Common Problems —
Common Front

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The five women lingered over their late afternoon coffee, the shining dark hair of the Italian radio commentator and the ash blonde of the Swedish lawyer a startling contrast even in the growing dusk. The others were a Belgian Red Cross official, a Netherlands housewife and a German doctor.

Framed in the mountain hotel's broad dining-room window before which they sat were the Alps, their peaks wreathed in late September mist. Below was the picturesque German village of Hindelang, a stone's throw from the Austrian border, where they had come the day before as delegates to an international women's conference.

The Swedish lawyer was reporting a conversation she had overhead earlier that day. "Two Hindelang women were talking outside the Hotel Sonne this morning about our meeting there," she began, "and, like the character in 'The Beggar's Opera' one said, 'Ohne genug zu essen, und ohne genug zu trinken, ist die ganze Demokratie quatsch.'" ('Without enough to eat, and without enough to drink, democracy is nonsense.') Delighted laughter rippled around the table. "All the same," interposed the Belgian, an attractive young woman in blue uniform, "we had better not forget in our democratic countries just how important it is to give proper attention to social problems. A hungry person is not interested in the ideology of those who offer him bread."

"International" tables and fragments of talk like this were commonplace in Hindelang's three mountain hotels — the Alpenhof, the Luftpoldbad and the Ingeburg — and in the village's Hotel Sonne during the last week in September, when more than 200 women from 13

Top photo, quaint old church in village of Hindelang draws group of conterees seeking relaxation after busy sessions.

Center, young women pause to smile for photographer before entering conference hall. (Photo by Willner, Berlin)

Bottom, Mrs. John J. McCloy (left), wife of the US High Commissioner for Germany, congratulates Dame Caroline Haslett of London for her address at conference. Dame Caroline is member of British Electricity Authority. Ruth F. Woodsmall, chief of HICOG's Women's Affairs Branch, is in center. (PRD HICOG photos by Claude Jacoby)
countries of western Europe met there with US representatives to consider their common problems and civic responsibilities in the troubled world of 1951. From their interchange of ideas, it is hoped, will come a common front for the maintenance of a living, vital democracy among Western nations.

THE FIVE-DAY CONFERENCE brought together young women between the ages of 25 and 35 from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. It was sponsored by HICOG's Women's Affairs Branch to afford women of this important age group the opportunity to understand the broader national and international problems which as citizens in democratic nations they must help to solve, and to give them the experience of working with women of other nations on the solution of these problems.

The conference theme was "Women in Public Life — Their Opportunities and Responsibilities." The program, developed through speeches, panel discussions and workshops, was planned by a committee of young women from western Germany with the assistance of Women's Affairs advisers in the various German states.

Following general sessions in the morning and evening, the delegates divided into seven discussion groups studying woman's role in public life, covering these phases of the conference theme: cooperation of women to affect the work of legislators; groundwork for the election and appointment of able candidates in public office; improvement of opportunities for professional training and advancement; attempts to mold public opinion through press, radio and films; efforts to shape educational and cultural programs in the community; ways of dealing with social problems in daily life, and adaption of family life to present conditions.

Those attending the conference from outside Germany were selected through US embassies with the aid of leading women in each country, and the German delegates were chosen by local and regional planning committees. The conference comprised a cross-section of married and unmarried women from business and professions, industry and rural employment, religious, social welfare and political fields. They differed in dozens of ways — in appearance, language, background, education, position, training and personality. But they had one thing in common — the knowledge that today, with the world divided, the democratic ideal they believe in imposes grave responsibilities, and a determination to find ways to use the potent force they represent in meeting those responsibilities.

There were dozens of housewives like Mevr. H. C. Diekse-Bresters of Zeist, Netherlands, the mother of five children who still finds time to serve as a member of the Emigration Committee of the Netherlands Women's Committee; professional women like Lizzi Moesgaard, barrister of the court of appeals in Copenhagen, Denmark; Anita Calabi of Milan, Italy, who conducts a radio program over La Voce dell'Italia; Mrs. Maj-Britt Baehrenotz, who edits the Swedish "Folket i Bild," or Dr. Magdalene Rueppell, physician and surgeon from Hamburg; young women in their early twenties such as Marie Jeanne Lommel-Coullon, a farm worker from Luxembourg, and Magda Bogenrieder, a textile worker from Aachen; others invading fields formerly dominated by men, like Margarethe Boeck, an agricultural engineer from Vienna, Austria. Teachers, social welfare workers, government workers, religious leaders also gave a diversified character to discussions.

