OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

THE GRAY YOUNG REPUBLIC

ORDINARILY, Americans are about as welcome in the East Zone of Germany as hoof-and-mouth disease, and have about as much chance of getting in as they have of obtaining a visa for the Soviet Union. Only during the traditional Leipzig Trade Fair, held one week each spring and one week each fall, are the bars let down. At those times, any Westerner may proceed to and return from Leipzig, provided he follows the shortest, most direct route by train or car and forgoes side trips along the way. There is a minimum of fuss and red tape; in fact, everything is arranged to make the visit to Leipzig a pleasant one. I went to the fair this spring, driving the hundred and ten miles from Berlin along the Autobahn with three fellow-Americans in an American car. At the Potsdam Bridge in Berlin, where we entered the territory of the German Democratic Republic, our passports, *laisser-passer* for the fair, and money were checked by eager adolescent members of the Volkspolizei (People's Police) and of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth), or F.D.J. Even the inevitable Soviet sentry behind the barrier, wearing a fur cap and carrying a tommy gun on his back, put on a friendly smile for the occasion and told me, in German, that the weather was damn unpleasant in Potsdam, much worse than where he came from. Knowing the Russians' flexible ideas about the definition of espionage, I did not ask him where he came from. In East German territory, there was only one Russian check point on the Autobahn during the whole two-hour trip to Leipzig (last year, I was told, there had been five), and the strident anti-imperialist slogans that invariably decorate East German house and barn walls had been removed, presumably as a polite concession to potential buyers from the West.

I had been in Leipzig once before, in the middle twenties, during the now forgotten days of the Weimar Republic. The city then was a famous center of printing and the graphic arts, and of the Continent's fur trade. It was a fine town for music, too. I also remember being struck by the Gothic style of its big, respectable-looking buildings, by its magnificent railroad station, by the Thomas Church (where Johann Sebastian Bach was once the choir leader), by the great Gewandhaus Orchestra, by excellent coffee at the Café Felsche, and, above all, by its vitality. In many ways, I now found the city almost unrecognizable. Neither the excessive display of flags nor the loudspeakers blaring German and Soviet songs nor the crowds in the street and their mood of feverish gaiety could eradicate my first impression—that life in what has become Soviet Russia's youngest "Republic" is as cheerful and inspiring as the daily half hour in a prison when the inmates are permitted to walk around the courtyard under the scrutiny of armed guards.

The sky was bluish and the sun was shining through a slight haze when we arrived in the city, but the prevailing color scheme was gray. The unpainted houses looked gray, the battered railroad station looked gray, and so did the dusty stretches of urban ruins and rubble—Leipzig was heavily bombed during the war. Nor did the drab clothes of the men and women and children provide any contrast. I had the feeling of being immersed in the same depressing gray atmosphere that I shall always associate with my visits in the last year or two to Prague, Budapest, Belgrade, and Warsaw. It is the bleak grayness of the Orwell state. The only injection of lively color into the dreary backdrop was the blue shirts of the men and women of the Volkspolizei, of whom there were a great many around, directing traffic, studying automobile license numbers, guarding official buildings, making the rounds of beerhouses—always watching people. Many of them, I was told, had been brought in from Dresden, Weimar, and Halle for the week of the fair. I saw few members of the Soviet Army on the street. The Russian soldiers stationed here, it was said, had been ordered to stick to their barracks in the suburbs during the festivities.

The members of the Volkspolizei were among the few Leipzigers who seemed to be happy with the way things were going in their city. And no wonder. They have well-paid jobs, and promotion is swift for those whose political staunchness is outstanding. The Volkspolizei, the new Reichswehr, is one of the few military outfits in the world that hand out bars and decorations in return for political reliability rather than military achievements. A medical student who had no money to continue his schooling told me that he was going to enlist in the organization. "I'll be a lieutenant and make six hundred marks a month," he said. "They'll let me finish my studies. Once I get my degree, I'll see what I can do." He didn't go on, but I gathered that he was considering becoming an "unreliable element" inside the group. About thirty such "elements" escape every month into the British Zone.

