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Notes in the Russian Zone. I-VI.

Mann, Klaus

Dresden, Leipzig, Weimar, Juni 1946?

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NOTES IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE

By Klaus Mann

I

DRESDEN, June

"So you're going to the Russian zone? Poor Herr Mann! Really, I pity you!"

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

I could not help grinning in view of her sad grimace. Had she known how much I was looking forward to this particular experience! While the Berlin housewife was feeling so extremely sorry for me and my companions, many a fellow-correspondent envied us the opportunity to take a peep behind the Iron Curtain.

The necessary arrangements for our trip were made through the special courtesy of Russian Public Relations officials. Our party -- including only me 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. (1a)

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,) looked so peaceful and prosperous!

The fields seemed 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.

{ [It is true, Dresden appears gloomy and pitiful. Once internationally famed for the splendors of its architecture, the great city

Major cities, destroyed as everywhere
Dresden - Leipzig - Plauen
Leipzig - Weimar - Jena ...

on the Elbe river has been reduced to a desert of rubble and ruins by one of the most mercilessly devastating bombardments of the war.

But then, it was not the Russians who dropped high explosives on Dresden's celebrated Zwinger museum, the Castle and the stately opera house. The inhabitants of this ghost city should know by now whom they have to blame for their calamity. There are plenty of signs and posters adorning the bleak remnants of buildings and monuments, to remind the population of the great culprit's name and responsibility. "This is Hitler's work!" the huge inscriptions read. And again, "That's what the Fuehrer has done to you!"

Besides, if Dresden is one of the most cruelly beaten German cities -- 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 pedantically piled bricks and rocks. As for the people, they too have a fairly clean, decent appearance. The average Dresdener seems to be about as well-dressed as are his countrymen in the western and southern zones.

What about the food situation? Our German interlocutors, when asked this obvious question, produced promptly their ration cards. To our surprise, we found out that food rations here are considerably higher than in other parts of occupied Germany -- a significant fact of which the Russian-dominated German population seems to be as unaware as we had been, up to now.

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 (30 grams 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 Saxoniens, under Soviet jurisdiction, have a daily 25-grams ration. Meat seems to be the only essential food item of which American-zoners get somewhat more than their compatriots in Russian-held territory.

All the natives 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 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 expression typical of the hungry. If you don't see many fat Germans in the U.S. zone, here you have to look pretty 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, in the Soviet zone, 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 could not find out exactly what kind of punishment a Black Marketeer would have to expect under Red-Army-sponsored local regulations; it does not seem likely, however, that such a foolhardy operator would get away with a few weeks or months in a German prison. What people are afraid of is not jail but Siberia....

But even if the Germans were not so deeply awed by Russian vigilance and rigor, 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. As for

the Russian soldier, he seems both less mercenary and less well-equipped than his counterpart 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, often for exorbitant prices (money does not seem to mean a great deal to him), or else to take them, if necessary.

Besides, German citizens in these parts would hardly be in a position to pay 1,500 marks (= \$ 150) 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 itself scarce and is not being spent recklessly.

Naturally, the Germans are apt to resent such restrictions. But then, the temporary freezing of the bank accounts affects just a comparatively small minority, while the average citizen ~~will not~~ ^{cannot but} profit by that anti-inflationary measure. 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.

Is this wide-spread animosity due to the bad behaviour of Red Army soldiers? But all the Germans with whom we came in contact during the first days of our sojourn 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. "Of course, there have been disturbing incidents," we were told. "But by now the situation has become about as normal as can be expected, under the circumstances."

Are the Germans afraid of Russian denazification measures? The

plain truth is, however, that 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, on the contrary, 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, it just proves that they are still thinking and feeling along the lines of Goebbels propaganda. The anti-Russian complex is too deeply rooted in their muddled minds; for too many years they have been fed with all kinds of sinister stories about the "Bolshevist barbarians," the "savage hordes from the eastern steppes," the "archenemy of civilization." Unfortunately, certain British and American officers stationed in Germany do their best to keep this prejudice alive and nourish it with irresponsible talk.

As the whole German nation has been made believe that all Russians are blood-thirsty monsters, 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.

The point of the matter is that the people in the various zones of occupied Germany 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 responsible themselves for those

to blame

vicious rumors. Their exaggerated secretness cannot but arouse suspicions. Why is it so difficult to visit the Russian zone or to move from there to any other area? Why is there an Iron Curtain?

