Appeal to Trade Unions
—— Sound, Friendly Cooperation Desired

By GENERAL SIR BRIAN H. ROBERTSON
British High Commissioner for Germany

This assembly of representatives of trade unions in the British Zone is an important occasion which marks the end of an era... It is a significant and welcome development that the reorganized labor movement should be among the first of German institutions to become reestablished among the councils of the nations.

I have watched your development during the past four years with the keenest interest and satisfaction. In particular, I have noted the counsels which divided you in your internal affairs... I think you are to be congratulated upon the manner in which you have dealt with these problems. I hope you may find ways and means of resolving your remaining problems.

I have much admired the wise and far-sighted attitude of the trade unions towards the important question of the relationship between prices and wages, especially since currency reform. Currency reform came at a time when prices and wages were already out of step. The very success of currency reform tended to increase the disparity.

It would have been so easy for the trade unions to have shouted for increased wages which might have undone all the good effects of currency reform itself. Instead of doing that, however, you worked steadily and firmly towards a reduction of prices as well as an increase in wages in those instances and to the extent that increases were clearly justified and necessary.

This process of adjustment in prices and wages is of course not complete. Indeed it is something which is never likely to get into a static position. If, however, you continue to deal with it in the sensible way in which you have handled it so far, you will, I am sure, serve the best interests of your members as well as of the community at large.

It could certainly be in the interests of nobody that agitations on this subject should create such difficulties for industry as would increase unemployment. I regard the question of employment in Germany as being quite the most important of all the many questions which should receive the attention of the new government...

I am convinced that there is a menace of serious unemployment in the future unless the situation is correctly handled. The creation of medium and long term credit is clearly the most important step toward increasing employment. The High Commissioners can be counted upon to give their utmost assistance in this respect.

In this connection I have had some very useful discussions recently with those chiefly responsible for the administration of ECA funds, and I am sure that we can look forward with confidence to the utilization of these funds for this purpose in properly substantiated cases.

I have also had recent discussions with my American and French colleagues about the possibilities of un-blocking frozen Deutscher mark accounts of foreign creditors and about the introduction of new foreign investment. I hope that we shall find a good answer to these problems in the near future.

It must, however, be realized that the extent to which the High Commissioners can give assistance in this matter of credits is strictly limited and is quite insufficient to produce the volume of credit which is required. Money on a large scale must be found within Germany itself, and I remain strongly convinced that this money exists and can be found in places where it is today lying idle or being put to extravagant uses designed to make profit for the individual rather than to serve the general interest.

I believe that the new government must face up to this problem and must find means for attracting this money into the proper channels. I believe that it must also have a comprehensive plan for creating employment, for constructing houses for the workers in those places where employment can be found and for directing production into those industries which will best serve the economic development of the country.

To revert to the question of the part to be played by the High Commissioners: it must be clear that Germany is still and must remain for some time dependent on external aid. So long as there is a firm determination to get out of this position as quickly as possible and to make the country economically self-supporting, there is nothing demeaning about the receipt of this foreign aid.

Indeed, Germany is not alone in this respect. My own country is also in need of external assistance. But Germany requires not only financial aid. Even more importantly she needs political support and sympathy from other countries.

It is for this reason that you and I must regret the very unfortunate impressions which have been created during the past few months. These impressions are not only unfortunate, but they are to a large extent false. The foreign press has been full of talk about the revival of German nationalism. Now no sensible person should resent the revival of a proper national spirit. It would indeed be a

General Sir Brian H. Robertson, British High Commissioner for Germany, delivered this address to the German Trade Union Congress (Deutsche Gewerkschafts-Bund) at the DGU's second annual congress in Hanover on Sept. 8, 1948.

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sad day for Germany when Germans cease to love and have pride in their country. We have too many examples already of countries in which the national pride and national honor have been trampled under the foot of tyrannical despotism.

