What are We Doing For German Youth?

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What are we doing for German youth? is a recurrent question among American observers every time the Communist "Free German Youth" (FDJ) stages another blue-shirted demonstration.

In East Germany, all youth are marshaled into the poisonous program of the FDJ through threats, bribery or persuasion. FDJers get priority on jobs, on college degrees, on political appointments. One town in East Germany has a 24-year-old mayor. In another, all street car conductors are teen-aged FDJ members.

Admittedly, such tactics are winning young East Germans to Communism.

What are we doing to win young Germans for democracy? American officials, along with their Allied colleagues and German youth leaders, are certainly not adopting the regimented tactics of Communism or Nazism. There is no youth program of "bread and circuses" and ruthless regimentation in West Germany. But there is a vigorous and growing program, recognizing individual rights and the variety of interests in youthful society, to create an alert and critical young generation, ready to demand its rightful place in democratic life and reject dictatorial threats whether such come from either the left or the right.

No one claims that West Germany's youth problem has been solved. The task of building a democratic tradition in youth affairs is a long, slow process, but given time and support it will provide the best answer to the Communist threat.

There are 5,400,000 young persons between the ages of 10 and 25 in the US Zone. The problem of their education is formidable.

Youth leaders of the future are these students of Pestalozzi School in Berlin who are studying to become kindergarten teachers. They are singing a folk song in recreation room.

The schools have generally begun to introduce citizenship training in classes. But even if these programs were adequate, 90 percent of German youngsters leave formal schooling at the age of 14 years and must depend on community and organizational programs for character development, political attitudes and citizenship training. HICOG has adopted varied and numerous programs, working through youth leaders and organizations, in promoting the re-education of German youth.

Initially, US youth officers assisted in rebuilding the voluntary organizations which had been banned by the Nazis. By October 1950, approximately 1,500,000 youth in the US Zone belonged to these West German church, trade union and political organizations, sport clubs, scouts, camping and hostel groups, cultural societies and rural organizations. Their combined strength is probably equaled by membership in the hundreds of small and local youth groups.

HICOG urged emphasis on self-government, training for democratic leadership, com-
The new youth leadership needs guidance and information. As a partial answer, a Youth Publishing Commission has been organized in Wiesbaden, financed by HICOG, to produce books and brochures, foreign translations and originally prepared material which provide the youth leadership with handy references on how to run a summer camp, elect club officers, conduct a democratic meeting, etc. A monthly magazine Wir Alle (We All) reaches 20,000 youth leaders with helpful information.

**TO DEVELOP LOCAL PLANNING and financing of youth programs, HICOG stimulated the creation of youth councils, comprised of civic leaders, and young representatives in almost every county and city in the US Zone. All states now have youth councils coordinating the work of major youth organizations, and youth serving agencies. Through such councils group differences are ameliorated and cooperation fostered.**

These local planning bodies are also important for the 3,800,000 youth who have not joined the major organizations. Without loyalty programs and places to meet, they are targets for the propaganda of the far right and the far left. The local youth councils, often with advice of resident officers and other HICOG officials, have created community centers, organized civic recreation and educational programs for all youth.

Now open to unorganized youth in the US Zone are more than 1,000 community centers, many of which were partially financed by HICOG. In addition another 250 centers are operated by the US Army’s “German Youth Activities” (GYA) program.

To reach the mass of youngsters with the lessons of democracy, HICOG has organized a non-commercial film program which attracts 2,000,000 persons monthly, approximately two-thirds of whom are under 25 years of age. Sandwiched in with travelogs and life in America, are films on discussion techniques, civic rights and youth problems. The American-trained operators, who make constant rounds to youth groups, schools and community meetings, use the films as a springboard for discussions.

**US RESIDENT OFFICERS** have used the leadership school participants, county youth councils and public youth officials to promote more than 15,000 public forums and hundreds of local civic service projects, such as safety drives, community nurseries, recreation areas, community centers, campaigns for new roads, political study groups, etc.