It wasn't difficult to talk to the people in Leipzig, but more than once I was assured that nobody would risk being seen with a stranger except during the fair. "At other times, one of us talks to a stranger in Halle or Weimar and the next thing he knows he is picked up by the Volkspolizei and told to come along," the wife of a bookbinder said to me shortly after I arrived. "And then . . ." She gave a shrug. "If he is lucky, he won't disappear. A woman I know, a refugee from Silesia, was overheard saying to another woman that no amount of propaganda could

teach her to love the Russians. She was reported by a snooper and taken to the Volkspolizei. She told them that the war had gone back and forth through the town where she had lived, and described a few things the Red Army had done there. 'How can you *love* people like that?' she asked them. Well, they let her go after a long interrogation. She was lucky that no M.V.D. man was around. Usually the Russian secret police work pretty closely with the Germans." The woman looked at me intently and said, "Stay here a few days and you'll notice that the population falls into two groups—those being spied on and those doing the spying. After a while, you get a regular persecution complex and feel that everybody is watching you. Just wait and see."

OFFICIAL reports claim that East Germany's production of steel today is four times what it was in 1948; the production of propaganda, although there are no statistics to prove it, has undoubtedly increased at many times that rate. Slogan-writing and placard-painting are important professions in the Soviet Zone. There is hardly a house wall that is not covered with placards, streamers, posters, or banners. Gerhart Eisler, the propaganda boss of Soviet Germany, may not have the imagination of Goebbels, but he beats his predecessor in volume and vehemence. It is hard for anybody living in the West to realize the intensity of the propaganda to which the people within Eisler's reach are subjected. Visitors en route to Leipzig on the official fair train were obliged to listen to loudspeakers alternately screeching "progressive" music and eulogies on the blessings of the Eastern world. At the Leipzig railroad station, they were confronted with banners in eight languages proclaiming that "The Youth of the World Will Fight Any Threat to the Peace of the World." When the visitors checked in at the administration office of the fair to be assigned to billets in private houses (only members of prominent trade delegations were quartered in the few functioning hotels), they were handed stacks of propaganda literature. From then on, they were constantly stopped by *Aufklärers* (official enlighteners), who tried to draw them into conversation and feed them the Party line. The enlighteners knew only what they were supposed to know, and insisted on ignoring everything else. Many times during my stay, I was asked why the Americans in West Germany had released prominent Nazis from prisons, but no one seemed to

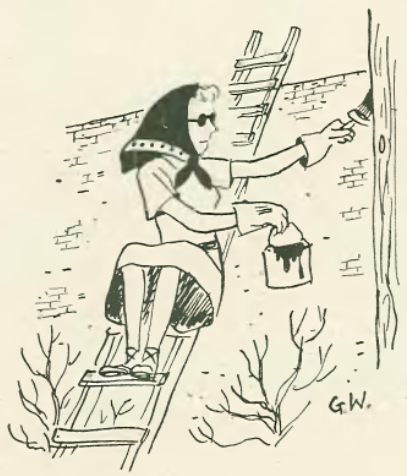
know (that is, no one admitted knowing) that among Soviet Germany's most powerful men today are many notorious old-time Nazis.

The indoctrination of the people in Soviet Germany starts in kindergarten, where the children learn new versions of the fairy tales. Cinderella, for example, is a poor working girl, exploited by Wall Street imperialists, and Prince Charming turns up as an "activist," the Soviet-German term for a shock worker devoted to the cause. Enlightenment never stops. At the age of eleven, children must start learning Russian in school. One afternoon at a café, I met a young tool-factory apprentice who told me that he has to devote three evenings every week to political education. On Monday evenings he goes to an F.D.J. "group hour," to hear lectures and sing songs; on Wednesdays he takes courses in the history of Communism and of Soviet Russia; and on Fridays he attends a "circle" hour, whatever that may mean. This youth is, nevertheless, a "Westerner." He reads the diminutive underground papers that are smuggled in from West Germany, he has no love for the Russians ("I don't even want to see their stupid films"), and he admires American goods ("Do you think we can ever produce tools as good as yours?"). But, he said, he likes the crowd at his factory. The workers have a beautiful clubhouse called the Friendship, he told me, and sometimes they have lots of fun there. His brother, a student at Leipzig University—one of Germany's oldest colleges, founded in 1409, and now "serving the indisputable wisdom of Leninism-Stalinism"—must take four hours of political education a week, and show good grades in it if he wants to continue his studies.

