Under the HICOG Exchanges Program, Mr. Schmidt spent three months in the United States. Participating in the journalist program, he attended a study course at Columbia University in New York City and visited many American newspapers. Since his return to Germany in early 1951, he has spoken before scores of organizations and meetings in Hesse. Following is a resume, translated from German, of the principal points he includes in his talks.

Press of Two Nations

By ADALBERT SCHMIDT
Political and Economic Affairs Editor, "Giessener Freie Presse," Giessen

The principles of American journalism are recognized by us in Germany, and we admit ungrudgingly that the Americans have attained high scientific standards. The quality of news, the absolute separation of news from opinion and the comprehensive presentation of both to arouse a maximum of reader interest are examples of this development.

In the United States, as in Germany; the main function of newspapers is to disseminate news among the public. But while our readers often complain that paper shortage keeps our dailies down to an average of eight pages, we must wonder whether American city papers—with at least 50 pages for regular and more than 100 pages for week-end editions—are "readable." We wonder whether American readers are able to digest the most important news of the wealth of material presented to them, since they cannot possibly read the entire paper.

The American press adheres to the principle of giving the readers straight news and of letting them make their own picture of the situation. It assumes that the readers do form such individual pictures, and subordinates to this rule the general German newspaper tendency to educate the public or to influence the readers in a certain way.

American papers, even those under strong influence by political parties or groups, consider it their foremost mission to represent public opinion and comply with the wishes of the people. As such guardians of public interest and civil liberties vis-a-vis the government, they make much wider use of their editorial pages as mirrors of popular opinion. I think this represents a substantial difference between the German and American presses.

The "Letters to the Editor" column is an established part of American papers, while still too many Germans are reluctant to make use of this opportunity to state their opinions in public with their full name and address. The very close relationship between readers and editors exerts a strong influence on the work of the American press.

Because of this relationship, another rule of American journalism is to present news and articles in a way that they can be easily understood by any reader and that they appeal to the greatest number. Expert treatises, written by professionals in their own special terminology, are unusual. By contrast, German papers are often proud to run a story personally written by a president, minister, mayor or prominent professor. American papers refuse such articles and refer "VIPs" to the "Letters to the Editor" column, where they can air their opinions.

On the other hand, the American press uses many more interviews than we do. Also, they do not restrict their interviews to the professional sphere of the interviewed, but inconspicuously include little human interest episodes and experiences, which again appeal to many readers. Fortunately this kind of interview is being used increasingly in Germany and is eliminating gradually the articles kindly placed at our disposal from "higher up."

An outspoken "party press," as we call the organs of political parties, is almost unknown in the United States. Though many papers tend to the Democratic or Republican side in their opinion, they are not dependent on these parties. The very Democratic-minded New York

Adalbert Schmidt.
Times, for instance, favored the Republican candidate Thomas E. Dewey in the 1948 presidential elections.

The editorial opinion of American papers is much less identical with their editors’ personal opinion than in Germany. Opinion is “made” as the majority of the readers want it, which I consider a great danger. In a middle-sized town in Pennsylvania, for instance, I found a Democratic morning paper and a Republican evening paper published by the same publisher and edited by the same editor.

In American cities, but also in middle-sized towns, the press tries to compete with the news service of radio stations. For our West German papers with only one edition a day this would be a hopeless enterprise. In the United States many papers with a circulation of as little as 15,000 up are published several times a day, each time with a new front page, featuring the latest news not much later than the radio.

Of course, this practice demands that the major part of the circulation be sold in the streets. In Germany the street sellers handle mainly the so-called boulevard papers, while the other dailies determine their circulation according to the number of regular subscribers. For the same reason, 75 percent of all American dailies are evening papers. The average American buys his paper in the late afternoon. Many American wives have jobs in addition to their households, and the families do not meet and read the paper before evening. In Germany they have dinner at noon and want to have their papers for afternoon reading.

The selection of news in the American press, save for a few important major papers, is more restricted to local topics. From our German point of view, we can only regret that most of the American public get only few news items from foreign countries, particularly from Europe. It is the city reporters, not the news agencies, who supply papers in middle-sized and small towns with news and pictures.

Europeans reading American papers such as The New York Times should remember that these are not “typical American papers,” just as New York cannot be called a “typical American town.”

The shift of emphasis to local and provincial news implies that the American papers have bigger reportorial staffs than ours, and that their reporters are experts in their particular fields of work. I met managing editors, even of larger papers, who had written editorials about Germany, but did not know that there is no longer a German “Reich” or that Berlin is not the capital of Germany at the moment. Bewildered, they asked me what the difference is between the duties of Mr. Heuss and Mr. Adenauer.*

These editors have sat behind their desks for decades and had little opportunity to see the world or their own country. They may have never experienced the political atmosphere of Washington, D.C., but they showed themselves experts on communal affairs. They were at home just as much with the city budget as the city treasurer himself, and their papers exercise a great influence on public life in the community. Their counterparts in Germany are likely to leave such matters to their city editors.

In addition to journalistic training facilities in practically every university, the American papers have an excellent central training institute for their staffs in the American Press Institute of Columbia University. With a number of other German editors and publishers, I had the privilege to participate in a course there, and I think it would be wonderful if the German press had a similar central institute, supported by all papers, for the initial and in-job training of its editorial staffs.

* Dr. Theodor Heuss is President—head of the Federal Republic; Dr. Konrad Adenauer is chancellor—head of the Federal Government.

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Exchange of Ideas to Aid Friendship

Future German-American friendship will depend largely on “a true exchange of ideas and facts between the people of the United States and Germany,” Dr. James R. Newman, US state commissioner for Hesse, declared in a letter to the Hessische Nachrichten, a newspaper published in Kassel in northern Hesse.

Dr. Newman’s statement was contained in an answer to an open letter published in the Hessische Nachrichten, which had suggested that American funds allocated for a new US Information Center be used instead to assist in the reconstruction of the city’s opera house.

Money allocated to the construction of a new Information Center in Kassel comes from the dollar fund appropriated by the United States Congress specifically for such construction and cannot legally be used for any other purpose, the commissioner’s letter pointed out. He added, however, that the fact that Kassel was chosen as one of the few cities in the Federal Republic where a new US Information Center would be constructed “can be construed only as a recognition of the unique position which the city occupies as an important center…”

Dr. Newman demonstrated his sympathy with the need for new theater facilities when he stated, “We certainly appreciate your efforts to have the theater rebuilt and we agree there is a definite need for this and other new cultural institutions in your city.”

Noting that the US Government has in the past supported and contributed heavily to the building or rebuilding of many German public and cultural institutions, the commissioner stated, “It is my belief, however, that with the changing of the economic and political situation in Germany, such direct aid is less necessary and may not be desirable.” The letter said future friendship would rest rather on an exchange of facts and ideas, a program to which the US Information Center is devoted: “Our desire is to see progressively better understanding between our peoples, and the new Information Center in Kassel will certainly aid in reaching that goal,” Dr. Newman said.

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