

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DB - 40
Leipzig Chronicle III
Go East, Young Man

Berlin-Grunewald
Richard Strauss Str. 4
September 25, 1958

Mr. Walter S. Rogers:
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Daer Mr. Rogers:

Of all the many East Germans encountered in Leipzig, only two showed any open resentment of Westerners to me. It is worth noting that neither of them were Communists. The first was a tobacconist in the Petersstrasse. I asked him for something he didn't have (peppermints) and he was truculent about saying he had none.

The second was the wide woman who ran a little tavern in the Gottschedstrasse. She made it plain that she would serve me a beer only because the DDR government demanded hospitality for Fair guests. Hers was a privately owned tavern and her customers were non-Communists, judging by their remarks.

My impression was that both these Germans resented Westerners with a kind of sullen envy. It wouldn't have been surprising to hear them express similar sentiments about their fellow-Germans in the Federal Republic. In Leipzig, you could hear from time to time the remark, "It's going too good for them," directed at West Germans.

Parallel to this feeling and probably much more widespread is the open pride of many East Germans in what they have accomplished during the past 13 years. "Despite" the Russian reparations, they say. "Despite" the lopsided deliveries of machinery and other products to the Soviet Union. "Despite" the rationing and the limited quotas of consumer goods... "look what we've done just the same."

The Soviet Zone regime has taken note of this pride and the Communists are doing all they can to pep it up. It is a major part of their campaign to "surpass West German per-capita consumption by 1961". This, according to the DDR propagandists, will "prove the superiority of Socialism."

Of course the convinced Communists see an immediate and indivisible bond between their doctrine and their material progress. But I detected no awareness of this holy alliance in my Leipzig conversations with non-Communists. It will be interesting to observe in the coming years whether these people will eventually attribute their accomplishments to 'Socialism'. For the present, they seem to regard them as personal triumphs, not as ideological ones.

* * *

The Leipzig Playhouse entertained a guest performance of the Maxim Gorki Theater (East Berlin) on Monday. Appropriately, the Maxim Gorki Company put on its version of the "Lower Depths", by Maxim Gorki.

They were good, the actors, convincingly tattered and forlorn. The set was in the proper tradition of proletarian realism - no symbols and no imaginative touches. Likewise the directors interpretation. Here was the catch.

The theater program announced that the "Lower Depths" was intended to tell the playgoers that "Man can change his miserable life (ala Marx) through truth." This message did not come through at all in Leipzig.

The Gorki performance ran simultaneously with another Soviet drama at Leipzig. This was the East German premiere of a film trilogy based on Mikhail Sholokov's "The Quiet Don". At the same time, the nearby house of the "Society for German Soviet Friendship" was carrying on its busy program of lectures, films, and discussion groups.

Consider these items together with the State-directed campaign for Russophilia and you touch on very curious matter.

One need only recall that the National Socialists made anti-Communism and Russophobia major elements of their program and pogroms. They succeeded in imbuing most Germans with fear and hatred of Soviet Russia, enough to launch a crusade against the Bolsheviks in 1941. The invasion and occupation of Eastern Germany by the Red Army in 1945 did little to diminish those feelings. Then the Communist puppet regime set out immediately to plead the love-Moscow case, a thankless task if ever there was one.

However, time seems to have softened these old emotions into a kind of dull resentment. The Russians, with their three huge casernes in Leipzig, their 400,000 troops in the DDR altogether, are next-door neighbors.

Meanwhile, there is genuine curiosity about the Soviets, quite apart from the official propaganda campaign. Or despite it. So when the Russians send a good film along (and there are some excellent ones), or a play, or a ballet troupe, or a musician, there is generally an appreciative audience on hand. The East Germans are as discriminating about the performing arts as their West German brothers. Besides, they are interested in nearly everything going on outside their own dreary cultural domain.

Yet there remains an awesome paradox in the Soviet-German relationship - the official broadcasts of love, and the private record collection of hate.