~~Clearly, the Russians know that not all Allied correspondents are friendly in their attitude towards the Soviet system. But they also know, or ought to realize, that responsible journalists, especially of the Anglo-American school, are exposed and trained to report facts, not to express opinions.~~

[An unbiassed observer strolling through the streets of this Soviet-occupied city cannot help wondering why the Russians are so secretive. Things in their zone seem to run smoothly. Is there anything they have to hide? We'll try to find out.]

As for the first impression, it is favourable enough.]

Dresden

transition:

Leipzig (books & etc)

Russians - more interested
in Germany than Anglo-
Americans ...
Politics (Unity Party)

(2)
Transition:
Two Russian
officers
Evasiveness

*Russians have
German Leftists
don't back
any party*

NOTES IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE

By Klaus Mann

II

DRESDEN, June

THE STRENGTH OF THE WORKING CLASS LIES IN ITS UNITY!...RECON=
STRUCTION OF THE FATHERLAND THROUGH UNITY OF ALL WORKING PEOPLE!...
HELP REBUILDING GERMANY BY JOINING THE SOCIALIST UNITY PARTY!...

It is with such slogans that the walls of Dresden are plastered. In the ruined center of this tragic city and in the comparatively well-preserved residential suburbs, on shop windows, street doors, newstands, monuments -- all over the place there are posters, banners, inscriptions advertising the Socialist Unity Party. Clearly, the present administration of this state, ~~Lower~~ Saxony -- the largest, most important province in the Russian occupation zone -- takes an unusual interest in that newly founded political body.)

The Unity Party, established last April, represents the fusion between Socialists and Communists. While German Communists throughout the entire country favour and recommend the merger, the majority of German Social Democrats in the non-Russian zones keep opposing it (more or less) bitterly. Due to Socialist resistance, no fusion has taken place, so far, outside of Soviet-controlled German territory.

Most
~~German~~ Social Democrats, traditionally anti-radical, maintain that the Unity Party constitutes, not a spontaneous development, but a Soviet-inspired manoeuvre designed to corrupt and control the more moderate labor party and to prepare the dictatorship of Bolshevism.

Communists and pro-Unity Socialists, on the other hand, argue that the establishment of a powerful united labor front is vitally in the interest of the German nation and could not but serve the cause of peace and democracy; that such a fusion had always been demanded by the most enlightened German liberals, long before Hitler; that the Nazi disaster might have been avoided, if the two great

left-wing parties had come to an understanding.

"What is all this talk about our Unity Party being an artificial affair brought about by Russian pressure and interference? Nothing could be less true!"

The man who uttered these words with a good deal of indignant emphasis was Otto Buchwitz, leader of the Socialist-Communist front in Saxony.

"As if we needed the Russians to tell us that we German liberals and anti-Facists are all in the same boat and ^{had} better stick together! Who has the nerve to tell me that our unity has been imposed on us by a foreign power? Yes, unity may have been enforced on us -- not by the Russians but by ^(Nazi terror!) ~~the Nazis~~. It was in German jails and concentration camps that German workers and intellectuals ~~came to realize the~~ ~~realization~~ of both Socialist parties came to realize the identity of their interests, the necessity of their collaboration. I know what I am talking about; I was there to witness this gradual, organic process -- the slow, painful birth of Socialist ^(solidarity) ~~unity~~."

Buchwitz, a veteran ^(champion) ~~member~~ of Germany's ^(labor movement) ~~Social Democratic Party~~, spent five years in a Gestapo prison. Formerly a Socialist leader in Silesia and, from 1919 to 1933, a member of the ~~German~~ Reichstag, he escaped ~~to Denmark~~ from Nazi Germany to Denmark -- only to be caught by the Hitler police when the Nazis invaded that country, in 1940. In concentration camps and Gestapo dungeons, Buchwitz asserted, there was no difference between Communists and Social Democrats. The People's Front, hitherto a postulate of certain political outsiders and theoreticians, became a reality under the relentless pressure ^{of} common suffering.

Yet there are other German Social Democrats who passed through the infernos of Dachau and Buchenwald, and still abide by their traditional anti-Communist policy. Curt Schumacher, for instance, the most important representative of the anti-Unity wing, had to

endure eleven years of Nazi imprisonment. The bitter experiences he ~~has~~ shared with Communist fellow-prisoners utterly failed to modify his views. Living now in the British-occupied city of Hanover, ^{Schumacher} ~~he~~ has established himself as the most implacable opponent of the Soviet-sponsored ^{merger policy} ~~united government~~.

