Ebern county, upon the occasion of the sudden dismissal of a local school teacher by state authorities. Convinced that the dismissal was unjustified, and after sharp debate of the issue with officials the citizens of Marbach adopted a resolution demanding the reinstatement of the teacher.

Apparently it was quite a new experience for German officials to find their action challenged by the entire citizenry of a community. The result was a revocation of the order of dismissal, followed by an investigation of the case, and a final admission on the part of state authorities that a mistake had been made. Certainly it might be said that the citizens in Marbach were beginning to "catch on."

As an example of a somewhat different nature were the general results of the local forum and group discussions in conjunction with the Bavarian legislatures' consideration of a revision of the legislature election law. Efforts in stimulating public discussion of the issue between proportional representation on one hand, and plurality elections in single member constituencies on the other, are bearing fruit.

Many Bavarian citizens are now being won to the cause of reform who previously were never aware that it was possible to have any better representation in the legislature than now exists. And, though legislative delegates are not being overwhelmed with letters and petitions from an enthused citizenry, the mere fact that the issue has been placed before the people for open discussion is having a definite effect upon the deliberations of the legislature.

TO BE COMMENDED are the ingenuity and foresight in introducing techniques and methods hitherto unique in the annals of the reorientation program, and thereby demonstrating what individual initiative as well as cooperative enterprise can achieve under the freedom of democracy. A few examples can be cited—

Melrichstadt MGO, recognizing that there were more than 1,900 needy children in his county, called a meeting of philanthropic-minded citizens and interested associations to determine the best means of assuring a happy Christmas to those children. At this meeting it was proposed that all local agencies unite and pool their

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efforts in a common plan, with the outcome that a community chest was organized such as is common in the United States. The MGO reported that this plan proved a huge success, and that DM 435 ($130.50) were turned in to the chest on the first day alone.

Bad Toelz MGO has encouraged the holding of a series of dances for the purpose of raising funds for needy refugees and undernourished children. These dances, ostensibly held under the auspices of the county welfare agencies, are not only producing funds, but are proving a most effective means of revolutionizing German taste in dancing. The MGO reported that the Viennese waltz is gradually giving place to that form of rhythmic gymnastics permitting an individuality of interpretation and of freedom of expression—the "jitterbug."

Aibling MGO, believing that the economic recovery of his county might be hastened by bringing its industrial and handicraft products to the attention of a wider public, aroused the interest of local businessmen and officials in holding a public exhibition along lines somewhat similar to the county fair in rural areas of the United States. The fair, held during the last two weeks of October, proved quite a success. The MGO reported that it was attended by more than 20,000 persons, and that orders amounting to DM 1,000,000 ($300,000) were taken by the 95 exhibitors.

Mindelheim MGO, desiring to draw local German officials closer to Military Government but finding it difficult to call upon them all personally, has adopted the practice of sending out to the mayors of his county a periodic information bulletin under the title "Do You Know." Included are items relative to MG action and changes in policy, as well as suggestions of a reorientation nature. A periodic bulletin of this nature provides a means not only of passing on information, but what is perhaps of even greater value, serves to remind German officials that Military Government is active and interested in what officials are doing.

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