

# Seminar in Salzburg

By Benjamin F. Wright, Ph.D. '25

LAST SUMMER saw the beginning, or the revival, of many international conferences. Doubtless the most critical of them was the meeting of representatives from sixteen nations in Paris for the purpose of drawing up an answer to the proposal made at the Harvard Commencement by Secretary Marshall.

I suspect that the most unusual of the conferences was another inspired from Harvard, although not by Mr. Marshall. It was a group of students who organized and directed the seminar on American civilization at Salzburg, Austria. There, too, were assembled representatives from sixteen European nations, but the subject of the conference was neither the national nor individual troubles of the Europeans; it was the nature of American institutions, customs, and ideas.

Earlier last year the Harvard Student Council had sponsored drives which raised \$44,000 with which to buy food for European students. Clemens Heller, an Austrian born graduate student, working with Richard D. Campbell, Jr., '48, the undergraduate who had been chairman of the food relief drives, and Scott B. Ell-edge, an Instructor in English, conceived a plan to supplement the food with the re-establishment of personal and intellectual relations. Discussing this idea with several interested students and faculty members, they decided that the best method was the establishment in Europe of a seminar on American civilization for European students. The choice of a subject for

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the project was a brilliant one, but that imaginative decision was only the beginning of their labors.

After deciding upon the focus for the seminar they had to move on several fronts simultaneously. Permissions had to be secured from the Austrian government. That was relatively simple, and the proposal was accepted enthusiastically. Approval was necessary from the American Military Government, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Department of State. A building had to be leased, a faculty recruited, supplies for making repairs as well as food and bedding ordered, transportation arranged—and the money for all this had to be raised. Later on they could see about getting a student body.

ALL of this was done, and by men who had to give most of their time to their studies. A member of the Harvard Faculty experienced in the difficulties encountered in such negotiations has said that this was one of the most remarkable jobs of promotion and organization of which he has ever heard. The credit for this feat, or rather succession of feats, goes to Heller, Campbell, Elledge, and a small group of students who worked with them, among them Levin H. Campbell, III, '48, and Kingsley Ervin, Jr., '45.

The Harvard Student Council both sponsored the project and made a contribution toward the money required. This was a sizable amount, for although no member of the faculty received any salary, and most of them paid their travelling expenses, the students paid neither for tuition nor for their room and meals. A few voluntarily contributed after they arrived. The World Student Service Fund gave a considerable sum, and the International Student Service helped with many of the problems of organization, as well as in the selection of students. The remainder of the necessary funds was contributed by private donors.

The faculty included thirteen instructors and ten graduate assistants who aided in the seminar discussions and, in some cases, gave an occasional lecture. Most of the assistants were

from Harvard, but others came from Princeton, Chicago, and the Yale Law School.

The Harvard Faculty was represented by Wassily Leontief in economics, F. O. Matthiessen in literature, and this writer in constitutional law and political theory. Alfred Kazin, New York critic, was Matthiessen's colleague in literature. Margaret Mead of the American Museum of Natural History dealt with sociology, Neil McDonald of New Jersey College for Women with government, Richard B. Schlatter of Rutgers, Elspeth Davies of Sarah



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Lawrence, and W. W. Rostow, formerly at Columbia but last year at Oxford, all lectured on history. Vida Ginsberg of The New School for Social Research held a series of conferences on recent drama.

Several faculty members were present for one or two weeks each. Lyman Bryson of Columbia Broadcasting Corporation gave a course on mass media of communication, Gaetano Salvemini of Harvard gave one lecture and held several discussion sessions on contemporary Europe, and James J. Sweeney, former director of the New York Museum of Modern Art, gave four lectures on contemporary art.

Before the seminar got under way some of us doubted whether European students and professors would be interested in attending a summer institute devoted to American studies. In fact, far more wanted to attend than the 100 who could be squeezed in. Only those students were accepted who could speak English, for it was the language of the seminar.