It seems unlikely that any amount of exchange scholarships, holiday touring, and government proclamations will overcome this duality. As for cultural exchange, Germans tend to be rather haughty about their own artistic achievements; many of them despise the kowtowing which German Communists perform at the feet of Soviet idols. In this light, a Gorki performance in Leipzig has things to contend with that are inconceivable in New York or Moscow.

* * *

The dance hall in the Grimmaische Strasse was filled with young people, most of them dressed rather nattily. The joint was thumping, thanks to the band's rhythm section. The drummer whacked away in that ferriferous German fashion which Duke Ellington calls "aggressive."

Two young men at my table were scanning the horizon in search of suitable dancing partners. They announced their choices to each other, puffed hurriedly on their cigarettes, and set off to seize their prey. I got up, sauntered over to a nearby table, and said, "May I request...?" The heavy-limbed girl grasped my arm and accompanied me to the dance floor. The band was playing a ponderous foxtrot. With war drums.

My attempts to start a conversation were resisted militantly. Name: "Gisela." Rank: "Clerk with the railway." Serial Number: "...".

Back at the table, the young men were engaged in earnest talk. One was in Leipzig from West Germany. He had fled three years before from a small town in the DDR. He was to have inherited his father's factory, but the DDR government collectivised it before he could get it. Now he was trying to obtain some of his father's other possessions.

The other was director of a pensioner's home in the Erzgebirge. He wore the emblem of the Communist labor union. "I'm up here (in Leipzig) trying to get a mixer for my kitchen," he said. "They make good ones here, Dammit, but they all get exported. And we haven't got enough West Marks to afford a West German one. What am I going to do?"



* * *

At breakfast, my host talked in guarded tones about his neighbors, the party functionaries, and the security police agent. "They have it good," he said, "television sets and cars. Some of them earn 1,200 marks a month (three times the average wage)."

He recalled the war: "I got shot up in Russia - both legs full of shrapnel and a hole in my head they had to plug up with a metal plate. When I got home, my own mother didn't recognize me on the street!"

He had been sick recently as a result of his wounds, and had to convalesce for eight months. "One of my neighbors turned me in to the police as a 'slacker'. There was a trial at the Labor Court, and she had the nerve to say she saw me through the keyhole beating rugs at home while I was collecting sick pay. Turned out I was in the hospital when I was supposed to be beating rugs. I said to her: 'Who the hell do you think you are, spying through keyholes anyway?' The judge acquitted me..."

* * *

A West German reporter, Eberhard Bitzer of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, suggested that we spend the morning looking at the Communist military installations around the city. (Several divisions are stationed in Leipzig.)

It was a gray day. A drizzle spattered on the windshield. We drove north past the railroad station onto the Schumannstrasse. The cobblestone street stretched up ahead into the mists, bumpy and drab, rows of delapidated apartment houses on either side. After awhile we began to see Volksarmee soldiers on the sidewalks - some walking, some with bicycles. "We must be near the caserne," said Bitzer.

A minute later we came to the barracks - a block-long complex of buildings surrounded by a high wall. The caserne dated from the Kaiser period. A teen-aged sentry motioned us inside the gate. Bitzer spoke blandly to the pudgy corporal at the gatehouse: "We are guests here at the Fair and we wondered if we might tour the barracks...is there some arrangement for tourists to look around?" The corporal's jaw dropped. He looked about helplessly, then grabbed the telephone. In the back of the dingy room, another soldier lay on a bare mattress, snoring.

The corporal spoke into the phone. "There's a couple of Fair guests here. They want to look around... So..." He hung up. "It's a bad prospect," he said, grinning sheepishly, "a bad prospect." Bitzer asked him about other casernes. The corporal mumbled uncomfortably: "Around the corner...up the Slevogtstrasse a ways..."

We returned to the car. As we drove off, we could see the corporal pick up the telephone again and gesture excitedly. The car bucked over the rough cobblestones.

"Not much use in trying the dumb act again," said Bitzer, "but we can take a look at the others." In the next few minutes we passed by two more barracks - one Russian and one Volksarmee. From a dirt road in back of the latter we could see big Soviet tanks being washed. Out in the fields, a squad was practicing a field exercise with tommyguns. From nearby we could hear bursts of machinegun fire. After five minutes, the squad leader started over towards us. "Let's get out of here," said Bitzer.