In the past year, HICOG has assisted two new organizations, the Bund Europäischer Jugend (Federation of European Youth) and Ring Politischer Jugend (Council of Political Youth) in conducting such activities as: a rally of 6,000 young people on “Political Freedom,” addressed by Mayor Ernst Reuter of Berlin; a European Union meeting in Munich attended by more than 15,000 from all over Germany; a European Union meeting in Coburg with 15 nations represented among the 1,000 delegates; a rally in Essen on “Freedom of the Individual,” attended by 12,000.
The adult education schools in the US Zone provide an important channel for further education of youth after they have left school. Of the 350,000 persons in the US Zone attending regularly these community night schools, 50 percent are under 25. Many of the schools feature civic and political education for young adults.

A particular pressing problem is created by unemployed out-of-school youth, estimated at 300,000 in west Germany by the Jugend Aufbauwerk (Youth Reconstruction Work) agency, of whom nearly 80,000 are thought to be homeless and wandering. Without an assured place in society and often even without basic necessities of adequate food and shelter, this element of the young generation implies future unrest and radicalism.

HICOG has assisted many private organizations in tackling this problem. Funds have been given to the Jugendaufbau and Jugendhilfe Land (Rural Youth Assistance) programs to assist these new groups in organizing. Grants have been made directly to many of their 800 youth homes and training centers now in operation or under construction. These institutions provide decent living conditions and apprenticeship training for 28,000 homeless and refugee youngsters. Approximately 540 community work projects, sponsored by Jugendaufbau, provide jobs and training for an additional 18,000.

Naturally, HICOG ties strings to all its grants, requiring that the institutions be open to all youth without regard for race, religion or political creed, and that the youngsters be given the fullest measure of self-government.

The situation of the 107,000 German university students, who have swelled university rolls by 50 to 100 percent more than the prewar enrollment, is also a vital part of the total West German youth problem. HICOG has aided the organization and financing of the Verband Deutscher Studen tenwerke (Student Relief Association), which has been successful in organizing student dormitories, arranging student exchanges with other countries and providing jobs for working students (approximately 40 percent of all students are partially self-supporting).

To promote an international outlook and further democratic training, HICOG has sent 330 youth leaders and experts, and 800 young people to the United States since 1948, to study various phases of youth work or to attend American schools and colleges. In addition, more than 250 have been sent to European countries. The traffic is not all one way. Each summer since 1948, approximately 40 international work camps have been held in the US Zone where each year some 2,000 youths from other countries, including the USA, worked with German youth on building playgrounds, youth centers and other community projects.

Since the occupation began, the US has contributed DM 13,000,000 ($3,094,000) to the operation of various youth and community projects. In addition DM 22,000,000 ($5,236,000) of ECA counterpart funds contributed by HICOG for youth homes, centers and student buildings, has been matched from German sources.

Undoubtedly, the various youth programs in west Germany involve many more active participants than the combined membership of the Communists' "Free German Youth" in the East. But probing deeper into these programs, indicates that they are not always effective.

A majority of West German youth still express no interest in politics; more than half favor one unified organization for West Germany, rather than the present system of numerous youth groups reflecting varied interests and objectives. While the Communist youth organization has steadily lost strength and been ejected from most West German youth councils, its well-trained, fast-talking members are still able to confuse young minds with talk of peace, anti-rearmament and "Ami, go home" in a youth forum or meeting.

HICOG's program at best is a slow method (although no one has yet demonstrated a quicker one) of winning the minds of West German youth. The greatest success has been achieved in developing a corps of youth leaders who have grasped the principles of individual rights and democratic group action.

However, their number and influence is not nearly great enough. One or two youth forums do not accomplish the political education of the youthful participants. Joining a youth organization does not always provide youngsters with democratic experience. Many local chapters of the major organizations still operate on old autocratic policies.

The preparation of youth for effective citizenship and allegiance to Western freedom is a long-term problem. It will only be solved if HICOG and the other Allied authorities can succeed in building a democratic youth leadership sufficiently strong to break with the autocratic past.

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