

The German Orthopedic Firm; Notes on Employee Training and Cost System

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On my recent trip to Germany I made it a point to gather some information on the training and qualifications of Orthopedic Mechanics, and on the German method of pricing, which I think is of special interest to us.

Germany has 500,000 amputees in round figures. 70,000 of these were the result of World War I. 250,000 of them were the result of World War II.

There are 1700 orthopedic firms or shops in Germany — 1300 in the West Zone, 100 in West Berlin and 300 in the East Zone. With the exception of 30 to 40 firms, they are all small, with three to five employees, more often the members of the family. I know of just one firm—perhaps the largest in Germany—which employs thirty, including office personnel, apprentices and sales personnel.

The technical staff may be divided into three groups: A. Apprentices. B. Orthopedic Mechanics. C. Orthopedic Master Mechanics.

The apprentices serve a 3½ year apprenticeship and take a course in one of the established trade schools. Therein they are taught the various branches related to Surgical Supports, Braces, and Prostheses.

Following the apprenticeship, one is required to pass an oral and practical examination before an Examining Board. Members of the Board are appointed by the Trade Chamber. The applicant is required to make one or more appliances. The oral examination covers general professional knowledge, including anatomy. If he

passes the Board, he is awarded a certificate of Orthopedic Mechanic (Journeyman).

The prerequisite for a Master Mechanic is five years of work as a journeyman. He is then admitted to take an oral and practical examination before the Examining Board. He is required to build a long leg brace and an artificial limb. This includes taking of measurements, plaster casts, making the model, complete fabrication and fitting of the finished product. All of this is done in the presence of the Board.

The certificate of the Master Mechanic entitles him to open up a shop of his own and teach apprentices. Opening of a shop may not be allowed if the Commission deems that adequate facilities are in the trading area.

A few words about the costing and pricing situation: The Board of Trade appoints a Pricing Commission which, with approval of a federal agency, sets all prices on all appliances, parts and repair work—with no loop holes to "up" or "down" prices. Strange as it may seem, the Commission condones neither increases nor reductions in prices. All pricing is uniform and exact even in the neighboring towns. In the absence of price appeal the customer goes where he thinks he gets the best in quality and workmanship.

It is the responsibility of the Commission to calculate cost of material and add a certain percentage for overhead expenses. The information as to how the Commission arrives at these figures is not available to the

shops; but it is said that it is done on a scientific and equitable basis. One contributing factor is that more than 75% of all the work in German shops is Federal and State insurance business.

Like any other business, all large shops in the East Zone in Germany have been taken over by the Communists, and no longer enjoy fundamental human rights.

I was in Germany during the Adenauer election. He is, in my opinion, one of the greatest living statesmen. Under his leadership Germany is doing an outstanding job in the fight against Communism, but she is hin-

dered by a lack of cooperation from other Western European nations.

Encouraged by the United States, Germany is full of energy — seeking to cooperate in building a united front against the Kremlin. There is little hope over there for a lasting peace — little confidence in any peace treaty Russia may enter into. We have learned the hard way that the Communists justify any means—deceit or brutality—to gain their end. Would that it were possible for every American to be afforded an opportunity to listen to any refugee from behind the Iron Curtain!

CARLTON FILLAUER TO PLAN PROGRAM FOR '54 ASSEMBLY

Carlton Fillauer of Chattanooga, Tennessee, has been named Program Chairman for this year's Assembly, according to an announcement by OALMA President, Lee Fawver.

Mr. Fillauer is already at work on plans for the four-day session which opens September 26 at Chalfonte-Haddon Hall in Atlantic City.

The professional and technical sessions will be arranged so that members and their families may take full advantage of the features which have made Atlantic City the Entertainment Capital of the World.

The American Board for Certification meeting will again hold a prominent place in the Assembly sessions. The Board will hold a Certification examination in Philadelphia on September 25. This has been arranged so that persons taking that examination may combine with it attendance at the Assembly which follows immediately.