

Germans and Jews: A Dialogue



Post Photos

X Fred Viebahn (left) and Heike Doutine (center) of West Germany, and Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith are among the 12 West German intellectuals and 12 American Jews who took part in a lively panel discussion yesterday on what Germans and Jews think of each other. See story on Page 12.

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Young Jews, Germans Talk It Over

Anger emblazoned Heike Doutine's rose petal cheeks. "I cannot come here with a big smile and say there's a new Germany. Our fathers were guilty and for me, there is still a guilt. It is not enough for me to say, 'We are too young. We didn't do it.' If you never confront yourself with the past, you cannot learn the lesson."

Abraham Foxman studied the grain of the wooden conference table. "I was born in Poland and lived through the Holocaust. On an emotional level, I do not like Germany, I do not like the language, I do not like the culture. I wouldn't visit Germany or buy German goods."

Foxman, on the staff of the Anti-Defamation League, and Miss Doutine, a writer from Hamburg whose father served with the German Wehrmacht when it occupied Poland, came together at the ADL headquarters yesterday. The occasion was a discussion of "Issues of mutual concern" by 12 young West German intellectuals and 12 young American Jews.

The exchange, sponsored by the Carl Duisberg Society, an organization devoted to improving U.S.-German relations, was lively, to say the least.

Miss Doutine, author of "German Requiem" (Scribners) looked skeptical. "Many leftists in Germany are anti-Zionist," she said.

To those German participants who indicated the belief that guilt belonged to the past, Jewish speakers like Dr. Lawrence Leshnik, an anthropologist and native of Berlin, had words of caution.

"I can't maintain feelings of ill will to a young German," he said. "But he has the historical responsibility to face up to the German past, and to translate this responsibility into action."

Most of the Jews said that, while they approved of this encounter intellectually, they had emotional obstacles to participating.

"I wanted them to be aware of this obstacle in the gut," said Foxman.

"At the gut level," echoed Leshnik, "the American Jewish attitude (towards Germans) stopped 30 years ago."

Zev Furst was heartened by the exchange. "I don't know if such an encounter would have been possible five years ago or even today between the older generation."

Frank Grutzbach, a Berlin

filmmaker, thinks that one way contemporary Germans can atone for the past is to work to better the conditions of the Gastarbeiter, the migrant worker in Germany from Mediterranean lands.

But, for Miss Doutine, Germans have not done nearly enough to atone. "Only in

1969, we had a Chancellor-Kiesinger — who used to be a Nazi. Even now, we don't even have a day set aside to think about Auschwitz. No, we complain that we don't own East Prussia anymore. About the Jews, they always say, well, that's just history. It is not enough."

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Echoing the sentiments of most of the Jewish participants, Foxman admonished the Germans, mostly leftist writers, poets and playwrights, that "it wasn't only the Holocaust that must not be forgotten, but that Israel must not be abandoned."

Fred Viebahn, a poet from the Rhineland, denied the belief expressed by the Jewish participants that West German leftists were "anti-Zionist."

"You have a right to be



DIALOGUE: Shown at the German-Jewish meeting held at the ADL offices in New York are, facing camera, Abraham Foxman, ADL director of national leadership, and to his left, Heike Douline, author of a new book *German Requiem*, published by Scribners.

German cultural leaders and Jews speak minds in strong dialogue at ADL

By SUE GARDNER

Twelve young West German representatives of current culture in their country on a visit here, elected last week to confront members of the American Jewish community. They met in conferences with groups from the American Jewish Committee and the Bnai Brith Anti-Defamation League. And, they "spoke their mind" at a press conference in ADL headquarters in New York.

No one minced words at the meeting. Abraham H. Foxman, director of national leadership for the ADL, born in Vilna, victim of the Holocaust, and at 10 an immigrant here in 1950 with five years of displaced persons camp experience behind him, declared:

"I had a conflict in accepting the invitation to this conference. I do not like Germans nor the German language. I would not visit Germany, nor would I buy German goods."

Several young Germans pounced on his words. Fred Viebahn, essayist, playwright, poet, and translator maintained that German Jewish writers and philosophers wrote in the German language. Asked by a reporter how many of them still resided in Germany, the question went unanswered.

Pass prejudices to children

Ursula Krechel, who holds a doctorate in German literature at 28, also pointed out along with Viebahn that "Nazism was a problem of the German people, not the language." She said the student rebellions of the 1960s stemmed from the demands of young people to know what their parents and their teachers, including college professors, did during the Holocaust.

"Teachers can pass on their prejudices to children," Dr. Krechel said. "And, you cannot expect young people who end their schooling at 16, with only a half page in a history book to tell them of the Holocaust, to understand what it meant. Those questions of the 1960s are still being asked

"The majority of Germans never felt guilt about the Holocaust," she insisted over the protest of the other members of her group who spoke with reporters. "Today, most Germans say they are anti-Zionist instead of anti-Semitic, but to me they are the same thing."

Among those who challenged Miss Douline's position was Frank Grutzbach, who was listed as a book seller, assistant film director and secretary to Heinrich Boell. Grutzbach said he not only felt the young writers did their best to explain the Holocaust in current terms but in addition to fighting anti-Semitism were against other racism such as that against workers from Greece. He pointed out that Americans would not want their country judged by actions of the Symbionese Liberation Army, and most German youth today do reject racism. Dr. Krechel said the majority of Germans felt the same way about the Jewish children killed during the Holocaust as a great many Americans felt about the children killed in the Vietnamese war.

The three weeks trip for the German group was financed by the West German government, the U.S. State Department, and the Carl Duisberg societies of New York and Cologne.

The group began their trip in New York and visited Washington, D.C., Harvard, Chicago and other university campuses on the tour. They said they found the American college students very friendly.

'Israel needs an aily'

Dr. Wolfgang Sanwald, publisher of such magazines as *The New Engineer* and *Medical Dimensions*, and president of the Carl Duisberg Society, served as co-moderator at the conference with Theodore Freedman, director of ADL's national community service and program divisions.

Dr. Sanwald headed a group of German students in a work-study program for three months

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"Teachers can pass on their prejudices to children," Dr. Kreebel said. "And, you cannot expect young people who end their schooling at 16, with only a half page in a history book to tell them of the Holocaust, to understand what it meant. Those questions of the 1960s are still being asked today by German youth."

Heike Douine, author of *German Requiem*, a recent Scribner's release, said she felt that the German people should "confess religiously" their guilt. Her book tells of growing up in post-war Germany.

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Dr. Sanwald headed a group of German students in a work-study program for three months in Kibbutz M'falim in Israel. "The only way to build understanding is by personal encounter," Dr. Sanwald said. "You can communicate the central importance of the role of Israel in Jewish existence by such meetings."