New Ideas on Information

— US Study Benefits Radio, Press

By JAMES G. ROGERS

GERMAN NEWSPAPERS, magazines, radio and book publishing have been given a transfusion of new ideas during the postwar years through the MG-sponsored cultural exchange program.

By the end of August 1949, 65 Germans from these informational fields had taken part in special study and training courses in the United States. The first of these exchange groups—four broadcasters from the US-controlled radio stations, with one representative each of the British and French occupation zones—had the longest and most elaborate program: six months of study and travel at radio stations in the United States, Canada and England, beginning in April 1948.

Since that time 36 newspapermen, seven editors and publishers from book publishing houses and 16 radio production workers and directors have spent an average of two months studying American techniques in their specialized fields, traveling and observing American life.

Behind these programs of intensive technical training, working experience and professional contacts in the United States stood Military Government's intent to strengthen the foundations of Germany's new-fledged democracy by sharpening the operational skills of the men and women who write, speak or publish the information brought to the German people through the media of press, radio and book publishing. Another concept behind the programs was the expanding effect on the democratic development and political horizons of the German information specialists given the opportunity to see and share in the everyday life of citizens living in a working democracy.

THE TRAINING COURSES for journalists and radio specialists were financed in 1948 by the Rockefeller Foundation and this year from the MG reorientation funds. They were planned and conducted by Columbia University in New York. German book publishers and editors were sponsored by the American Book Publishing Council.

In addition to taking intensive courses in newspaper technique at Columbia University's American Press Institute, the German newspapermen participated in seminars attended by leading American journalists and editors, and spent several weeks of work on the staffs of US newspapers and news agencies. Radio workers also were given formal courses at the New York school and actual experience with the large US networks and smaller broadcasting stations.

Although no formal courses were arranged for them, the visiting book publishers and editors studied American operations and practices for eight weeks at publishing houses in New York, Washington, Boston and Philadelphia. Also on the publishers' schedule were consultations with American authors whose works they had published in Germany.


FROM THE STANDPOINTS of technical improvement and knowledge of American life and attitudes—the major objectives of the special study tours—the projects have been successful. In the radio field, MG observers reported that it would be hard to exaggerate the value which had accrued to the German visitors, to radio in Germany and, in good will, to the United States.

After several months of observation of the work of the returned radio broadcasters participating in the initial tour, US radio officers had only one adverse comment: That the returnees' enthusiasm not only for American radio practices but for all things American was perhaps too unqualified for other Germans. However, it is certain that Germans, in general, are more inclined to place credence in even the most enthusiastic reports of a fellow-countryman who has had first-hand experience in America than in similar views expressed by US occupation personnel.

Among the results of the first radio study tour were: All returned personnel were put into responsible positions in their respective broadcasting stations. Each has given a series of talks and led discussions with fellow staff members on American methods of producing and sending plays, literature, school sessions and cultural productions. At Radio Munich, the returning German specialist made broadcasts on "American Institutions," "Meeting People in the USA," "Radio in a Free Country" and "Broadcasting in Canada and the United Kingdom." He also wrote articles for a German radio magazine on "Television in the USA" and "A German Sees America."

TYPICAL of the activities of all the returning radio workers were those of Hans Westermann of Radio Bremen. Appointed as a commentator after his six months' foreign study, Westermann influenced other staff broadcasters to modify their impersonal, academic style in favor of the informal, direct and conversational approach he had learned in the United States.

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Besides lecturing to the Radio Bremen staff on American methods of listener research and non-commercial radio in the United States, he made a special series of broadcasts on American leaders, took over analysis and comment on the US presidential election campaign and, with another staff member, produced a series of dialogue discussions on cultural topics such as the American theater, films and music.

Westermann also gave four talks on life in the United States before America House audiences, contributed a number of articles on his impressions of America and Americans to local newspapers and magazines and led nine discussion group meetings of high school and university students.

