ERP Providing Homes

Twelve families will find a home upon completion of this housing development in Sandhausen, near Heidelberg. ERP aid will come from over-all contribution of DM 750,000 ($178,500) being used in various projects in area. (US Army photos)

By WILLIAM T. NEEL
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THIS PROJECT IS SUPPORTED with Marshall Plan Funds,” says the sign on one of the apartment blocks built in the Heidelberg suburb of Weiblingen by a local, non-profit, cooperative housing company.

To 45 families, this sign spells more than a mere economic fact. It spells low-cost housing in a location where husbands, sons and daughters no longer need travel hours to reach the plant, farm or office where they are employed. A long period of misery, beginning in Hitler’s concentration camps, in a crowded battlefield hospital or in an evacuation camp in an Iron Curtain country — and including years on the waiting lists of housing offices — has reached its end for many with the completion of the new ERP-supported apartment blocks.

Emil Wohlfahrt is a technician with the Rhein Chemie A.G., producers of chemicals, in Mannheim. He, his wife and their teen-age daughter moved into one of the new three-room apartments at 5 Hermann Treiber Strasse in Heidelberg-Weiblingen on Feb. 15, 1951. Before they moved into the new ERP-aided apartment block, mother and daughter lived with the parents of Emil Wohlfahrt in a little town in Tauberbischofsheim County, near the Bavarian border. Father Wohlfahrt was only able to join them over the weekend.

Up to 1945, the Wohlfahrt family lived in Insterburg, East Prussia. When the Red Army conquered East Prussia in 1945, the Wohlfahrts fled to the wife’s parents in Berlin. The badly-damaged, overcrowded former German capital did not offer much opportunity of gainful employment to father Wohlfahrt. He left Berlin for his native Lauda in Tauberbischofsheim County and found a job with his present employer. A move of the firm to Mannheim made it necessary for him to rent a furnished room in Heidelberg. The railroad trip from Lauda to Mannheim and back would have required six hours per day.

NOW THE FAMILY IS REUNITED. They pay DM 49 ($11.66) per month for their new three-room apartment, a sum which appears incredibly low to the average German city dweller. It takes father 30 minutes to reach his plant by bicycle. Leaving his home at 7:30 in the morning, he is back at 6 p.m. The Wohlfahrts enjoy their being together in a nicely furnished apartment after having shared their rooms with in-laws for almost five years.
This uncompleted apartment house is to become home for 24 families. Project is being aided by a Marshall Plan contribution of DM 52,000 ($12,375), part of a DM 750,000 ERP allocation to help construct 286 family units in the area.

And they are aware that their apartment was partly financed by ERP funds. "We know that this apartment block was built with Marshall Plan money," said Frau Wohlfahrt. "That's why we did not have to pay Baukostenzuschuss (a certain amount of money which the tenant must contribute to the construction cost, a well-established post-currency reform practice in Germany)."

Weilvingen is only one of 22 developments in the city and the county of Heidelberg, an area with a population of more than 240,000. ERP counterpart funds, usually allocated as a first mortgage in addition to German public and private funds and the owner's financial and labor resources, made possible the construction of 286 family dwelling units in this section of the US Zone state of Wuerttemberg-Baden.

Most of the new housing is built by non-profit, cooperative housing construction associations, but individual expellee builders also benefit from ERP housing program funds. The total ERP funds allocated to the Heidelberg area amount to DM 750,000 ($178,500), a sum which constitutes a significant contribution to the over-all development of housing construction in a district which has always been notorious for its disproportionately high rate of unemployment.

Marshall Plan funds thus achieve a double purpose. In addition to the increase in German labor productivity by giving workers decent homes near the plant, counterpart fund loans create new jobs, strengthening the purchasing power of people taken off the dole.

Country resident officers have been charged with the responsibility of checking the use of ERP housing funds on the local level. This responsibility entails numerous conferences and discussions with bank officials, tenants, housing officials, building contractors, construction workers and community administrators. These discussions provide the Resident Officer with a detailed picture of the various aspects of the program. The best impression of the impact of the ERP Housing Program is gained through on-the-spot visits.

On the slopes of the fog-bound Odenwald mountains near Eberbach, a bricklayer looks up from his work. "Certainly," he remarks, "this is an ERP-supported housing project. The first three houses in this row were built with Marshall Plan funds." He knows where the money comes from even though the project fails to show the usual sign. The Resident Officer jots down on his notepad: "Reminder to disbursing bank and owner—put up sign on Eberbach project."

The bricklayer is an expellee who works in a lumber processing plant in the nearby city of Eberbach. For more than four years, he and his family have lived cramped in the attic of a farmhouse in a small mountain village with a battered bicycle serving as his only means of transportation to the plant. Now he uses his annual leave to supply as much manual labor as possible to his future home in order to keep the total cost as low as possible.