"A brilliant fellow, no doubt, my old friend Schumacher!" ^{Unity} ~~my~~ boss Buchwitz admitted. "But full of personal ambition -- and completely under English influence. You know, he has just been in London to ^{receive} ~~get~~ new instructions from his Red-baiting ^{British} ~~unhappy~~ friends..."

Buchwitz insisted that the majority of German voters in the non-Russian zones would favour Socialist-Communist unity, if the new party were given a fair chance to explain and publicize its purposes. "It is not our purpose to impose Communism on the German nation," he said. "Nor would the Russians encourage ~~any~~ such a policy. The immediate task confronting all of us, here in the Russian zone and in ^{the} other areas, is a twofold one: reconstruction in the spirit of democracy, and the complete extermination of the last vestiges of Nazism. The solidarity of all liberal groups is indispensable lest the ex-Fascists or neo-Fascists run the country again. Why, they still are much too fresh, ~~and~~ too active -- especially in the western zones! Isn't it quite alarming and astonishing that a notorious reactionary and backer of the Nazi party like ^{Privy} ~~Minister~~ Councillor Hugenberg, former leader of the Conservatives, is still at large and lustily intriguing in the British-occupied part of Germany? People of his kind are liable to do a lot of harm in the future, unless they are stopped by a strong, united left-wing front."

Also, Buchwitz stressed the fact that his ^{group} ~~party~~ has by no means a political monopoly. There are ^{in the Russian zone} ~~two other organized~~ ^{licensed parties} ~~groups~~, both anti-Marxist -- the Union of Christian Democrats, representing the fusion between Protestants and Catholics, and the Liberal Democrats. "Of course," Buchwitz added, "our party is by far the strongest, with 415,000 registered members alone in Saxony."

Before leaving the Unity chief of Dresden, we asked him one final question. "Don't you think," one of us ventured to say, "that certain mistakes must have been made by the initiators and leaders of your organization. If your party actually owes its existence and its influence to the freely expressed will of the German people -- how is it possible that practically all your countrymen outside of the Russian zone, excepting the Communists, seem to regard you and your political friends as stooges of the Soviets? Could it be that the Russians jeopardized the prestige of your movement -- unwittingly, to be sure! -- by showing too much interest in its success? Maybe the publicity of your venture is not being handled tactfully enough? Maybe the unification of the two labor parties -- overdue as it may have been -- should have been postponed, rather than to be compromised by the all too obvious blessing of the occupying power?"

Buchwitz, slightly taken aback at first, was quick to answer: "There is only one effective defence against malignant slander -- action, work, results! We will prove our integrity and the rightness of our program, not by arguing with our enemies, but by contributing to the moral, economic and political recovery of our nation."

✓ Reasons: on the Unity
Social Democrats disappear
in re-education camp
Unity men hold
leading positions:
Lippert, Trayer
Transition
Lippert
Transition:
Lippert
Mowbray, Schoolhouse, etc.

NOTES IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE

By Klaus Mann

III

LEIPZIG, June

The two Russian officers never smiled but what they said sounded reassuringly optimistic. One of them was a lieutenant colonel, the other a major; both held important positions in the local Advisory Control Commission.

[We had asked for an interview with representatives of ~~the~~ Military Government. The conversation took place in the office of the Public Relations officer -- a mustached, dark-eyed young captain of remarkable suavity. He apologized for the civilian clothes he was wearing. "It's Sunday today, you know....," he observed with a disarming smile. (When we saw him again, Monday morning, he still was in ~~his~~ mufti -- looking like an amiable boulevardier, rather than a revolutionary soldier...)]

As for the two gentlemen of the city administration, their appearance was martial enough -- with impressively large gold ~~epaulettes~~ epaulettes, stiff, high collar, heavy boots, and all. They greeted us politely but not without a certain reservation. The colonel said, "Welcome in Leipzig!" -- a wish that was presently translated by a bespectacled, earnest young woman whom the officers introduced as their interpreter. The next remark she had to translate to us came from the major. "What can be do for you?" he asked as we were sitting down under a big Stalin portrait.

We said that we would like to ask the gentlemen a few questions -- whereupon the attitude of our two interlocutors stiffened and the expression of their faces became even more impenetrable. We were informed by the polyglot female, however, that all our inquiries would be answered "as accurately as possible." -- "Will you please go right ahead and ask any question that may be of interest to you,"

she encouraged us.

Our first question was: "Do you feel that the denazification of German political, cultural and economic life is proceeding successfully in this particular area?"

