The principal address before the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag), in Bonn Sept. 7 in observance of the third anniversary of the first session of the highest elected legislative body in Germany was delivered by its president, Dr. Ehlers. Below is a condensed translation of the text of the address as published in the official Bulletin of the Federal Government. The translation is by Dr. Frank H. Jonas and Dr. Liselotte Goldbeck of the editorial staff of the Information Bulletin.

For a Free and United Germany

Translation of Address
by Dr. Hermann Ehlers
President of the German Federal Parliament

MORE THAN ANY other nation we are being asked today if we really have an inner justification to celebrate a national commemorative holiday. In fixing this day with substantial reserve, the Federal Government did not proclaim a national holiday, though one can hardly draw a fine line in such cases. Nations need discernable and clear outlines for their national events. Other nations have been more fortunate in the choice of national commemorative days, because they have had events in their national history that naturally lend themselves to such observation. I am thinking of the day of the destruction of the Bastille in Paris and of the Declaration of Independence of the 13 colonies in North America...

In this respect, as in many other matters, we in Germany have been even worse off in our recent history. One must conclude that, after a considerable lapse of time, the attempts of the Weimar Republic to make August 11, 1919 a national holiday met with little or no success. We owe it to ourselves and to the German people to explain why this happened. Certainly the fault did not lie in the quality of the Weimar constitution. Though one may criticize it for this or that, in general one must say that if it could have been carried out without disturbance and if it had not been undermined at its foundations from the very beginning by the most diverse forces, it could have provided the basis for a

Continued on page 16

On the occasion of the Sept. 7 commemoration, Prof. Theodor Heuss, president of the German Federal Republic, made the following statement which was published in the Bulletin of the Federal Government.

WE DO NOT know yet if the seventh of September will be wedded to the conscience of the German people, so that it becomes self-evident to celebrate it in thankfulness. It lacks the dramatic accent of history. We ourselves would wish that after the Germans had been presented an excess in dramatics and theatrics ending in a wildly composed national tragedy, they would regain a feeling that, according to Hoelderlin’s words, sobriety, too, and particularly sobriety, is “holy.” We do not mean the sobriety of an unimaginative philistine, rather that of a man who approaches his daily duties and their realization with clear consciousness.

When the German Federal Parliament, which was chosen by the people in a free election, met on Sept. 7, 1949, the people of the Federal Republic had created its first legitimate organ, its spokesman before the world and the administrator of its fate, as far as this can be encompassed by laws. That was an extremely important and incisive step after the distress, sorrow and the historical doubtfulness of the precedents. We are well aware of the visionaries who expected far too much and the discontented whose silent but at times also noisy scorn accompanied the beginning. One must not become confused either by the resentments of those who were disappointed or by the cheap polemics of those who would like to come to the forefront again.

Although some points in the events and the decisions of these three years will remain debatable in the political discussions of the day, an appraisal by history sometime will emphasize strongly these years. It does not make too deep an impression on us that abroad one speaks of the “German miracle,” for we know that honest admiration and apprehensive astonishment are included in these words. Besides, it is not a question of a “miracle” but rather of something very simple and wholly sound, the diligence of the German himself, of the farmer, the worker, the merchant, the teacher and the civil servant. And also of the politician! I think I see a lessening of the stupid talk about the “people in Bonn.” The professional demagogues, naturally, go on trying to keep it alive. But wherever the feeling for correct judgment still exists, one will see and should also admit the great work, which was done during these three years by the Federal Parliament, the Federal Council, the Cabinet, and the experts of the so-called “ministerial bureaucracy.”

END
For a Free and United Germany
Continued from page 15

liberal German nation. We should cease to reject superficially the Weimar Republic and its (constitutional) order. Looking back, we are more willing today than we were in the years from 1919 to 1933 to recognize that the establishing of the Weimar Constitution on August 11, 1919 was an extremely significant event in our history...

TODAY WE ARE again confronted with the problem of justifying a national commemorative day. The whole problem is brought into the open when (we recall) that twice during the past three years we have made the first meeting of this German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) and once the election of the president of the Federal Republic the basis for this day. This change in reasons could cause one to form the opinion that this in political situation we had better not celebrate any anniversary or holiday at all.

When we recall that almost 20,000,000 persons in the Soviet occupied zone are required to celebrate the anniversary of the establishment of their constitution, and that it is no accident this day falls on the same day as the “liberation by the Red army,” then we understand in what a grotesque and desperate situation we find ourselves as a whole German people.

For the time being this national commemorative day can only be a day for the Federal Republic...

The limits in time and substance the Federal Republic has set for itself are found unequivocally in the Basic Law. We do not have the least desire to forget this fact. Anyone who can read the Basic Law feels that the waiting of all Germans for a single German state is vibrating throughout it from beginning to end...

We cannot foresee what the occasion will be in the future for a national holiday of a unified Germany. If we may imagine such an event, it could only be the day when this unity is granted to us... We Germans have learned from the misfortune which has befallen us that a national event would be bad as a basis for national celebration if it were only national in character and if it were to seal off one nation from the others. We want to understand the longed-for event which will restore our outward unity — for spiritually we have never been separated — as a contribution to an ever-growing large community of nations for the benefit and need of all...

THERE IS NO German politician, ... who would not have to understand and realize that the desire for unity is the most urgent objective of our policy. There is no defensible political or ideological reason that permits any other political decision. Yet if anyone should come to any other conclusion, he would exclude himself from the political community of this people and this state... But everyone who participates in this discussion (the question of German unity) should know that the overwhelming majority of the German people, which is represented in this body, would understand that a unity under the terror of the knout would be no unity but only the final assassination of the German people. For us the concepts of unity and of inner and outward freedom are inseparably connected...

