Windows to the West

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IN THE SPACIOUS marble halls of the Munich building
where Hitler, Chamberlain and Daladier in 1938 signed
the ill-famed pact which opened an area of destruction
in Europe, scores of Germans today are discovering the
real America. Browsing through library shelves, listening
to music and lectures, attending classes, they are begin-
ning to comprehend the free opinion, the self-criticism
and the growing culture of America.

A symbol of terror and tyranny, the building was once
Hitler’s Nazi party headquarters for all Germany. Today
the Stars and Stripes has replaced the red and black
Swastika on its severe graystone facade, and a large sign
proclaims: “Amerika Haus.” Under its new name, it has
become as familiar a landmark to Muencheners as it was
when the demotic dictator raged from its broad bal-
conies.

The Munich building is now one of 25 US Information
Centers — or “America Houses,” as they are popularly
called — established in the major cities of the US Occupa-
tion Zone of Germany and the US Sector in Berlin.
Opened by US Military Government and now operated
by the US High Commissioner’s Office, they were origi-
nally designed to counteract the Nazi-spawned calumnies
about the United States by providing Germans with the
best in American books, magazines and newspapers.

But today they have expanded from their primary lib-
rary functions into centers of contact with Western cul-
ture. Lecturers, cultural leaders and artists from all the
Western democracies appear in Information Center meet-
ing rooms and auditoriums. Documentary films and exhi-
bits graphically portray the institutions of democracy,
life in faraway places, the purpose of the Marshall Plan
and a host of other subjects.

IN A WEEK of daily visits to one US Information Center,
a culture-starved German may get a varied fare from
lessons in English, to a public forum on “the protection
of civil rights,” with a piano recital by an American artist
and a lecture on “the international influence of Mahatma
Gandhi” added for variety.

These varied activities are aimed at a threefold ob-
jective described in an official report by Patricia van Del-
den, chief of the Information Centers system in Germany:
“Dissemination of information about, and the creation
of understanding of, the United States of America, its
ideals, traditions, culture, government and institutions;
aiding Germany’s integration into the family of nations
by promoting democratic practices in the community and
by familiarizing the German population with democratic
patterns and structures throughout the Western world;
and acquainting the German public with the objectives
and achievements of international bodies whose aim is
the furtherance of peace and freedom.”

These ambitious goals developed from a very modest
beginning in the US Zone city of Bad Homburg, Hesse,
when Military Government opened a small library for
Germans on July 4, 1945. When it was transferred to the
US headquarters city, Frankfurt, a few months later, the
library contained approximately 700 well-worn volumes
of educational and reference books, primarily from sur-
plus US Army stocks.

Two years later, there were 20 Information Centers
in the US Zone and American sector of Berlin, offering
lectures, forums, movies and other services in addition
to their library facilities.

THERE WERE MANY compelling reasons why Military
Government had initiated this large-scale cultural
program in Germany. One of the most urgent was the
dearth of cultural materials, Germany had lost an esti-
imated 35,000,000 books through the inadvertent war
damage to public libraries and other institutions. Even
before the war, libraries were sorely depleted as Nazis
burned millions of volumes which violated their perverted
philosophies.

Up until currency reform in June 1948, when the de-
preciated currency was replaced with the respected
“Deutsche mark,” a good book was as difficult to buy as
a good cup of coffee. Even the limited and poor quality
new editions, including obtruse volumes on technical
subjects, disappeared from booksellers’ shelves as fast as
they were displayed, to be resold in the streets at fan-
tastic prices.

Even worse was the effective isolation of Germans in many
cultural, social and professional fields through 12 years
of Nazism and war; doctors were out of touch with many
new medical developments; the reviving political and
civic leadership had been completely cut off from the
techniques and procedures of democratic government;
the schools still operated on principles which had pro-
duced arrogant nationalists since the days of Bismarck.
A whole crop of editors, journalists, radio men and other
workers in the information fields, had to be developed
to replace the staffs which had been hardened in Dr.
Goebbels’ distorted propaganda molds.