The two officers, promptly and positively, 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." (We had heard about some of those exceptional cases...) The active cooperation of German liberal groups -- one of the officers added -- ^{was} ~~contributed~~ ^{ing} greatly to the speedy and thorough execution of the political purge. "Denazification," he concluded ~~emphatically~~, "has not been a major problem to our authorities."

What about the Black Market? We asked this second question somewhat timidly -- adding a few remarks about the serious disturbances illegal trade causes in the American zone.

Not so in Leipzig! The major made it quite clear that the very term of "Black Market" was inappropriate in this area. "There is no such thing as an organized contraband in our domain," he stressed. 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 German police is very good at taking care of them. We have here a first-rate local police force, you know -- picked fellows, reliable anti-Facists! They're doing a brilliant job."

The next issue we ventured to bring up was that of Fraternization -- one of the major headaches of military authorities in the U.S.-controlled areas.

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. ~~There is~~

"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?"

Whatever problem we mentioned, the two gentlemen assured us that it was well under control. The major, expert in economics, said that the food situation was satisfactory: the farmers fulfil their quotas, the distribution of food rations functions smoothly enough. 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.

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 from the poison of Nazi indoctrination. But it can be done -- with the active support of the politically mature, truly liberal Germans. We have found such Germans in every community, including Leipzig. It is with the assistance of that enlightened minority that we try to re-educate the misguided masses."

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. [A soldier must never ask whether the execution of any given order involves difficulties or not. He just does what he is supposed to do -- letting the difficulties take care of themselves.]"

Transition:
Russian 94th major action
interview in German captivity
94th NW do

NOTES IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE

By Klaus Mann

IV.

LEIPZIG, June

[This city, however badly damaged, has suffered less destruction than almost any other major German community. If Berlin, Dresden, Cologne have been reduced to ghost towns, Leipzig still resembles its old self and has maintained some of its traditional liveliness and enterprising spirit.

We did quite a bit of sightseeing, accompanied by our Russian hosts. *(First of all, they took us to, reminding Leipzigers and the world)* ~~As there was~~ the massive monument ~~in honor~~ of the victory won here, in 1813, by the Prussian-Russian-~~British~~ Austrian coalition against Napoleon I. Our Red Army guides dwelled proudly on the important role Russian prowess and strategic skill had played on that historic occasion. Also, they showed us the Russian church built in this German town by one of Stalin's crowned predecessors, Czar Alexander I, and told us, not without horror, how this Greek-Orthodox shrine had been used as an observation post by desperate SS men during a more recent Battle of Leipzig.

We were introduced to some of the publishing firms for which this city has so long been famed -- the venerable house of Reclam and the distinguished Insel-Verlag, now operating again, if only on a comparatively modest scale. As for Leipzig's other commercial ~~and~~ speciality, furs, we heard mild complaints from industrialists about the paralyzing lack of raw material. The worried businessmen added, ~~however~~, however, that the city administration had just started breeding fur animals such as rabbits, beavers, various kinds of foxes. "So maybe our industry will ^{up} pick ~~up~~ again," they said hopefully.

We found plenty of the most furry creatures in the zoological garden; but of course, those precious animals are out of reach ^{to} ~~for~~ material-hungry

furriers. One of the city's most popular attractions, the Leipzig Zoo has survived the war in surprisingly good shape. Only a few delicate monkeys were killed by ~~the~~ air pressure during the bombardments. As for the lions, panthers, elephants, bears, and other inmates of the vast and picturesque establishment, they look fatter and fitter than most humans do in these parts. Natives as well as Russians seem to take great pride in their beautiful Zoo. "It's one of the finest in the world, you know," we were told by our conducting officer. "And, mind you, it's the only zoo still intact in the whole of Germany!"

"Yes, our city has been comparatively lucky -- we have to be grateful for that!" -- This was the Mayor of Leipzig speaking, Gunter Kalk, a man of just 35, as jolly and dynamic as he could be. We had our chat with him in his private residence, with no Russians present. Herr Kalk treated us to a bottle of delicious Mosel wine -- "from the cellar of a Nazi bigshot," as he explained cheerfully --, while Frau Kalk -- an attractive blonde: half-Gretchen, half-Valkyrie -- offered us a richly assorted cold buffet containing all kinds of sausages, cheeses, salades, and so forth. (Frau Kalk's hors-d'oeuvres, by the way, were curiously reminiscent of those we had enjoyed, just a few hours before, at lunch in our Russian-operated hotel. Obviously, the Russians had sent over a choice of their delicatessen, thus enabling the Mayor to entertain us in style.)

