Leadership Training for Youth

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That is the greatest problem we have with German youth," said the slight, graying instructor, nodding his head after the boy who had just asked for new instructions. "They are always looking for orders. They will do anything you ask them, but they want to be told first."

The German was watching a group of 25 youngsters engaged in a class of amateur dramatics on the lawn of a large house overlooking the Starnberg Lake in Bavaria. The youths were not training for Thespians, but were learning to organize impromptu theatricals as an activity of a youth organization. There would be other classes in group singing, sports and games, and, above all, in a diversified subject called "group work." Hailing from all parts of Bavaria, the youths were participating in a course at the Bayerische Jugendleiter Schule (Bavarian Youth Leadership Training School).

In referring to the German predilection for following orders, the instructor had touched on a basic reason for the training school, one of four in the US Zone and Berlin sponsored by the Office of the US High Commissioner.

In Germany's attempted conversion from dictatorship to democracy, the youth were left in a chaos of smashed ideals and disintegrated organization. They were confused by their freedom and ignorant of its responsibilities. The Allies quickly encouraged the reorganization of youth programs in tune with the new spirit they were fostering in Germany. In the Soviet Zone, starting a "youth movement" proved to be a simple matter. The Hitler Youth merely changed its colors and its allegiances and went marching on under a new name — Freie Deutsche Jugend ("Free German Youth").

In the West where individual freedom is the basic goal, the programs and plans are much more complicated, involving hundreds of individual clubs and organizations, thousands of community programs for youths still wary of any kind of organization, "boys' towns" and "youth villages," apprenticeship training and self-help programs — a myriad of voluntary activities, designed to make Germany's young generation good citizens in a democracy.

But democracy does not spring full-bloomed from such freshly planted seed. The organization of a Boy Scout troop or Pathfinder's club does not automatically provide paragons of youthful self-government. Too often at first, the leader pounded his gavel, called for attention and began issuing orders. And just as often, the assembled members meekly obeyed him. And there was appalling ignorance of co-operative planning, parliamentary procedure, democratic discussion techniques and methods of self-government.

The growing adult corps leaders of youth groups also had little background in principles of democratic programs. Well-intentioned guides, councilors, recreation directors and professional youth workers tended to do too much thinking for the young people and often failed to encourage them in planning their own programs and in solving their own problems. They were schooled in a concept which held that the purpose of organized groups was to strengthen a program or promote an ideology — religious, political, sports or other. The idea that young people join groups to gain self-assurance, democratic experience and recreation was almost unknown.

It was quickly realized that some kind of intensive training was needed to develop leaders capable of providing youth with the latter kind of experience. In 1948 and 1949, youth officials of HICOG and their German counterparts co-operated in setting up leadership training schools in the US Zone and in the US Sector of Berlin.

Haus Schwalbach,* erstwhile sumptuous hunting lodge of the Anheuser-Busch beer barons, in the wooded hills near Wiesbaden, took on the Hessian Leadership School along with its community activities. A former German air corps research station in the little village of Ruit near Stuttgart was converted into the Württemberg-Baden Sport und Jugendleiter Schule (Sport and Youth Leader School). Wannsee-heim was established for Berlin's leadership training in a former yacht club overlooking beautiful lake Wannsee, and a lakeside house at Niederpoelking, near Munich, became the home of the Bayerische Jugendleiter Schule (Bavarian Youth Leaders' School).

With the exception of the smaller buildings at Niederpoelking and Wannsee, each of the schools accommodates 60 to 100 students and often conducts several courses.


Ruit teacher conducts group singing class for trainees.

DECEMBER 1950
simultaneously, lasting anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. A broad range of subjects taught includes a variety of leisure-time activities, such as folk-dancing, amateur dramatics, handicrafts and others, as well as basic instruction in democratic group work and psychology. But whatever the courses, they all include training in how to lead a group so that young people will learn to think for themselves and to organize activities that will involve participation by all members.

Perhaps the most important instruction is that known as "group work." Leaders are taught how a collection of young people with different points of view can be developed into a group; how the group can work out a program; how to elect its officers, conduct its meetings and discuss its problems so that all opinions can be heard. In addition, a liberal dose of practical psychology equips the leaders to handle such problems as inspiring a group to action, holding back the aggressive type that tries to dominate the group, and drawing all members into active participation.

Practical work is emphasized in all courses. Sometimes a nearby village school sends its classes to the leadership-training institution for recreation periods, thus giving students an opportunity to practice newly-learned theories.

In working out their theories, instructors sometimes organize what they call "social plays" involving typical situations in any organization. Thus one member of the class may be appointed "an aggressive type" who tries all the demagogic tricks in usurping leadership and dominating the group. Other members pool their parliamentary wits in stopping him. At the end of these sometimes vociferous dramas, the teachers and students join in critique.

In all activities of the schools, the teachers strive to practice the theories they preach. They call it "combining method with content," meaning that the democratic methods are applied to teaching the contents of every course. Within the broad outlines of the curriculum, the students are encouraged to discuss the subject matter to be learned and propose the methods of learning it.

In a class on social programs for teen-age youth, a group of girls was encouraged to develop their own proposals for organizing activities in their respective communities. With counsel and advice from the teacher, the youngsters learned to divide up their problems, organize panel discussions, and later combine the reports from each panel into a workable program.

