

Seminar in Democracy

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WHAT SHOULD MR. AVERAGE CITIZEN in Germany know about voting systems, political party programs, local self-government, the basic rights guaranteed in his state and federal constitutions, the European Movement, or the Schuman Plan?

Why is his information on most of these and other current topics either often sketchy or entirely lacking, or coupled with distaste for all things political?

How can the problems of political ignorance and apathy, chief hindrances to democratic development, be attacked?

In order to help fill the gap in general political information and to arouse an interest in civic and governmental affairs, a small group of civic-minded citizens of Frankfurt in cooperation with the US resident officer there, established the now popular Seminar for Politics in February 1951. The idea originated with a German employee of the resident office, Helmut Kimpel, who as a graduate exchange student in political science had participated in many public discussion groups in the United States.

THE TITLE "SEMINAR" was chosen for the proposed organization for psychological reasons, inasmuch as it presupposes a serious, academic approach to political problems. But in practice, lectures and talks are given in a free style inducing active and lively discussion among participants, who represent a cross-section of the population. It has, in fact, turned out to be more of a small "town hall" than a seminar.

The German title of the Seminar for Politics is *Frankfurter Seminar fuer Politik e. V.* Horst Siebecke, of the *Gesellschaft fuer Christlich-Juedische Zusammenarbeit* (Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation) is chairman, and Mrs. Ulla Illing is business manager. Sessions are held five nights a week, Monday through Friday, at the Frankfurt Civic Affairs Center, 55 Mylius Strasse. Sometimes two meetings are held in a single evening.

In a sense, the seminar could be termed a progressive *Volkshochschule* (Public Education Center) for politics. Modern pedagogical techniques — group discussions, films, tape recordings and other procedural aids — are employed. Mrs. Illing reports that great emphasis is placed on stimulating maximum group discussion of the various topics presented and the individual group participant is considered more important than the lecturer.

The so-called *Grundkursus*, or basic course, in political affairs was established in March 1951, and comprises a series of six talks and discussions on basic rights and duties of citizenship, political parties, democracy as a way of political life, and so on, with continuous stress on greater citizen participation in governmental affairs especially at the local level. The same material is arranged in somewhat different form for participating groups of

elementary and secondary school teachers, particularly those who teach civics; it is called *Lebendiger Politischer Unterricht* or roughly, "vitalized civics."

IN ADDITION TO the basic political affairs course, a wide range of current topics are dealt with mostly in a single lecture-discussion meeting. Among those which have elicited widest participation and after-comment, are the Marshall Plan, peace with Israel, increase in Frankfurt streetcar fares, the Schuman Plan, acute need for more school buildings, the role of women in politics, training of youth for public affairs, and trade union problems.

Public interest was aroused early — at the March 13 meeting — where more than 200 participants heard arguments as to whether the Veit Harlan film *Die unsterbliche Geliebte* (The Immortal Beloved) should be banned because of Harlan's connection with the highly anti-Semitic movie *Jud Suess* (The Jew Suess) under the Nazis. Although the meeting was orderly, the police intervened to keep out further participants because of dangers in overcrowding. Later, other controversial matters were discussed in an objective manner and without incident.

The seminar, under the able management of Mrs. Illing, has been very successful in attracting lecturers and discussion leaders from those active in public life and practical politics. Since March 1951, these have included 13 *Bundestag* (federal lower house) deputies, six Hessian state legislature deputies, 21 Frankfurt city councilors and city assemblymen, and a number of leaders of the major democratic parties, high administrative officials, university professors, trade unionists, leaders of women's and other organizations and journalists. Most of these have almost invariably contributed their services on a *gratis* basis.

Ulla Illing (at microphone) is explaining to participants of the "rhetorical course" different forms of discussion techniques. Public speaking exercises are recorded on tape recorder (in background) and played back to aid teaching.



ATENDANCE AT THE individual meetings, lectures and discussions from March through October 1951, totaled 5,242, of whom approximately 40 percent were young people under 35 years of age. About 40 percent, too, were women of all ages. Special participating groups have been teachers, women's organization leaders and, in one case, the staff of a German news agency.

