

# BERLIN— A Divided City

AS an ex-Berliner I was able to make comparisons between the four Berlins I have known—the capital of the old German Empire, the capital of the ill-fated democratic Weimar Republic, the capital of the Third Reich of Nazi Germany, and now the meeting place of two ideologies, a sort of Eastern and Western world in miniature. Berlin today is the capital only of the German Democratic Republic (which the West Germans always refer to, disparagingly, as the "Soviet Zone") for the Western capital has been established in Bonn. However, the political fate of millions in both Germanies is still bound up in the destinies of Berlin.

It has been calculated that the war left Berlin with nearly 240 million cubic yards of debris. Perhaps you can better imagine this as 80 million truck loads of shattered buildings—houses, factories, churches, hospitals, museums and schools, which amount to more than one-sixth of all the rubble to be found in Germany. Everywhere—and this was 11 years after the war—I saw machines with conveyor belts and mobile crushers, creating Berlin's new building material from the old. Ironical and proud, the Berliner points to rubble hills hundreds of feet high which have been planted with trees and shrubs and are now pleasure and sports grounds. It has truly become the greenest city in the world, and the town planners assured me that they keep to a five-to-one ratio of building acres to parklands.

Once again the boulevards have been built to keep the metropolis radiantly gay with their 9000 garden restaurants and cafes and their elegant shops and first night cinemas. Berlin's "Milky Way" is the name given to these boulevards by the night pilots who fly over their glittering sea of lights.

Three hundred years before New Zealand was discovered, a Prussian Prince built from Berlin to his hunting lodge a road which has become the most famous, most elegant and, by foreigners and Berliners, most beloved avenue in Berlin—the Kurfürstendamm, a delightful town planners' dream of the streets that cities of the future will have. It was here that I was invited to the luxurious hotel Kempinski to a luncheon in honour of English journalists. The food was excellent, the Mosel wine delightful, the cigars colossal, and the conversation boring. In spite of the ability of all the Germans there to understand English, there was a translator, the solitary woman in the party. Between mouthfuls of chocolate parfait and whipped cream, she told us everything in German or English. I was told later that this was to give the Germans a better chance to think out the correct answer (for the English) on Germany's and Berlin's top problem: "Re-unification." I felt sorry for the reporters of Reuters and the Associated Press for they, in sometimes straightforward and sometimes subtle questions, asked the West Germans *how*—how do you think it is possible to reunify Germany, or Berlin with Germany; the Germans merely kept on answering *why* there should be re-unification and mentioned no methods.

West Germans try to frighten you from visiting Berlin at all, and, once there, West Berliners try to frighten you from visiting East Berlin. When I

The second of two talks, broadcast recently from National stations of the NZBS, in which ODO STREWE describes life in Berlin today

told my own mother, who, incidentally, has always taken a very rational and objective view of East Germany, that I wished to visit East Berlin, she showed fear.

"Do you really want to go?" she asked me. At that moment the roar of an electric train passing gave her the desired background noise to say dramatically: "Did you hear that train? It is driving from East Berlin through West Berlin into the Soviet Zone." "Where does it go to?" I enquired. "To Potsdam. When you're on the platform you're in West Berlin, but all the railway staff are from the East and the moment you step on to the train you are under Communist jurisdiction. You are quite free to travel to and from East Berlin, but you must be careful not to drive one station beyond the border of East Berlin. If you do you will be in the Soviet Zone of Germany and liable to immediate arrest because you have no visa to enter and that means weeks before you return."

Mothers are always worried about their children and that is understandable, but Berlin mothers have these added anxieties. Even if their sons are quite a bit past their 21st birthday, mothers still say: "And don't forget not to fall asleep in the train, and don't forget, you need East German money to pay for your fare back."

To get this money I discovered a peculiarity that West Berlin alone has—small shops called "Exchange Offices" which have posters in their windows giving you the daily exchange rate. This is regulated by the demand for East or West German money. One West German mark (that is approximately 2/-) generally gets you four and a half East German marks. Once upon a time the West Berliner made use of this fabulous exchange rate and bought in the shops of East Berlin. Today you need a friend in East Berlin willing to take the risk of shopping for you and spending a few years in gaol if he is caught. As you can imagine, it is not easy to take much advantage of the exchange rate these days. We can't blame the East Berliners for their prohibitions for no economy in the world could bear such a trade, and you have to produce your East German passport before you can buy yourself anything from a cup of coffee to a television set, with the single exception of books. And may I say, in passing that the books in the East Sector are as fine in their typography and as high in their level of contents as you could wish for.