In one school a group of boys was called into an executive session to determine why there were so many squabbles between them and the Hausleiter — a sort of janitor-supervisor — and what to do about it. Instead of argument and bitter recrimination, which sometimes mark the parliamentary practices of their elders, they agreed upon an equitable division of the housekeeping duties between themselves and the Hausleiter's staff. Youthful and adult students are made aware they too constitute a group and learn to work co-operatively with the school staff and members of the school household.

Although varying in details, the schools are organized along the same general lines — with a Kuratorium or board of directors, comprised of public-spirited citizens, determining the broad policies and activities for each institution. A full-time German director and a small teaching staff, aided by many volunteer and part-time teachers, operate the schools and teach the classes. A member of the Community Activities Branch of the Office of the US Commissioner of each state acts as adviser. Frequently American and/or European experts in a particular field supplement the permanent school staff.

As the facilities of the institutions are limited, every possible effort is made to spread their influence by conducting extension courses. Thus faculty members are constantly called to conduct discussions or teach courses in democratic group work at meetings and conventions of adult and youth groups throughout their respective states. The Niederpecking school maintains a list of qualified teachers in all parts of Bavaria who can be called upon for instruction from any nearby group. Their fees are paid by the school. Others send out small teams of teachers to hold two- or three-day courses for appropriate groups and communities.
THE PERMANENT FACULTY members of the schools come from all walks of life and all levels of education. A PhD is not as important as the right kind of personality and enthusiasm in teaching leadership activities. Many of the instructors whose average age is not much higher than their students, have been sent by HICOG to the United States for periods of work and study with American youth organizations and programs.

Mrs. Judith Russell, leadership training adviser, and other members of the HICOG Community Activities staff, spend considerable time in advising and aiding the schools in their many problems.

Likely youngsters and youth leaders, teachers and social case workers, parents’ sports leaders and others, are all invited to classes at the schools throughout their organizations or communities. Courses are also arranged for special types of leaders or groups, such as Jugendpfleger (professional youth workers), GYA center directors, student government leaders and camp directors. One school has held rehabilitation courses for recently returned PW’s from Soviet Russia; another gave sports training to war invalids; some courses are attended by school teachers interested in more democratic and informal methods. Occasional courses are also provided for leaders of adult groups.

Many prospective leaders are “discovered” by the schools’ extension teachers and invited to attend. The students are charged a small fee of 50 or 75 cents daily, to cover expenses and a liberal number of scholarships is offered to help worthy but underprivileged students.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES vary among the different schools, but all of them depend partially or totally on HICOG support. Wannsee and Schwalbach receive all their funds from HICOG grants; Niederpoecking receives three-fourths of its financing from HICOG and the remainder from the Bavarian State Youth Committee. Ruß is, perhaps, better off than the others, as half of its funds are allocated by the state from the Fussball Toto, a legalized betting pool on football which provides substantial revenues to the Wuerttemberg-Baden government.

German sports editor discusses sport and recreation programs with international group of boys at Haus Schwalbach summer camp.  
(Kurt Hopp photos)

Hessian youth leaders learn folk dances. (PRD HICOG photo)

However, the school staffs have begun to plan for the day when the occupation ends and American support is withdrawn. At recent meetings of the faculties, suggestions were made to enlarge Kuratoriums, bringing in industrial, labor and other influential leaders who could also provide additional support. Various types of public subscription have also been proposed. However, the scarcity of capital in present-day Germany and the novelty of schools for democratic leadership create difficulties in fund-raising.

Although operating fairly smoothly, the schools also face other problems. Competent personnel is difficult to find. Organized youth groups of political parties, labor unions, churches and others sometimes question the purposes of the schools since they are more concerned with training youthful leaders in their respective ideologies than in education in basic democratic techniques.

NEVERTHELESS, THE SCHOOLS are steadily growing in influence and prestige. According to Mrs. Russell, more than 10,000 persons, the majority of whom are influential members of groups and communities, have attended courses in the schools, and many times that number have been reached through extension courses. Students are generally enthusiastic, many of them returning for additional training, and there is never a shortage of waiting applicants. HICOG officials have noted with gratification a growing acceptance of the institutions among German circles which at first were inclined to be suspicious of such American-inspired activities.

The results of leadership training can only be measured in intangibles — the attitude of a group leader; brisk discussion instead of ponderous speeches in group meetings; new interests and enthusiasm among county youth committees. HICOG officials are continually uncovering these hopeful signs in visiting centers, youth groups, forums, meetings and other civic programs. It will take many years to bring Western Germany’s new youth movement to a full and democratic fruition, but the Community Activities Branch convinced that the leadership training schools are hastening the process.  

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INFORMATION BULLETIN
1. Municipal sewage is pumped into wagon which will later spray it over growing vegetables. Scene is the pumphouse in Flungstadt.

2. Sewage, mixed with well water, is sprayed over growing vegetables with battery of revolving nozzles. ([EUCOM Medical Bulletin photos])

3. Women harvest radishes from a field previously irrigated by raw sewage. Canal in background leads to a small reservoir.