



Washington's German School

Outside view of German School

In its January issue Bank Notes introduced the International Bilingual Primary School, the first of a series of articles on international and foreign schools in Washington. For the second story in this series we have asked Mr. Konrad Busse to give us a glimpse of the German School (located off River Road in Potomac, Maryland) where one of his daughters is a student.

Why do I send my child to the German School in Washington? When our Staff Relations Office asked me this question the other day, I think they expected me, as one of the very first parents to send a child to the school, to deliver some sort of propaganda speech about it; after all, the purpose behind this series is to acquaint the staff with the various educational opportunities existing in metropolitan Washington for their children. I find that the German School has an interesting curriculum, but its quality is not the real reason why I send my child there. Actually, my first reason is a desire to acquaint my child with the cultural philosophy and the history of my home country—with all its good and bad sides. Being far away from Germany, perhaps even living

for the rest of my life in Washington, I cannot truly say that my first reason for sending the children to this school is their potential reintegration into schools in the home country, desirable as this goal is. All I really want is my child's understanding of the world from which I come, as a means of bringing about an understanding between that world and the one in which they grow up here. This personal need of mine is fulfilled in two respects: the type of curriculum offered, and the way in which the school operates.

Let us take the second aspect first. The school is not a government school although heavily subsidized by the Government of the Federal Republic. It is rather supported and run by the "German School Society of Washington". Membership in this society is compulsory for all parents of children attending the School. The Board of Directors is elected by the parents and is presently composed of German, Swiss and U.S. nationals, some of them Bank staff members, many serving in Washington as part of an international career. The staff of the school too is quite mixed. It consists by and large of post-war-generation teachers, either

seconded by the Ministries of one of the German Laender or recruited locally. Although it follows the German educational system, the school has its roots in metropolitan Washington. There is no instruction in German history or geography in the elementary grades, but rather "heimatkunde" (roughly translated, "study of the area in which we live") but actually a combination of local geography, history and social studies, developing parallel appreciation of life on both sides of the Atlantic, by studying shopping, farming, seasons and holidays of the year, measurements, currencies, etc. By means of the two languages, students are initiated into both the American and German cultures. The kindergarten, composed of two grades from four to six years of age, fulfills an important function in this regard since many children entering the school know very little German. The non-critical and non-analytical behavior of children in this age group lightens the burden of learning a new language. In the second elementary grade, once the pupils have achieved a degree of competence in the writing of German, English is given more emphasis. My daughter, now in her fourth school year, has reached a level of competence in English comparable to an American fourth grader. The fact that remedial courses are available for those who, because of previous schooling, might be deficient in one language or the other, has brought about quite an in-

ternational student body. About half the 240 children now attending the school are from German-speaking countries, the rest from eight countries, apart from a strong contingent of U.S. citizens. This truly bi-cultural education has resulted in my daughter's beginning to understand and accept the good and the bad of both cultures, so far without any conflict of loyalty, although our home language is English. As an example, we enjoy watching together some TV programs where certain German characteristics are criticized without her getting excited or being confused!

What are some of the elements of its German curricula that makes this a German school? I have already mentioned the two years of kindergarten which are followed by four years' education at the elementary level. Instruction in social studies, by the very attractiveness and vividness of the subject matter, provides the framework for broadening the German and English vocabularies, the exchange of capacities for oral and written expression, creative activity in drawing, singing and play acting and Discipline of reading, writing and arithmetic. Yes, the word "Discipline" is written with a capital "D", as you would expect! Order, neatness and punctuality plus plenty of work go with it. At the age of ten or eleven, high school life begins. Our teen-agers are so busy with many hours of homework and an active extra-curricular arts pro-

Mrs. Lillian Hagedorn instructing English in the second grade



gram that little or no time is left for "proms". The "Gymnasium" is still in the process of expansion, at the rate of one grade level per year, so that, hopefully, by the school year 1970/71, with the establishment of the highest grade, "Oberprima," this branch of the school will be complete. Students graduate with the "Abitur," a matriculation certificate, assuring admission to European universities and which is usually equivalent to the completion of the second year of local colleges. The high school has two basic branches: a mathematics/natural sciences oriented course of study or one stressing languages. English and German, of course are not considered foreign languages. However, students of both branches have to study history, geography, music, art, physical education, Latin (from grade 7), French (from grade 9), mathematics, biology, physics (from grade 8), chemistry (from grade 9), and girls have, in addition, sewing and knitting in grades 5 and 6. In short, the curriculum is not as selective as that in other schools reflecting the German philosophy of a curriculum offered as an organic whole.

Another characteristic of the school is the fact that religious instruction



(Far left) Cornelia Maiss, daughter of Mr. Otto Maiss (Foreground) Nicole Busse, daughter of Mr. Konrad Busse

is part of the curriculum. Throughout all grades participation in Protestant and Catholic instruction is voluntary. Nevertheless, a student in grades 5 to 8 may decline religious instruction only with the consent of his parents. Religion in the highschool grades is not so much instruction of a creed but rather history and philosophy of religions, dealing with Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions.

In summary, here is a school that does not wish to propagandize itself, but rather wishes to make a small contribution to the understanding of people; and if we at least respect each other, we feel we have already achieved a great deal.



Mr. Marcel F. Verheyen, Treasurer's Department reached the twenty-year mark on Friday, March 24. We are sorry to have omitted him from the group picture in March Bank Notes.

