LETTER FROM VIENNA

ONE morning recently, I stopped in for breakfast at the Café Kremser, an old-fashioned Viennese coffeehouse that smells pleasantly of fresh coffee and stale tobacco smoke. The Kremser is on the Ringstrasse, halfway between the American-occupied Hotel Bristol and the Soviet-occupied Grand Hotel. Because of its location, the Kremser is a sort of Viennese Panmunjom, frequented by Americans from the Bristol and Russians from the Grand, who are equally fond of the coffee with *Schlagobers* (whipped cream) and the delicately crisp *Kaisersemmeln* (hard rolls), which are a major cultural heritage from the late Austrian monarchy. It's the kind of place where the waiter brings you a morning paper and a glass of water the moment you've sat down, and treats you as a friend after you've been there twice. On this day, the paper was well worth reading. I had arrived in Vienna the night before on my first visit in almost a year, and a lot of things had happened in my absence. The Soviets had transferred their control of Austria's Russian Zone from military to civilian hands; Ivan Ivanovich Ilyichev had been appointed High Commissioner of the Zone, replacing Colonel General Vadim P. Sviridov. They had lifted military controls over passenger and freight traffic across the Zone boundary, permitting Austrians to travel freely about their own country for the first time since the end of the war. They had authorized the resumption of airmail service between Austria and West Germany, East Germany, and Japan. They had decreed that Austrian firms no longer needed permits to export products from the Soviet Zone. They had released to the Austrians certain port installations on the Danube that previously were set aside for the Soviet Danube Fleet. And they had permitted the Austrian government once again to award decorations for meritorious service, a privilege previously denied on the ground that the political reliability of the recipients was not sufficiently taken into account. As of now, the Austrian government can award thirteen kinds of decoration, ranging from the Grand Star of the Insignia of Honor, which is reserved for the highest dignitaries, to the Bronze Medal, which people receive for saving a child from drowning, or some such. Nothing could be more gratifying to the Austrians, who love medals even better than money.

Though I hadn't yet ordered, my waiter, who had served me several times in the past, brought me an *Einspänner*, which is black coffee in a glass, and topped off with whipped cream; a Viennese waiter never forgets a guest's coffee-drinking habits. He pointed surreptitiously at a nearby table where three men and a woman were talking in Russian. "The man with the sandy hair is the composer Dimitri Shostakovich," he told me, in a low voice. "The gray-haired one is the film director Grigori Alexandrov. They have breakfast here every morning. I asked Shostakovich to sign my autograph book, but he didn't want to. Then he looked through it, and when he saw the signature of Robert Stolz, he signed right away. Here, I'll show it to you." In Vienna, it is not unusual for a waiter to carry an autograph book around with him and ask prominent guests to write in it. In the book he handed me, Shostakovich had written several words in Russian. "It says, 'On my journey to Vienna, in June, 1953, D. Shostakovich,' " my waiter informed me. On the page that had softened the composer's resistance were inscribed the first bars of the popular Viennese *lied* "Im Prater Blüh'n Wieder die Bäume" and the signature of Robert Stolz, who is also responsible for "Two Hearts in Three-Quarter Time" and many other songs. The waiter told me that the Russian *Herren* were good customers. "They want plenty of *Schlag* and love our *Kaisersemmeln*," he said. The Viennese approve of people who breakfast on coffee with *Schlag* and *Kaisersemmeln*, and are instinctively suspicious of those who prefer tea and toast, or grapefruit and cereal.

The presence of Shostakovich made me wonder

"What with personal appearances, newspaper, radio, and TV buildup, our picture ought to be a smash. Our one problem, as I see it, is to stop the word-of-mouth reaction."

