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Russian Zone's Iron Curtain Lifted—Slightly

By Klaus Mann
Staff Writer

My Berlin landlady seemed quite upset when told that I was leaving for "enemy territory." That was her name for the Soviet-occupied zone of the Reich. To her, it was like making an excursion to hell.

While the Berlin housewife was feeling sorry for me and my companions, many a fellow-correspondent envied us the opportunity of taking a peep behind the Iron Curtain.

The necessary arrangements for our trip were made through Russian Public Relations officials. Our party—only myself and two personal friends—was free to pick the places we cared to visit. Our request to interview Germans without Russian witnesses was unhesitatingly granted.

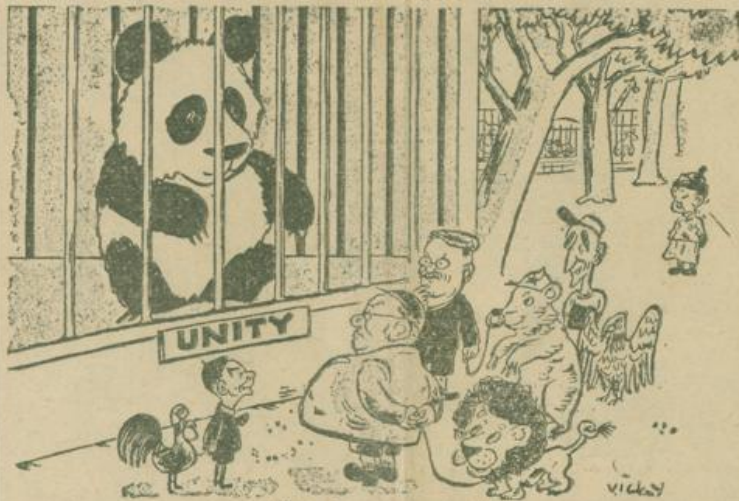
Why do most Germans believe that conditions in the Russian zone are infinitely worse than in any other area? This question kept puzzling me as I moved along through Soviet-controlled German territory. The land we passed through, on our way from Berlin to Dresden, seemed peaceful and prosperous!

WORK PROGRESS

The fields appeared to be in fine shape, promising good crops of wheat, vegetables, potatoes. Every bit of ground was cultivated. In industrial centers spared by our bombs the chimneys smoked lustily. There can be no doubt that a lot of work is being done under the Russian rule.

Dresden, however, appears gloomy and pitiful. Once internationally famed for the splendors of its architecture, the great city on the Elbe river has been reduced to a desert of rubble and ruins by one of the most merciless bombardments of the war.

There are signs and posters everywhere adorning the bleak remnants of buildings and monu-



"There is such an animal!"

Vicky in the London Daily News Chronicle

dition, have a daily 25-gram ration.

Meat seems to be the only essential food item of which Germans in the U.S. zone get more than their compatriots in Russian-held territory.

All those with whom we discussed the matter (in many cases without any Russian listening to our conversation) agreed that the food rations have never been cut, and that they are always fully distributed.

There may be occasional delays, we were told, "caused by transportation difficulties. We have no rubber, you know, and

But the people I contacted are afraid of not jail but Siberia.

Even if the Germans were not so deeply awed by Russian vigilance and justice, they would not find many "black" goods to buy as the output of local farms and factories is under the strictest control, and any trade with the outside world is utterly out of the question.

The Russian soldier seems both less mercenary and less well-equipped than his equal in the U.S. area. GI Joe sells to the "Krauts" all conceivable kinds of commodities, from candy to Army trucks. Red Ivan, on the other hand, doesn't have much to sell. He is rather inclined to buy the things that may catch his fancy for exorbitant prices (money does not seem to mean a great deal to him) or else to take them, where necessary.

BLACK MARKET
German citizens in these parts are in no position to pay 1,500 marks (150 dollars) for a carton of cigarettes, which is the American-established rate on the Berlin Black Market. For in the Russian zone all German bank accounts have been blocked and remain frozen for the time being, "to avoid inflation."