REPORTING on his study abroad and the problem of applying what he had learned to German radio practice, Dr. Peter Kehm of Radio Stuttgart expressed regret that radio legislation had progressed so far in Wuerтемberg-Baden that it could no longer be altered. He declared that similar legislation in England and Canada, where conditions were comparable to Germany, was handled much more carefully than in his own country.

Dr. Kehm said that he was most impressed with the close contact between US radio producers and the listening audience, attributing this condition to listener research and “live” broadcasting before large audiences. Dr. Kehm considered his principal task in improving German broadcasting techniques to be the establishment of closer contact between listening audiences and the broadcasting station. To this end, on his own programs he began “live” broadcasts before large audiences and planned an opinion survey among Radio Stuttgart listeners by a local polling organization.

Commenting on his stay in the United States, Dr. Kehm declared that the opportunity to see American life was no less important than the technical experience gained through studying at many different radio stations.

“My deepest impressions came through contact with average American citizens, their daily lives and problems,” he reported. “And I think that the word Democracy, which has never been easy for us Germans to understand, has taken on a living meaning for the six German travelers to America.”

AS PROFESSIONAL observers and reporters, the German journalists who participated in the 1948 or 1949 study programs in the United States have been among the most prolific and incisive commentators on things American. Starting with their experience in a great university and proceeding to actual work on large and small newspapers from the Atlantic seaboard to the Far West, the journalists relayed their observations to the German public through regular correspondence to their newspapers and magazines.

Like the radio broadcasters, after their return to Germany, the correspondents passed on their knowledge to colleagues through talks and discussions.3 They also took part in public forums and group meetings, most of which were followed by question and answer sessions which revealed deep interest on the part of German audiences. Werner Friedmann, publisher of the Munich Abendzeitung (Evening Newspaper) and one of the principal figures in establishing that paper’s journalism school, gave a number of talks at Information Centers in Bavaria, as did Heinrich Kierzek, editor of the Fuldaer Volkszeitung (Fulda People’s Newspaper). Both Friedmann and Kierzek were in the group of German journalists who visited the United States in 1948.

As part of his speaking activities Friedmann gave five hour-long talks before the Verein Bayerischer Zeitungsverleger (Bavarian Newspaper Publishers’ Association) and four speeches on the “Functioning of American Democracy” in the America House in Munich. Each of the latter talks drew more than 1,000 persons. He also addressed the German-American Club and the German-American Women’s Club, both in Munich, and the personnel of the Sueddeutscher Verlag (South Bavarian Publishing House). In addition he described his American experiences to five smaller local groups, with an average attendance of 100 at each talk.

THE MANY LETTERS of acknowledgment received at the Munich America House following each of Friedmann’s speeches demonstrated an enthusiastic reception on the part of German audiences.

In one of Friedmann’s talks he explains that “we know too little of each other and we can learn quite a bit from each other... Americans have a chance to take part in directing their destiny and the American taxpayer is a person to be respected, in contrast to European customs... America does not know the authoritarian state and does not know self-conceit by the authorities. People are proud to be able to assert their opinions and they also do it... The election of President Truman is a good example of a functioning democracy because the voters were not to be influenced either by propaganda or by the results of the Gallup poll.

“There is no denying that certain racial prejudices, a lack of social institutions and, first of all, slums exist in the United States. Nevertheless America is the hope of Europe and the participation of America in European affairs will benefit the destinies of this continent... Women play a much more important role in the public life of the United States than they do in Europe. American women have achieved a place of importance and their voice is heard with respect...”

FRIEDMANN TOLD one of his audiences of a humorous climax to their visit. In a restaurant, they were pleased with the good service and the good looks of a waitress. When they questioned the girl, asking if all girls in America were as beautiful as she, the girl replied in German, “I wouldn’t know. I come from Tegernsee.”

In describing American democracy as he saw it, Mr. Friedmann said: “Practical democracy is so obvious that no one talks about it. Whether one participates in a municipal council meeting where every one at-

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1 See “German Editorials” section in recent issues of the Information Bulletin.
3 Lake district in southern Bavaria.

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