Visit to the sprawling federal parliament building in Bonn is goal for interested citizens from Huenfeld County, Hesse.

Meeting “Their Government”

By PAUL R. PHILLIPS
US Resident Officer, Huenfeld, Hesse

I was amazed to see an SPD* member of the “Bundestag” (Federal Parliament) talking amicably with a CDU member.

The “Bundestag” building itself is very simply constructed and the furnishings are anything but lavish. The “Bundestag” members themselves have very small offices, some only eight by 12 feet. The newspapers lead one to believe otherwise.

Our “Bundestag” delegate spent more than one hour answering our questions and listening to our comments.

THESE AND MANY OTHER REMARKS made by local groups after their return from a day in Bonn are convincing proof of the value of such visits. Begun only in June, the program to send representatives from as many towns as possible in Huenfeld County to visit the Bundestag (Federal Parliament) for a day has already caused more discussion of, and genuine interest in, the operation of the Federal Government than any other single program being undertaken in the county.

Largely responsible for this growing interest in the government are the discussion evenings held by the visitors to Bonn before groups in their own communities

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* The SPD or Social Democratic Party is the opposition party while the CDU or Christian Democratic Party is the largest group in the CDU-CSU (Christian Socialist Union) coalition government headed by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.
Group visits Chancellor Adenauer near his home on the Rhine to exchange pleasantries. Tours acquaint visitors with dignitaries as well as parliamentary procedures.

Each group has been met in person by the Bundestag member who arranged the trip. The delegate has usually given from one to two hours from his busy schedule to explain to the group the political parties represented in the Bundestag, his personal opinion on a number of pending issues, the procedure for passing a federal law and other parliamentary technicalities. He has usually also introduced the group to several other members of the Bundestag as well as to a federal minister or two.

One group met Jacob Kaiser, minister for all-German affairs, but only got a look at busy Finance Minister Fritz Schaeffer. The last batch to go to Bonn happened to meet Dr. Konrad Adenauer on the street near his home. One of the party, more bold than the rest, jumped out of the bus and told Dr. Adenauer how happy the group was to see the chancellor in person and thereupon wished him a long, happy and successful life. The 75-year-old federal chancellor, not to be outdone by such camaraderie, replied with equal cordiality to the group and stood together with the visitors while two photographs which the visitors greatly prized were snapped.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE visits of citizens to the new Federal Government cannot, I believe, be overemphasized. Because the Federal Government is hardly more than two years old, most West Germans have not yet developed the feeling that the government is "their government."

Once they have seen the government at work and talked with the people who make it work, their interest in what the government is doing from day to day becomes a much more personal matter. Through this process of the citizen's developing a personal interest in his government will perhaps come a feeling of greater responsibility for what it does.

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