Apart from the sick and old, who are free to draw limited sums, people here depend on what they actually make by their work. As taxes on larger incomes are all but ruinous (not only in the Russian zone but everywhere in the Reich), money makes it self scarce and is not being spent recklessly.

Many Germans resent such restrictions. But then, the temporary freezing of bank accounts affects a minority, while the average citizen cannot but profit by its anti-inflationary aspect.

Considering the orderly state of affairs visitors find in this area, there remains something intriguing and irrational about the anti-Russian prejudice maintained by so many Germans.

Does this wide-spread animosity stem from the bad behavior of Red Army soldiers? All the Germans with whom we came in contact during the first days of our stay here—among them old personal friends of mine who would certainly tell me the truth—admitted that the conduct of the occupation troops is in general quite satisfactory.

DENAZIFICATION
Are the Germans afraid of Russian denazification measures? The truth is the Russian policy, in this respect, is less rigid than the one followed by American authorities. In the U.S. zone, no German who belonged to the Nazi party or an affiliated organization can hold a responsible job.

In this area ex-Nazis are much more readily forgiven as long as they want to work and play ball with the Russians. It is only the Party bigshots, especially the former financiers and conservative sponsors of the Hitler movement, who are out of luck under the Russian system.

If the Germans, in spite of all these facts, go on hating the Russians, apparently they are still thinking and feeling along the lines of Joseph Goebbels' propaganda.

The result is the whole German nation has been made to believe all Russians are blood-thirsty

monsters and those Germans who live in the Anglo-American zones take it for granted that life in the Russian-held areas must be sheer horror and misery.

On the other hand, Germans are apt to think of the British and the Americans as kindly and extravagant, if somewhat whimsical and ludicrous characters. The Russian-dominated part of the nation, therefore, envies the people in the Anglo-American camp where, in the imagination of eastern-zone Germans, everybody has plenty to eat and a lot of fun.

Actually Germans in the various zones know little about each other. If they were better informed, they would realize that life in the Anglo-American zones is by no means all roses, while conditions in the Soviet-controlled areas are not so catastrophic as generally suspected.

No doubt, the Russians are partly to blame for these vicious rumors. Their exaggerated secrecy cannot but arouse suspicions.

In Leipzig I interviewed two Russian officers. One of them was a lieutenant colonel, the other a major. Both held important positions in the local Advisory Control Commission. To my surprise they were quite open with me, or at least appeared to be.

GREETED POLITELY

Their appearance was martial enough—with impressively large gold epaulettes, stiff, high collar, heavy boots and all. They greeted us politely but not without a certain reservation.

Our first question was, "Do you feel that the denazification of German political, cultural and economic life is proceeding suc-

cessfully in this particular area?"

The two officers promptly answered in the affirmative. Denazification measures, they said, have been, and are still being, carried out in strictest accordance with the policy agreed upon at Potsdam. "We want every German to work," the Colonel explained. "But no former Party member is allowed to hold any important position, except in certain most exceptional cases."

The active cooperation of German liberal groups—one of the officers added—was contributing greatly to the speedy and thorough execution of the political purge. "Denazification," he concluded, "has not been a major problem to our authorities."

What about the Black Market? The Major made it quite clear that the very term "Black Market" was inappropriate in this area. "There is no such thing as an organized contraband in our domain," he stressed.

ASOCIAL ELEMENTS

Of course, asocial elements—he admitted—may exist in Leipzig as everywhere, but there are not enough of them to constitute a real problem.

The next issue we brought up was that of fraternization—one of the major headaches of military authorities in the U.S. Zone.

Fraternization? The Colonel did not quite understand. Red Army soldiers, he pointed out, would hardly be inclined to fraternize with their former enemy, even if they were not forbidden to do so.

"Our men have not yet forgotten the crimes committed by Germans in Russia. There are too many bitter memories, there is too much hate. How could a Russian patriot fraternize with a German girl whose brother may have murdered Russian women and children?" he demanded.