To supplement the work in the seminar proper, arrangements have been made for participants to view in action the *Bundestag* in Bonn (three visits) and the Hessian state legislature in Wiesbaden (four visits). They have made 15 visits to the Frankfurt city assembly, not only to observe the procedures of parliamentary bodies, but to see just how particular issues are handled by the legislators.

More than 400 propaganda letters from the Soviet Zone, addressed to individuals in western Germany, have been answered directly by the seminar at the request of the addressees, who did not wish to reply themselves. From March through September, the seminar distributed around 4,600 brochures dealing with political or civic topics in the Frankfurt elementary and secondary schools.

To arouse interest and a sense of citizen responsibility of young Germans reaching the voting age of 21, a "Political Birthday Festival"* was arranged by the seminar last Oct. 18, which was attended by more than 400 young Germans who had reached their majority in the previous quarter. The meeting was addressed by Dr. Walter Kolb, Frankfurt mayor; Hermann Schaub, chairman of the city assembly, and leaders of the three major democratic parties. Meetings for these 21-year-olds will henceforth be held every three months, and it is expected that many of them will become active seminar participants.

Financially, the seminar has thus far operated on a rather modest basis expenditures since Feb 20, 1951, totaling less than DM 5,000 (\$1,190). During this period the seminar has succeeded in building a near-phenomenal position for itself in the public life of Frankfurt. Mem-

* See "Young Citizens Hold Forum," Information Bulletin, November 1951.

Dr. Franklin has been associated with German affairs for 25 years, 18 of which he has spent in this country. His direct contact with Germany began in 1919, when he started a three-year occupation duty assignment in Coblenz as an army captain. Later, as US consul in Berlin and Leipzig, he was in a position to follow closely German economic and political developments.

Dr. Franklin joined OMGUS, Berlin, in December 1945, and served successively in the Office of the Chief of Staff, Information Control Division, and was chief of the Civil Administration and Political Affairs Branch, Berlin Sector, during the Soviet blockade of the city in 1948-49. Since January 1950, he has served as assistant chief, Political Affairs Division, OLC Hesse, in charge of the political re-orientation programs such as civil liberties, local government reform, electoral reform, and citizen participation in government.

He holds a doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Leipzig, and has also studied at the Universities of Bonn, Heidelberg and Berlin.



Frankfurt Seminar for Politics is attended by approximately 1,000 men and women every month. Shown are participants in one of courses designed to acquaint citizens with rights and responsibilities. (PRD HICOG photos by Gassner)

bers of the city assembly, including party leaders, frequently refer in assembly meetings to matters which have been discussed in the seminar, and viewpoints expressed there, an indication of the growing influence the organization is exerting on civic affairs.

A large share of the credit for this unique development in such a short space of time is undoubtedly due Mrs. Illing, who through her zeal for the seminar's purpose and her ability to publicize it and its activities has reached virtually all circles of Frankfurt, and even into many neighboring communities. Relations with the press and radio, especially the former, are most favorable, scarcely a day going by without the appearance of some item, and frequently a long article, about the seminar in one or more of the Frankfurt newspapers.

THE TASK OF DEVELOPING political awareness today in Germany is made doubly difficult not only by the average German's fear of "politics" stemming from his unfortunate experiences of the past, but also by the present Eastern threat to the Western idea of individual rights and responsibilities in relation to government. The Frankfurt Seminar for Politics has, however, tackled this job effectively and has already made a significant contribution toward stimulating interest in political and civic affairs.

Already there are evidences of a growing desire on the part of the citizens, at least in the Frankfurt area, to take a more active part in governmental affairs and to assume a greater sense of responsibility as citizens for what happens in the building of their new nation.

The Frankfurt Seminar is taking a prominent place in Hesse, along with the *Schmitten Buergerkundlicher Arbeitskreis* (Working Circle for Citizenship Training) with its nine-day "seminars in democracy" for young people, and also the Seminar for Politics recently organized in Wiesbaden under US resident office sponsorship, which provides lecturers from the University of Mainz and from local Wiesbaden public affairs circles.

These organizations with their development of successful techniques in popularizing civic and political affairs in Hesse during recent months may well serve as an inspiration to similar civic-minded groups in other cities in western Germany. +END