Impact of Exchanges Program

By ANNE TURNER and JAMES G. ROGERS

ON THE NIGHT OF July 19 last, 500 men and women crowded into the 400-capacity city theater at Pforzheim, Wurttemberg-Baden; they were there to participate in a public forum featuring six local citizens recently returned from America.

In the afternoon of that same day, another group of 500 gathered some miles away in Stuttgart to dedicate the "Anna Haag Haus," a unique social institution combining the functions of a home for working women and a community youth center.

In the preceding month, on June 14, a number of Frankfurters, including newspaper men and radio broadcasters, collected at a public library for the opening of Frankfurt’s first reading room for children.

Apparently unrelated, these ceremonies have a common denominator — the HICOG Exchanges Program. This vast social and political experiment, which within three years has sent some 6,000 persons on exchange visits to the United States and more than 500 teachers and other professional persons to neighboring European democracies, is making a solid impact upon nearly every aspect of German life today. It is working to democratize the thinking and standards of thousands, modify deeply entrenched social attitudes and institutions, and release into German life forces for progress banned during the long years of Nazi government and war.

THE PFORZHEIM FORUM was thus a report on American ideas and practices by a "citizen team" which had traveled for three months in the United States under the Exchanges Program.

The Stuttgart opening was the communication of an idea which had its origin in the American tour of Mrs. Anna Haag, Stuttgart journalist and legislator, who had returned to Germany to initiate and lead a joint German-

American campaign to build a home for young working women — the first of its kind in Germany. "America gave me not only the idea but the courage to do this," Mrs. Haag declared.

The Frankfurt ceremony marked the introduction into German state-supported libraries not only of the new idea of a children’s reading room but also many other related innovations. Dr. Gertrud Gelderborn, chief of the Frankfurt Public Library and sponsor of the new room, told the dedication audience that it was the result of her study of American library methods during a three-month exchange visit.

Even more dramatic, perhaps, than these activities of returned German exchangees was the action of a dozen or so "teen-agers" during the recent Communist Youth Festival in East Berlin. These youngsters, all of whom had spent a year in the United States, living with American families and going to high school, served as receptionists and guides for the thousands of youths from Communist-controlled territory who dared to cross into West Berlin for a look at the free world.

The idea was suggested by the teen-agers themselves. As one put it when volunteering, "The youth in the Soviet Zone have been told many lies about America. I can convince them of the truth. I know. I was there for a whole year; I saw it myself."

STRIKING THOUGH THEY ARE, these incidents do not convey the full purpose, scope and effectiveness of the HICOG Exchanges Program. An appraisal of its

* See "Dream-Come-True House" in Information Bulletin, September 1951.

German students and teacher trainees, sent to the United States under the Exchanges Program, chat with American fellow students on the campus of Columbia University.

Miss Turner is public liaison officer of the Exchanges Staff, Office of Public Affairs, and Mr. Rogers is reports officer of the Office of Public Affairs. Prior to her joining the Exchanges Staff last March, Miss Turner had served in the public relations office of the Nuremberg war-crimes trials in 1947-48, on the staff of the US Feature Service (Amerika Dienst) in 1948-49 and in HICOG's women's affairs office in 1950-51. She was with the Division of International Press and Publications, Department of State, in Washington for several months in 1949-50.

Coming to Germany in the early days of the occupation, Mr. Rogers was appointed reports and public information officer of the Information Control Division, OMGUS, in May 1948 and with the advent of the Office of the US High Commissioner in October 1949 was named to his present position.
Many of the American field representatives have noted the influence of the returned exchangee on his neighbors. "The average German is more inclined to believe his fellow-citizen who has been 'over there' and made personal studies and observations," was the analysis of one.

Supporting this natural tendency to believe the friend or neighbor who has "seen for himself" is the fact that approximately 3,000 of the visitors to the United States under the HICOG Exchanges Program have been men and women in leading positions in public or professional life. These include federal, state, county and local government officials; labor union functionaries; journalists; radio specialists; publishers, judges and lawyers; public health doctors and nurses; social workers; agricultural and home-economic specialists, and leaders in the areas of youth, religious and women's activities.

In the field of civic responsibility, men and women of all interests and professions have returned from American study-tours as advocates of the value of group effort in Germany. Impressed by the American approach of group action to solve community problems — group action that relies on the expenditure of common effort rather than large sums of money — the Germans have been quick to adapt the idea to their own communities, which are universally short of funds but long on capable manpower.