Herr Kalk, a former businessman specializing in German-made chocolate and hard candy, told us that he had always been a liberal but by no means a Communist. Having been without political affiliations before and during the Nazi period, he is now an enthusiastic adherent to the Socialist Unity Party. "It's thanks to that great movement of anti-Fascist solidarity," he cried, "that things are going so well in this zone!"

The Mayor feels very strongly about this point -- that ^{conditions} in the Soviet-held area are better than in any other part of Germany, and that this

state of affairs is primarily due to the ~~longly established~~ harmony ^(between) of the two left-wing parties. Under the auspices of a truly popular administration, far-reaching and constructive reforms like the partition of the vast Junker estates could be carried out efficiently and smoothly. As for the forthcoming referendum on the nationalization of Nazi firms, the Mayor feels that not only the Social-Democrats and Communists but also the two conservative parties recognize the rightness and significance of that proposal. The plan calling for socialization of all plants that belong to war criminals or active Nazis, will affect the 500 biggest industries in Saxony, including the large machinery plant in Leipzig. "It has nothing to do with Communism, though," the Mayor insisted. "It's just a logical, inevitable measure to break, once and for all, the economic power of anti-democratic, war-mongering elements."

As for the recent Leipzig Fair, the Mayor admitted that it ~~had been~~ ^{was} "a moral success," more than anything else. "Of course," he said, "our industrialists are not yet in a position to produce commodities on a large scale -- which may have been a little disappointing to some of our potential customers from the other zones. Still, everybody was most favourably impressed with both the variety and quality of our products. Besides, the Fair offered us a wonderful opportunity to renew contacts with old friends and business associations from whom we had been cut off for too long a time. How surprised some of them were to find us still ^(and) alive in comparatively good health! Obviously, they had expected to find only skeletons here ^{in Leipzig!}"

Both the Mayor and his wife -- neither of them looking very skeleton-like -- had a long, hearty laugh. "Well, and now you tell me something about the most recent musical hits in America," the Mayor suggested -- opening, as it were, the informal part of our little meeting. "I love swing music, you know. Want to hear some of my phonograph records?"

"But first let's have a few bites to eat!" the Mayoress insisted.

"Why don't you help yourself, Herr Mann? ^{please} try this Russian salad!"

Transition: *Interview in Leipzig* **** *Wann*

NOTES IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE

By Klaus Mann

V.

[WEIMAR, June

"It will be a great thrill to see Weimar," Victor said as we approached^d the city. "Imagine! The town of Schiller and Goethe, one of the great centers of European culture..."

Victor is our conducting officer -- a young Russian lieutenant who has been travelling with us ever since we took off from Berlin. A tall, handsome lad of 22 or so, he is a veteran of Stalingrad and many another battle. His English is pretty poor, but he speaks fluent German. While on the whole rather harsh in his criticism of anything German, he has a definite weakness for German pistols and German poetry. His collection of German-made guns includes some remarkable pieces. Among the German verse he knows by heart are lengthy fragments from Goethe's Faust. Goethe is one of his heroes.

"So that's where he lived!" Victor observed in a respectfully lowered voice. We had reached the "Frauenplan" -- the ancient square on which the Goethe House is situated. How sleepy and idyllic the grey buildings looked in the pale, gentle light of an early summer evening!

As for the famous mansion itself, it has been badly damaged by bombs and is still under reparation. The poet's artistic and scientific collections, however, are displayed in an adjacent wing spared by Allied explosives. Several Russian officers, including an impressively bearded colonel, accompanied our party as we were shown around through the halls and cabinets of the Goethe museum.

Our German ~~guide~~ guide -- a white-maned Goethe student whom the Russians addressed as "Herr Professor" and treated with great respect -- said to us, in concluding the tour: "Isn't it curious that these soldiers from Moscow, Leningrad, and other faraway places, should be more interested in our ~~greatest~~ Dichterfuerst ~~than~~ (Prince of Poets)

than the German leaders and officials have been for the past twelve years? Not since 1933 has the Goethe House had so many visitors as right now -- and most of them are Russian! Do you know that Hitler has never set foot here? He visited this town repeatedly to pay his respects to Frau Foerster-Nietzsche, the philosopher's sister, known for her extreme nationalism and her anti-Semitic views. The Nietzsche Archives where a great thinker's posthumous notes and letters were falsified by irresponsible heirs -- that was just the right milieu for our Fuehrer! But the Goethe House? No! To Hitler, Goethe had to remain unacceptable. Goethe -- the humanitarian, the cosmopolitan, the Free Mason..."