whether there might be some connection between his being seen in such a public spot and the new Soviet attitude of conciliation. Such speculation is common among Americans in Vienna, where the question "What are the Russians up to now?" is always good for another round of coffee. New arrivals from the States usually proffer a number of theories, while those who have been here a while are inclined to wait and see. But even old Vienna hands to whom I have talked recently admit that the latest Russian policy has had some potent effects. At Russian highway control points, motorists who automatically slow down to show their papers to the Soviet guards are told, "*Nix Kontroll, fahr schnell!*" and the wooden road barriers have been raised and decorated with flowers and evergreens. General Sviridov, who is still the supreme Soviet troop commander in Austria and whose public appearances in Vienna in the past were always formal and suitably grim—in uniform with all his medals—was seen attending a performance of the American Ballet Theatre at the Volksoper wearing a blue suit and a broad smile and applauding vigorously after each curtain. The next day, two pretty naïve young ladies of the ballet company walked into the Grand Hotel and asked for some luggage labels as souvenirs. A polite Soviet officer told them he was sorry but the Grand was temporarily out of labels, and the young ladies went blithely on their way. In 1947, a visiting American diplomat entered the Grand by mistake and was held prisoner for eight hours. Several months ago, in the old, tough days, an American lieutenant colonel got lost while walking in the Vienna Woods and inadvertently crossed over into the Soviet Zone; he had to spend nine hours in the Soviet Kommandantura before being released. Now American soldiers who go walking in the woods with their girls and happen to stroll across the line are picked up by Soviet patrols and handed back to the Americans with no fuss at all.

THE Austrians, in their delight over the new Russian attitude, have apparently forgotten that the Western Allies made similar concessions beginning as far back as 1946, when they let Austrians travel freely in the West's zones. In August, 1949, the Americans abolished highway controls inside their zone, and in August, 1951, they abolished military controls at the borders of their zone. There were no outbursts of joy among the population. "The Americans only did what was expected of them,"

an Austrian told me blandly the other day. During the recent wave of exultation throughout the country, even Austrians in high places seem to have overlooked the fact that the Soviets have not yet made any major concessions. Chancellor Julius Raab, the forceful, ambitious leader of the business-and-industry faction in the Catholic People's Party, has proclaimed that "the Russians are prepared to come to an understanding." Actually, the Russians have offered no proof of such preparedness. The Austrian peace treaty remains unsigned. Nothing has been said about withdrawing the fifty thousand Russian troops that are now on Austrian soil. In their zone, the Russians still encroach upon Austrian jurisdiction and interfere with domestic affairs, still hold many political prisoners in the penitentiary at Stein (they have, however, agreed to release six hundred Austrian nationals who are now confined in Soviet prison camps on various political charges), and still run several large Austrian properties, among them the Zistersdorf oil fields, which have become Europe's largest source of petroleum west of the Soviet Union. Four-man teams of the International Patrol still ride around in sedans—the Western Allies supply Chevrolets for three months at a time and the Soviets a Pobeda (Victory) every fourth month—but there is never any friendliness between the Western and Russian soldiers. Not long ago, the Soviet and American members of a patrol got into a soldierly argument over who should sit next to the driver. The Russian called the American a "fat boy," and the American retorted that the Russian, who had big ears, looked like "a Viennese taxi going downhill with both doors open." This exchange of courtesies, carried on in bad German, had to be straightened out at a special meeting of the four provost marshals of the Vienna Interallied Command. On the day I arrived, two Russians killed a girl in the suburb of Mödling, in the Russian Zone. With the exception of the American-controlled *Wiener Kurier*, which calls a Russian a Russian, the Viennese papers politely referred to the criminals as "two uniformed deserters from the occupation forces."

By timing their minor concessions nicely, the Soviets have won the most recent round in the interminable tug-of-war between the East and the West in Austria. There is now neutralist talk even in anti-Communist circles; one hears the old, familiar remark that "the Russians aren't so bad, after all." The new situation appears to play directly in-

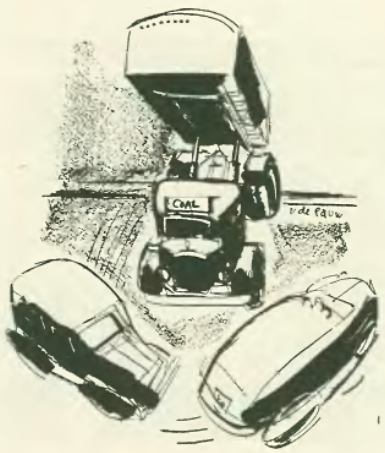
to the hands of Chancellor Raab, whose friends give him credit for the Soviet concessions and ignore critics who point out that no one outside the Kremlin has any reason to claim credit for anything the Russians do. Raab has completely eclipsed his predecessor, Leopold Figl, a warmhearted, courageous man who steered Austria through the difficult postwar years and who once, at the unveiling of a Red Army monument in Vienna in 1946, had the audacity to utter some kind words about what the Western Allies had done for his listeners. But Figl represented the farmers' interests in the People's Party, and though the Austrian farmers constitute a powerful element in times of crisis, they always lose ground during an era of prosperity, when the businessmen and industrialists come to the fore. And the spokesman of the businessmen and industrialists is Raab, a man who talks a good deal about "realities."

