Youth Self-Help

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The most important asset in any nation is its youth. At the same time, youth can become the greatest liability, if discouraged or misled, or given little hope for the future. The great majority of youth in Germany, co-operatively working with youth in other nations, can become one of the greatest forces for peace and democracy. But there is also the pressing danger that they may follow the courses of extreme nationalism of the right or left, which attracted so many jobless, disillusioned, frustrated young Germans after World War I.

A large part of the German youth problem is economic. How will they support themselves while studying? How will they get jobs, once out of school? Where is their place in the overcrowded German economy? Only when young people have a reasonable answer to these questions can they begin thinking of their constitutional rights, participation in political parties, and — in short — developing into good citizens.

Although few constructive proposals have been made and, where made, have produced little action in solving the problem of German youth, a movement to help youth help themselves is slowly spreading throughout western Germany, fostered by enlightened leaders and progressive civic groups, and stemming in large part from the initiative of young people themselves. Through self-help programs, young men and women have earned while they learned, built the homes that they were to live in, and the classrooms for their own study. They have picked up trades and skills, assuring them of a future, and in so doing, have restored self-respect, emphasized individualism, and have learned by living with their fellow men.

German youth between the ages of 14 and 25, numbering 2,761,000, constitute 15 percent of the population but 26 percent of the unemployed in the US Zone. According to statistics from the Federal Government, 550,000 youth are unemployed in western Germany. There are some 170,000 applicants for apprenticeships which are unavailable. Investigation in Bavaria showed 95,000 applicants for 9,000 apprenticeships, in Hesse 26,000 for 8,000 apprenticeships. This situation is aggravated by an estimated 4,000 youthful border-crossers entering west Germany monthly from the destitute Soviet Zone.

In addition, youth unemployment is expected to increase during the next five years as a growing number of students leave formal education. Less than five percent of youth are educated in universities. Study at special schools is possible for an additional 10 percent. At least 85 percent of the youth have no formal education beyond the age of 15 years.

The universities, too, are in a difficult position. Average enrollment of 1936-37, totalling 21,300 in the American zone, has now increased to more than 61,000, a 290 percent increase. On the other hand, 40 percent of university facilities and equipment were damaged or destroyed during the war.

Thus the program of such organizations as the Arbeitsgemeinschaft des Jugendaufbauparwerkes (Working Association of Youth Reconstruction), Verband der Deutschen Studentenwerke (Union of German Student Work), the Association for Former American Work Students and others have laid the groundwork for a solution to these problems. Working together through the co-ordinating efforts of the German Section of the International Council on Youth Education and Self-Help, these groups have helped thousands of youth learn new skills, continue their education, establish contact with foreign students, and often find a place to live.

The Jugendaufbauwerke has attacked the most immediate and urgent youth problem, that of homeless and wandering young people, uprooted by the war and its aftermath. The agencies of this association have been responsible for the establishment of 359 youth homes and 269 workshops throughout western Germany. Others are in process of construction. Using the self-help concept, these projects create living facilities, educational and recreational opportunities, and work possibilities leading to rehabilitation and independence of youth.

Entrance into the homes and workshops is entirely voluntary, and the youth have participated in their construction and improvement. Youth self-government is also encouraged. An important concept of the program is that the projects are not charity institutions. Assistance from government and private sources should not result in direction of these activities.

Typical of this program is the Friedensdorf, or Peace Village, located in the former architect's offices of Hitler's gigantic sport stadium at Nuremberg — once the locale of Nazi party rallies. In the large two story building, which the youth themselves renovated, more than 100 boys, from ages 14 to 23, live and work. They are apprenticed to qualified masters in workshops where they receive training in such trades as leather working, cabinet making, carpentry, upholstering and others.

Under guidance of the Jugendaufbau officials, the boys have already completed two new buildings of a proposed 12-unit settlement, which will eventually take care of up to 150 youth. Each building will be laid out like a large "H" with the master and his family living in one wing, the workshop in the center, and the youth living in the
opposite wing. Each of the 12 units will be dedicated to a different trade.