Courses in political education are mandatory for all classes of the population. The official *Kulturprogramm* set up during the fair for the benefit of visitors offered lectures ("Peace and the Arts," "What Can the Church Do for Peace?," "Writers Fighting for Peace"), discussions ("Germans Talk to Germans"), and a play called "Even in America," the hero of which, according to the program, "doesn't merely *want* peace but decides to *fight* for peace at home." There were concerts featuring "popular music from Germany, the Soviet Union, and the People's Democracies." (Moniuszko, Tchaikovsky, Smetana, Enesco, Wagner, Johann Strauss, Vladigeroff, Khatchaturian, and Berlioz made up one bill.) No matter where you turned, you were likely to bump up against

"peace"—or, rather, the Soviet version of peace. The fair was officially described as the Fair of the Five-Year Plan and of Peace. Last year's theme—Soviet-German Friendship—didn't go over so well with the people of East Germany, who had suffered under the Red Army, so the emphasis was shifted this year to "peace" and German unity. Above a clock in a restaurant I saw a sign reading, "I'm Ticking Every Second for Peace." The unity theme—"*Deutsche an einem Tisch*" ("Germans at One Table")—is repeated endlessly. All over the city, I saw a poster depicting East Germans seated at a round table, waiting for the West Germans, who were being kept from joining them by the restraining hand of wicked Uncle Sam. There were, I noted, quite a few benign likenesses of the mustachioed, pipe-smoking "Best Friend of the German People," as well as a number of pictures, with appropriate captions, of one Adolf Hennecke, a miner who had increased his prescribed output by something like three hundred per cent. The main slogan over the entrance to the big hall in which the fair was held read, "We Salute the Democratic Forces Fighting for a Unified, Indivisible, Democratic, and Peace-Loving Germany." Beside it was a big cartoon captioned "Eisenhower & Adenauer, Wholesale Slaughtering Firm."

Such propaganda may not be subtle but it is effective. Everybody wants peace, and there are few Germans who don't yearn for unity. Several pro-Western Leipzigers complained to me that broadcasts from the Western world are overloaded with propaganda. Too frequently, the East Germans fail to realize that by trying to escape propaganda they are following the Soviet propaganda line. Leipzigers have short memories these days. They have evidently forgotten that on April 19, 1945, their city was occupied by the



United States First Army, which at once started feeding underprivileged children on a large scale; they have been told and told that the vast numbers of emaciated, dwarfed children and tubercular-looking people they see on the streets are "the result of inhuman treatment by the American imperialists." It's immaterial that what they are told is not true; it has been hammered into the consciousness of the population so long that it is accepted as true. Last year, my young factory apprentice told me, ten per cent of the two thousand workers in his plant were for the East German regime; this year, twenty-five per cent are for it. The most violently discontented people around Leipzig are the refugees from the formerly German, now Polish, territory east of the line formed by the Oder and Neisse Rivers. They are miserable and want to go back, even though they know there is nothing to go back to. "I used to live in a village that is now cut in half by the Polish border," a girl told me. "My uncle writes that there is a sort of no man's land along the line that is plowed twice a day, so that the footprints of anybody crossing it can be spotted at once." March was designated by the East German government as Polish-German Friendship Month, but no matter how hard Herr Eisler tried, he couldn't make anybody swallow that one. The very mention of "Oder-Neisse" is apt to start fireworks among the East Germans; in fact, Walter Ulbricht, the Deputy Premier, had to issue an edict that "whoever talks of Oder-Neisse is an enemy of peace." But there is no indication that this resentment will ever erupt into revolt. The Volkspolizei see to that.

Occasionally, pro-Western sympathies are displayed in places where the sympathizer can lose himself in a crowd, as in a sports stadium. The big sporting event of the fair was a soccer match between a team from Düsseldorf, in West Germany, and a Leipzig team. There was great jubilation in the stands when the Düsseldorfers won, 4–3. I couldn't understand this reverse enthusiasm until somebody told me that the Leipzig team was "a bunch of stupid activists." Propaganda imprints a strong mark on sports in the Soviet orbit, and sportswriters must sometimes have a hard time keeping their faces straight as they hew to the line. The day after the soccer match, I read in a paper that a Red Chinese basketball team, having completed a tour of the satellite countries, was returning home. The team had

played, and lost, thirty-three games, the composite score being 6,856–636, but had been received "with great warmth," according to the paper, which added, "They played an excellent game, but not quite so excellent as that of their foes."