Although the Military Government staff included a
corps of experts and technicians to provide leadership
and advice in developing liberalism and democracy in
these and other vital fields of public life, the need for
books, reference materials and informal places of con-
tacts with Americans was still acute.

In addition, the real danger that American advice and
influence would be ineffective if Germans were not en-
Today the 25 Information Centers, located in the major cities of the US Zone, and Berlin, are supplemented by more than 100 auxiliary reading rooms in smaller towns. Fifteen bookmobiles—libraries on wheels—servicing outlying villages will soon start operating. Several additional US Information Centers are being opened in major cities of the British and French Zones, such as Bonn, capital of the Federal German Republic, Hanover, Dusseldorf, Mainz and Coblenz.

Each Center includes a library numbering between 10,000 to 18,000 books, including outstanding technological and scientific publications, as well as political, cultural and fiction works, supplemented by subscriptions to hundreds of American and foreign periodicals. About 10 to 25 percent of the books are in German, purchased from the countries where they are published — Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands. In addition, all of the Information Centers have lecture rooms or auditoriums, children’s libraries, music rooms equipped with records of America’s finest classical music, and space for exhibitions which are circulated throughout the Information-Center system.

Entirely financed by the US government, each Information Center is supervised by an American with extensive experience in library and civic center operations, assisted by a competent German staff, which for the most part the supervisor himself has trained. To improve staff efficiency, the Information Centers Branch of the Education and Cultural Relations Division, Office of Public Affairs, HICOG, is currently operating a librarians school for its German assistants.

For the most part, the Centers are located in former Nazi or Reich-owned properties. Thus the light and cheerful Augsburg Center is a renovated house of horror — onetime Gestapo headquarters. In Marburg, the ancient university city, a famous medieval inn, later appropriated by the Nazi party, is now the house of the new world culture. The best example, of course, is the conversion of Munich’s erstwhile capitol of Nazism from “a palace of darkness” to “a castle of light,” as it was described by a German press service. In Wuerzburg the Information Center is located in a quadrangle of temporary buildings erected by the US Army early in the occupation.

Democracy in Action has been demonstrated to Germans by the US Information Centers in numerous and often unexpected ways.

Merely the manner in which the libraries were operated has been an eye opener. The traditional German library is a “fortress of culture” which guards its books with jealous care. To take out a volume, the prospective borrower had to know exactly what book he wanted by title, author and date of publication and sign for it, giving character references and his reasons for wanting the book. Browsing among open shelves was generally not permitted, and a fee was usually required.

Entering an Information Center library, the German visitor was not only invited, but urged by a friendly librarian to wander among the bookshelves and select his choice. If he had a vague idea that he wanted to learn

Shepard Stone, deputy director of the Office of Public Affairs, HICOG, addressed a capacity audience in German to describe the US Information Center’s program at ceremonies marking opening of the new “Amerika Haus” in Wiesbaden. L. to r., Mrs. Patricia Van Delden, Information Centers chief, Hans N. Tuch, director, Wiesbaden “Amerika Haus,” and Mr. Stone. (PRB OLCH photos)

abled to realize that America was more than a nation of lady wrestlers, bloody strikes and boogie-woogie fiends such as Hitler had portrayed.

Thus the Information Centers’ program constituted the US government’s first co-ordinated program to bring the real America to Germany’s doorsteps. And as each Information Center was opened its popularity began to grow rapidly.

Even though the first libraries contained mostly English-language volumes, the number of Germans who still remembered a few words of their public school training in the language, and joined the Information Centers’ clientele, was surprising. As German language programs and English lessons were inaugurated, the attendance rate climbed higher.

Another inevitable attraction during the winter, in coalless electricity-short Germany was the delightful warmth of the Information Centers. Many an American speaker during those grim days discovered that a good portion of his crowded audience was indifferent to the lecture, but impressed with the comforts of the US-supplied building. But Information Center officials noted that attendance continued to grow in the summer and many a person who came in to get warm returned later to participate in the programs.