Friedensdorf is directed by an advisory committee of local citizens, headed by a Nuremberg newspaper publisher, and financed through state contributions and private donations. The sale of articles produced by the youth in their workshops is expected to bring in additional funds.

**THE JUGENDBAUWERK** system originated from un-co-ordinated and sometimes confused efforts of many local voluntary agencies to help youth in the early post-war days. In 1947-48, state associations were formed, which last year amalgamated in a meeting in Rothenburg into a west German "Working Association." The Bonn government recently allocated DM 4,500,000 for the construction of more homes and workshops in the Jugendausbau program, which is already serving 20,000 youth.

Most of Germany's university youth have faced severe financial problems since the currency reform wiped out the wartime savings of the young men and women in 1948. Today, local self-help organizations of students have been established in all of west Germany's universities. In October 1949, representatives of these local student working groups formed a working committee to organize the Deutsches Studentenwerk, Verband der Deutschen Studentenwerke (organization of student working groups). This organization will promote campaigns to obtain more funds for students from government and other sources, and co-ordinate the programs of the local groups.

An interesting sidelight is the fact that expenses for many of the delegates to the meeting last autumn were contributed by prominent citizens, who had themselves benefited from the student self-help program of the Weimar period.

The student work groups are aiding about 80 percent of the university youth in one way or another — primarily through the operation of co-operative messes, providing scholarships and aiding students to get part-time jobs.

**RECOGNIZING THE URGENCY** of the student situation, HICOG education officials met with west German university rectors in Bad Nauheim last year to develop additional aid plans. As a result requests were made to state finance ministers for government funds for the student relief program and there is a good possibility that money will be forthcoming from the Bonn and state governments. A grant to the program by HICOG is also under consideration.

A new program to provide a regular exchange of work-students between Germany, America and European nations is now being organized by a group of Germans who participated in a similar program during the years 1925-33. At that time some 200 German students were sent yearly, through the cooperation of US agriculture and labor groups, to work in the United States for two year periods. About 140 alumni of this program have formed "The Association of Former America Work Students" and have cooperated with the Occupation Forces in re-education activities.

Now occupying leading positions in German industry, labor, government and education, this group has received offers amounting to DM 100,000 to set up a revolving fund for a new US-German student exchange. Now seeking an appropriate US agency to sponsor the American side of the program, the group plans to arrange for study and work trips of worthy young Germans to the United States. It also desires to accept American students on a reciprocal basis.

**THE HICOG EDUCATION** Division in conjunction with the Exchanges Division has already got this program underway by arranging for one year visits of 26 students to work on American farms and 26 students to work in factories this year. They are to be sent to the US as the first contingent of a regular work-student exchange to be continued on a permanent basis. The State Department in Washington is seeking a stateside sponsor for the program which may also arrange to send American students to Germany.

The program realizes a favorite Goethe philosophy that every man should learn to work with his hands. Thus, a doctor of philosophy may spend a year running an American tractor, while an embryo lawyer may do a stint on an auto assembly line. In this way the German students learn the work, the experiences and the attitudes of the average American working man. The student becomes integrated into an American community for a time, and attains firsthand experience of a democratic society.

To co-ordinate the many activities of the self-help programs for working youth and students, the German Section of the International Council on Youth Education and Self-Help has been organized. Specifically the agency seeks to promote and co-ordinate self-help programs, seek aid for these programs and to develop contacts and relationships with groups in other democratic countries interested in youth.

The council is comprised of an advisory committee upon which are represented German leaders from industry, labor, education, religion and youth, and an executive committee comprised of representatives of the various areas of self-help activities. Dr. Theodor Baueuerle, education minister for Wuerttemberg-Baden, is chairman of the organization.

**THE SELF-HELP PROGRAMS** now in existence are far from providing the complete solution to the problems of German youth. There are many thousands for whom no place has yet been found in the limited facilities of these efforts. But the organizations for self-help now developing provide the best framework and channel through which government and private agencies can contribute to the rehabilitation of German youth.

In doing so they will not be providing the demoralizing stopgap aid of grants, doles and charity, but will extend to youth the facilities and opportunities for securing their own future. In the process, the young people will develop the individualism and self-confidence so necessary to a democratic Germany.

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