LIFE in Soviet Germany is no fun, what with the secret police, ration cards, and high prices, but at least everybody has work and, in the opinion of many, "things are looking up." Germans like to be told authoritatively what to do, and in East Germany they get plenty of orders. Across the line, in West Germany, no one tells the people what to do. "If you Americans would only tell us even what *you* are going to do!" four people complained to me in Leipzig. There is much less to eat in Soviet Germany than in West Germany, but—politically very important—there is much more than there was last year. Meats, fats, sugar, milk, cheese, and most kinds of fish are still rationed, but the rations have been increased. The basic meat ration is nineteen hundred grams a month, considerably more than it is in England. Bread, flour, and barley are unrationed. Anybody who has the money can supplement his food and clothing ration at the state-owned H.O. (*Handels-Organisation*) stores, where foods and consumer goods are to be had legally at black-market prices. Just how high these prices are can be understood if one compares the weekly wages of an East German industrial worker and an American industrial worker—sixty marks, say, as against sixty dollars—and realizes that a mark consequently means as much to the East German as a dollar means to the American. In the H.O. stores, if one employs this parallel, a man's suit costs three hundred and thirty-nine dollars, a cake of soap two dollars, a pound of beef seven dollars, a typewriter seven hundred and fifty dollars, an alarm clock nineteen dollars, a hand towel six dollars, and a pair of men's shoes a hundred and twenty dollars. I was told by an employee of the nationalized shoe industry that men's shoes are sold to the H.O. stores for fourteen marks a pair. The H.O. adds a markup of fifty per cent, which increases the price to twenty-one marks, and then adds the four-hundred-per-cent "budget supplement" levied by the Soviet Military Administration, which steps the price up to a hundred and five marks. The rest is for "overhead." No matter where money comes from in East Germany, nine-tenths of it always goes into

the pockets of the Russians. A story surreptitiously going around in Leipzig tells of an old peasant woman who enters an H.O. store for the first time and sees a picture of Stalin on the wall. "Who's that, the boss?" she inquires. "No," replies an employee. "That's the cashier." Talking to a clerk in one H.O. store, I asked who could afford to buy a suit for three hundred and thirty-nine marks. He looked around, and when he saw that there was nobody nearby, he said bitterly, "Who but those activists and the uranium miners?" and quickly walked away. I understood then why so many people have signed up voluntarily to work in the uranium mines of the Erz Gebirge. With premiums and overtime, they make as much as a thousand marks a month.

Of East Germany's total economy, roughly one-third is organized into Russian-controlled corporations known as Soviet A.G.s, which produce primarily for "export" to the Soviet Union. (Many of the Baltic fisheries belong to Soviet A.G.s, and thus Soviet Germany, though it has direct access to the sea, has to ration some kinds of fish.) The Russians, through these corporations, control eighty-two per cent of Soviet Germany's gasoline industry (which explains why gasoline is smuggled, for hard West marks, from East Germany into West Germany, where the supply is relatively abundant), fifty-two per cent of the chemical industry, forty per cent of the power plants, thirty-four per cent of the coal mines, and twenty-five per cent of the optical industry, including the Zeiss works in Jena. Ninety-one per cent of East Germany's foreign trade in 1950 was with the Soviet Union and its satellites. There are constant transportation difficulties and a grave coal shortage; the production of the Zwickau-Ölsnitz coal basin is around two hundred and fifty thousand tons a month, less than the Ruhr mines produce in a day. There is a dearth of steel and other metals, especially felt in the manufacture of ball bearings, which formerly came from Schweinfurt, in West Germany. The only ball-bearing factory in East Germany cannot keep up with its quota; within the past year, the management of the factory has changed three times. But on the whole East Germany's economy is growing stronger; no more than three or four per cent of the available labor force is unemployed. Something like twenty per cent of the economy is still privately owned—but it is private only in theory. Actually, the

owners or managers of private industries are told by East Berlin what to produce and where to sell. One such enterprise, an old printing house with four hundred employees, has lately been specializing in the production of beautifully lithographed posters of Lenin.

The city's famous retail luxury trade, on the other hand, has come to a standstill. The only fur coat I saw on display anywhere was made of dyed rabbit. It was in the shopwindow of a furrier on the Brühl, which once was an important center for international fur traders. I went into the shop. The owner said the coat belonged to a customer, who had lent it to him "so the window wouldn't be empty." One of the city's leading tailors told me that he could make me a suit for a hundred and seventy marks, provided I furnished all the materials—"and that includes thread and buttons." The window of what appeared to be an expensive jewelry store had a beautiful set of Dresden baroque silver on display. I went in to inquire about the price. The clerk called the proprietor, who informed me, coughing delicately behind his hand, that the set wasn't for sale. In fact, he had nothing to sell. He could quote only prices for labor, exclusive of material; the customer had to supply that himself. "Our firm used to do work for the Court of St. James's until 1939," he said, with the faintest trace of bitterness. "However, I assure you the quality of our workmanship is as good as ever. If you could bring us the silver . . ." Then, unable to contain himself any longer, he said, "The truth is we have become just a workshop for the Russians."