As I drove through Berlin in the fast, clean, electric trains, I noticed that



MODERN FLATS, WEST BERLIN

"A five-to-one ratio of building acres to parklands"

everyone rode in silence staring into nothingness or reading the papers, being extremely careful to be seen reading only those papers published in their own zone. This is a self-imposed discipline, based on self-preservation.

"You have only to look at their shoes," a West Berliner said to me as we rode into East Berlin. "You can recognise which sector they come from"—meaning that the people from East Berlin are literally down at heel. Unfortunately for the East Germans he was right and it doesn't take long to find out that you are travelling through the East, not only by looking at the shoes but also at clothing. And it is not only the attire of the people that changes, the whole environment becomes different like the change of a stage setting.

One drives eastwards from the juke-box glitter of Berlin's West End through a no-man's land of ruins and policemen to the dowdy and pretentious primness of—the name remains unchanged—the Stalinallee; from a tinselled world of flickering soft drink advertisements to a drab world of meaningless red-and-white political slogans. Neither shows the Germans at their best and no good comes from the clash between them. But I soon discovered that if you have no black-market intentions and don't carry instructions for spy organisations across the Eastern borders, you can feel quite at home in East Berlin, or at least, get used to walking under the watchful eyes of uniformed, heavily armed men and women patrolling stations, standing in factory and coffee entrances, smoking on check-points or just lounging on street corners. The array of the colours of their uniforms was quite startling, but they were all very polite and in spite of all prophecies of my western friends, I was never black-mailed, arrested, offered any bribes, or requested to become a "willing tool of some kind of red conspiracy." The East Germans are far too busy maintaining the industrial

progress they have achieved in the last 12 years which has now placed them as the fifth industrial power in Europe.

"Our opera," says the Westerner, "will soon rival Brecht's famous theatre in the East." You can make the comparison yourself—when you can get tickets. Culturally—in theatre, opera, music (including ecclesiastical music), ballet and film, East Berlin has a slight edge on West Berlin. I found the officials friendly and the younger generation in offices and broadcasting stations as happy as any young people anywhere in the world. This is easily understandable for the intellectual leads an extremely comfortable life by comparison with the worker. What then are East Berlin's greatest disadvantages and advantages? To be fair one must remember that East Germany did not get millions from Marshall Aid—on the contrary, it had to pay reparation to Russia. East Germany, too, was far more devastated by the Nazis' last stand, suffering from their scorched earth policy and the understandable revenge of the Red Army. East Germany has no Ruhr Gebiet, which means it has to import all its iron-ore, and, in order to smelt this, it has to import anthracite coal from Soviet Russia and pay with export articles. The Germans seem to be doubtful who is having the better deal and there's a current joke to the effect that "Lyenko the Russian genius in biology has bred a new animal—it is a cross between a cow and a giraffe—it feeds in East Germany and is milked in Russia!"

In spite of all this, conditions have improved in the last few years and if consumer goods are sometimes in short supply that's owing to the preference that is given to industrialisation. A growing bureaucracy and the lack of trained personnel and an efficient managerial class, have also caused many state enterprises to work badly or with financial losses. But unlike countries such as Hungary, the leaders of East Germany have been relatively diplomatic; for instance, realising the Germans' romantic nature, they have not condemned Father Christmas or the Easter Bunny to death or ignominy—in fact, quite the contrary. Last Christmas I visited in East Berlin a very large Christmas market and festival which had all the trimmings of angels and stars and wise men. I saw thousands of East Berliners eat great quantities of roast chicken and when I mentioned that to a West Berliner he said, "Oh, you see, after the war when you have nothing to eat—food is the most important thing and satisfying the appetite is the first step to prosperity." The implication was, of course, though my West German friend would never have admitted it directly, that the food situation in the Eastern Zone has improved enormously.

East Berlin also has some magnificent parks. The cliché of Stalinistic architecture seems to be coming to an end, but East Berlin is still permeated with an unsophisticated spirit of messianic missionary hope, and upholders of the regime share, in common with the naive and the puritanical, the idea that they alone have the absolute truth... All dictatorships are puritanical at heart, and the dictatorship of the proletariat is no exception. There were no unemployed or prostitutes in the streets of East Berlin, but neither was there the freedom to be one.

Between one footpath and another in this single city, Berlin, you find epitomised, as it were, the conflicts and passions which divide the world today.