The exchangees have founded or helped found dozens of voluntary citizens groups which have educated both themselves and the general public on how to attack and solve community problems. They have been prime movers...
in establishing day nurseries for children of working mothers, city playgrounds, other recreational facilities, self-help projects for refugees, and community aid for war veterans and the unemployed.

Similarly, exchangees of all ages and interests took to the idea of the parent-teacher association, previously unknown in Germany. Returning to their home communities, many plunged into organizing German parent-teacher societies—a long-standing goal of HICOG education officials and progressive German educators.

Today, there are scores of these parent-teacher associations in western Germany. These associations have been instrumental in improving the curricula of German schools by advocating more social studies, citizen training and democratic techniques in the classroom. Sparked by exchangees, the parent-teacher groups have had a strong influence toward liberalizing an educational system in which the teacher has long been the absolute authority.

These changes in the educational field, as well as advances scored in the other areas in which exchangees are active, have not been made without overcoming opposition and serious obstacles. For example, some teachers have faced the opposition of their superiors when they attempted to introduce into their classrooms the techniques and attitudes learned during exchange visits in the United States or in the European democracies. In one case, a teacher recently returned from the United States was dismissed from her post on the ground that, after her American study, she was “on a different pedagogical level” than her fellow teachers.

Seven delegates of Federal Republic's upper house return after study of US government methods and procedures.

In all fields, the returning exchangees have of course encountered the conservatism, fear of new ideas and practices, indifference and opposition to all-things-new that face any proposed change in social concept or custom. Frequently, exchangees have collided with the antagonism of Communists and neo-Nazis.

In the case of the younger exchangees—those in the teen-age, college or young professional levels—the prejudice of older persons, the suspicion of stay-at-home fellow students or the need of employment have created obstacles. Sometimes younger exchangees returning from the United States have hampered their own effectiveness in promoting German democracy by expressing the desire to emigrate immediately to America.

This emigre attitude is diametrically opposed to the intent of the Exchanges Program, which is concerned with developing democratic Germans—not future Americans. It has, fortunately, never seriously hampered the young returning Germans, since most regain their enthusiasm for their homeland after a short period of readjustment.

Despite these obstacles, the exchangees—whether firmly established leaders in today’s Germany or the teen-agers, university students and younger professional men and women on whom the nation’s future will largely depend—have been tireless in sharing their American experiences through speaking and writing activities. Not unusual are these examples:

A leading Regensburg publisher interpreted America to more than 3,000 persons in 20 separate speeches.

A professional youth worker sent to HICOG the summaries of 70 talks he had delivered to audiences totaling 5,000 persons.

Most of the returned Germans speak to several groups, at the least; the talks are usually informal and followed by question-and-answer sessions. The importance of these talks cannot be overestimated in bringing to the average German new ideas and encouragement for facing and solving his individual and group problems.

Exchangees in official life, as well as private citizens, have returned from study tours to conduct campaigns to
liberalize or reform election and governing procedures. They have demanded better candidates and better officials, made them declare their platforms, and fostered more political representation and expression for minority elements of the population, such as refugees.

A county official in Wuerttemberg-Baden was so impressed by open city-council meetings in America that he stopped a practice in which he had previously concurred—the holding of closed sessions by the various town councils in his county. Until he saw on his US trip the effect of citizen interest on local government, the county officer had not been convinced that the average citizen could or would contribute to governing his own town.

The political activity and power of American women have been translated into German concepts by returning exchangees. Since women had been excluded, during the Nazi period, from German political affairs, it is noteworthy that not only women leaders but also men, public officials and leading professionals, have assisted and encouraged German women to organize political campaigns and run for office.

IN AN EFFORT TO educate potential leaders and teachers, exchangees have assisted in organizing seminars, forums, courses and institutes in political and social sciences. At the Frankfurt Seminar of Political Science,* more than 600 private citizens have studied government and civic responsibility with the aid of outstanding guest speakers and visits to representative government agencies and bodies.

Development of the HICOG-supported Institute for Political Science in Munich has been strongly influenced by seven staff members who have participated in the Exchanges Program. To a great extent, they have based courses and lectures on their American experiences and materials.

Another aspect of German life in which the effect of the Exchanges Program can be observed is the growth of


German College Life vs. US College Life is debated by German with fellow students at Georgetown University.

an internationalist spirit now making a rent in the nationalism that has cloaked German thinking for many years. Exchangees are among the most active leaders of groups and movements promoting internationalism in Germany.

