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Some general impressions of the present situation
of science in Germany

For Dr. Havighurst

By R. Courant^D

Rehabilitation program

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The following is a summary of general impressions received of the scientific situation in Germany in June, 1948; I had during my visit intimate discussions with scientists, scholars, industrialists, businessmen, German and Allied administrators and other people. The main places visited were Frankfurt, Berlin, Hamburg, the Ruhr district (including Muenster), Heidelberg, and Goettingen.

The present moment is a crucial one for intellectual life in Germany, and for science in particular. If one grants the premise that science and education in Germany ought to play a role in the European reconstruction, then one must pay attention to the dangers and potentialities of this moment of instability; relatively small measures may precipitate fairly large effects.

Even much more so than a year ago, German intellectual life is dominated by sharply divergent factors. The overshadowing dilemma is that between East and West, involving in particular the problem of Berlin. The second important factor is the currency reform, which, in spite of great temporary hardships for institutions of higher learning, is bound to have a tremendous impact on the intellectual life in Germany. (As an example: the expectation of a strong economic recovery in the Ruhr district has led to vague but ambitious plans for a big scientific development in that district.) A factor pointing toward recovery is the undeniable success German universities

are having with a selected fraction of the younger generation in spite of all the handicaps. A negative factor is the lukewarm attitude of some German administrations toward universities and research activities. This lukewarm attitude is enhanced by a fairly widespread bias against science; many people active in education, as well Germans as people in the military government, feel that social sciences should be emphasized as against natural sciences. (Example: a university commission under the leadership of Lord Lindsay from Oxford has been established by General Robertson to evolve proposals for university reform in Germany. No scientists belong to this commission.)

In the Allied control agencies, the universities come under the branch on education and religion. But scientific research is handled by an office attached to the economic section. Such a split in a domain where a connection between research and teaching is the only hope for the future may prove a great hindrance for reconstruction.

The psychological attitude of the average German scientist, in spite of improvements in living and working conditions, seems, if anything, to have deteriorated. Impatience, a righteous attitude toward the Allies (who "should have known better"), a mixture of fear and hatred for the Russian influence, a feeling of insecurity about the privileged position of universities and university professors, and a rising nationalism are creating in many places an atmosphere which is entirely not conducive to creative research. There are of course notable exceptions, but German science and intellectual life as an organic fabric seem dangerously weakened. Nothing like the pre-Nazi level can be reached within a generation. Yet it would be not difficult or costly to preserve a good deal of the German tradition in research and training.

German scientific revival seems to become rather distinctly visible in the field of German scientific publications. It is surprising how these activities have multiplied during the last year. Not only has the Soviet sponsored Berlin Akademie-Verlag started a very ambitious program of publications of all sorts, but also private publishers have become enterprising again, in particular the Springer-Verlag, which is now essentially in the hands of Mr. Lange and J. Springer in Berlin and Dr. Ferdinand Springer in Heidelberg. One of the main handicaps for German scientific publishing, however, seems to be the present artificial rate of exchange between mark and dollar; as a consequence, German publications are offered abroad at a price which is all but prohibitive and will call for criticism and even boycott.

A word should be said about the East-West problem. My observations, as far as the eastern side is concerned, are limited to Berlin, where I saw not only German scientists, but also German representatives of the eastern administration, particularly Dr. Nass, Administrative Director of the Prussian Academy, and Dr. Rompe, a physicist who is a key figure in the Ministry of Education for the Soviet Zone.

The Russians are unbelievably active in supporting science and scientists. Living conditions for scientists in the Soviet orbit are attractive; possibilities for publication are amply provided; institutes are being built, equipped, and financed. While of course the overwhelming majority of intellectuals in Berlin are anti-Soviet in their inner attitude, one must not underestimate the attraction and the influence of carefully planned and executed Soviet policy. After all, German intellectuals and scientists cooperated all too willingly with the Nazis although they should have known better.

Except for the effort made by the British to establish Goettingen as a leading scientific center, there does not seem to exist at the moment anything in the British and American Zones in Germany that can compare with the efforts of the Russians.

