The German Viewpoint

By HEINRICH von BRENTOANO

FOR TWO WEEKS during the month of February 1951, five other members of the German Bundestag (Lower House) and I visited the United States as the guests of the US Department of State. The purpose of the trip was to give some of the German Bundestag members an opportunity to discuss the over-all political situation with representatives of public opinion in the United States, with particular reference to the difficult problems affecting the Federal Republic of Germany.

Two weeks are a very short period of time. However, the assistance given us by the State Department enabled us to establish contacts which will be of vital importance in the development of mutual understanding between the two nations.

We all had opportunities to talk with leading officials of the State Department and the Department's German Bureau, with officials of other departments dealing with German and European affairs, with members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, with representatives of the big trade unions and with many other personalities in public life.

We were impressed by the open-mindedness and frankness, indispensable for mutual understanding, with which these discussions were held. I believe that these contacts were valuable and will bear fruit. I wish that such talks could continue.

I WAS CONVINCED from the beginning that the lack of direct personal contact between Americans and Germans has been the cause of many fateful misunderstandings, and this conviction deepened from day to day as our talks progressed. Since 1933, the Germans have been isolated from the rest of the world; at first this isolation was voluntary and later enforced.

The situation has not been improved by the events of recent years. The generous and valuable HICOG Exchanges program has given many Germans an opportunity to look at their troubles and problems from a different angle. In most cases, however, these Germans have followed their personal interests and wishes, and either have not spoken or could not speak as representatives of the new Germany.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson meets in Washington with six members of the Federal Republic's "Bundestag" recently in the United States for a two-week visit. L. to r. Erich Ollenhauer, deputy chairman, Social Democratic Party; Hans Muehlenfeld, leader of German Party's caucus in Bundestag; Hermann Puender, CDU member; Mr. Acheson; August Euler, member, National Executive, Free Democratic Party and leader of his party in Bundestag; Heinrich von Brentano, house leader of Christian Democratic Union and author of accompanying article; and Gerhard Luekens, national secretary of the Social Democratic Party.

I considered it, therefore, our principal duty to point out in our discussions Germany's complex situation, which is sometimes incomprehensible to outsiders. It is always hard to explain to others that Germany is in a more difficult and serious situation than its neighboring countries and peoples in Europe.

I do not mean to avoid the charge that Germany, itself, is primarily responsible because of its own acts for the situation in which we find ourselves today. I merely want to point out that while it is well to keep this in mind in analyzing the developments of the last decades, it is of no help for the building of our common future.

IT IS OBVIOUSLY IMPOSSIBLE to repeat all those points I made in my talks to explain the German situation, but I think it is necessary to give an over-all picture of my conversations. I tried to explain that the entire sociological structure of the German people has changed. The enormous loss of life during the war years, especially among the middle-aged groups, resulted in a population structure which has the form of an hour-glass. The influx of nearly 10,000,000 refugees into the already overpopulated areas of Western Germany has, in addition, caused social and economic changes which can hardly be understood by outsiders.

These millions of refugees have lost their homeland and their roots of existence. Perhaps never before in
history has a nation had such a difficult problem as this to solve, as these people must be given new incentives for existence. The situation in the densely-populated area of the Federal Republic has been further complicated by the unparalleled housing shortage and the lack of jobs, both caused by enormous war damage and the latter still aggravated by continued dismantling.

The restrictions on manufacturing and the prohibited industries resulting from the lost war are causing greater hardships. The industrial capacity of Eastern Germany, including the Silesian coal mines and the valuable processing industries in central Germany, have been lost to us as well as the surplus agricultural production of Pomerania, Mecklenburg and Saxony. In addition to all these things the collapse of the German financial system led to the loss of all capital reserves. The primary task in Germany today is the reconstruction of the completely disorganized national life and the re-establishment of the faith of the German people in their future.

EVEN THE BEST FRIENDS and most considerate advisers of Germany cannot evaluate as thoroughly as the Germans themselves the disastrous effects which this situation has had on the material, social, economic and biological life of Germany. An intimate knowledge of the facts and their inter-relations is not sufficient.

The postwar political development in Germany has produced other problems which cause permanent tension among the German people. The establishment of four Occupation Zones inevitably led to a different type of development in each zone, since the political and economic ideas of the various military governments did not coincide in all points.

The Soviet-occupied zone of Germany has been politically and economically separated for years now. This tearing apart of integral parts is all the more depressing since it is well known in Western Germany that a new system of terror is relentlessly and cruelly seeking to oppress Eastern Germany politically and economically and is persecuting intellectually its 18,000,000 inhabitants.

It was therefore our duty to obtain a better understanding for the legitimate German demand for re-establishment of German unity and recognition that Germany cannot achieve this unity by its own strength. And particularly in view of the pending Four-Power Conference it was our duty to voice emphatically the demand that no decisions should be made on Germany without German participation.

THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC's own political development was also the subject of numerous discussions. After the Basic Law was adopted, approximately 46,000,000 Germans of the three Western Occupation Zones were enabled once again to elect a parliament and a government in accordance with the principles of a free democracy. This election took place under the Occupation Statute.

All the German visitors stressed the fact that the reasons which led to the enactment of the Occupation Statute no longer exist. We did not want to be misunderstood and we did not want the Americans to think that we were raising questions of prestige or making use of international tensions, which would be especially dangerous and tragic for the German people.

It was rather our desire to build up a real democracy which induced us to emphasize that the prerequisite for a sound and firm democracy is freedom of action within a self-chosen order. That such an order should be able to act with authority is generally conceded. Every statute which is imposed by foreign authorities upon this democratic order is therefore contrary to the idea of self-determination. Because of this, dangerous misconceptions now exist among the German people which prevent political consolidation. The question of who is really responsible and who holds the supreme authority requires a clear answer in any democracy. That is why I considered the request to strengthen German democracy and its responsible organs a legitimate request. I hope that this request was not misinterpreted.

I WAS VERY GRATIFIED to find so much sympathy and understanding for our problems in the United States. It was our intention to impress upon the representatives of public opinion in the US that the German people are conscious of their common responsibility with the West and are conscious of their obligations, in view of the common threat to liberty and the basic rights of men. However, one should realize that the experiences of the past have forced new considerations on the German people. One should understand that the enormous misery which the last war brought upon Germany has resulted in a tremendous fear of a new war, and one should also realize that no other nation in the world wants a long period of peace so much as Germany.

It was also our duty to explain that while Germany longs for peace, we do not seek peace at any price. Germany does not think of choosing peace at a price which would cost her her freedom. That would mean suicide.

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