America’s Good Friends

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AMERICA’S GOOD friends among the German people are the former "exchangees" — the men and women who worked and studied in the United States for periods of three months to one year under State Department sponsorship. But these teachers, students, professional and civic leaders are finding a growing number of problems on their return to Germany primarily because of their partiality for the United States. The fact that they are working earnestly and intelligently to solve these problems, perhaps better than any other evidence, indicates the sincerity of their friendship for America.

These were the impressions gained at a meeting of some 50 exchangees held in Hof recently through the sponsorship of the Hof Exchange Circle.

During the opening session of the two-day conference, the exchangees, all of whom came from the northern Bavarian district of Upper Franconia, heard Mrs. John J. McCloy, wife of the US High Commissioner, and Dr. Oron J. Hale, US state commissioner for Bavaria, urge them to extend their American experiences and learning to an ever widening circle of friends and associates. In the subsequent panel discussions, the exchangees indicated that this they were anxious to do, but that they were running into the traditional conservatism of many elements of the German people. The implication was that many Germans were more isolationist than some Americans.

AS ONE OF the conferees expressed it: "I found more Americans interested in learning about Germany during my trip to the United States, than Germans eager to hear about America on my return."

They agreed, however, that this reaction was not universal. In fact, most had been called upon to give lectures or write articles on their experiences abroad. In particular the young people — the teen-agers and university students who had lived a year in the United States — found keen interest among their fellows and the youth organizations. Many had converted ideas and methods picked up in America to effective use in Germany. One woman had opened a new vocational school for girls, utilizing many American education methods, and had even gained civic support in financing the construction of a new school building. A librarian had introduced the American open-shelf system to her institution with the enthusiastic approval of the patrons. Several of the young farmers were attempting to use US agricultural techniques on their farms.

But the fact that many Germans, particularly among official circles, have displayed an aversion to "new-fangled ideas from abroad" had posed an unpleasant surprise to exchangees returning from what several called an "inspiring visit in the United States." A man, who had visited the United States as a representative of a farmers’ organization, reported that neither the state government nor even his own organization had requested any sort of report from him on agricultural America. At the same time, he said that he had found avid interest among the small groups of farmers to whom he had talked. Educational authorities were described as the least receptive to foreign ideas, and one teacher reported that she had been forbidden to use liberal teaching methods which she had learned in an American classroom. University students were generally given no credit for their studies in the United States.

THE INTENSE interest of exchangees in utilizing their foreign experience in Germany, however, was far more encouraging than the reported resistance to new concepts and procedures was discouraging. There was general agreement that the task of the exchangee was not to propagate American methods — which in all circumstances were not adaptable to Germany anyway — but was to spread to the widest circles the useful knowledge gained from exchange visits in order to impress upon Germans that “every nation has something to give another.” They urged caution in advancing foreign ideas, and in all cases to drop the “made in USA” label until the proposal had proved workable and acceptable to the respective government agency, firm, school or civic organization.

Another theme which produced active interest among the Upper Franconian exchangees was the possibility of improving international relations through the Exchanges Program. They were particularly impressed by a report on the organization of the “Columbus Society” in Munich, primarily comprised of exchangees, which is

Guests at the conference included (left to right): Dr. Oron J. Hale, US state commissioner for Bavaria; Mrs. John J. McCloy, wife of the US High Commissioner; Hans Hoegn, mayor of Hof, and Friedrich Freiherr von Teuchert, vice president of Upper Franconia.

(INFOG photo)
aimed at drawing foreign students and other visitors from abroad into closer association with Germans by organizing social programs and offering them visits in German homes during vacation times. The proposal to form chapters of this organization in Upper Franconia is now being considered.

An important phase of international relations to which the conferees at Hof felt they could make a contribution was the promotion of better relations between American troops and Germans.

It was pointed out that US soldiers are stationed among a people whose language they do not understand, and whose customs are foreign to them. Often their only contact with Germans is through some of the less desirable elements of the German population.

"If leaders of American troops, with German help, would seriously attempt to interest the soldiers in the problems of German life, then the soldiers would soon find more profitable ways to spend their leisure time and would come less often to the point of drowning their troubles," one of the exchangees said. With the general agreement of the group, it was pointed out that no individuals are better equipped to introduce Americans to the better elements of the German population than the exchangees themselves. Their knowledge of English and recent visits in the United States would give them a common ground for establishing a friendly relationship with Americans. It was suggested that such a task might well be taken on by local Columbus Societies or similar organizations.

During the conference, the exchangees found their first opportunity to practice this new experiment in international relations, when they were entertained at a Saturday evening buffet supper by the 15th Constabulary Squadron at its enlisted men's club. After overcoming an initial reserve, the exchangees discovered mutual interests and a friendly acceptance on the part of the soldiers, which indicated that closer relations could easily be fostered between themselves and the American defense forces.

The conference, which was held on the weekend of April 26, was organized by the Hof Exchange Circles with assistance from the local US Public Affairs Office. It attracted almost one-half of the 150 former US visitors living in Upper Franconia, a good turnout even by American standards, considering the fact that all delegates voted to pay their own expenses at the meeting.

In the two days of speeches and discussions no major problems were solved nor startling resolutions passed. However, the convention obviously renewed the interest and determination of the participants in utilizing their Stateside experiences and correcting misunderstandings which are common among Germans about America.

END

VOA Broadcasts in Russian from Munich

This is the Voice of America speaking to you from Europe" is heard nightly in Russian. Commencing May 22, the Voice of America launched its first Russian-language program to originate from western Europe.

The program, prepared and broadcast from VOA's European Radio Center in Munich, is heard from 10 to 10:15 p.m., Central European Time, or midnight to 12:15 a.m., Moscow Time. It brings to Soviet listeners the voices of their own people who have taken the road to freedom, and also sends behind the "Iron Curtain" news and information suppressed or distorted by the Soviet Government.

The new Russian program follows closely the inauguration of the Lithuanian-language program, now heard daily from 7:45 to 8 p.m. Central European Time. It went on the air for the first time May 15 — the 32nd anniversary of the opening of the Lithuanian parliament. That parliament reaffirmed the independence of the Lithuanian Republic and adopted its constitution. Although forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940, Lithuania continues to be recognized as a sister republic of the United States of America and other free countries.

The launching of the Lithuanian and Russian programs was undertaken after careful testing of the pilot project of VOA broadcasting from Europe, which began with the Polish program Oct. 1, 1951. Effectiveness of the Polish broadcast became apparent through the attacks of Polish press and radio on VOA, and from reports of Polish fugitives who say that VOA was an important influence in their decision to flee the country.

Headed by a few hand-picked American experts on Iron Curtain areas, the European Radio Center of the Voice of America has hired security-tested refugees. These men and women have recent first-hand knowledge of conditions inside captive countries. Many have survived harrowings experiences in forced labor camps and prisons.

Typical of these is Marian Czuchnowski, writer, poet and journalist on the Polish staff in Munich. After the defeat of the Polish army by the German army in 1939, Czuchnowski was arrested by the Red army while fleeing the Nazis. He underwent a year of grilling, transfers, interrogations and then a three-year forced labor sentence. He survived typhus and pneumonia before he was released and joined the Polish government in exile.

Returning to Poland after the war, Czuchnowski went underground when the Soviet-puppet Lublin government took over the country. The "shadow government" dissolved in 1948 and Czuchnowski returned to free-lance journalism. He joined the staff of VOA in November, 1951.