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES were no barrier. Earphones — more than 200 of them — were plugged in Hindelang's Hotel Sonne, where all general sessions were held, and translations were made simultaneously in German, French and English. At smaller discussion meetings and workshops, the groups compromised on a language familiar to everyone, but in most cases, either German or English was spoken in these confabs.

Thousands of lofty words reaffirming the moral value of the democratic way, or pointing — realistically and hardheaded — to the need for preserving it if the free world is to survive, came to the ears of the young women through the medium of the earphones.

One evening, for instance, it was the sari-gowned Miss Parmal Das of Calcutta, India, who is now with UNESCO's Department of Education in Paris, quoting in English from the poet-philosopher Rabindranath Tagore: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free; where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls ... into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."

The next morning, it might be Dr. Dorothy Fosdick of Washington, D.C., only woman member of the Policy Planning Staff of the US Department of State, saying: "We have been proclaiming the demands and hazards

Conference hall was crowded for all sessions. Dr. Shuster is speaking here at opening. He gave his talk in German.
of political life today. Enough of that! The time has come to proclaim our faith that we can meet these demands, and overcome these hazards."

The schedule was an intensive one, allowing little time out except for the afternoon coffee hour or a brief mountain walk. General sessions were held each morning and evening in the Hotel Sonne, and in the afternoon the women divided into groups for their workshop analysis of what should be woman's role in public life today in a variety of spheres. On one evening during the five-day conference, the delegates were entertained at the Haus Ingeburg, more than 6,000 feet above sea level, by Bavarian dancers and yodelers in native costume, and an eight-year-old child pianist, daughter of music-teacher parents from neighboring Sonthofen.

**A GALAXY OF PROMINENT speakers, besides Miss Das and Dr. Fosdick, were on the program. They included Mrs. John J. McCloy, wife of the US High Commissioner for Germany, who was chairman at the opening session; Dr. George N. Shuster, US state commissioner for Bavaria; Dame Caroline Haslett of London, member of the British Electricity Authority; Mme. Marie-Helene Lafaucheux, vice president of the Assembly of the French Union; Dr. Erna Scheffler, member of the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany; Frau Anna Haag, German author and lecturer; Anna-Liisa Sysiharju of Finland, professor of educational psychology in the College of Home Economics, Helsinki; Dr. Liesel Beckmann, professor of Business Economics at the University of Munich; Dr. Ursula Michel, executive assistant for the Continental Rubber Company, Hanover, Germany; Mevr. Diekse-Bresters, the Netherlands; Frau Charlotte Starick, executive secretary of the Women's Groups of the Berlin Trade Unions; Frau Lieselotte Nold of the Bavarian Mothers' Service of the Evangelical Church; Frau Antje Lemke, director of the Women's Service Bureau of the Women's Affairs Branch of the Office of the US High Commissioner for Germany.

In a brief talk at the opening session Sunday evening, Sept. 23, Mrs. McCloy urged the young women to insure the value of their new-found impact on the community by setting themselves the task "of becoming well-informed, of always learning the facts and examining both sides of a problem before criticizing or taking action." Mrs. McCloy warned that "the times are too serious to indulge in misinformation or in unilateral thinking, and too many hazards exist on every side which could readily lead to disaster in the absence of clear, objective thinking."

The wife of the US High Commissioner reminded her listeners that "it requires courage to understand and defend the points of view and interest of nations other than our own, and to oppose any violation of individual rights, wherever and whenever they are infringed."

Dr. Shuster echoed this thought. "There is only one great danger," he said, "that our world could be split because of petty, selfish interests . . . The politically-minded citizen of today must stand with all his energy for a good cause, but he must continuously be conscious of the well-being of all." Women can play an important role in the removal of barriers between nations, he declared.

Dr. Shuster urged the conference delegates to remain alert to every threat to freedom, and to keep fully informed about world happenings. Women of the West must be willing to shoulder a heavy share of the burden. Free Europe now carries in its determination to remain free, he emphasized.

**DAME CAROLINE HASLETT brought to the conference the story of her own personal success in Great Britain's industrial sphere, and in a charming, humorous vein reminded the young women that with the equality they have achieved with men in the competitive world, has come "a responsibility to make a full contribution to public administration and all forms of public service which try to ensure that modern scientific advances are directed to the betterment of the individual lives of men and women in their search for happiness in living and satisfaction in their daily job."

Dame Caroline, who attended a similar conference for women in an older age group at Bad Reichenhall* last

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year, said later in an interview, “I go to many conferences, but I know of none where there has been such a worthwhile feeling as this one, and I think all of us will go back to our countries inspired to influence a wider sphere. You know, I saw a woman from Norway sitting with a German and Italian, whose countries were Norway’s enemies not so long ago, and I said to myself ‘by Jove, we talk about the difficulty of the United Nations functioning, but here it is right here in a special form.’”