Whatever problem we mentioned, the two gentlemen assured us that it was well under control.

Another issue worrying U.S. Military Government officials—the shortage of trained personnel due to redeployment—was shrugged off by the Colonel. "We get as many qualified men as we need to do a good job," he said.

RE-EDUCATION

As for the political re-education of the German people, both officers agreed that one must not expect miracles. "We have to be patient," they said. "It will take years to cure the German mind of the poison of Nazi indoctrination. But it can be done—with the active support of the politically mature, truly liberal Germans."

Before concluding our interview, we asked the following question: "What particular problem connected with Military Government in this area do you regard as the most difficult one to master?"

The two officers exchanged surprised glances. Then the Colonel stated with great dignity that he had never found any problem particularly difficult.

"Besides," he added, not without solemn emphasis, "our job is not to brood over problems but to carry out orders."



Another view of Allied occupation.

Illustration by the Philadelphia Inquirer

ments reminding Germans: "This is Hitler's work" or "That's what the Fuehrer has done to you!"

Though Dresden was at least as thoroughly destroyed as Cologne or Hamburg—it looks comparatively neat and orderly. All the rubble has been removed from the streets, which are flanked by little pyramids of carefully piled bricks and rocks. The people have a fairly clean, decent appearance. The average Dresdener seems as well-dressed as his countrymen in the western and southern zone.

RATIONS

Germans' when asked about the food situation, promptly produced their ration card. To our surprise, we found that some food rations here are considerably higher than in other parts of occupied Germany—a fact of which the Russian-dominated German population seemed to be as unaware as we.

A German worker in the Soviet zone gets a daily bread ration of almost one pound, while his colleague under American control has to be satisfied with two meagre slices. Fat rations (50 grams of butter a day for a working man) are about twice as high as in the U.S. area.

As for sugar, that article is entirely lacking on ration cards in U.S.-governed Bavaria, whereas Saxony, under Soviet juris-

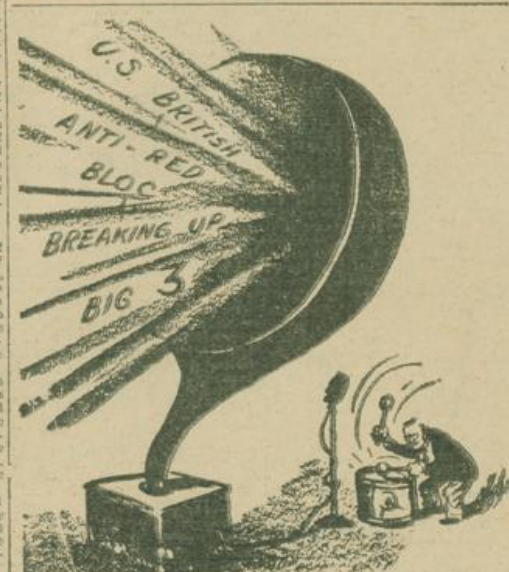
trucks don't run without tires... So if this week's butter ration happens to be somewhat late, we don't worry too much, because we know we'll get it in the end."

Yet it would be an exaggeration to say that Dresdeners look well-fed. On the contrary, most of them are rather on the skinny side and have that hollow-eyed, tired look typical of the hungry. If you don't see many fat Germans in the U.S. zone, then you have to look hard to find one of normal weight.

Even though the official food rations in this area are comparatively plentiful, living conditions here are more austere than in other German provinces. The simple explanation for this seemingly paradoxical fact is the almost complete absence of a Black Market.

While in the American-controlled domain practically everybody gets himself some additional food supplies from illegal sources, the Germans in this part of the country are actually compelled to live on what is legally allotted to them.

There is no Black Market to speak of, mostly because the discipline imposed by the occupying power is stringent enough to frighten the authority-conscious German population. We were unable to learn what kind of punishment a Black Marketeer would have to expect under Red Army-sponsored local regulations.



Lack of real information hurts, too.

Illustration by the St. Louis Star-Times