Inter-Faith Councils

GERMAN leaders have now become interested in participating in a movement to replace intolerance, hostility and brutality in human relations with understanding, friendliness, good will and cooperation.

This mission in Germany, beginning March 30, 1948, was the result of an invitation by the Military Governor to Dr. Everett R. Clinchy, president of the International Council of Christians and Jews, to organize interested German leaders into working councils for an education program among Protestants, Catholics and Jews.

The program was to be accomplished through the schools, universities, churches and synagogues, clubs, business and professional associations, labor unions, farmers’ organizations, press, radio and film. In interviews with leading citizens in the major cities in the US Zone in October 1947, Dr. Clinchy had discovered not only an interest in a movement to moderate existing intolerances, but a readiness to participate in forming local councils.

Particular interest was first shown in Munich and it was chosen as the first city to concentrate upon in the development of a local council. Dr. Karl Scharnagl, then mayor of Munich, and Dr. Anton Fingerle, city superintendent of schools, assumed leadership for developing a council.

Educational leaders were called together by Dr. Fingerle, and leading citizens by Dr. Scharnagl.

It was agreed to form a local council on a pattern similar to that which the American Conference of Christians and Jews had developed during its 20 years of growth. The Munich leaders adopted the name “Gesellschaft fuer Christlich-Juedische Zusammenarbeit” (Council for Christian and Jewish Cooperation) and announced on July 15, 1948, the organization of the first council in Germany at a meeting attended by 53 outstanding citizens. Dr. Karl Scharnagl, Dr. Ernst Lichtenstein and Dr. Spanier became the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish co-chairmen respectively.

Through a grant of funds from the National Conference of Christians and Jews in the United States it was possible for the Munich council to engage Dr. Joseph Brandlmeier as full-time director on Sept. 1. Dr. Brandlmeier has completed the organization of an educational organizations committee, a religious organizations committee and a civic committee, with a membership of 80 leaders.

These committees are being orientated in monthly meetings on human relations problems with emphasis on development in the community of a will to improve relations among its people. The Munich council should be in a position to do a constructive job next year in creating interest in other organizations and helping with speakers and program materials.

At the same time the Munich committee was being developed, contact was made with leaders in other cities in the American Zone. Twelve German delegates were selected for the International Conference on Human Relations which was held in Fribourg, Switzerland, July 21-28, 1948.

Chosen from the cities in which it was planned to establish councils, these delegates included Protestants, Catholics and Jews from among the clergy, educators, business and professional men and government officials.

THE FRIBOURG conference was one of the first international conferences attended by Germans since the war. Not only did they welcome a new fellowship with people of other nations, but also they made a contribution to alleviate some of the existing international tensions resulting from the war. These delegates have given important aid to the

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development of German councils, generally as members of the organizing committees. Some have written reports for newspapers in their community or their professional and trade magazines. Others have discussed the conference on the radio and before local organizations.

Organizing committees for the formation of boards of directors for other local councils were created early in July 1948, in Frankfurt, Wiesbaden, Stuttgart and Ausburg. An average of 18 community leaders from these gatherings addressed by Dr. Clinchy, who was visiting Germany while en route to the Fribourg conference in Switzerland. Many German participants expressed the view: “This is something that must become a part of the German life.”

Opportunity to promote the councils program came with the visit of the Rev. Edward V. Cardinal to Germany as an educational expert for Military Government. During September he addressed a public meeting in the Munich city hall, attended by 160 persons, on the theme “Prejudice—Our Common Enemy.” He participated in a committee meeting in Wiesbaden and addressed a group in Frankfurt. He also addressed 20 Catholic leaders in Stuttgart with most of the Catholic members on the Stuttgart board of directors present.

In October, organization of the Wiesbaden and Stuttgart councils was started. When the Wiesbaden council was formally organized on Nov. 18, 33 of the 36 who had agreed to serve on the board of directors were present. The other three were out of the city on business trips. At the close of the meeting, a person in the audience said: “With the spirit shown this evening ... this movement is going to succeed in Wiesbaden and you can count on whatever help you need from all of us.” Dr. Fritz Reich, a graduate from Bonn University in comparative religions, was chosen director.

Other councils have been organized in the larger cities. To assist their work, Military Government has appropriated funds under its reorientation program to aid the initiation of these German councils with the understanding that the councils would receive part of their financial support from German contributions. Military Government also offered to give consideration to council directors, who possessed required qualifications, for inclusion in the reorientation program of sending Germans to the United States for 90 days to observe and study the work of the National Conference of Christians and Jews and related organizations as a part of the training for their job. This program is now in operation.

Since February, directors Dr. Joseph Brandmeier of Munich, Peter Schmidt of Stuttgart and Dr. Wolfgang Lentz of Frankfurt have been in America studying the work of the National Conference of Christians and Jews in its local and national offices. In addition, Mr. Bernhard Mueller, Protestant layman and businessman in Stuttgart, and Dr. Karl Scharnagl, Catholic layman and Munich’s former mayor, have spent 45 days each in America studying the National Conference.

The main problem in inter-faith work in Germany today is to develop German literature to meet the needs of the local councils in enlisting interest and developing programs. A translation of Sterling Brown’s “Primer on Intergroup Relations” has been completed and is being printed. The English report of the Oxford Conference 1946 “Foundations of our Civilization” is being translated for publication. Experience has revealed the need for a director of literature and publicity who will coordinate the ideas from the various local councils. Thus a German Coordinating Council of Christians and Jews has been organized. It has employed Dr. Knud C. Knudsen, formerly of Berlin, as the director of literature.

In order to crystallize the best German thinking on human relations a two-day conference was held at Munich May 30 and 31. Approximately 130 delegates attended. The conference was divided into six sessions — with the closing session open to the public on the conference theme “Gemeinschaft nicht Feindschaft” (Friendship, not hostility). Fourteen German leaders, representing the four councils — clergymen, educators, professional and business men — had met in Bad Nauheim on March 28 to plan the Munich conference.

Delegates to the conference were selected from among those most able to take part in the discussion and contribute to developing sound thinking in this field. Foremost German authorities on each topic were chosen as speakers with the understanding that the material presented would be printed in a booklet which will be used in the educational program.

The Munich conference was followed by two-day workshops in June for representatives of each of the following commissions in the local councils: educational organizations, Stuttgart; religious organizations, Frankfurt; and community organizations, Wiesbaden. These workshops were to agree upon projects to be undertaken for the coming year, and assign projects to local councils for study.

Beginning in July, Dr. Knudsen will hold a series of four conferences with different sections of media of communications — one a month for four...