Today these economic boosts to the Information Centers’ patronage no longer apply since Germany’s remarkable recovery with Marshall Plan aid and currency reform has improved living conditions and renewed the availability of books and cultural programs from purely German sources. But the popularity of the US Centers has continued to grow — now solely on their own merits.

The attendance has increased from around 600,000 visitors monthly in the summer of 1949 to well over 1,000,000 monthly in 1950.
something about American history, he was loaded with a half-dozen volumes in no time. And he was given a card and the privilege of borrowing any book he wanted, without paying a penny.

Even during the grimmest days of scarcity, an Information Center lost no more books than does an American community library.

"Germans have been so thoroughly disciplined and taught such earnest respect for a good book, that the failure to return a borrowed volume is a major sin with them," said Max M. Kimental, deputy chief of the Information Centers Branch.

The system has been so impressive that at least one German library director has asked Information Center aid in converting his institution to the same procedure.

THE LIBRARIES have functioned as much more than a mere source for leisure reading. They have provided a valuable supply of reference material for newspapers and publishers, doctors, lawyers, government officials and particularly students who have been the Information Centers' best patrons in preparing for examinations and writing theses. The librarians seek to answer any question and track down information on any requested subject.

They have provided books on public administration to a city government, labor statistics to a German labor office, outline of parliamentary procedure to a fledgling professional society, surveys of English literature to a university, magazines to hospital patients, and so on.

In addition to constituting an important source of information, the Information Centers are rapidly developing into an institution entirely new to German society — community centers, where any worthy group of citizens receives aid and facilities for organizing cultural programs and civic improvement projects. Thus one house co-operated in the founding of a girl scout movement; another turned over its halls for a German Agriculture Week; many co-operate closely with and provide books and records for the Adult Education Schools (Volkshochschulen), which once considered the US institutions as unfair competitors.

In fact, the German adult schools are everywhere beginning to recognize the valuable educational aid rendered by Information Centers, as was recently signified in an advertising poster: "The Volkshochschule has become, after the America House, the most inexpensive public institution for learning and adult education in the city."

THE WIDE APPRECIATION for the Information Centers' community services can be judged by the following letter from a key official of a German district government to the director of the Augsburg Center:

"During the past year, your contribution to the promotion of popular education in Swabia has proved invaluable. Your direction of the America House activities has resulted in their complete identification with the local cultural life of the community. Beyond that you have effectively supported the activities of philosophical and sociological clubs, societies of natural science and art, and general adult education and culture. For this all of us who have the interest of education and culture at heart are grateful."

Through such services, the Information Centers promote German willingness to listen to and participate in discussions aimed at stimulating the development of German democracy. "Protection of civil rights," "How you can influence your government," "Improving German women's normally inferior position in society," and scores of similar subjects of lectures and forums give the common man, long disenfranchised in authoritarian Germany, a new concept of his rights and responsibilities in a democracy. Good press coverage of these programs, promoted by Information Center directors, spreads the message to a wider audience. The public appreciation of such services was typified by one newspaper commenting on a political discussion:

"This discussion was another proof of the fact that the America Houses in Germany again and again take up German problems for discussion, and that these institutions are not, as some shortsighted people used to declare, merely organs of the Occupation Power."

SUPPLEMENTING AND WOVEN into all these activities is the Information Center program of interpreting America to the Germans. Besides the books, exhibits and films available on America, an important factor is the voluntary participation in Information Center programs by occupation Americans. In addition to the officials of the US High Commissioner's Office, who speak on their specific fields of activity, many army officers and men lecture on a hobby, a specific field of interest, a section of America he knows best, or other phases of American life. The wives of US personnel have conducted kindergartens, arranged children's programs and taught classes in the Information Centers. These institutions have now become enlightening and mutually profitable places of association for Germans and Americans.