In the most recent elections, last February, the Austrians voted overwhelmingly for the two parties that have made up Austria's coalition government since 1945—the People's Party and the Socialists. The Socialists led the People's Party by thirty-seven thousand votes but, owing to a peculiar twist in the election laws, got one less parliamentary seat. The extremists were decisively beaten; the Communist Party got five per cent of the vote and the neo-Nazi Verband der Unabhängigen got eleven per cent. But if Austrian politics are fairly settled, the economic facts of life are often bizarre. Until last year, an Austrian trying to open a business with fewer than twenty employees had to obtain a license from a committee of his competitors. Restrictive trade practices and archaic guild rules, some of which go back to the era of the Empress Maria Theresa, are still in force. Merchants caught keeping their stores open as little as five minutes past the closing hour are fined. Over a hundred and thirty thousand people, out of a population of seven million, are unemployed, and so far no solution has been found for this problem. But the runaway inflation, which in one year, 1951, drove prices up forty per cent, has been checked; the schilling is stable; industrial production has risen to a hundred and seventy per cent of the prewar level. These are sad days for the black-marketeers who hang around the Café Mozart; people now go to the banks to change foreign currency, at the official rate. Still, money is scarce. The shops are full of unbought goods, and doctors and dentists com-

plain volubly that patients aren't paying their bills.

DESPITE all the difficulties of life here, the charm of the city seems to be indestructible. Talk of an impending Third World War has subsided, and with it the dreadful feeling of claustrophobia that used to afflict Americans in the city, surrounded (as they still are) by the Soviet Zone and its Red Army. (The American forces in Vienna at present consist of three military-police companies and one headquarters company.) Many Americans have taken up the Viennese habit of having an afternoon snack at Demel's, whose owner, Christian Demel, was once the confectioner to the Imperial Court. Veteran Demel waitresses, many of them now dignified ladies in their sixties, can recall the days when the establishment's discipline was so strict that they were marched to church in formation on Sundays. They still are forbidden to address the customers except in the third person. Demel's is always putting on some sort of special show. Currently, its large windows are filled with an exhibition of various *Torten* and their recipes, which date back to the nineteenth century.

A frequent guest at Demel's is President Theodor Körner of Austria, a slender, white-bearded man of eighty and a descendant of an old, aristocratic family whose name was originally von Körner. He was once a general in the Kaiser's Army, and right after the Second World War he became Mayor of Vienna. He is often seen in the streets of Vienna—an erect figure, despite his age, walking along without a bodyguard and without hat or topcoat, even in wintertime. He likes to shop and to talk with the people and listen to their problems—a latter-day Harun al-Rashid. Körner loves music and often attends concerts and the Opera. Every year, he



personally launches the Vienna Festival of music and drama.

Anyone who dislikes music would have a hard time in Vienna. When the International Chamber of Commerce convened here earlier this year, it held its sessions in the Konzerthaus, which is the largest hall in town; on the first day, the delegates listened to the Wiener Symphoniker play the "Festliches Praeludium," composed by Richard Strauss for the opening of the Konzerthaus in 1913. Throughout the delegates' stay, their business meetings were interspersed with music. When it came time to go home, a bemused American executive told one of his Viennese hosts, "I've heard more damn music during this congress than I've heard in my whole life back in the States." During the annual festival, the Vienna State Opera performed twenty-two different operas on twenty-two successive evenings. On one night recently, three State Opera companies, all of them first-rate, performed three operas simultaneously—"La Forza del Destino" at the Theater an der Wien, "Tannhäuser" at the Volksoper, and "The Marriage of Figaro" in the courtyard of Schönbrunn Palace. It is typical of this city that at the end of the third act of "The Marriage of Figaro," as Figaro and Susanna started their wedding procession, the castle was lighted up and its baroque façade became part of the stage décor. It is also typical that in the course of a lawsuit brought by a Yugoslav baritone against the Opera for breach of contract, the court held a session on the stage of the Konzerthaus, where the plaintiff rendered several arias for the judge in order to disprove the Opera's claim that he wasn't good enough. The judge happened to be a former teacher at the Music Academy, who, as one Viennese paper noted with delight, "always carries musical scores as well as lawbooks in his briefcase," and the baritone won his suit.