At this point, Victor who had been following our conversation added with a strange, childlike gravity: "Goethe, the genius! We Russians admire genius -- whatever tongue it may speak. Genius does not belong to any particular nation; genius belongs to the world."

Our friend Victor may sound a little peculiar to readers familiar with the ~~lingo~~ lingo of young lieutenants in other armies. Is Victor an exception, or may we regard his attitude and terminology as characteristic of Russian standards?

But even presuming that our conducting officer happens to be an exceptionally sensitive and educated fellow -- the fact remains that the average Russian (a notion which does not include, of course, certain half-savage [&] Mongolish types!) is indeed much more culture-conscious than is generally realized.

It is true, this Russian enthusiasm for spiritual and artistic values may at times be naive like a child's admiration for glittery things, while in other cases this cultural interest may be tainted with political speculation. What matters above all in our context, however, is the practical results and consequences of this culture-minded Russian attitude, especially as regards occupied Germany.

While the Germans in Russia did everything to destroy or paralyze

native culture, the Russians, on the contrary, make it their business to sponsor and stimulate cultural activities in their occupation zone. It is by no means just the "proletarian" or "Marxist" brand of art and philosophy in which Soviet agencies take an active and constructive interest; rather, they try to encourage and popularize the manifestations of German culture in all its aspects -- excluding, of course, the forerunners ~~and~~ and actual champions of Nazi ideology.

Goethe can hardly be described as a "Bolshevist;" yet everything is being done under Bolshevik auspices to revitalize his cult. Or, to take a contemporary example -- Ricarda Huch, Germany's outstanding woman writer, known for her at once imaginative and scholarly presentations of historical subjects. 82 years of age, she is now living in Jena, just a few miles from the Goethe town. Friends and admirers worried when this area was taken over by the Soviets. Would the Reds treat ^{Ricarda Huch} ~~that venerable~~ ~~lady~~ with the consideration due to her age and fame? ~~After all, Ricarda~~ ^{she} ~~Huch~~. Even though an upright and courageous anti-Nazi, ^{or persecute} ~~she~~ is by no means a left-wing author but belongs rather to the conservative camp. Maybe the Russians were going to boycott ^{her} on account of her religious leanings and her melancholy romanticism?

But -- surprise! -- all this anxiety turned out to be quite unfounded. Frau Huch, I am ^{glad} ~~safe~~ to report, is safe and well in her home on the "Philosophenweg" (Path of the Philosophers) at Jena. We called on her, on our way to Weimar. The Russian officers whom we had brought along seemed greatly impressed by ^{the old lady's} ~~her~~ fragile but intense personality. "What will power! What endurance!" Victor exclaimed afterwards. "There she is, 82 years old -- still working, still creating! Isn't it wonderful?"

In every town we visit the Russians make it a point to show us, first of all, what is going on in the various fields of cultural ^{life.} ~~life.~~ Their great passion is ~~of course~~ the theater; we had to see ~~shows~~ shows in Dresden, Leipzig, Jena, Weimar. ~~everywhere~~. The productions were on ~~the~~ a fairly high artistic level, in spite of technical difficulties and disturbing

shortages. The local repertoires seem to follow in general the traditional German pattern -- the usual operatic and dramatic classics (Mozart, Wagner, Verdi; Schiller, Goethe, Hebbel, Grillparzer), some operettas and light comedies, some recent international hits like "Our Town" and "Antigone." Also, there are a few new German and Russian plays dealing with political problems, (but they do not seem to be very popular.) One does not get the impression that the theater, on the whole, is being used as a vehicle for Communist propaganda.

Nor could we find any indications of Marxist propaganda in any of the public schools we visited. The Dean of Jena University, Prof. Friedrich Zucker, told us that Russian authorities were giving him all possible assistance but did not interfere with his pedagogical and scientific work. The university, one of Germany's most ancient and most distinguished schools, was partly destroyed by bombs but could be re-opened last October. 70 professors out of 140 had to be retired, Zucker said, in the process of denazification. The dismissed teachers could be replaced, however, so that now all the faculties are operating again, with ⁽¹⁴²⁾ 1300 professors instructing 1300 students.

"Our most brilliantly staffed faculty, right now, is the medical one," Prof. Zucker told us. "We are proud to have here some physicians of world-wide reputation." The Dean added, however, that there were noted scholars in other departments as well. "Allow me to mention in particular our philosopher, Prof. Leisegang," he said. "A remarkable mind. Fortunately, he has just been licenced again."