Even though I found among German scientists some enthusiasm and loyalty to institutions in Berlin, I do not think that in the long run the Soviet dominated Berlin institutions will be able to keep all of their highly qualified scientists. There are unmistakable signs of defection and of the desire to leave, either for western Germany or for abroad. Among scientists in western Germany and among Allied administrators I found little confidence in the future of Berlin, rather an inclination to salvage as much as possible from the wreckage than to encourage a determined stand. This attitude may to a certain degree change in connection with political events, but it seemed to be rather deeply ingrained in many people, Allied and German, within western Germany.

It would seem to be worth while if the European reconstruction program should secure systematic advice in scientific matters. There should be on the staff of Mr. Harriman scientists with sufficient knowledge and authority. On a very much smaller scale, the Rockefeller Foundation could make a decisive contribution in the role of a catalyst along the lines previously discussed, by arranging for exchange of books and periodicals, by making international contacts for German scientists possible, by financing visiting lecturers, and by helping in a small way with individual research problems.

I am adding a list of names of people whom I met on my recent trip and who, as I think, may be worthwhile contacts for Dr. Havighurst.

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London: Professor F. Norman, King's College, Strand, London W.C.2 (telephone Primrose 2073 or Museum 8000), is Professor of Germanistics. He has been a British liaison officer to the OSS during the war, he has been on important postwar missions in Germany, and he is a trusted adviser of many people in German matters.

Dr. Worsfold, German Department, Foreign Office, Scientific Branch, is one of the important men in the Scientific Section, while the Education Department is run by Dr. Crawford and by his assistant, Miss MacLane, a particularly attractive, efficient, and impressive young lady.

Further, I would suggest to contact Lord Lindsay, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, a good friend of Frank Aydelotte and one of the leading personalities in the educational field. Through his committee he is now more intimately connected with the German universities than most other people in England. In spite of his age he is full of vitality, alertness, and constructive ideas.

In Germany it would be very important to see not only Dr. Blount in the Control Commission in Goettingen, but also Dr. Fraser, who unfortunately is leaving his job and who during these last years has done more than anybody else in the reconstruction of science in Germany. Among Germans in Goettingen I would suggest to see Professor Franz Rellich, at present Dean of the Science Faculty and Director of the Mathematics Institute. Among the physicists I mention Professor Kopfermann in the Physics Institute of the University. Of course Otto Hahn is an important scientist in Goettingen. Von Laue is still in this country. There are many other people worth seeing in Goettingen, such as Heisenberg, Rein, Nohl. Dr. Fraser or Dr. Blount may suggest other people too.

In Berlin I would advise to see not only Dr. Nordstroem, the Chief American Scientific Officer of the

Control Commission, but also Germans such as Dr. Ueberreiter, the youthful Acting Director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physical Chemistry in Dahlem; furthermore, the mathematician Erhardt Schmidt and the pharmacologist Heubner, the last two important senior members of the Academy and typical German nationalists who, at least until recently, have fully cooperated with the administration of the University and Academy. It also may interest you, if this is feasible under the present circumstances, to talk to Dr. Rompe, whom you can reach through the Academy. It may be that before making contact with him and with the Academy Director, Dr. Nass, it would be better to check with Dr. Nordstroem, but I think definitely that talking to people on the other side of the fence may be extremely illuminating.

In Hamburg I would suggest that you see, in the Mathematische Seminar of the University (Rothenbaumchaussée), Professor Zassenhaus, a trustworthy, idealistic, and enterprising man.

In the University of Muenster it would be very much worth while to talk to the British University Officer, Mr. F. R. Perraudin. He is a highly intelligent young social scientist with an excellent knowledge of the situation in the district. Among the German professors in Muenster I recommend for contact Professor H. Behnke, one of the anti-Nazis in the University who has done a great deal in rebuilding the place.

It may interest you also to see Dr. Ferdinand Springer, scientific publisher in Heidelberg, address Springer-Verlag, Neuenheimer Landstrasse 24. A talk with Springer would give you a very good idea of the forces and potentialities in German scientific publishing.

If you have a chance to go to Marburg, you may find it useful to talk to Professor Dueker, psychologist. Dueker has been an active anti-Nazi, was imprisoned and

condemned to death by the Nazis, and is now an exponent
of liberal trends among academic people.

I hope to supplement this list.