* * *

At the Press Center, a tall man with sunken eyes approached me and started speaking in a low voice. "I heard you yesterday in the press conference. I represent a publishing firm..." He introduced himself. We bowed and shook hands. Would I like to visit his firm's exhibit? He took me by the elbow and piloted me out the door. While driving over to the Hansa Haus in his little "PS-70" (a DDR-produced car) he explained that the People's Own Publishing House "Technik" issues scientific books exclusively. "I'm very unscientific," I protested. The tall man grinned.

He ushered me past the exhibit tables to a curtained-off alcove where the People's Own publisher, Eberhard Arlt, held court. At 52, Arlt is one of those vigorous manager types you find both East and West of the 18th Meridian. He described himself as a plant engineer, an economist, and a Silesian.

He launched into a rapid-fire sales talk. "We are causing a sensation in the publishing world," he said. "We're doing something absolutely new - scientific books published in four languages simultaneously."

"We started off six years ago. This year we have a best-seller. Vukalovitsch's 'Thermodynamic Qualities of Water and Steam.' It is printed in Russian, German, English, and French, all in the same edition. So far we've printed 20,000 copies. The Chinese and Indian editions are coming...For 20 marks (\$5) it's a bargain too..."

"Now we're planning a multilingual scientific dictionary. Each text will be done by a man from a different country. What's more, you can add new languages to each of our editions. The expansion is unlimited."

Arlt rattled off a lot of statistics about his firm. "In the last five years, 1,400 titles." "We publish magazines too - 27 in German and one in English." "We expand 10 to 15 per cent each year." "We have 370 employees and a lot of freelancers besides." "On the multilingual editions it takes us about eight months to prepare the manuscript...The Russians need a lot of editing; they get long-winded."

I couldn't understand why Arlt was giving me all of this razza-matazz until he murmured the following: "The trouble is..we need an outlet in the United States and somebody to cooperate on translations there..." Thereupon he delegated me to carry the tidings.

While Arlt was pausing for breath, I asked him if his was a profit-making operation. "Up to now, no," he said. "But when we make a profit it will go to the State." Who pays for the losses, I asked. Arlt chuckled. "Father State pays," he said happily. (Does that sound familiar?)

During the latter part of the monologue we were joined by Arlt's chief editor, a handsome fellow named Ludwig Bröckl. The boss bowed himself out of the alcove, and Bröckl took over. He invited me outside to talk some more. As soon as we were away from the nook he started asking questions about international affairs. Was there going to be an atomic war? How did I view the Middle East crisis? What about Quemoy? Does Dulles want war? Will there be an agreement to disarm?

Then he invited me to lunch.

We walked over to Auerbach's Keller, the historic tavern made famous by the Faust legend. Bröckl kept shooting queries at me, most of them about the West. Half way through the outlet, he paused and grinned abashedly. "You must excuse me for asking so many questions," he said. "But you are the tenth American I have ever met in my life."

After the meal he told a bit about himself. He was 34, and a native of Sudetenland. The Russians captured him during a 1944 drive and he spent several years as a prisoner of war. "They were fairly decent to us," he said, "but tough." Now he lived just outside of Berlin. "I drive through West Berlin every day to work," he said. "I always listen to the American radio station. I love jazz. And you know, your news broadcasts are surprisingly objective."

Ludwig Bröckl wore the Communist Party button in his lapel. He said he became a convinced Marxist after the war. There appeared to be no doubt that he was loyal to the party line. Except for one thing: he was fascinated by America, seemingly much more so than by Russia. He urged me to get in touch with him in Berlin.

It would be rash to jump to conclusions about Bröckl's Western leanings. But I have encountered similar attitudes among half a dozen young East Germans who are convinced Communists. All of them belong to a new intelligentsia, cultivated and protected by the State. Yet none of them seems to subscribe to the crude propaganda of the party functionaries about "degenerate and evil Western influences". They might pay lip-service to this line, but that is about all.

