

adequately than to the least important questions. Our students do not learn much about Russia because the current curriculum does not provide much opportunity for them to learn about it.

Ignorance of Russia a Danger

The "enigma wrapped in a riddle," as Churchill put it, is made of the same stuff as the Iron Curtain, namely our ignorance of the Russian people. One need not attempt to describe the magnitude of our current difficulties with the "unpredictable" Russians except to re-

iterate that our inability to predict is largely a function of our neglect to attempt to learn about them.

Will we find a solution to our current problems with Russia only to face other countries in a few years over similar barriers of ignorance, suspicion and fear? If our learning experiences are to prepare our children for their world by providing significant and useful information and attitudes, we had better face the future equipped with truly significant learnings.—*Richard W. Burkhardt.*

Letters from Abroad

Gertrude H. Fitzwater
Column Editor

Rebuilding Austrian Education

The story of the tremendous task which Austrian educators faced at the end of World War II is told by Wilhelm Gross, principal of a senior and junior high school in Vienna. Mr. Gross tells not only of conditions in the schools at the close of the war, but of the measures taken to rebuild Austrian education. The job which Austrian education had to assume was a tremendous one and the manner in which rebuilding moved forward in the relatively short period of five years deserves our deep admiration for the courage and vision of the individuals involved. It is interesting to note that Mr. Gross recently spent several months visiting schools in this country.

—GHF.

AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR was over we found in the Austrian school system a number of problems which were alarming in their magnitude and shocking in import. In Vienna alone, sixty-seven of our elementary and high school buildings were completely destroyed and 354 were partially damaged.

Schools were closed and about one million children of six to eighteen years of age had had no instruction for months. Many of them, throughout the country, were not even enrolled in any school. They had fled with their

mothers or relatives from bombed spots in the city or from the war fronts. A few schoolboys could, and did, enroll in rural schools.

Six or seven hours a day of air raids prevented normal teaching. Anxious parents kept their children at home. Some of the school buildings were occupied by the Allied armies. Sixty per cent of the teachers had served in the army. All of these depressing facts were alarming not only because of the shortage of schools and available schooling, but also because of the need for well-trained teachers for the schools.

Reorganization Undertaken

The educational depression from which millions of people were suffering was due also to the fact that the ministry of education and the education board of Vienna, which serves a third of the whole population, were completely dissolved. These men, who tried to reorganize the kind of schools for which Austria has long been famous, faced the almost insurmountable problem of overcoming the lack of sufficient teachers and buildings. They had in like manner to eliminate or to counteract, in so far as possible, the effects of seven years of Nazi education.

There was no elected federal government which could assist in this work. A local organization had to be provided for. In addition, it was already a great effort to provide schooling of any kind for the children, and the government was unable to pay salaries to teachers for months.

It is almost unbelievable that under these circumstances teachers and a quickly founded education board took up the task of school supervision and teaching. There were no schoolbooks whatsoever, and no benches in the classrooms. In May 1945, only 1905 classrooms in 217 school buildings in Vienna could be used for teaching purposes. A large number of students had to be cared for in one room.

Classrooms and Teachers Provided

In spite of a considerable increase in the birth rate (in 1945-46 there were 87,000 students in Vienna; in 1948-49 there were 125,000 students in the elementary and high schools alone), it was soon possible to keep class enrollments balanced and to reduce the number of pupils in one room.

The average number of pupils in one room is now less than thirty-two. In September 1948, 3,564 classrooms in 333 schools were in use. In the meantime new buildings are under construction and many others are being rebuilt. For most of our subjects schoolbooks are prepared and are in full use.

Teachers were provided for all schools and students. Those who had received their certificates during the period of fascism were re-educated; if they had not been members of the Nazi party they could take up teaching.

Widespread Interest in School Improvement

All over the country there is widespread interest among teachers and school officials at every level in education improvement and reform. Vienna was always well known for having one of the most advanced school systems in the world. The Nazis, of course, tried to obliterate the democratic and pedagogical gains of former periods. But many of the old democratic leaders and teachers are influential once more and the tradition of progress is again evident in current practice.

The progressive movement is not limited to a "few notable exceptions." It is continually increasing in its influence. Federal aid is now provided to secure better classrooms, to set up better schools, and thus to develop better students. In the first year after the Second World War, students repaired their classrooms in order to have a roof giving shelter. Now they are studying in lighted rooms and they have books and writing paper.

Is not this record an outstanding accomplishment for the schools of Austria?—*Wilhelm Gross*.

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