A penetrating analysis of the ills of today’s world, which she described as “mortal sick with fear,” was contained in a talk by Miss Das, the onetime dean of women in Calcutta’s Scottish Church College and holder of a doctor of philosophy degree from Columbia University in New York City.

Miss Das declared that “the road of understanding and cooperation is the only road for us today—the road to one world or none.” Placing the blame for women’s ineffectiveness in political life squarely upon their own shoulders, Miss Das said, “It is women’s ignorance and indifference that are largely responsible for their not being the power they might be in the world over, a power for goodness and mercy and love and justice.”

Often it is the women who choose to put up the barriers which are the symbols of fear, believing that by doing so they can ensure the safety of their families, she went on. “It is often they who will not make an effort to know anything about the world outside their narrowly-confined homes; they choose to keep away, to be aloof and indifferent rather than participate because there are dangers in participation.” In these troublous times, she concluded, “we are either pulling each other up to a better and higher destiny, or dragging each other down to destruction.”

**Warning that nihilism today can only mean disaster, Dr. Fosdick reflected the realistic thinking of the US Government in the present world crisis when she called attention to the fact that although America is building its military strength, the nation’s objective is not war but peace. “Our objective is an affirmative one,” she said, “to work for the conditions of peace with all those who join us. In Europe, we are all concerned to see develop a genuine community, strong in its own defense and loyal to the central convictions to which Western man has hitherto pledged allegiance.”**

Dr. Fosdick urged the conference delegates to remember, however, that “if we are to succeed in making the Western community so precious, so valuable, so full of promise that we will all feel our first obligation is to defend it, we must improve the quality and performance of our national and local political life and give concrete evidence of its promise.”

Realism in facing facts is an important requirement for effectiveness in politics, she said. Reasonableness in dealing with solutions to problems, an ability to be experimental and teachable are qualities demanded of those who prepare themselves for political action in the West European community today, she declared. Her “let’s get-going-and-do-something” talk won resounding applause.

**Privately and publicly, German women at the conference were of the unanimous opinion that the opportunity to talk with women from other nations had pulled them out of the miasma of sentimentality regarding their postwar ills and made them realize that other women, the world over, have problems like theirs.**

Said Frau Erika Libal, a Mannheim lawyer who teaches political science and legal problems in a school for social workers, “We have not found new ways or absolutely sure remedies for all problems here, but we have seen that other countries have the same problems, that the situation of other women is similar to our own and that all of us are trying to find solutions in the same way. One doesn’t feel so lost knowing this: one has the conviction that all of us will stand together in finding roads to cooperation.”
The political sagacity of many older German women who were active in political circles before Hitler cut them off from participation in public affairs, was a distinct contribution to the conference talks. Frau Anna-dore Leber, publisher and politically-active Berliner who was forced to watch her husband's execution by the Nazis, was there, as were Frau Emmi Beckman, past president of the German Association of University Women, and for approximately 50 years an active public figure, and Frau Anna Haag, onetime member of the state legislature for Wuerttemberg-Baden and ardent supporter of United States policy; Frau Dorothea Karsen, adviser on women's affairs to the Bonn government; and Frau Thea Nolte Baenische, who holds an executive administrative position with the state government in Lower Saxony.

No resolutions were adopted at the conference; no proposals were put forth as having conference endorsement. The five-day session merely explored ways in which the woman as an individual can influence public life, and thus be a force for the maintenance of a strong, workable democracy in the bloc of free nations. The findings of the workshop studies, however, had all the flavor of decision, even though they did not bear a formal stamp of decision.

HERE ARE A FEW of the pertinent results of the seven workshops:

Group I — Women's cooperation in legislation.

Dr. Ingeborg Becker, consultant in the German federal Ministry of Justice, outlined a wide scope of legislative work for women as prepared by her workshop, citing methods of women's political activity in various countries as revealed by conference participants from these countries. The group agreed, she said, that there must be a more proportionate participation of men and women in public life, deciding that only if all problems of public life are regarded with the eyes of both men and women can full understanding be reached, thus guaranteeing solution of problems that will satisfy all.

Delegates heard simultaneous translations of principal speeches in French, German and English via earphones.

Group II — Women in administration.