DURING my first week in Vienna, I saw Shostakovich every night at the Opera or at a concert and every morning at the Café Kremser, but we did not establish even a nodding acquaintance, the way two strangers who keep running into each other in less complex parts of the world often do. As an admirer of Shostakovich's music, I rather hoped that I would get a chance to meet the man, and when it became apparent that I would not at the Café Kremser, I asked a Russian correspondent for Tass, the official Soviet news agency, with whom I had a slight ac-

quaintance, if he knew how it could be arranged; it seemed as good a moment as any to test the Russians' new sweetness-and-light policy. The correspondent said sure, he could fix it up, but in view of experiences I'd had with Soviet correspondents, I assumed that that was the last I would hear from him on the subject. To my surprise, he called me up the next morning at my room in the Bristol and said, "You are invited to a private reception in honor of Shostakovich at the Soviet Embassy tonight. Where shall I bring the invitation, *Herr Kollege* [colleague]?"

I told him anyplace that suited him, and tried to think of some spot that he would consider correct and neutral. I could hardly believe my ears; as far as I knew, no American correspondent had been invited to the Soviet Embassy since the start of the cold war.

"Suppose I bring it to the Bristol?" the Tass man said.

"Would you come here?" I asked, more astonished than ever. In the past, a Soviet correspondent would have been more likely to arrange to meet an American correspondent on the moon.

"But of course," he said. "I'll be over in half an hour."

He showed up as promised, and I met him in the lobby. He gave me an invitation, typed in German, that read, "A delegation of Soviet *Kulturschaffende* [culture creators] is in Vienna for a short stay. . . . The plenipotentiary of the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with the Countries Abroad has the honor to invite you most cordially for cocktails, from 8:30 to 10:30 P.M. . . . Street clothes."

"Just fill in your name," said the Tass man. "I'll be there myself, and I'll introduce you to Shostakovich." He looked around the lobby and said it wasn't bad there. Mindful of the new trend, I invited him to lunch. He replied that his wife was waiting for him at home, but he accepted a drink at the bar.

"Whiskey?" I asked.

"By all means," he said.

When the drinks came, he raised his glass and said, "To peace."

"To peace," I said.

A few Americans who were seated nearby watched us curiously. The Bristol is full of Americans who have to do business with the Russians in the day-to-day operations of the Allied Council. If the Americans remain cool toward them in the months to come, the Communist press may accuse them of being "warmongers;" on the other hand, if the Americans enter into social relations

with them, embarrassing questions may be asked back home. It's quite a dilemma.

That night, I left the State Opera before the end of a fine performance of "Ariadne auf Naxos" and drove over to the Soviet Embassy, on Reisnerstrasse. The Embassy is in the formerly aristocratic Third District, and the Third District is in the British sector—just another instance of the geographical confusion that arises in a city as split up as Vienna. The building dates from the early nineteenth century, prior to the Congress of Vienna; it was severely bombed during the last war and little remains of its original façade. It was almost completely rebuilt after the war, in accordance with Moscow specifications, which called for an ugly neoclassical style. When I arrived, the building was brilliantly lighted. The doors were wide open, and I walked in. At the foot of a large marble staircase, a man in civilian clothes wished me *Guten Abend*. When I showed him my invitation, he barely glanced at it and then asked me to go up to the second floor. There seemed to be no one else around. Upstairs, all the doors were open. Crystal chandeliers gleamed above red carpets and a profusion of marble. After walking through several rooms, I came upon a reception hall where groups of men and women were standing around talking. A large buffet had been set up along one wall. Most of the men were wearing square-cut jackets that fell straight down as though made of wood, and bell-bottomed pants. The Tass correspondent came over to me and we shook hands. I asked him who the other guests were and he pointed out members of the Soviet diplomatic colony, two high-ranking Red Army officers, and diplomats of the satellite states. Several of the guests had brought their wives. He then led me to one end of the buffet, where many small glasses of vodka were arranged on a tray. He gave me a glass and took one himself. "Russian vodka," he said, and looked at me expectantly.