The loan from Marshall Plan counterpart funds will be the first mortgage on the house, ownership of which will be transferred from the cooperative housing association to the tenants two years after completion. As this article is being printed, the family is moving into its new home. Father will be able to come home for lunch and will no longer have to push his old bike over the steep Odenwald mountain paths.

Ownership of a home means integration into the community. The bricklayer's family ceases to be the unwelcome guests of a small farmer and the children will again come to learn the meaning of the word "Home."

The itinerary of the resident officer's inspection trips to ERP housing projects in the county of Heidelberg covers 12 cities and towns. It is not always easy to reach the new developments. Frequently the communities have been unable to build streets fit for passenger cars. One of the HICOG drivers used to crack: "Just follow the mud. The deeper it gets, the nearer the project." Once a gravel truck stuck in the mud bored the road for a whole hour.

Spot checks are made everywhere to discover cases of non-compliance with ERP Housing Program regulations. Whenever such violations are found, notes are taken, resulting in discrepancy letters to banks, owners and construction associations. Failure to display signs, eligibility of tenants, and complaints as to excessive rates of interest are the most important matters requiring corrective action. The discrepancies are pointed out to the German partners in the program.

The appreciation of the objectives of the Marshall Plan Housing Program on the German part, however, is demonstrated by the cooperative spirit in which corrective action is taken in most of the cases. And, whether implied or expressly stated, German workers, public officials, bank executives, architects, contractors and newspapers agree on one thing: "The ERP Housing Program is a wonderful scheme and we would love to see it continued."
The strict departmentalization system of German newspapers places all news of ERP, including the ERP Housing Program, on the commercial and financial page. Unfortunately, only bankers, business executives and college economists read the business page. As the Resident Officer was convinced the people of the Heidelberg area should see what ERP housing funds have accomplished in their communities, a press tour to all ERP housing projects was conducted last December. It resulted in extensive and favorable publicity. Series of pictures and articles on the ERP Housing Program in the Heidelberg area appeared in all local papers.

Some of the headlines proclaimed: "Three-Quarter Million Deutschemarks ($178,500) for Housing," "Here We Build with Marshall Plan Money," "ERP Funds Promote Housing Construction." Total press coverage amounted to almost 2,000 words and 13 photos. All papers used the opportunity to cite some of the ERP Housing Program regulations, especially those regarding the eligibility of tenants, and added some explanations of ERP terminology, e.g., counterpart funds.

WITH THIS PUBLICITY, the role of the Resident Officer in the implementation of the Marshall Plan Housing Program was bound to catch the attention of the public. Very soon, letters started coming in by the dozen. And "Dear Sir: I respectfully request your assistance in obtaining an ERP loan..." or "Is there any possibility of getting a second mortgage from ERP funds?" became some of the typical inquiries directed to the Resident Officer.

One county community requested the Resident Officer to assist in the procurement of water supply equipment for an ERP-supported housing development when delivery of the equipment was delayed by the current shortage of non-ferrous metals. Municipal officials made inquiries as to the possibility of exemptions from the eligibility rules of ERP Housing Program regulations. Replies were sent out advising German would-be builders to address their requests for ERP loans to German banks, informing housing officials that no exemptions from eligibility rules must

This house is part of a project for 20 expellee families being built by the Aid Work Program of the German Evangelical Church. ERP helped with DM 31,500 ($7,497).

US Resident Officer William T. Neel, author of the accompanying article, discusses the financing of a two-family house in Bammental, near Heidelberg, with occupant, Mrs. Herzog. More than half of the total cost, DM 7,000 ($1,666), was covered by ERP aid. D. G. Moeller (center), reorientation specialist in Mr. Neel's office takes part in discussion, one of many such personal contacts in the crowded daily routine of the county Resident Officer.

be made, and furnishing advice and guidance to others. ERP housing reports and correspondence on ERP housing now fill two bulging files in the Heidelberg RO’s office.

The ERP Housing Program has not only provided 286 families in the Heidelberg area with homes, it has not only increased the productivity of workers employed in industry, agriculture and export trade, it has not only created new jobs for construction workers—it has also fulfilled an important social task. It has given numerous families a feeling of belonging and it has aided the integration of Germany's "new citizens" in German community life. This is one more step toward the ultimate objective, "A better Germany in a better Europe."

Hessian Union Strength Up 17 Percent

Almost 70,000 Hessians joined trade unions during 1950, bringing the total of organized workers in Hesse to more than 506,000.

The new trade union membership represents 36.2 percent of the entire Hessian labor force, unemployed included, compared to a percentage of 32.3 in 1949.

Approximately 387,000 of the Hessian trade union members are laborers, while the remaining 119,000 have been recruited from white-collar workers. Women aggregate almost 17 percent.

INFORMATION BULLETIN