

Symbol of Appreciation

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AN ANONYMOUS GERMAN in Munich scrawled on the back of a money order: "A wonderful ideal" and sent it off, a money order for DM 10 (\$2.38).*

Some 400 miles away, in embattled Free Berlin, an old man stopped at the post office on his way home from the welfare agency and wrote: "I am 80 years old and on public relief, but I think I can spare DM 3 (71 cents) for this good purpose."

Again elsewhere in Germany, a woman made a close check of her billfold and decided, sighingly, that she could not afford it—no, not now, three weeks before Christmas. But she kept it in mind, and soon after the first of the new year she took DM 20 (\$4.76) out of her husband's pay envelope, went to the post office and wrote: "I would have been glad to give more, but honestly, I can't."

A few days later, these money orders, along with thousands of others from all parts of Germany, wound up on a desk in Cologne's Old University building, where a sign on the door says: *Dankspende des deutschen Volkes*.

WHAT HAD HAPPENED? What made Germans in all parts of the country suddenly take some marks from their tight budgets and give them away, very often anonymously? They felt that they owed a debt of gratitude to millions of anonymous men and women all around the globe who had joined in a common effort to help Germany out of its greatest need and distress after 1945. And though their position was still far from enviable, they wanted to show the world that they were grateful for what they had received.

Hostilities had just ceased in the spring of 1945, when a Swiss chaplain crossed the Rhine into Germany and brought a knapsack full of medicine to help combat an outbreak of disease. He did not know then that he was starting a world-wide relief campaign, conceived of a world-wide war and as unique in its extent. A few weeks later supplies started to come in from Germany's two neutral neighbors, Switzerland and Sweden, and before the summer had passed the victors of World War II opened the German ports to relief shipments from their own countries.

* Deutsche-mark amounts have been converted to dollars at the official exchange rate of DM 4.20 equaling \$1. It should be kept in mind, however, that — generally speaking — the German workman looks on the mark the same way an American looks on the dollar.

Churches, welfare organizations, youth groups and the governments stepped in and organized the flow of donated food, clothing and household goods, which increased from day to day. Six years later, by the summer of 1951, gifts from private citizens abroad to German friends or welfare organizations had reached the DM 1,000,000,000 (\$238,000,000) mark. All countries in the free world were represented on the list of donors, excepting only the few which were equally bad off as Germany, such as Austria and Greece.

RANKING FIRST AMONG the donors was the United States, where 60 percent of all private relief shipments to Germany originated, not counting the vast government-sponsored Marshall-Plan and GARIOA (Government and Relief in Occupied Areas) programs. The runners-up were Switzerland and Sweden, with per-capita shares even exceeding that of the United States. The 150,000 inhabitants of Iceland sent their contributions as did formerly German-occupied Norway and the Netherlands, as well as faraway South Africa and Haiti.

However, even the most generous outside help cannot rebuild a country. It has to be put to proper use, which the German people did. Foreign shipments of food and clothing relieved them of the most pressing needs, increasing their ability to rebuild. With a maximum of effort, Germany was back on its feet only six years after the complete collapse of 1945, a rehabilitated nation in the world community.

President Theodor Heuss inaugurating the "Dankspende" drive in Bonn Nov. 27, 1951. Left to right: President Heuss; Hanns Hartmann, director of the Cologne radio station; Robert Goerlinger, mayor of Cologne; Louise Schroeder, former acting mayor of Berlin, and Bishop D. Hans Meiser, who represented the Protestant Church in Germany. (Photo by Georg Munker, Bonn)



The flood catastrophes in Kansas and Italy in 1951 provided the young Federal Republic with an opportunity to extend a helping hand to other distressed populations, to prove that it understands the principles of humanity from which it has benefited. Immediately upon receipt of the first news of these disasters, German motor pumps were flown to Kansas, and a hospital train left for Italy. But even so, the feeling persisted among German citizens that their nation should find some way to express its gratitude to the countless anonymous donors, who would never know the people whom their gifts had helped, or how much a nation had depended on them.