I didn't let him down. "To peace," I said.

"To peace," he said.

The vodka was good but unusually mild. I remarked that a very acceptable vodka was being made in the States these days. At this point, a man who had been standing nearby, listening to us, stepped up, and the Tass correspondent introduced him as a colleague who had been in America. "You must mean Smirnoff vodka," the newcomer said, smiling agreeably. "Not bad, but the

really good vodka—all good vodka—comes from Russia."

The three of us moved along the buffet, and the Tass man filled a plate for me. "There's only red caviar," he said apologetically. "But the next time you come we'll have black. From Astrakhan."

"Yes, you must come again," said the other man.

"Another vodka?" said the Tass man. "And perhaps a little walk through the hall?"

It was 1946 all over again, when we Americans were invited to the Soviet Officers' Club at the Hofburg in Vienna, and to similar receptions in Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest, at which each toast was a ritual and even the walk through the hall was part of a prearranged program, like an obligatory visit to a state farm or a new steel plant or a workers' library. The Tass man took my arm, pointing out more prominent guests and talking conversationally. Next week, his wife and child were going to Moscow, he said. It would mean a long train trip for them—three days and three nights, by way of Kiev. The child would go to school in Moscow; there was no real school in Austria for the children of Soviet Occupation personnel—only a kindergarten for the smallest of them. The Tass man went on to say regretfully that there was also no place in Vienna where he could get *borsch* and *pirogy* and other Russian dishes; the cooking at the officers' messes and at the Grand Hotel was done by Austrians. "Always Wiener schnitzel," he said. "But we have good wine from the Crimea in our stores for fourteen schillings [fifty-six cents] a bottle."

I asked him how he liked life in Vienna.

"I like my work here," he said in an expressionless voice. "And skiing in winter. I come from Siberia, where we

do a lot of skiing. If you ever go to Russia, you must travel there. And you must see the wonderful new cities the Soviet Union has built in Central Asia. Tell me," he went on, lowering his voice, "that car I saw you in, it is a new one?"

I said it was a new Buick.

"Does it have what they call automatic transmission?"

"Yes, it does."

"And you do no shifting when you stop and start again? Amazing!"

I invited him to take a ride with me some day, and he accepted with pleasure.

A man in a blue suit and pearl-gray tie joined us and was introduced as the *Pravda* correspondent. "Well, well, well!" he said to me, with a smile. "Aren't you a little worried about being here alone among us? What would the people back home say if they could see you now?" The Russians enjoyed this little joke, chuckling and nudging each other. Then, for a few minutes I had to listen to the old line about how American correspondents can write only what their Wall Street employers want them to write and how they are always looking for the worst when they write about the Soviet Union. In spite of this, the *Pravda* man said, the Soviet Union had decided to let Westerners in, as soon as Intourist, the Soviet travel agency, had completed the necessary arrangements.

"And when the Americans come to Russia, they will be free to go anywhere they want," the Tass man said.

"They'll see with their own eyes what we have achieved," said the *Pravda* man.

"The *Kollege* has a new car with automatic transmission," the Tass man said to the *Pravda* man. "No shifting whatsoever. Just steps on the gas and goes."

"Do many people in America own cars like that?" the *Pravda* man asked.

"Millions," I said.

There was a short silence, and then the two Russians showed me into an adjoining room, where Shostakovich was sitting at a table with some other men. They brought him over and introduced him. Shostakovich is a frail man who looks younger than his age, which is forty-seven; his appearance makes one wonder how he could have had the physical endurance to create such a great work of art as his Seventh Symphony during the shattering siege of Leningrad twelve years ago. He was wearing brown-rimmed glasses and kept puffing nervously on a long cigarette. His hands were trembling a

little and he spoke in a low voice. Serious composers everywhere have their problems—such as how to make a living and be a composer at the same time—but Shostakovich must have faced a few problems that Western composers don't have to contend with. Back in 1931, when he was twenty-five, he wrote, "Music cannot be without a political basis, an idea which the bourgeoisie finds hard to understand. . . . Music is no longer an end in itself but a living weapon in the struggle." Five years later, he was accused of "counter-revolutionary tendencies," and his Fourth Symphony, which was already in the hands of the Leningrad Philharmonic, was withdrawn and has never been performed. His Fifth Symphony, which he composed in 1937, was received enthusiastically, but later, along with Prokofiev and some other Soviet composers, he appeared to be in trouble again. Presumably he is once more in good standing with the Party; otherwise, he would hardly have been allowed to travel even as far as Vienna.