A woman civic leader in Wuerttemberg-Baden returned from an exchange visit in England to initiate the founding of five chapters of Europa-Union. In Hesse, several young exchangees made themselves the nucleus of a local group to study international affairs and to enlist the aid of the Europa-Union organization in promoting the exchange of persons among neighboring European nations.

This broad interest in internationalism has made for a tremendous growth in privately sponsored exchanges. The returned Germans have worked to make the Exchanges Program a two-way street. For example, a "citizen-team" from Krefeld, North Rhine-Westphalia, has announced a plan to invite a team of eight citizens of Kalamazoo, Mich., for a six-week study-visit to Germany. In like manner, a Karlsruhe group is raising funds to finance two American exchangees at the Karlsruhe Technical College.

THE ACTIVITIES CITED here are the more readily evident reflections of the myriad changes being made in German cultural, political and social concepts—changes which, dramatic or obscure, are a measure of progress toward a genuinely democratic society. In stimulating and focusing German initiative and responsible participation in this work of democratic cultural reconstruction, the Exchanges Program has been a potent force behind many of these changes.

As such it has complemented and heightened the effectiveness of the other components of the many-sided HICOG program for helping the German people prepare for national sovereignty and membership in the family of democratic nations.

END

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Bibliography of Exchanges Program Articles
In Information Bulletin

The Information Bulletin has published nearly 50 articles and features concerning the Exchanges Program, including impressions of visitors to the United States, results of work by American visiting consultants, material aids and affiliated activities. The list of these articles in order of issue of publication follows.

Student Exchange, article by Frank G. Banta, chief, Cultural Exchange Section, Education and Cultural Relations Division, OECUS, on initial progress of exchange program, No. 149, Nov. 30, 1948.

German Politicians Observe US Elections, article by Louis Kelly, special correspondent, Civil Administration Division, OECUS, on behavior of German political leaders during 1948 national election, No. 152, Jan. 11, 1949.

Second for Themselves, review by Dr. Edward H. Litchfield, director, Civil Administration Division, OECUS, of government affairs exchange program, No. 154, Feb. 8, 1949.

Literature, review by John Evarts and Carol D. March, of cooperating editors of German weekly, 

Visit to United States, digest of report by Mayor Ernst Reuter to City Assembly of Berlin, No. 159, April 14, 1949.

Practicing Democracy, article by Willi Birkelbach, Hessian youth leader, on reactions to study in United States, No. 161, May 17, 1949.

Visual Arts, review by William G. Constable, curator of painting, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and visiting consultant, on changes needed in German art, No. 165, July 12, 1949.

New Ideas on Information, review by James G. Rogers, reports officer, Information Services Division, OECUS (also co-author of this month’s article), of exchanges’ reactions, No. 171, Oct. 4, 1949.


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Medical Associations, resume of survey by Dr. Franz Goldmann, visiting consultant from Harvard School of Public Health, March 1950.


Exchanges Applaud US Visits, summary of discussions at conference of returned exchanges, August 1950.


Midway on the Main, article by Dr. LeRoy Vogel and H. A. Rhodes of OECUS on exchange of professors between Chicago and Frankfurt Universities, September 1950.

America is Different, article by Dr. W. Grohe of Darmstadt on impressions during year’s study in United States (reprinted in several American publications), September 1950.

Farmers from America, article by Trudy Kriegsmann, staff writer, Public Relations Branch, OECUS, on activities of American farmer youth in Hesse, September 1950.

The Exchanges Say ..., article by Beth Borchard, Information Bulletin staff writer, summarizing comments by returned exchanges, October 1950.

Adding the Human Element, description of departures of 350 exchanges for United States, with text of address by US High Commissioner McCloy, October 1950.

Little Michele’s Fear, article by Gisela Kossow, visiting consultant, on training of delinquent youth, November 1950.

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An Old Farming Custom, article by Jack E. McKee, visiting consultant from California Institute of Technology, on unsanitary German agricultural practices, December 1950.


Message from America, resume of impressions by Wolfgang Bernhardt, Berlin youth, of visit to United States, February 1951.

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Young Farmers Return, review by Margaret Glick of Brethren Service Commission on experiences of German youth in the United States, May 1951.

Community Council Arrives, article by Jack P. Houlihan, visiting consultant from Philadelphia, May 1951.

Hand of Friendship, article by Aileen S. Miles, press escort officer, Public Relations Division, HICOG, on five-week tour of Germany by 11 American women leaders, July 1951.

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