But there is a wide difference between a proper pride in one's country and bitter aggressive hate against other countries. The impression which has been created is that there is a revival of just this kind of hate. Some particularly unfortunate things were said during the recent election campaign, and it will be some time before the echo of these speeches has died down abroad. I am sure that the responsible leaders of political opinion in this country do not wish to see a rebirth of xenophobia in Germany.

NOW THAT the elections are over, I hope that more care will be taken to avoid causing alarm and offense abroad. Indeed an occasional hint of recognition of what other powers have done for Germany since the war might not be entirely out of place. In Bonn yesterday I was happy to note, however, that the point was continually made that a better understanding must be sought with other countries.

Then also in recent weeks we have seen the reappearance of a certain number of wild men who have attempted, not entirely without success, to gain popular support by reviving old slogans and old crazy ambitions. It is certainly not in the interests of Germany nor of world peace that these unruly elements should be allowed to extend their influence, and I hope that the new German Government and the governments of the states will take care of them. It is much better that they and not we should do what is necessary in this respect. There is also the question of the possible revival of pro-Nazi anti-democratic and highly nationalistic press...

In this state of criticism against the Occupying Powers, dismantling has been the chief issue. I have never resented that German leaders should criticize dismantling and try to save for Germany as much as possible of her resources. That is natural and no doubt is expected of them by their supporters. I do not believe that dismantling as now programmed represents a serious blow to the German economy. I do not believe that it causes unemployment except locally and temporarily because employment is limited by other factors, notably finance and the sales market.

However, I am ready to make allowances for some exaggeration on these scores. What I deplore is the accusations of competitive interest and bad faith on the part of the Allies and especially of His Majesty's Government. These accusations are not true and when made they cause great resentment and awaken suspicions in my country and others of a revival of German "nationalism." That is not the way to get the policy altered; just the reverse.

It is right that I should acknowledge here that trade union leaders have been far wiser in these matters than some of their fellow-countrymen. I have read with the greatest interest some of the speeches which trade union leaders have made recently. These speeches appealed to reason and not to sentiment or false accusation, and such speeches carry weight. I would like to repeat: such speeches carry weight.

NOW WE ENTER upon a new phase. Yesterday I had the pleasure and honor of attending the opening session of the new German Parliament. Very shortly the first Federal Government will be formed. The enemies of democracy say it is a puppet government. They say that to distract attention from the situation in the Eastern Zone where the rickety puppet theater is now being hastily knocked together. They say that to find some excuse for the fact that no advance towards real self-government, towards giving genuine popular representation, towards political freedom has been permitted in that zone.

You know those things but perhaps you fear that the High Commissioners will keep as tight a hold over the Western Germany government as the Military Governors did over the Frankfurt administration. That is not so. The Occupation Statute and the principles laid down for the work of the High Commissioners show clearly that something quite different is intended.

The chief reason why the Military Governors felt obliged to withhold their approval of a good many proposals was that under the old setup, in giving their approval the Military Governors accepted a responsibility to themselves for the substance of the proposals. They felt themselves also to be trustees for the German people and for the government now to come into being. They were unwilling to see the position prejudged on important issues which they felt should be settled by a German Government with a popular mandate behind it.

It was for this reason that they were unwilling to see taken fundamental decisions concerning the ownership of industry and concerning the part which labor should play in the management of industry. It was for this reason that they felt a need to be cautious before committing the future German Government to plans, excellent in themselves, for greatly increased expenditure on the social services.

THE HIGH COMMISSIONERS will not be in the same position. They only have to consider certain broad issues, of which the chief are security and respect for international obligations. They have also to keep a watch to insure that German policies do not result in an increased need for external assistance. They will not in other respects feel themselves responsible for the soundness or unsoundness of German legislation.

It will be the endeavor of my colleagues and myself to give all the support and help within our power to the new government. We want it to succeed and it must succeed. An eminent German politician has said a few days ago that the new government should be allowed to open its account with an opening credit of confidence. I am prepared to give it this credit. I am not, of course, speaking merely of the executive organ of the government which may have the responsibility of power first entrusted to it. I speak of the whole

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