GERMANY'S PRESIDENT THEODOR HEUSS found a way: to buy works of contemporary German art with funds donated by the German people, and to give them to these nations as a symbol of German gratitude for their help. Contemporary German art had suffered under the Nazi regime. Hitler classified it from the standpoint of his ideology and ruthlessly ruled out everything which did not suit his concept. He banned the works of internationally famous artists such as Beckmann and Marc, removed them from the German art galleries and dumped them on the world markets. But the unexpected happened; from that very day on world interest in modern German art increased and kept increasing as the political disputes about its cultural value went on.

And now German art, threatened by a creeping paralysis since the sociological upheaval of two lost wars had set a rapid end to private patronage, would have a new, great and worth-while task: to portray, through the medium of art, the life of the present German generation to the peoples of the world. These works, carefully scrutinized by an expert jury, would tell them of a new Germany and, at the same time, would enrich the cultural treasures of these nations and of the world.

Under the personal supervision of President Heuss, and the trusteeship of prominent personages of German public life, a non-profit foundation was established in Cologne, called the *Dankspende des deutschen Volkes*, literally translated a "Donation in Gratitude of the German People." It is the instrument of the campaign for which President Heuss appealed to the German public at a ceremony in Bonn on Nov. 27, 1951. "This is not a political affair, it is primarily a human one," he said. "Gratefulness exalts a nation, because it is the attitude of free men."

THE RESPONSE FROM the German people was immediate and strong. Two days after the opening ceremony the first contribution was received from "one who waits for the equalization of war burdens."* He

* The "Equalization of War Burdens" is a German legislative proposal, under which property losses through events of the war and its direct consequences are to be equalized. Capital levies will be imposed on individuals who suffered no or insubstantial losses, for the benefit of those who lost most or all of their property. Due to the enormous difficulty of such a program, the bill has been under consideration almost four years.

apparently did not quite know how much he should give, so he sent DM 7.77 (\$1.85) to match the foundation's bank account number 77,777. More remittances followed, and by the end of the first week they came in at the rate of 100 a day. Within less than two months DM 192,000 (\$45,730) had been collected, from contributions ranging from DM 1 (23.8 cents) to DM 500 (\$119) from individuals, and up to DM 50,000 (\$11,900) from firms and organizations.

But the campaign is only just getting started. Local governments throughout Germany are preparing to organize citizens' committees to support the drive, theaters will stage non-profit performances for the benefit of the *Dankspende*, and sports clubs will contribute the proceeds of coming sports events. Trade unions, business organizations and youth groups are joining in the effort to spread the campaign over the country. Their task is to set up local channels for collection, to provide facilities — not to "sell" the idea.

"Selling" seems to be superfluous. The majority of the people have understood the simple appeal "to contribute in the same spirit in which the world helped us: without any political implication, in the spirit of a peace which is rooted in the hearts of mankind." Part and parcel of a democracy in the making, there are opponents of the *Dankspende*. There are those who endorse the idea, but want to have it done their own way. There are others, who say they will participate only if their particular friends abroad receive a gift of gratitude. And there are, of course, also the antagonists whose arguments and polemics against "western gangsters" can hardly conceal their defiance. But they are the proverbial exception which confirms the rule.

THIS SUMMER, WHEN it is expected the foundation's goal of DM 1,500,000 (\$357,150) will have drawn nearer, a jury of 12 prominent German art experts will convene to scrutinize the thousands of paintings, drawings and sculptures offered by German artists. They will select the best ones, giving a representative cross-section of contemporary German art.

And then these works of art will be presented to the nations to whom Germany feels indebted, to their governments, churches, welfare organizations, and to many individuals who spearheaded the drive to help the defeated country. In art galleries all over the world they will be on display as witnesses of a time when charity, brotherhood and friendship finally overcame hatred and war, and as memorials to the gratefulness of a nation which was the first to benefit from this revolution of thought.

"Based on my experience since the inception of the *Dankspende* I can positively say that the desire to thank is a deeply felt and strong one among the German people," said President Heuss. "In this short time already the foundation's success has proved that the German people are overcoming bitterness, disappointment and apathy."

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