Trade Union Federation
— To be Organized in West Germany

A NEW organization is in the making which many competent observers expect to be one of the strongest democratic bulwarks of the young Western German state.

A conference at Koenigswinter, held May 3 and 4 moved the project toward a concrete plan. Forty top trade union officials from all three Western Zones of Germany were present, delegated by the democratically-elected executive boards of the several trade union federations and trade unions in Western Germany. Out of the Koenigswinter meeting came the decision by the so-called "preparatory committee" to convene in Munich from Oct. 12 to 14 a charter congress whose task will be to found a Western German Trade Union Federation.

The prospective Western German Trade Union Federation will constitute a milestone on the road towards the reconstitution of the German trade-union movement which, because of its adherence to democratic ideals, fell victim in 1933, to the onslaughts of Nazism. Notwithstanding the efforts to reconcile labor to the loss of its liberties, the Nazi regime proved to have been conspicuously unsuccessful in extinguishing the desire of the German working population for genuine labor organization.

UNTIL NOW the western German trade unions have recruited more than 5,000,000 members constituting 40 percent of the working population, a better record than in the pre-1933 period. This achievement compares most favorably with that in other major industrial countries where union membership is voluntary.

The Western German Trade Union Federation has been four years in the making. Ever since the beginning of the occupation, western German unions have striven towards the geographic expansion of their organizations which at first were formed on a local level covering a county or district. Subsequently, these local trade unions in the US and French Zones respectively amalgamated into state trade unions which, in turn, formed state trade union federations.

In the British Zone, the merger of similar unions, such as the metal unions, was effected on a zonal level and, correspondingly, a zone-wide federation was formed. Thus, there are now seven trade union federations in Western Germany to which are affiliated 100 state and zonal trade unions.

WITH THE economic fusion of the British and US Zones in 1947, the trade unions in the combined economic area considered it not only desirable but essential to establish even closer relations than those hitherto maintained. As the first step in this direction, leading union officials in the Bizonal Area proposed, on Aug. 20, 1947, the establishment of an informal bizonal Trade Union Council to serve as a coordinating body until a bizonal trade union federation was created.

In his conference with top US Zone trade unionists on Sept. 8, 1947, the US Military Governor stated that US Zone trade unions could affiliate with those in other zones provided that economic unity, freedom of movement and a free exchange of ideas prevailed among the zones concerned. US Military Government would have no objection to bizonal trade union mergers, the Military Governor declared, inasmuch as these conditions had been fulfilled in the combined economic area. Shortly afterwards, British Military Government issued a similar pronouncement to British Zone trade unions.

THE PROPOSALS to form bizonal labor organizations were discussed and voted upon by union governing bodies and delegates' conventions throughout the Bizonal Area. Apart from adverse criticism largely by Communist elements, overwhelming endorsement was given by trade unionists who pointed out that bizonal trade unions, rather than prejudicing the eventual formation of Germany-wide trade union movement, were a step forward in that direction.

Before proceeding with the development of a specific organizational program, the bizonal Trade Union Council called together on May 25 and 26, (Continued on next page)
How will the prospective Western German Trade Union Federation look? Only the broad outlines of this new organization can be sketched at this time inasmuch as the basic decisions will be made at the charter congress in October. The trizonal union federation will resemble democratic federations in other countries such as the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the United States. It will consist of a varying number of trade unions, somewhere between 16 and 20 in number, which are expected to affiliate with the federation. These unions will be the trizonal trade unions which have been formed or will soon be created.

Indeed, it may be questioned why a Western German trade union federation is being formed instead of a Germany-wide labor organization. The answer to this question does not lie alone in the MG position that free and democratic trade unions cannot exist except where the basic freedoms are observed. Perhaps, the complete reply may best be indicated by the following quotation from a published article by a prominent Western German trade union leader:

“We regret the impossibility of creating a German Trade Union Federation including the Soviet Zone. Unfortunately, this is prevented in addition to the zonal boundaries by the differences in trade union ideology, which exist for the time being, between the Western and the Soviet Zones. The trade unions in the Western Zones wish to be active, independent of any state power, from employers and also from the influence of the occupation powers; this can indeed not be said with conviction about the other side.”

Magazine Difficulties

Illustrative of the precarious financial status of much of the German publishing industry was the failure during April of two Bavarian magazines: Tempo, a sport magazine, and Der Ruf (The Call), a magazine for young intellectuals.

Suspension of the latter magazine is an indication of the attitudes and interests of the student-age groups in Germany, as well as of the financial hazards confronting attempts by private individuals or groups to reorient German youth. Der Ruf was started in the United States by young German prisoners of war and continued after their return home.

At one time attaining a circulation of 70,000, the periodical was inspirational and idealistic. It opposed the postwar cynicism of young German intellectuals, arguing man’s moral obligations to society and presenting democracy as a social and political goal. After currency reform, Der Ruf consistently lost circulation and, despite editorial changes to give it a wider appeal, was finally forced to cease publication. — From Military Governor’s Monthly Report No. 46.