

W. BERLIN: FORTY YEARS AFTER

by Julian Crandall Hollick

If you want to understand West Berlin's history and present political reality, take the train from Hanover or Hamburg. The border crossing from West to East Germany gives the first clue. Barbed wire and high fences line the track; police line the station platform. The few East German civilians who are waiting for their own trains seem to look right through you as though you were invisible—a ghost train heading for Berlin.

Then follow hours of chugging through the silent East German countryside, until the train slows with dramatic emphasis and eases its way between prison camp walls, over a trestle bridge, and into West Berlin. But now the visitor has learned two important things about West Berlin that the air traveler will never know: that it lies deep inside East Germany, literally an island in a hostile Communist sea; and it is wonderfully green—almost a country in miniature—with forests and lakes and a feeling of spaciousness unique among cities in the Western world.

The East German border police are no longer quite so impersonal and glacial in manner as they were a few years ago. That also says something about the city's status. After thirty-five years of destruction, blockade, Soviet ultimatums, and physical division, West Berlin's physical security finally appears certain, recognized by both East and West. Although there are still incidents at the Wall, it's been fifteen years since the signing of the 1971 Four-Power Agreements, guaranteeing the status of the city.

Indeed, life in Berlin has become peaceful and routine. Up until the 1970s most Western newspapers and television networks kept full-time Berlin correspondents² for such was the city's status as the focal point of East-West tension. Today the city houses a few freelance "stringers," nothing more. Berlin has simply faded from the headlines; and not even the renewed superpower glowering of the past few years has affected the city's relations with East Germany or the Soviet Union.

If the threat from without has faded, the threat from within—according to many Berliners and the many foreign visitors who make the ritual pilgrimage to the city and Checkpoint Charlie—has dramatically increased. Berlin, it is said, is a dying city, kept alive through massive sub-

sides from Bonn and the Western allies. On the Berlin Wall someone has scribbled the slogan "Half-dead, half-alive." Since the Wall was built in 1961 the city's population has declined from 2.2 million to 1.8 million. In the past ten years alone, a quarter of a million Berliners have emigrated to West Germany, and deaths still exceed births by more than twenty thousand every year.

Grim statistics. But behind the numbers is a more positive story. Of course the city's population has declined, but largely because it was inflated at the start. In 1945, Berlin's population was swollen by refugees fleeing before the advancing Red Army. Then the age pyramid was stood on its head when hundreds of thousands of widows of former Reich civil servants decided to stay on in Berlin and collect their pensions. They are the group now dying off at alarming rates.

Until 1961, the problems of a former capital struggling to adjust to its new status were masked by the steady influx of refugees from East Germany via East Berlin. When that tap was turned off, Berlin's age structure started to look fatal, and headlines and speeches proclaimed that the city was literally dying of old age. Today, however, the issue is only obliquely referred to, if at all, by the city's politicians and officials. The number of people over sixty-five has declined from 25 per cent of the population and tends toward the West German average of 13 per cent. City planners have now begun to see virtue in a smaller population and a lessening of the strain on public services, although they still offer hefty tax breaks and other financial subsidies to attract West Germans to the city.

YOUTHFUL ALTERNATIVES

Another age factor is the city's attraction for the young. There are more students in Berlin than in all of greater Boston. Berlin continues to live off its prewar reputation as the most cosmopolitan and open of German cities, where even conservative politicians see the virtue of tolerating experiments in communal living. It is true that when the good citizens of West Germany are tucked in bed at 10:30 each night, much of West Berlin is just starting to come alive. But the image of the wild, swinging city is also a bit exaggerated. By 2:00 A.M. the bars and clubs are closed or closing, the transvestites have taken off their makeup for another day, and even the young seem to have gone home. Berlin may be naughty, but not quite as naughty as it claims to be.

There is another, more practical, reason why so many

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young men come to the city. Because of Berlin's martial law status as a separate entity, students in West Berlin can avoid West Germany's military draft. At last count there were probably as many as ten thousand young West Germans in the city who had come to avoid military service. The presence of this sizable antidraft movement coupled with Berlin's reputation for political and social tolerance have made the city into one of the most radical in Western Europe. It was on the elegant Kurfürstendamm in October, 1968, that riot police broke up anti-Vietnam war demonstrations led by Rudi Dutschke, "Rudi the Red."

Dutschke is now dead. But the city's radical reputation lives on. In 1979, in the working-class district of Kreuzberg (which looks anything but rundown when compared with many American cities), students looking for affordable rental housing tried to move into apartment buildings left deliberately vacant by property speculators. In doing so, they ran up against the German reverence for private property, and the world's press was once again full of scenes of street battles between police and students.

Politicians in the ruling Christian Democratic (CDU) administration now candidly admit that the students had a genuine grievance. Office blocks and apartment buildings were sprouting up in the city, financed almost entirely by taxpayers. The political irony is that it was the Social Democrats who used force rather than persuasion against the students, thereby losing much of their credit with the young. The result was the birth of the "Alternative Liste"—the "Alternatives" being West Berlin's version of the Green movement. In 1981 the movement received 7 per cent in city elections—in some districts considerably more, enough to elect members to the city Senate and exercise real political control in districts like Kreuzberg. In elections this past March, the AL, as they are popularly known, nearly doubled their following to 13 per cent, and these were not only the young.

This support has been gained even though the housing issue has been largely resolved. The Christian Democrats ended twenty-five years of Social Democratic rule by claiming to have a formula to end the housing scandal. And they did. Under the calm, moderate leadership of Richard von Weizsäcker (now West Germany's president), the CDU and the AL sat down together and resolved the crisis. The CDU leaned on the property owners to sign rental contracts with the students, legalizing their squatting. The Alternatives, for their part, gave the new city government the benefit of the doubt and acted as intermediaries whenever asked.

