Labor’s Legislative Program
— Goals in the Coming Election

Article
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WHAT DO the trade unions expect of the Bundestag? appears as the main caption of a legislative program prepared recently by the trizonal Trade Union Council, the highest representation of organized labor in Western Germany. The program was presented publicly in early July, about five weeks before the western German electorate goes to the polls on August 14 to choose the Bundestag (popular assembly) of the first Parliament of the young Federal Republic of Germany.

In anticipation of this eventful occasion, the Trade Union Council decided on May 30 and 31 to set forth the views of western German trade unions on major social and economic problems affecting, in its judgment, the welfare of the working population.

The work of drafting a program was entrusted to the two council committees on economic and social policy, each consisting of experts drawn from trade unions and union federations in the Trizonal Area. The text formulated by these committees was subsequently adopted with modifications by the Trade Union Council.

TRANSLATING the council’s question into “What do the American trade unions expect of Congress?” may indicate the political significance of the query. Viewed in this light, the council’s legislative program assumes obvious political importance. With 5,000,000 members (10 to 15 percent are below voting age) enrolled in western German labor organizations, it may be assumed that consideration to this program will be given by the political parties, particularly in an effort to gain the support of independent voters. The published text of the program calls upon all employed persons to decide on election day whether the program is to be carried out by the Bundestag.

A careful examination of the council’s report discloses that virtually all its points have previously been made by western German trade unions. Indeed, some proposals represent a carry-over from the pre-1933 period which have been received upon the reconstitution of the German trade union movement. The council’s seven-point program may be grouped into three main sections as follows: The first four points are built around the demand for the maintenance and achievement of full employment; the next two relate to fundamental changes in the economy; and the last part covers a wide variety of labor legislation.

The problem of full employment has received special attention from the trade unions during the past six months when unemployment has been climbing steadily to ever new postwarf highs. As of June 30, 1949, unemployment in the Trizonal Area amounted to 9.3 percent of the wage and salary earning labor force. Representatives of organized labor have expressed deep concern over the rising unemployment, particularly at a time when a large pent-up demand exists for essential consumers’ goods, and when the German economy needs to be expanded in order to recover peacetime living standards lowered as a result of the war. They also wish to help the German people discharge their obligations arising from the war.

THE TRADE Union Council has described its concept of the situation as follows:

“The insufficient utilization of productive forces stands in a disturbing contradiction to the undersupply of the German people. Economic policies (followed) until now have not kept an upper stratum from living better than before the war, while the real income of the employee lies considerably below the pre-war standard. In spite of that, the production of goods is stagnating because the working population, owing to insufficient purchasing power, is not in a position to acquire the essentially inadequate supply of goods. Consequently, the warehouses are overfilled with consumers’ goods although the long-deferred demand is available. . .

The trade unions regard the speedy and effective elimination of unemployment as the most urgent task, whereby mass purchasing power will be raised simultaneously.”

As an immediate measure to combat rising unemployment, which is abnormally high among building workers, and to overcome the housing shortage, the council advocates large-scale housing construction for lower income groups to be financed out of public funds. Along with urging that 150,000 new dwellings at an estimated cost of DM 1,500,000,000 ($450,000,000) be built in 1949 to take care of the most pressing needs, the council recommends that a four-year housing construction program be worked out simultaneously. A national organization responsible for the planning and supervision of the long-range program is also proposed.

THE COUNCIL foresees that “with the carrying out of a large-scale housing construction program, the capacity of the building industry will be utilized more fully, thereby also stimulating the general economy. The attainment of full employment and its lasting maintenance cannot however be ensured by this alone. Other measures are necessary.”

To ensure the maintenance of full employment, the council considers it essential to have federal legislation which would coordinate state and federal economic action. Espousing an over-all economic plan for the entire federal area whose aim would be the most efficient utilization of available production facilities and raw materials in line with the demand for basic consumers’ goods, the council also calls for a credit policy appropriate to carrying out the plan successfully.

