THE SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION was “European Union” and it took little prompting from the youthful teacher to spark a vigorous exchange of ideas among his eighth-grade students. In other wings of the futurist, wide-windowed building, there were classes in the functions of the state government, the trade union and harbor operations. It was the social studies period in Bremen’s modern, progressive Habenhausen elementary school.

In a shabby stone building within sight of the Bavarian Alps, students shuffled their feet on the black-tarred floor as they listened to the teacher drone through the history of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. A detailed blackboard diagram of the Battle of Sedan (which would have been more suitable for a class in military tactics) was used to illustrate the lesson. A faded picture of Bismarck and an old print depicting the French surrender hung on the dingy walls.

The two educational extremes illustrate the point of departure and highest achievement of intense efforts by liberal German educators and US officials to bring about a democratic reform of the German school system. After hundreds of workshops and training courses, the exchange of dozens of American experts and nearly 1,000 German educators and young teachers between the US and German school systems and the expenditure of more than $4,000,000 and DM 31,000,000 (approximately $7,378,000) in American funds during the past two years, schools like that at Habenhausen are still rare. But the antiquated methods and nationalistic content illustrated in the Bavarian history class are being modified under the impact of new ideas.

IN A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL, less than 15 miles away, a young man teaches 50 children, representing all elementary grades from the first through the eighth. The regimented rows of benches (on which earlier generations sat like little soldiers) have been rearranged to permit the youngsters to work together in small groups, while a class constitution, drafted by the pupils, is posted on the back wall. A question box, to encourage inquisitive minds, hangs from the teacher’s desk. In spite of the overcrowded cluttered room an easy relationship of mutual confidence and respect exists between teacher and pupil.

In such an atmosphere the children learn by working together, asking questions and discussing the subject of study, thereby sharpening the critical faculties so necessary to alert citizens of a democracy. It is the substitution of these new methods for the old system of memorizing facts and figures that educators call “inner school reform.”

Weimar Republic efforts to introduce the liberal teaching methods were later halted by the Nazis who dismissed progressive teachers, closed experimental schools and forced Germany into “educational stagnation.” Since 1945, liberal educators actively supported by American officials have had new opportunities for introducing new methods. How well they have succeeded is difficult to measure. All education ministries in the US Zone and many in other parts of Western Germany have officially advocated liberal classroom techniques but in the last analysis progress depends on the understanding and initiative of the teachers.

Modern equipment and facilities, boasted by the Habenhausen school, stimulated democratic teaching methods. However, the achievements of the Bavarian village teacher belie the protests of many teachers and officials that the “terrible school conditions” proscribe progress. All teacher colleges include the new teaching methods, although it will be some time before their graduates gain appreciable influence on the school system. HICOG’s 14 Education Service Centers conduct in-service teacher training, as do many German organizations, such as the Bavarian State Foundation for Education Reconstruction which last year sent its members lecturing to 25,000 teachers throughout the state.

HOWEVER, YOU CAN STILL go through class after class of autocratic instruction before finding a session like that in a high-school English class in Wiesbaden, where a student was leading an objective discussion on current affairs. The number of progressive teachers is growing, but they are still a minority.

Habenhausen Elementary School is one of Bremen’s three model schools — modern, spacious, airy, well-equipped institutions completed since passage of Bremen School Reform Law in 1949. War left intact only 20 percent of Bremen’s classroom space, destroyed one-third of schools. Five more up-to-date institutions are under construction.
As an example, the State Foundation for Education Reconstruction, at Kempfenhausen, Bavaria, concentrated two years of committee work by scores of teachers, and constant pressure on the Education Ministry, to create and introduce a new curriculum in all state elementary schools. Today the plan has been adopted on a trial basis.

It provides for integrated subject matter to give youngsters a comprehensive picture of society and the world they live in, as well as the inclusion of social studies problems in teaching all subjects. Thus a class in modern history or Eastern European geography should also include a discussion of the refugee problem. In fact, the Kempfenhausen educators are especially anxious that teachers face this burning Bavarian issue in an objective way to promote good will and understanding in the schools where many classes have a majority of refugee children.

The new curriculum concepts are clearly demonstrated by the Hesse's new history book for the fifth and sixth grades, "Mankind in the Changing World" (Der Mensch im Wandel der Zeiten) which James Morgan Read, chief of HICOG's Education and Cultural Relations Division, calls "as good a history textbook as I have seen in any country." Instead of a chronology of dates and dynasties, it tells how the average man lived through the politico-social evolution of history from Charlemagne to the United Nations.

Some chapter headings: "From the Farmers' World" (medieval life); "Powerful Princes and Free Men" (the 30 Years' War); "Men Want Freedom" (the American Revolution and Napoleon); "New Science and Technology" (the Industrial Revolution); "A Labor Leader Becomes President" (the Weimar Republic); and "The Destroying Fire" (the Second World War).

