The Coming Generations

— German Youth and the Future

by Dr. Alonzo G. Grace
Director, Education & Cultural
Relations Division, OMGUS

The Hitler Youth Movement was
organized and recognized by the
party as a Reich organization in 1926.
However, no more than 2,000 youth
were present at the party rally in
Nuremberg in 1929. In 1936 the
organization was legalized, and Hitler
decreed that “the entire youth of
Germany, outside the home and school,
receive its training — physical,
mental, and moral — in the Hitler Youth
for National Service and in the spirit
of Nazism.” At this time, Baldur von
Schirach published “Hitler-Jugend,
Idee und Gestalt” (Hitler Youth, Idea
and Form) in which he wrote, “What was formerly
called the German Youth
Movement is dead.”

Each youth took the follow-

From sandbox to pillbox?

Youth movements and youth orga-
nizations are not new in Germany. In
fact, the first organization known as
the Wandervogel (wander birds) was
organized back in 1896, and through
the years, until the Hitler era, youth
movements and organizations embrac-
ed many sound programs. Perhaps
the greatest achievement was about
1914 when youth became a recognized
factor in the life of the nation.

From the text of the above article
Dr. Grace took his speech for the radio
program “Town Meeting of the Air”
in Berlin, July 12, 1949.

(Continued on next page)
fall with special weight on the youth of Germany.

CAN WE now paraphrase the Schirach statement of 1936 and say, “What was formerly the teaching and spirit of the Hitler Youth Movement is dead”?

The basic principle underlying our effort in Germany is that the reorientation of German youth is essentially a German responsibility and that our role is threefold: First, to assist those forces inside Germany to provide leadership and direction to the citizens of tomorrow; second, to foster an atmosphere in which the positive elements can find expression in society; and third, to prevent the recurrence of any totalitarian or militaristic tendencies among youth organizations.

During the period of our effort to help German youth help themselves, several developments may be mentioned:

1. Voluntary Youth Organizations—This is one method of preventing the domination of the State in the control of youth. Today the total membership of voluntary youth organizations has increased 700 percent since 1946. One million five hundred thousand or approximately 25 percent of the young people between the ages of 10-25 belong to one or more organizations. Concurrently, voluntary citizen participation on behalf of youth has been encouraged and, at the present time, youth committees consisting of representative citizens from the community have been formed in 266 counties in the American Zone.

2. Leadership Training — Five leadership training schools have been established in which over 4,000 youth leaders have received training in the fundamentals of democratic youth work.

3. Cultural Exchange — A cultural exchange program is in operation under which more than 50 selected German youth leaders have studied youth work in the United States. Eight Americans and 23 European youth leaders have aided in advising German youth organizations.

4. Self-help Programs — One of the basic needs at the present time is to provide the youth with a mission. Unemployed youth is a potential danger in any nation. The self-help program thus far has been developed in three ways:

(a) Youth Reconstruction: The self-help program for German youth is one of the most encouraging and one of the most important developments in recent months. Over 100 projects have been developed without the aid of publicity and without the knowledge of the general population. These programs in Germany consist of the rebuilding of damaged buildings, new dormitories, new homes. This becomes most important, because it is estimated that as many as 100,000 youth are homeless and wandering from one place to another throughout the US Zone.

(b) International Work Camps: Thirty international work camps will be in operation in the American Zone this summer. At these camps will be representatives from many European nations and the United States. Youth from many nations will live and work together.

(c) Work-Study Program: This involves an international exchange of selected students and is the result of a program developed between 1919 and 1932 in Germany. It provides for sending German students to the United States and other countries for a two-year period during which time these youth work on farms and in factories, studying, working, and observing the way of life in the United States or in whatever country is participating in the program.

Of the 500 students who participated in this work plan between 1925 and 1932 only one ever became a Nazi, and dozens died in concentration camps or in the war. Many hold positions of importance in Germany today. While there are many problems connected with the development of such a program on any extensive scale, widespread interest has been expressed in the plan.

A good start has been made in the revival of a sound younger generation, but there are numerous problems and difficulties to be overcome. Youth organizations must liberalize their programs, become less competitive and more cooperative. The average German citizen must learn to volunteer his time, ability, and money to advance cooperative youth programs. Although limited in extent, certain nationalistic tendencies must be eliminated.

It is certain that only those aspects of MG’s program will remain which a considerable number of German leaders have come to believe in, and which are closely related to German needs and desires. When we have completed our effort, we hope that these four things will remain:

1. Youth leaders who believe in the democratic process of group life and who have elementary knowledge of the skills and techniques necessary to achieve their beliefs.

2. The idea of the importance and necessity of democratic youth work established firmly in several places: in legislation, in the minds of many community leaders, in the training curricula of many training centers, and in the organization and programs of county and state youth committees.

3. Youth organizations which have been improved from the standpoint of democratic objectives and methods. This will involve two things: first, a new concept of the group leader as a helper and counselor who is primarily interested in the personal growth of individual young men and young women through democratic group life; and second, the practice of more democratic methods in group life—such as discussion techniques for problem solving, the use of recognized parliamentary procedure in handling the business of the group, and the use of activities, interests, and skills, not as ends in themselves, but as means to help individuals grow and develop.

4. Large numbers of German citizens in local communities who have a desire to cooperate in meeting the needs of all the youth, organized and unorganized, on a community-wide basis, and who have an elementary understanding of practical methods.

THE ULTIMATE test of our success in helping German youth to help themselves is simply this: Will youth develop the character, the moral-spiritual power to resist the nationalistic trend? Will youth fall for anything? I believe that the youth of the world will help the youth of Germany to create a world of law and order, humanity, social justice, and peace. I believe that a large number of German youth, in spite of the Hitler era, are ready, willing and eager to do their part, but the change will not be accomplished overnight.

END