Not the least interesting group

among the student body were the ten professors and instructors from universities in nine European countries. Members of the faculties of the universities of Cambridge, Amsterdam, and Rome gave one or two lectures each on aspects of American society and literature. To the professors, as to most of the younger students, it seemed an immensely liberating and encouraging experience to attend the seminar. Professor Dounias of Athens told me that he had been unable to leave his country for fifteen years, and few had had the opportunity to carry on discussions with men of other countries since 1939.

Many of us had expected to encounter some suspicion of American motives, or even outright antagonism. Apparently that was reserved very largely for the authorities of eastern Europe. There were no students present from Russia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Rumania, or Bulgaria, although there were delegations from Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

It seems that some of the officials in certain of the eastern countries thought that the seminar would be a front for propaganda. A few students arrived with that conception, but they were soon dispossessed of it. The lectures and seminar discussions were directed toward scholarship, toward, that is, a critical examination and understanding of various aspects of American history, politics, literature, economic and social institutions.

The choice of this subject for the seminar was an inspired one if only because there is a great deal of curiosity in Europe about America, and there are few agencies, other than the movies, for satisfying it. Except for a few courses on American literature, there is virtually no instruction in the Continental universities on American ideas or resources or institutions. There is no institute of American studies anywhere in Europe.

Beyond this quite adequate reason, the subject is a relatively neutral one, and therefore one on which it is possible for students from traditionally antagonistic countries to work together harmoniously. In view of the present diplomatic situation it may seem misleading, if not downright wrong, to call this a neutral subject. But it was, I thought, neutral even when compared with such subjects as European cultures or European federation, and almost infinitely less involved in emotional attitudes than such questions as the war

settlement. When the discussion at Leopoldskron turned to the state of Europe, as it did on several occasions, the existence of latent bitterness was evident. When the subject was Melville or the American radio or *The Federalist*, there was no occasion for anyone to dwell on the unhappy events of the last few years in Europe.

PERHAPS I can illustrate the point I am trying to make by reference to the experience in my own seminar. At its first meeting there were fifteen students present. When at home, they spoke eleven languages. In our discussions all used English. In the group there were two Czechs who had been in concentration camps. There were two displaced persons from Eastern Europe, five students who had been in the Italian, French, and Danish undergrounds, two who had been in the Allied armies, and three former members of the German army who had been prisoners of war in the United States. So far as I could determine, these experiences no more interfered with the study of American constitutional ideas than they did with the enjoyment by the same students of the music at the Salzburg Festival. Certainly it was both an unusual and an exciting experience to hold a session at which there were reports on topics in American constitutional law from a Spanish refugee now studying in Paris, a Dane who worked with the student underground in Copenhagen, and a German from Heidelberg who learned English and read American history while a prisoner in the United States.

Until the time comes when there is a permanent institute of American studies on the Continent, or, better yet, a number of such institutes connected with the major universities, the Salzburg Seminar should be continued. That it helps to fill a genuine need is as certain as its feasibility. The Chief of the Education Division of the American Forces in Austria recently wrote an entirely unsolicited letter to President Conant in which he said that the achievements of the seminar warranted its continuance. "We hope," he added, "that Harvard will appreciate the splendid contribution of the Student Council to the solution of problems which confront this troubled world."

The students and professors who came last summer seemed to have a very good time. They learned something about this country—many learned

a great deal—and they began to re-establish among themselves those intangible but extremely important ties which make for international good will. Since nearly all of them are or will be writers or teachers, leaders in the influential student organizations, or public officials, their influence will be far reaching. The seminar may even contribute toward the altogether desirable end of lifting the Iron Curtain, if students and teachers from the countries of eastern Europe attend. The delegations from Czechoslovakia and Hungary were among the best at Salzburg last summer. There is good reason to believe that some, perhaps all, of the eastern countries will follow the example of Czechoslovakia and Hungary if the seminar is held again.