The Big Difference

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No one has a monopoly on serving or guiding youth." These words summoned more than 200 representatives of industrial, political, cultural and youth organizations in Wuerttemberg-Baden to a two-day meeting at Heidenheim. This is the first statewide youth congress of its kind held in West Germany since the war, was unique in bringing together representatives of many outside interests as well as HICOG and Bonn government leaders. All met with the realization, as the program pointed out, that if the educational, recreational and social needs of all youth are to be met, the support and co-operation of all concerned will be needed.

This was further emphasized by H. Hassinger, Youth Affairs adviser to the Federal Government, who pleaded that each one forgo special interests and try to represent youth as a whole. This official warned that youth work does not merely entail fund raising but must go deeper. It must have a spiritual foundation.

The program of the conference was devoted more to group work with the speeches being limited to subjects of special interest to the meeting.

Dr. Peter Brandenburg, mayor of Pforzheim, noted in his talk that "the problems of youth are the problems of the whole population. In every age step of his development a human being is a personality and a full-fledged citizen — even when a day old — and it is our job to see that he enjoys his rights in full. Of the politicians and officials who criticize the youth of today for being disinterested, I must ask this question: Do we adults have the right and final answers to all our problems? What did we learn as a result of the first world war? It didn't lead to the modesty and humility of the German people which was necessary in order to find its proper place in the world. I am afraid we Germans, and others, too, again have failed to learn our lesson.

"The political parties and government officials complain about our youth. Shouldn't they rather complain about the fact that great masses of the people themselves stand idly by on the sidelines while being skeptical about youth? What can we expect from youth when we can't set a good example?" Dr. Brandenburg concluded by naming self-government and self-reliance as the goals of youth.

An Australian, Lawrence Moyse, newly appointed director of the US Zone's World YMCA and YWCA services, discussed voluntary youth agencies. Mr. Moyse pointed out that for better or for worse, the work of voluntary agencies is influenced by the government-sponsored youth program. Therefore, the program of the voluntary agencies must somehow be co-ordinated with that of the government. Voluntary agencies should strive for state co-operation; government representatives, on the other hand, should seek the advice of agency workers.

Speaking on behalf of the Bonn government, Mr. Hassinger listed the following objectives of the federal youth program:

- Measures to relieve the needs of homeless, unskilled and unemployed youth.
- Promotion of training for citizenship.
- Support of the Bundesjugendring (work committee for youth activities and youth welfare) and the German Youth Hostel Association.
- Support of a youth recreation program for all youth who come under the law for Kriegsfolgenhilfe (War Consequences Compensation).
- Promotion of international co-operation and understanding among youth.
- Promotion of facilities for school and pre-school age youth.
- Improved youth laws.

Laurence E. Norrie, chief, Community Activities Branch, HICOG, in discussing "HICOG Policies on Youth Activities," warned that adequate plans for youth were still lagging in Germany and that "glaring social sore spots and mass frustration confront youth everywhere."

Saying there are 500,000 unemployed, and more than 100,000 homeless and 4,000 refugee youth coming from...
the East monthly, he pointed an accusing finger at adults who have failed to provide the needed youth centers and homes, sufficient schools and playgrounds, vocational training, work and a satisfactory social life. This, in turn, he warned, prevents youth from participating in the development of their country; “these are problems which politicians and governmental leaders cannot continue to ignore . . .”

However, the HICOG official’s remarks were not all in a pessimistic vein. Emphasizing that West German youth have not fallen for the Communist line, Mr. Norrie said that the FDJ (Freie Deutsche Jugend—Communist-sponsored “Free German Youth”) has steadily declined in strength in West Germany during the last four years (from 1.5 percent to 0.6 percent of all organized youth in the US Zone).

“The West German youth movement is the most rapidly growing youth movement in the world,” he explained citing the fact that 2,000,000 youth belong to voluntary youth organizations in the US Zone and that 250 youth committees with more than 7,000 members have been created to promote local youth programs. He also asserted that more than 800 youth homes and projects are in operation as well as 1,000 community centers. These institutions, plus the training of some 20,000 volunteer youth leaders, have been largely financed by HICOG.

In 1950 HICOG spent DM 6,000,000 (about $1,428,000) in assisting youth committees and organizations to carry out such programs. In addition, nearly DM 50,000,000 (about $12,000,000) has been set aside to provide such facilities as community centers, student union building, medical centers, model vocational training schools, etc.

IN REFERRING TO CRITICISM that HICOG was not educating German youth politically, Mr. Norrie said, “This is probably true—when one interprets political education as being over indoctrination of a partisan sort. This we have not attempted to do. We feel, however, that this is a task for the German youth organizations, political parties, the schools . . . and the labor unions. It is the job of the press, the radio and other institutions. Political education should flow through all youth organizations and not be primarily partisan in nature, but informative about the great political issues of Germany and the world.”

Mr. Norrie particularly cautioned against underestimating democratic experience which youth receive in the organizations, groups and forums, where they elect officers, plan their own programs and discuss current political and social issues. “They develop a philosophy of life out of the give-and-take of ideas and arguments—that is political education.”

In support of HICOG’s youth policy, Mr. Norrie quoted a statement made recently by 10 influential youth leaders to US High Commissioner John J. McCloy: “We reject being herded into one mass youth organization to be used for political ends . . . we know we can achieve our ideals only in the democratic atmosphere of freedom and the right to be different such as we enjoy in western Germany.

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