THE fair itself, which I visited one afternoon, followed the pattern of similar political road shows I have seen in Prague, Budapest, and Poznań. It was a sad comedown for the once

great Leipzig Fair, which was first held in 1250, as a tribute to free trade. The Soviet Union overshadowed the show, with a display of machinery, industrial products, Zim and Zis automobiles, and hundreds of gadgets that had been manufactured in Soviet A.G. plants in East Germany. In the satellites' exhibits, there was the same official emphasis on heavy machinery, and there were the now standard photographs of machines rather than the machines themselves, and the customary abundance of charts, graphs, percentage figures, and banners bearing workers' ardent promises to fill and exceed their quotas. There was the streamlined Polish railroad train that is always featured at these events, and the three Czechoslovak Tatra automobiles for which "orders cannot be taken at the moment." The arrangement of the exhibits in the big hall reflected—like the seating arrangement of an official dinner party—the esteem in which the members of the Cominform family are currently held in Moscow. Last year, the "newly industrialized" countries of Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria were given the places of honor. This year, the exhibits of Red China and North Korea were the favored ones. China displayed hog bristles, jade, ivory, furs, furniture, jars of grain and flour, and pictures of its leaders. The Korean exhibit consisted of enlarged photographs of what were labelled American atrocities, and blown-up reprints of out-of-context statements by General Douglas MacArthur and United States High Commissioner John J. McCloy. A Korean gentleman, who introduced himself to me as a soldier of peace who had been fighting the United Nations troops only three weeks before, handed me a booklet entitled "Korea for the Koreans! Germany for the Germans!" Nearby was the Albanian exhibit, displaying containers of oil, chunks of dried fish, and sections of tree trunks. Dominating the entire hall was a red plaster statue of the Best Friend of the German People, twenty-five feet high. Classes of school children were led in, and stood before it in silent admiration. They didn't bow, as Japanese children used to bow before a statue of their Emperor, but there was the same look of almost religious devotion in their eyes.

THE evening of my visit to the fair, I took to dinner a woman I had known in Leipzig long ago, when the world seemed brighter. We went to the Intourist restaurant that has taken over Auerbach's Keller, the four-

hundred-and-twenty-year-old hall that is the scene of one of the most memorable passages in Goethe's "Faust." (The Intourist restaurants are operated by the Russians and are the most expensive in town. They are the only places where foreigners can eat, and they require payment in dollars, pounds, or other hard Western currency. The incidence of Soviet secret agents among the clientele is undoubtedly high.) I mentioned to my friend the distress I had felt that afternoon at the fair as I watched the school children being led into the presence of Stalin's statue. "Ah, yes," she said. "Who has not felt that distress? People of our age, after all, have seen both sides of the coin. *We* can reason and judge and condemn. But the children!" She paused a moment, and then went on. "People in the West can't imagine what it means to be spied on, day and night. You get to a point where you don't even have to turn your head—you know instinctively that somebody is watching you. Then you *do* turn your head, and, sure enough, there he stands, just as you had sensed. In those happier days of the past, when I could afford to dress well and use makeup, I felt flattered whenever I caught a man staring at me. Now I have no clothes I'm not ashamed of, and when a man stares at me, he isn't thinking of me as a woman—he's thinking of me as a possible enemy of the state."

—JOSEPH WECHSBERG

•

UP WITH THE LARK, DOWN WITH THE DOLDRUMS!

Agreeable to me the nascent day:
Ham, eggs, black coffee, buttered toast, and jam.
And to the pig his corn, the horse his hay;
To ewes, the cry of Ewe-hoo! from the lamb.

Acceptable to me the languorous dark:
The switches off, the covers up, come sleep.
And to the cat her fence, the dog his bark;
To ewes, their usefulness as counted sheep.

—DAVID MCCORD

•

No one can say with certainty when stamp collecting began. It must have been subsequent to May 1, 1840, when the first postage stamps were put on sale.—*Encyclopædia Britannica.*

There's the Britannica going out on a limb again!