Of course, they were not immediately accepted at their face value. Many Germans evinced suspicion that the Information Centers were high-powered propaganda agencies. As the programs and services develop, however, this distrust is rapidly disappearing. As one young student wrote:

"Not so long ago I availed myself of the opportunity of the lectures, language courses and other facilities of

Dr. James R. Newman, State Commissioner for Hesse, speaking at Wiesbaden. L.t.r., on platform, are E. K. Neumann, chief, Public Affairs Division, OLCH; Johannes Maas, Wiesbaden city councilor; Shepard Stone; Hessian Minister President Christian Stock; Mrs. Van Delden; Hans N. Tuch, Gertrude Moeder, interpreter, and Dr. Newman.
The only one of its kind in postwar Germany, the Kindergarten in Wiesbaden's new "Amerika Haus" is source of fun and interest to Dr. James R. Newman and Christian Stock, Minister President of Hesse, as they carry out an inspection.

The America House. Since (they) are free of charge I was somewhat opposed to this institution, which I considered a regular instrument of propaganda destined to influence and win youth — for certain American ideologies. This was my opinion about the America House before I took the opportunity of attending any of its activities...I have convinced myself of your high standards, and I am really surprised and delighted...

ANOTHER IMPORTANT cultural attraction has been the succession of visiting American and European artists and lecturers touring the US Information Centers. Although their services are voluntary, and there is no money to pay them fees, the Information Center officials are not above buttonholing any passing professor, musician or just plain tourist, who has a bit of American life to convey and is willing to contribute his time.

And some very able representatives of America have made the Information Center circuit: Yehudi Menuhin gave concerts; the Yale Glee Club sang; Dorothy Sands, Dr. John W. Draper of West Virginia University, Felix Hirsch of Bard College Faculty and Christopher Lazare, well-known editor and writer, all lectured at the US Information Centers. Robert J. Flaherty, the eminent documentary film producer, showed samples of his films and conducted discussions concerning them.

Perhaps the simplest but most effective statement of the growing significance of the Information Centers to Germans was carried in a feature story of a German newspaper at Heilbronn in Wuerttemberg-Baden recently:

The reporter described how he overheard two small boys on a street car plotting their route to an unstated destination in town.

"I was interested to know where these little fellows were going all by themselves, and so I asked them what they intended to do after they got off the street car.

" 'To the America House, of course!' was the almost indignant answer, for it was obvious that the little boys were astonished that an adult would not realize that there was just no other possibility...

" 'Tell me, what do little youngsters like you do there?'

" 'Why, we read the books, naturally,' was the little fellow's prompt answer.

" 'And the picture books, too,' the tiny brother hastened to add in his enthusiasm.

"Finally we reached the street. The moppet took his little brother by the hand and they started off earnestly in the direction of the 'America House, of course!'

ONE SHOULD TELL this little story to the American taxpayers. They surely would be glad to know that the America House which they support with their money has become something important even for the youngest citizens of the town," the reporter concluded.

The windows of Hitler's one-time Nazi headquarters face to the west. Today, as the Munich "Amerika Haus," the entire building has become a symbolic "Window to the West." Through it, and other US Information Centers in Germany, the US government is making one of its most generous and enlightened efforts to restore the Western cultural ties of a recently misguided and isolated people.

END

Rebuilding of 15,000 Berlin Homes Commences with Help of ECA Loans

The repair and rebuilding of nearly 15,000 Berlin dwelling units has been undertaken since announcement of a DM 35,000,000 ECA allocation for housing was made.

Up to mid-May, 275 individual housing projects financed by the Marshall Plan had been started. They represent an investment of DM 21,500,000 of counterpart funds.

Loans made so far range from a few thousand Deutsche marks for repair of one house, to several of more than DM 500,000 each for rehabilitation of large social-housing projects. Housing space for 13,205 families now in emergency use is being converted into permanent dwellings through repair of war damage. An additional 1,639 units are being regained through restoration of heavily damaged buildings not presently occupied.

Approvals for further projects are now being granted at the rate of 50 to 100 per week.