Shostakovich told me, through the Tass man, that he was working on his Tenth Symphony, which would bring to an end a cycle that had started with his Seventh. Like each of his other works, he said, the Tenth will have a central theme, but he didn't want to discuss it until it was completed. He had just written a string quartet, his fifth, and was working on a violin concerto. He didn't know much about the technique and the possibilities of the violin and had been consulting the greatest living Russian violinist, David Oïstrakh, on the subject. Oïstrakh was going to perform the concerto at its première in Moscow this fall. I ventured the opinion that it would probably be a difficult concerto, adding that some of Shostakovich's chamber music seemed very difficult to me.

Shostakovich looked surprised. "That's not what Oïstrakh says," he

PARIS MEMO

BUMPED into a tourist (from Salt Lake City) last night at a chi-chi little bar off the Champs Elysées. He turned out to be not only a gentleman, but a scholar.

"Paris sure is a nice city," I said as an opener. But he shook his head.

"Not what it used to be. I miss the old Paris, the Paris of Carpentier and Gaby DeLys. You call this Paris? Nothing's the same—except, of course, the Dubonnet. Ah (taking a sip) . . . that will never change!"

(We pause a moment to tell you why Dubonnet will never change. Parisians know it as the ideal drink at lunchtime . . . cocktail time . . . in fact, any time. Originally created to be a mild aperitif, Dubonnet now is as omni-horal to Frenchmen as tea is to Britons.)

". . . no sir, it's not like the Paris of old." It was after midnight and this Salt Lake City fellow was still drinking Dubonnet like he had a financial interest in it, so I talked him into going to Maxim's for Crepes Suzette.

Oh, yes . . . and another Dubonnet.

replied. "*He* doesn't have any trouble with it."

Shostakovich went on to say that he was working hard, and always working. In Moscow, he gets up at seven and immediately starts composing; he has a house in the country, and when he is there he starts at five. He was aware that his works are being played in the United States; he had heard several American recordings of them and liked those conducted by Koussevitzky, Toscanini, and Stokowski best. When I asked what composers are most often performed in Russia, he named Bach, Beethoven, Glinka, and Moussorgsky. Of course, he added quickly, *all* composers are performed in Russia. Running his fingers through his short hair, he said, "Just before I left Moscow, I listened to Gustav Mahler's First Symphony. [Mahler was artistic director of the Imperial Vienna Opera from 1897 to 1907.] Only the formalism of certain moderns is rejected by our audiences."

"Schoenberg?" I asked.

"Schoenberg is performed up to the time of his *Gurre-Lieder*, in the early nineteen-hundreds," said Shostakovich. He thereupon got up and excused himself, saying he'd had a hard day, and went back to his table.

I had a last glass of vodka with my Russian *Kollegen*.

"We must have another meeting soon," the Tass man said to me.

"Yes," said the *Pravda* man. "You must come again."

Then I walked down the marble staircase and through the open doors into the dark street, and drove off in my Buick, without shifting gears once.

—JOSEPH WECHSBERG

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The heavy rains during the latter part of last week were welcome for crops in Columbia County but were not at all helpful to the 101st Annual Columbia County Fair. Platitudes are due Harold Lochner, Fair Secretary and Manager, and the many others who worked so hard to make the Fair a worthwhile event. While the rains almost washed away the entire Fair Grounds and nullified any chance for the Fair Association to make a profit Lochner and his colleagues can know that their efforts were appreciated.—*Portage (Wis.) Columbian.*

There's *one* platitude for you, Lochner.

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HIGHER MATHEMATICS DEPT.

[*From the Times*]

The seven-and-one-half pound Graphic 70 takes pictures 2¼ by 2⅜ inches, a negative format which when enlarged four times produces an eight-by-ten-inch print without cropping.