Now someone may object, and certainly many will do so in this instance, that the worst way to further the idea of unity would be to celebrate a national anniversary of the German Federal Republic. In this way, the objectors would say, the partition of Germany would be glorified and celebrated.

Apropos of this argument there is the question of the spiritual justification for the method we have followed in building the German Federal Republic... We know that at first the political will of our people did not create this state, which includes only a part of Germany; it resulted from the political and military collapse and from occupation policy. If some persons outside of Germany had read the book *Congress of Vienna, A Study in Allied Unity* by the Englishman Harold Nicholson, perhaps the optimistic notion of holding and governing Germany mutually in political impotence would not have occurred.

BUT WE MUST state that in 1948 for the first time there appeared the possibility of undertaking a political centralization of the three western occupied zones that would go beyond the narrow confines of the states and the economic cooperation between the zones.

It can be said today that it would have been extremely unwise and even irresponsible not to take advantage of that political prospect. It is to the credit of the ministers-president of the West German states and the members of the Parliamentary Council that despite all individual problems and doubts they made possible the inception of a German body politic. At that time they underscored the provisional nature of this new government in many ways, most significantly perhaps by providing a temporary Basic Law instead of a constitution.

We could have already learned from our experience after the First World War that the self-abnegating and time-consuming method of gradual and piecemeal reconstruction is the most promising one. Anyone who would want to tell the German people today that another method would be more fitting and promise greater success would be on the road which we once took to the ruination of our people ...

No one should say that a temporary central political organization, created for a limited period, does not need... political consciousness. No one among us would want another authoritarian government or a totalitarian dictatorship...

A DEMOCRATIC STATE — and we can only conceive this particular kind of state today — is rooted in the minds and hearts of its citizens only when they feel that it exists for their benefit.
What this house is charged to do — if it is to do its duty — is to examine and re-examine what is legal and what is possible; to modify demands, distinguishing between what is transient and what is essential; and to bring about acceptable compromises on what is possible, and — within this framework — relative justice.

We Germans will still have to strive hard to apply the concept of democracy in (exercising) our national political responsibility as it ought to be applied legally, which means that each agency of the state which derives its responsibility from the entire people must remain responsible to the entire people.

A group of persons who thought they had been treated unjustly, and who probably were, recently told me that many of its members were considering joining radical parties as self-defense. That means self-defense against this national government and its slowly stabilizing order.

The political interest, which every state must demand and which our state can also expect, does not include approval of all the measures taken by the state and its government. Our constitutional system entitles everyone to pursue his goals through legal means which are provided for political behavior, particularly through the election process.

But there was more behind that threat; it was the giving of notice — not made here for the first time in our generation — to get rid of this state and its order by force and by radical means in order to achieve the demands of individuals and groups. This announcement attacked the established order which was granted to us because of our common life. A nation which would not take itself seriously enough to see this would fail to do the duty entrusted to it. Whoever threatens this national existence with radicalism and totalitarianism will bring it onto that road which we have already once trod to the disaster of the German people. We would have been very poor students of our recent history if we did not resist with all the constitutional and legal means at our disposal the new attempt to establish despotism among us.

Also, in thinking about the stability of our own democratic order, let us not forget for one moment our German brothers in the East who are forced to forego all of these political and civil freedoms which have accrued for us. Nothing depresses us more than the ever recurring realization that today we can do very little to help them. We are convinced that we cannot even remotely consider force as a means to improve their position, because we know that only greater disaster would result for all of us.

Colleagues of the Federal Parliament who are present at this ceremony can testify that three years ago they approached a very unpopular task. It would be wrong to assume that all the blame for the public's repudiating anonymously or openly this parliament's work should be laid at the door of this particular parliament... I do not think I am wrong in saying that during the past three years a certain change has taken place among our people, at least among those who are willing to learn and change their minds, in that many have acquired an understanding for the task and the work of our parliament.

Consider it most gratifying that during these years it was the younger generation rather than the older people who experienced such a change of mind... Many a deputy who at first approached his assigned task with concern and even resignation has been freshly inspired to do his work with all of his strength, going even beyond his strength, by his talks with young people during the past year.

Oft repeated rumors are circulating among our people that this parliament, either in its election or in its political decisions, is not capable to meet the demands that are put on it.

We do not deny that, not only in Germany but in all nations of the free world, not even to mention the totalitarian states, the burning question is whether elections really provide those persons, charged with legislative responsibility, including the executive too, whom the voters really want in the office. It may be that in view of population figures, density and structure in the modern state, the time has passed when it seemed possible at a given time to send to parliament a certain representative of a certain number of citizens. I even doubt, except in small localities perhaps, if the possibility to do so has ever really existed. What is possible, however, is the activation of the political responsibility of the people... and the delegation in a legal manner of a political task which the people, from the standpoint of mere practicality, is not in a position to fulfill.

A word may be said at this point about the problem of the political parties... It is the function of political parties in our country, as in other nations, to organize the political will of the people. Anyone who is charged with public responsibility knows that this will exists, though quite often ill-defined and unorganized perhaps, but nevertheless for the most part with definite objectives. Since constitutionally we have only one possibility to achieve the political will, and that is to exercise influence on legislation and the government under the rules provided for doing so, the political party is an inescapable necessity for us.

The organization and the work of the various political parties may invite all kinds of criticism... But by observing and checking each other they are still, taken together, the most effective protection we have against establishing a monopoly of power by any one group or party. Therefore, we should not dismiss them so lightly as is done now and then.

Since the political intent of the people is organized by the parties, we must take the delegation of the political responsibility which follows equally seriously. We are not living under a dictatorship.

Also, it must be clear to the whole people, particularly in a democratically and legislatively governed state, who

Continued on page 24