Turning to the problem of real wages, the council asks for “an energetic (government) price policy.” Ever since the beginning of the occupation, the trade unions have laid greater stress on holding prices down than on obtaining wage boosts. With the specter of the mid-1920’s inflation still fresh in their minds, the trade union members have been anxious to avoid a wage-price spiral which might lead to its repetition.

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DEMANDS FOR “democratization of the economy” and for socialization of basic industries, which date back in Germany to the post-World War I period, are probably the most controversial aspects of the Trade Union Council’s program. Feeling that the advent of the Nazi regime might have been prevented if the trade unions had had a larger voice in the running of the economy, labor organizations have maintained that the recent course of history has justified their desire for greater responsibility and for “democratic control and management” of basic industries.

The Council contends that “the experiences from 1918 to 1933 have shown that formal political democracy is not sufficient to achieve a truly democratic society. The democratization of political life must therefore be complemented by the democratization of the economy.”

In order to attain the “democratization of the economy,” the council calls for legislation which would give employee representatives in individual establishments the right of participation in the social, personnel and economic phases of management. The council would also like to see the establishment by law of “economic chambers” consisting in equal numbers of representatives of employers’ and employees’ organizations and other self-appointed economic agencies. In earlier statements on this matter, the trade unions have explained that they contemplate an arrangement whereby the chambers would act in an advisory capacity to the legislature and would exercise limited functions under direct government supervision. Legislation and the major executive responsibility in the economic field, the trade unions explain, would of course remain the exclusive prerogative of the government.

Concluding its legislative program, the Trade Union Council declares that divergent regulation in the Laender on important labor law and social political matters has intensified previous a lack of uniformity in legal provisions affecting the interests of labor. Among other matters, uniform legislation should be enacted, the Council believes, providing for equal pay for equal work of identical productivity, minimum working conditions for vocational groups whose coverage by collective agreements is not possible, protection against dismissal, regulation of apprenticeship training in effective cooperation with the trade unions, and social insurance reforms.

The action taken by the council in furthering its legislative program throws some light on the important matter of the relationship between western German trade unions and the various political parties. This relationship is not only dissimilar among the major democratic nations, but may differ at various times in the same country. The latter part of this observation applies with particular force to Germany.

Prior to 1933 the three major labor federations in Germany were linked, to a greater or lesser extent, with particular political parties. At the beginning of the occupation, former trade union officers in the rival pre-1933 trade union federations agreed to form united labor organizations free of political party or denominational commitments. While there has been some criticism from outside the present labor movement that its professed political party neutrality has not always been scrupulously observed, trade union leaders who had earlier been in rival camps not only deny the allegation but charge that outside forces, particularly communist elements, are seeking to disrupt the unity of the labor movement. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the western German trade unions are particularly sensitive to any imputation of partiality towards any particular political party. On the other hand, in the Soviet Zone where the trade union federation and the Communist Socialist Unity Party have virtually identical programs and interlocking directorates, the contention of political party neutrality is open to most serious question.

THE WESTERN German Trade Union Council declares that its program is not a political party program, but rather is addressed to all political parties. Besides not supporting any political party or candidates, the council has specifically requested western German trade unions not to hold any election rallies, and to confine themselves to exercise of their right to vote. The trade unions and works councils have been advised by the council to post the legislative program in shops and offices. Replying to my query as to whether the trade unions or works councils had also been requested to discuss the program at their general meetings, a council spokesman said that they had not been so advised, but that some might do so on their own initiative. He further reported that copies of the legislative program had been sent to all major political parties for informational purposes without any invitation for comment or endorsement.

Before election day comes around, the people of western Germany will be presented with programs and platforms expressing divergent views. For those who seek the meaning of political democracy, the view of voters going to the polls to decide among these various programs in the first free federal elections in Germany since 1933 should provide a satisfactory answer.

(Continued from page 12)

Civilian Personnel Bulletin

at most of the places at which OMGS employees are presently stationed.

Marriage to German nationals. No change is made for the present in Military Government and EUCOM regulations.

Foreign Service Salary Rates

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Foreign Service Staff Employees

| Class 1 | $150 |
| Class 2 | $400 |
| Class 3 | $700 |
| Class 4 | $1,000|
| Class 5 | $1,200|
| Class 6 | $1,400|

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