Since there were only German women participating in this workshop, the subject was studied entirely from the German point of view. Dr. Maria-Eugenie Oehme, lecturer and executive secretary of the Berlin Community Council, reported that the group worked out two suggestions to be submitted by women's groups to the Women's Affairs department of the federal Ministry of the Interior, and to the federal Ministry of Labor:

"That in the interest of an efficient new generation of female civil servants to carry out a more intensive vocational guidance for women for the training and opportunities in middle and upper civil servant's careers, it is requested that the federal Ministry of Labor speed up the establishment of the federal Labor Office and simultaneously supply the connected vocational agencies with the necessary prerequisites in the form of informative material and qualified vocational guides for these career fields" ... and "that the Women's Affairs department of the federal Ministry of the Interior start investigations of the integration of a new generation of female civil servants and submit the results to the proper authorities and simultaneously call their attention to the fact that according to Article 3, Paragraph 2 of the German Basic Law, women are to be given equal opportunities in being admitted as trainees."

Group III — Professional training and possibilities of advancement for women.

The advisability of giving boys training in household work against the time when they may be useful as husbands of working wives — a practice now in vogue in Norway — was among conclusions of this group. Frau Char-
Conrolees often split up into small groups like this one. Counterclockwise, in picture, are Mrs. Helen Nixon, Women's Affairs adviser, Berlin; Joanna Brink, The Hague, general secretary of the Dutch Association of Country Women; Anita Calabi, Milan, Italy, radio commentator; Helen McLaughlin, author of this article; Miss Woodsmall, and Frau Emmi Beckman, Hamburg, veteran president of the German Association of University Women.

(Photograph by Scholl, Bad Oeyndorf)

Hotte Steinbruegge, medical technician at the Hanover Veterinary College, reporting on their discussions, said they had covered the subjects of professional preparation, professional training and, superficially, advancement possibilities for women in commercial, household, agricultural, social and educational, technical, handicraft, creative and academic professions. The group was unanimously agreed that there should be equality in training for both young men and women.

Group IV—Molding of public opinion through press, radio and films.

To win women as attentive and critical newspaper readers is the main problem as far as the press is concerned, according to Frau Olga Amann, Munich journalist, who reported for this workshop. The group decided that not enough effort is made by the German press to explain political developments to the reader, that there are not enough feature articles and pictures. Close contact between women's organizations and the press is a "must" if the women are to project their influence in this field, it was decided.

In radio and television, women can be a similar force for the forming of a true, democratic public opinion by making practical proposals regarding programs related to economic, political and other public questions. Education and cultural film programs for women can be promoted through film clubs, and cooperation of women's organizations in choosing good films for children and young people is an important requisite for the motion picture control.

Group V—Women's cooperation in education and cultural affairs.

This workshop directed its studies along the lines of civic education and education toward international understanding and cooperation. Frau Elfrieda Oberbeckmann, headmistress of an elementary school in Stadthagen, Ger-

many, summarized conclusions by her group, which she reported embraced family education, youth work, and adult education as bearing strongly on training for civic responsibility.

Cooperation with international women's organizations, reorganization of teaching history and geography in schools with use of UNESCO textbooks, establishment of UNESCO clubs in all countries, and the international exchange program, were underscored as necessary steps to education for international understanding.

Group VI—Social problems of daily life.

Effect of the war on social problems, especially in heavily damaged areas of western Europe, consumed much of the time this group devoted to its discussion, it was reported by Dr. Rueppell. In Germany, it was pointed out, the Federal Government is attempting to solve many of its social problems, and there women can serve effectively in administration of these social aid programs.

The group decided, Dr. Rueppell said, that the exchange of experiences with women of other countries had been of invaluable assistance to the German women in the workshop.

Group VII—Adapting family life to present conditions.

A women's organization, which "represents the interests of the family, of the wife and mother on the highest level" is the best medium by which the woman as an individual can influence community affairs, national and international, according to a report on this workshop's discussions outlined by Dr. Christal von Mertens, interpreter and art historian from Kiel, Germany. The group also agreed that women's organizations must cooperate more closely, coordinating their interests in order to make their influence felt.

Ways of strengthening family life were gone into, as were discussions of technical inventions which make housework easier and participation of father and son in household tasks.

A STANDING DEMONSTRATION of appreciation by the young western European women for the HICOG-sponsored opportunity to meet with one another and with US women wound up the conference on the evening of the fifth day, Sept. 27. Speakers from Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy and Norway expressed their gratitude in formal speeches addressed directly to Miss Ruth F. Woodsmall, chief, Women's Affairs Branch, HICOG, declaring that "because of this opportunity to establish friendship ties with women of other nations in discussion of our common problems, we are returning to our homes with renewed hope for the future."

In her reply, Miss Woodsmall said she believed that the Hindelang "experience in international understanding" would open up a new chapter in which the young women of western Europe and the US "will move forward together with more confidence and with a new sense of common purpose."