* * *

One of the DDR's most successful propaganda films was showing in the House of the National Front (the "front" organ of the Communist Party which theoretically represents all the other parties). It was "Operation Teutonic Sword", a purported documentary about the career of General Hans Speidel, current ground forces commander of NATO. The film allegedly documents Nazi war crimes for which Speidel was "responsible". According to several West Germans, the accusations made in the movie have yet to be disproven.

Admittance to this (and most other DDR propaganda films) cost nothing in Leipzig. In the stuffy auditorium, only a few old couples and some youngsters viewed the showing. After all, it was free.

However, it would probably be a mistake to underestimate the effect of such propaganda. With films like this one, the DDR wages an enormous campaign against the "Fascists and Nazis" who "rule West Germany." Speidel is only one of the objects. It is part of the State's program to convince East Germans that theirs is the only peace-loving and democratic Germany. Some of the mud they throw sticks to the targets.

* * *

After supper, I went to the District Clubhouse of the Free German Youth (FDJ) to attend a discussion about sports. A girl in the lobby handed me a ticket and waved me down a corridor. I expected a large gathering.

About 20 youngsters were huddled in one corner of the large hall. None of them had on the Prussian blue shirt of the movement. The two young men in charge of the program sat at a table about seven rows away from the nearest youth. They waited a few minutes for latecomers. Nobody came. Then the thin-faced group leader got up to introduce the evening speaker, a secretary in the Leipzig Sports Association.

The sports functionary sprang to his feet, an energetic Open-shirted type who bounced on his toes.

"Dear youngsters," he began, "you must all help the DDR to develop champions and to build Socialism. That is our task. (a little girl suppressed a giggle). You see what our Taeve Schur did? (Schur recently won a world championship road race on his bicycle in France. The German Communists were so ecstatic that they nominated him to the

national People's Assembly, which of course guaranteed his election.) "You can do what our Taeve did too. And that way we will force the recognition of the DDR through sport!"



The FDJ District Clubhouse
The "Compass" poster (left) records vows the youngsters expect to fulfil by 1960 - "Construction Hours" etc.

The functionary then launched into an elaborate description of East German political aims and accomplishments. He did this in that indecipherable jargon known as "Party Chinese". It went way over the heads of the youngsters. They surreptitiously nudged each other, snickered occasionally, and looked bored.

Finally he said: "How many of you dear boys and girls play table tennis?" Two boys hesitantly raised their hands. "We have a tournament planned," said the functionary, "and any of you can enter." There was no response.

"All of you can use our sports fields. They are open to everyone. And you can get training there from champions!" Still no response. The functionary worked up a desperate smile. "Well, are there any questions?"

After a minute of silence, a girl, apparently a schoolteacher, stood up and spoke. "You functionaries ought to get away from your desks once in awhile, and meet the youngsters if you want to achieve your aims. You just send out invitations. They get thrown away. We never see you outside your offices."

The secretary was taken aback. He mumbled and stuttered. "That's ...not quite right... We have...lots of work."

A boy raised his hand. "One thing we are sore about. My pals and I, we signed up for 270 'construction hours' (see DB - 39) to help build a sports field for another FDJ group. We did them too. But now it's our turn to get a sports field and nobody wants to help us.



The secretary said: "We'll look into it. Now let's see this evening's film." The lights were turned off and we watched "Youth at the Start", a Polish color film about the World Youth Festival at Moscow in 1957. Following the movie, the sports official stood up again. "Dear youngsters, just remember, the victors you saw in the film are not the only medal winners, but all of you help build the glorious victory of Socialism are winners." More suppressed giggles.

As a parting shot, the functionary cried, "Play sports, and stay away from those immoral Vogelscheuche (scarecrows, the Leipzig word for rock 'n rollers) with their silly get-ups and Western music."

Judging from the reactions of these youths, they are not going to bring forth any champions from their ranks - either for sports or for Socialism.

David Binder
David Binder

(to be continued)