When we asked whether Leisegang embraced Marxist ideas and belonged to the school of materialistic thought, Zucker seemed slightly shocked. "Leisegang -- a Marxist?" he cried -- half-amused, half-indignant. "Dear me, no! He doesn't want any part of it."

Nevertheless, Leisegang is free to teach philosophy at a Red-Army-controlled university...

If it is true, however, that the Russians do not try to degrade German culture to an instrument of party propaganda, it is also true

that they prefer and boost a certain type of leftist art and literature. Marxist writers are now enjoying a somewhat hectic boom in the Soviet-occupied area. The main agency behind this semi-official political-cultural movement is the so-called Kulturbund -- a well-financed, well-publicized organization with headquarters in Berlin and local branches throughout the entire zone.

The Kulturbund sponsors lecture programs, musical recitals, round-table discussions, art exhibitions, and the publication of a literary monthly, Der Aufbau (Construction). The Aufbau-Verlag, connected with the "Bund," is the most active publishing house in postwar Germany. In spite of the critical paper situation, that privileged firm has managed to put out inexpensive, handsome new editions of great German poets like Goethe and Heinrich Heine -- not to mention the mass production of topical books and pamphlets by contemporary German authors.

The three stars of the Aufbau-Verlag, in the field of modern literature, are Johannes R. Becher, president of the Kulturbund -- a poet of remarkable eloquence and sensitivity; the well-known anti-Fascist playwright, Friedrich Wolf, and Theodor Plievier, a novelist of international reputation. All three of them returned recently to Germany from Moscow where they had been among the initiators and intellectual leaders of the Free German Committee. While Wolf and Becher settled down in Berlin, Plievier chose Weimar as his residence.

"I am happy ^{to be} here," he told us as we dropped by at his ^(peaceful) quiet, suburban home. "Much happier ~~that~~ than I would be in Berlin or any other big city. It's so good to live quietly and cultivate your garden and sit in the sun, after all those years of struggle and wandering! Besides, there ^{is} something very special about the atmosphere of this place, you know. After all, Weimar is not just another provincial little town. For a German writer who spent most of his life abroad, it may be a good idea to make his home in Goethe's neighbourhood..."

NOTES IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE

By Klaus Mann

VI.

(Conclusion)

The most interesting comments on the Russians we heard during our trip came from a bunch of simple, tough GIs. We happened to run into them in front of Soviet Military Headquarters at Weimar. "Ge!" one of my travel companions cried as she noticed the familiar khakis in the midst of Red Army uniforms and German civilians. "I'll be damned if those guvs over there aren't Americans!" -- And the GIs, grinning at the attractive woman correspondent: "An American gal -- in Weimar, of all places! Let's shake hands with you, sister!"

They belonged to some kind of communication outfit stationed in Weimar for the past few months. Just about 40 men, commanded by a young lieutenant -- completely disconnected from the bulk of U.S. occupation troops.

"Aren't you feeling kind of lonely here?" we asked them. "Just a handful of Yanks among all those Ruskies?"

Not at all, they said. Quite the contrary! "We're pretty well off here in Weimar," one of them stated, while a second GI added: "Last week I had to go to Berlin. What a messy place! Our guys there seem to have just one interest -- the Black Market. Disgusting -- that's what it is. Boy, was I glad to get back to the Russian zone!"

"So you guys think that the Ruskies are doing a pretty good job?" the woman correspondent inquired.

This time the whole bunch of American soldiers -- there were five or six of them -- answered simultaneously: "A crack good job!"... "Prima!"... "I don't see how they could be doing a better job!"... "Other countries had better get the nats out of their own eyes before criticizing the Russians!"

"And how do you get along with them individually?" the inquisitive girl continued her interview. "Haven't there been any fights between you guys and the Reds?"

The answer came in form of an unanimous chorus again: "Never any ill feelings between us... Them Ruskies never given us any trouble... Pretty good guys, most of them... Have a lot in common with us, too..." -- The last point was elaborated by a middle-aged, bespectacled sergeant. "Some people seem to ~~like~~ feel that the Germans are in certain ways like the Americans," he observed. "I don't think so at all. In my opinion, the Russians are much more like the Americans than the Germans are."

To us, this accidental meeting with a small group of unprejudiced, ~~pleasant~~ countrymen was both heartening and instructive. What they had to say, and said to us in their plain, straightforward manner, was indeed apt to confirm our own observations.