Not only objectivity, but the struggle for human rights is a basic theme of the two-volume book, which was prepared by a committee of the State School Advisory Commission.

Unfortunately, few good textbooks on the sensitive social science subjects have been produced in the US Zone. Out of 1,700 revised or newly written books published since 1945, only a few deal with history, geography and civics. Notable among them is an objective history used in Wuerttemberg-Baden high schools, an 11-volume series similar in content and outlook to the Hesse book, which is standard in Berlin schools, and a series of 50 social studies pamphlets produced by a Bremen education group.

The shortage of textbooks is due primarily to financial restrictions and not a little to the traditional German reliance on the "personality of the teacher" rather than the printed page to convey knowledge. Even many liberal educators fail to grasp the importance of an objective text, used as a basis, though not a bible, for instructing children — particularly in the new and unfamiliar social studies fields.
The work of HICOG’s Education Service Centers, the exchange of German and American textbook specialists and even direct HICOG support in the form of grants of book paper and materials have had substantial influence on this situation.

The value of reformed content and method of German education, however, would be diminished without reorganization of the school system to insure educational equality for all children. Under the traditional European two-track system, strongly entrenched in Germany, the wealthier children received 12 years of elementary and high school education, while 90 percent of the youngsters had only 10 or 11 years of full and part-time training in the inferior elementary-vocational school track. This educational disadvantage limited the chances of the workman’s child to gain a position of leadership or influence in society.

In Hesse, an equally progressive school law, developed by the State School Advisory Commission, under direction of Heinrich W. Haupt, has a good chance of passing the state legislature this year.

In Bavaria and Wuerttemberg-Baden proposed school reform legislation has been snarled up by ministerial opposition for two years, although a common curriculum for the first six years has been introduced in the latter state in recognition of the need for equalized educational opportunity.

The establishment of free tuition and textbooks in principle, though not always in practice, has been an important step in enabling poorer children to get secondary education. This fundamental democratic right to free public education has been under attack from many quarters, however. In Wuerttemberg-Baden tuition is only 50 percent free in secondary schools, while Bavaria recently reimposed a fee of DM 5 ($1.19) per month.

SCORERS OF OTHER PROBLEMS involved in the democratization of German education are the objects of intense reform efforts. Teacher training is being improved through the inclusion of instruction in modern teaching techniques, and the gradual elevation of teacher institutes to college level schools. The parent-teacher movement to apply the citizens’ influence on school affairs, is slowly growing. Scientific educational research has been revived in Germany by HICOG’s Education Service Centers and many German agencies.
Dragging at every forward step, however, is the problem of school finances.

"Whenever there is need for economy, the first place the state governments make their cut seems to be in the school budget," said Dr. Read. "Germany needs a united movement of teachers and citizens to demand more money and better education for the children."

Even in Bremen, where three school buildings are modern as any to be found in the United States are under construction, and five more are planned, "education gets only 12 percent of the state budget," said Wilhelm Berger, of the State School Board. "In New York State, 24 percent of the budget is appropriated for schools. We need twice as much as we are getting."

A special school tax is now under consideration in Bremen. In other states, however, the budgets are much less than the Bremen outlay, with little hope for substantial increases in sight.

Perhaps the healthiest signs in German education are the numerous independent organizations working against considerable odds for a thorough-going school reform. Organizations like the Bavarian Kempenhausen Foundation, the Hessian State Advisory Commission, the Education Research Center at Wiesbaden and the German Society for Education are reaching a broad area of teachers and parents in marshalling support for democratic evolution of education.

The recent amalgamation of all Bavarian teachers' organizations into one statewide association under progressive leadership is particularly encouraging. Many of these agencies are partially supported by HICOG funds, but most give every indication of remaining as permanent, vital forces in the German education world.

The problems they face are formidable and success will be achieved only through a long and difficult period of evolution.

Payne Templeton, chief of the Education and Cultural Relations Branch, OLC Wuerttemberg-Baden, warns against "the usual American impatience in expecting the

Weserbahn Trade School, Bremen's largest vocational institution, offers apprentices and other students a variety of courses. Here teacher demonstrates to would-be waiters how to serve, table of eight. Survey reveals average age of teachers now is 40, as compared with 55 before war.

German, US Universities to Be Affiliated

A program of student affiliations between American and West German universities, which will lead eventually to exchanges of students and student papers, establishment of scholarships, transatlantic round-table radio programs, and joint activity by university organizations, is currently being arranged by the World Student Service Fund.

As a result, affiliations have been developed between Heidelberg und Yale Universities; Mainz and Howard Universities; Tuebingen and Princeton and Fiske Universities; Free University of Berlin with the American universities of Swarthmore and Columbia; Frankfurt and Chicago Universities; Marburg and Duke Universities; and Erlangen and Goettingen and Cornell Universities.

Affiliations have also been established between technical schools, such as the Stuttgart Technical College and Georgia Technical Institute, and Hanover Technical College and Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute of Troy, N. Y.