Having spent almost a couple of weeks with Russians in the Russian zone, we three correspondents could not help coming to exactly the same ^{conclusion} which was expressed to us by the isolated Weimar GIs. This conclusion has a twofold gist which can be summed up as follows:

First, the Russians are competent organizers -- more successful than any other occupying power in their attempt to re-organize a paralyzed, chaotic Germany. (4)

Second, the Russians do not hate the Americans.

As for the former point, I may as well modify it by adding that conditions in the Soviet-held part of Germany are of course far from perfect. Even if I had not noticed any signs of corruption and mismanagement myself -- I would take it for granted that mistakes are being made. How could it be otherwise? It remains true, however, that the Red Army administration -- described by Goebbels (and not by Goebbels alone!) as a kind of apocalyptic plague -- proves on the whole efficient and sensible. ~~Even if food is scarce, and a~~ bureaucracy oppressive, in the Russian-

(Food may at times be)

occupied area; ^{but} there is no "chaos," no "glaring misery" or "~~open~~ ^{Red} terror." Nor has that area been transformed into an arsenal or ~~prop~~ propaganda center to serve the sinister schemes of "Bolshevist imperialism." We have found no evidence to justify such suspicions.

As for the latter point -- the Russian attitude towards the U.S.A. --, every American who has ever been in the Soviet Union knows that our country is more liked and respected there than any other "capitalistic" nation. During the war, Britain, too -- especially the British army -- enjoyed considerable popularity with the Russian "men in the street." What struck us now as curious and noteworthy, however, was the fact that the feelings of the average Red Army soldier have remained unchanged as regards the U.S., while his sympathies for the British seem to be suddenly gone.

Almost every Russian enlisted man, commissioned officer or civilian functionary with whom we discussed the political situation would sooner or later bring up the famous anti-Russian speech Winston Churchill delivered in America. While denouncing the ex-Prime Minister as a "war-monger" and "vicious reactionary," all those men seemed to take it for granted that American public opinion had unanimously reacted against the kind of policy Mr. Churchill proposed.

"Americans -- good fellows! Russians -- good fellows!" as one of our new friends, a private called Ivan, put it. "Why should Russians, Americans not be friends?"

And Lieutenant ~~Ben~~ ^{Vic}, our conducting officer, observed one evening as we were attending a show together: "Look how those Germans keep staring at us! It surprises them to see you Americans in the company of Red Army soldiers. They think we don't like each other. They think there will be a war between our two countries. But they are mistaken -- the Germans are ^{always} wrong. War between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Republics? What nonsense! -- And now let's enjoy the show!"

- Food... (1) Rations
 (2) Harvest and control of agriculture
 (3) Quotes and observations from G.I's, Germans and officials
 (4) Blackmarket and results from non-existence... menus...
 (5) Transportation and R's attitude, fish story... Kaput car story

(POLICY AS AGAINST NO POLICY)

- Politics: (1) Socialist Unity party leader... Quotes... history... pap
 (2) Editor Critstian Democrat's organ; testimony... newspaper
 (De-nazification von Linedmann ect... Schummacker; Hoegner.
 (3) City administration notes Leipsig... Burgomeister ect.
 (4) Pressure: Pleivier, Becher, as against solely amer literature. (NEWSPAPERS
 (5) Referendum... on nationalization... what alternative?
 (6) Ideology: De-nazification or not...
 (7) Russian aim? Rebuild, or win-over pr both?
 (8) Churchill's speech
 (a) (1) de-nazification...
 (a) actors, intellectuals, professionals, oke...
 (effect on progress). Heavy rations for intellectuals and heavy workers... (Victor's salary)
 (b) Cultural life: (Still de-nazification)
 (Universities, books, opera, theatre, authors, Goethe,
 (~~Nixx~~ Nietzsche Music) ross, Aintenius....
 PROPAGANDA
 (c) Books and publishers:
 Quotes and figures, book shop story, quotes of rosa ect.

Schools: Schiller school: and Jena University...
~~xxxx~~

- Fraternization... (1) G.I's
 (2) Russian coldness

Blackmarket

Money ...contrast and results....

Bureaucracy..... (colour story)

Results: Russians pro-American, anti-British, raaporte... Among Germans,
 Illusion that in american zone everything is dixie
 Russian indifference to German self-deception
 that in long-run, germans will like the the Rooskies best, despite present beliefs and propaganda, as like things to work.
 Love of americans is not love of democracy but of black-market.

Freedom?

Berlin not Russian zone....

Russian Army life: courtesy, salaries, the boy with a ^{PA}cousin
 in Wisconsin....

Dachau, the Germans.....

-RICARDA Huch-
Johannes Becker-



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