Four years of the Alternatives in the Senate has also calmed most of the wilder fears of the political establishment. Parliamentary sessions are now a good deal livelier; the AL members work long hours and dig deep. The SPD still can't find a kind word to say about them, but the Christian Democrats, if somewhat condescendingly, say they welcome the AL for opening up political life and bringing neglected environmental and social issues to the forefront of city debate.

Some of its ideas are clearly impractical. In the recent elections the AL made great play of banning cars from the city center on the grounds that exhaust fumes kill the city's trees. But Berlin is simply too vast to function without autos, and the city's forests are manifestly not dying. Automobile plants also employ one out of every seven adult

Berliners.

Interestingly, the Alternatives have formed a de facto alliance with Mayor Eberhard Diepgen to push for an end to some of the more archaic remnants of the Four-Power Allied occupation of the city. Under the 1971 agreements, Berlin is still officially under martial law: Over five thousand ordinances drawn up by military commanders in 1945 are still in effect. In theory, Berlin is an occupied city; in reality, the Allied military presence is fairly low-key and unobtrusive.

The mayor and the Alternatives are pushing for the abrogation of these martial law ordinances on the grounds that they are anachronistic and antidemocratic. It is not hard to see what they mean. Any implement that can be construed as a weapon is banned from the city—a category that can be interpreted as including kitchen knives, hang gliders, and ceremonial swords, as well as firearms. Berliners are also supposed to carry their passport on their person at all times. No demonstrations are allowed near military personnel.

Most of these restrictions have been ignored in the breach over the years. But recently, overzealous local prosecutors, perhaps seeking to curb radical groups, have started to dig into the military manuals and refer cases for prosecution under martial law. The Allies have then to decide whether there is a violation of martial law; if there is, the case is turned back to the Berlin courts for prosecution.

The most spectacular case occurred last year when two young Green Peace activists were prosecuted for illegal possession of "war materials." Their "crime" was to have flown a hot-air balloon over the Wall into East Germany to protest nuclear war. The East Germans returned the balloons, and there the matter might have died but for one zealous Berlin prosecutor eager to deter such escapades. He forced the Allies to set in motion their own judicial process, which ended up in a West Berlin traffic court. The judge, clearly in sympathy with the accused, let them off with a token fine and issued a public warning to the prosecutor's office not to bring similar cases before the court.

In a more serious episode, the Allies have recently angered many Berliners by expropriating large tracts of farmland inside the city for development as firing ranges and military housing. In one instance enraged citizens tried to seek redress from Washington, only to be told that U.S. courts have no jurisdiction over Berlin. A similar case is now before the High Court in London, in which Berliners are challenging the British Army's right to make the decision to plough up farmland near Gatow for use as a tank-firing range.

Both Mayor Diepgen and the Alternatives argue that this is a travesty of democracy and that Berliners should enjoy full legal rights. The Allies are sympathetic, but point out that any alteration of the city's status will give an opening to the Russians if they want to abrogate any part of the 1971 agreements. Interestingly, most of the AL want Allied military occupation to continue; they just don't want too many visible reminders of who lost the war.

THE THREAT AND THE HOPE

The Alternatives are also credited with prodding the established parties to do something about the city's large Turkish population, which now stands at 120,000 or 8 per

cent of the total population. West Berlin's "Turkish problem" is pretty much West Germany's guest worker problem in microcosm. The word "ghetto" is frequently used to describe the concentration of the Turks in three Berlin districts, of which Kreuzberg is merely the largest and best known. By American standards, these are clean and well-organized lower-middle-class suburbs. True, all the store signs are in Turkish and many of the women still wear the heavy woolen coats and shawls of their native Anatolia. And Kreuzberg must have the largest concentration of shish kebab stands outside Istanbul. But Kreuzberg is definitely not a ghetto. And the discrimination suffered by the Turks would make a black American smile.

Most of the Turks came in the late 1960s to fill the low-paid jobs that West Berliners were no longer willing to perform. They spoke little if any German, their wives even less, and they found no framework in which to express their culture and their religion. Fifteen years later the Berlin Senate has gone out of its way to provide whatever the Turks want. The problem is that the Turks seem to want to have their cake and eat it too. They want all the legal safeguards, including the right to vote in district elections, but without taking on the obligations of German citizenship. Spokesmen for the Turkish community insist that it is virtually impossible for them to meet the requirements of German citizenship. The Berlin Social Services department notes that of the thirty thousand Turks who were eligible to apply for German citizenship in 1984, only two hundred actually did so.

There have been a few instances of violence over the past couple of years, but not enough to qualify as a form of race discrimination. Germans respect the Turks' capacity for hard work—in Germany a great virtue. Immigration has been halted; and with the improvement of the city's economy, there is less grousing about the Turks as the source of German unemployment.

There are, however, obvious social problems. Turkish children drop out of high school at a rate that approaches an alarming 40 per cent. Many Turkish women speak no German and have been brought up to stay at home. The city is doing its best to offer programs to educate the women, as well as to provide other needed social programs. While these won't be entirely successful, it is far from accurate to say that the Turks are a depressed "lumpen proletariat." By most people's standards they are doing quite nicely for first-generation immigrants. Nevertheless, the Berlin authorities are acutely sensitive to the charges of discrimination and to use of the word "ghetto," and recognize that they have to do more than most countries would consider necessary to overcome them; they have to eliminate even the *impression* of discrimination.

The Turks are not the only immigrant problem. In recent years West Berlin has seen an influx of young men from Ghana, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, and Lebanon seeking political asylum. They are attracted by Germany's standard of living and by its generous social welfare net. But most important they come because of the extreme liberality of the Federal Republic's refugee laws.

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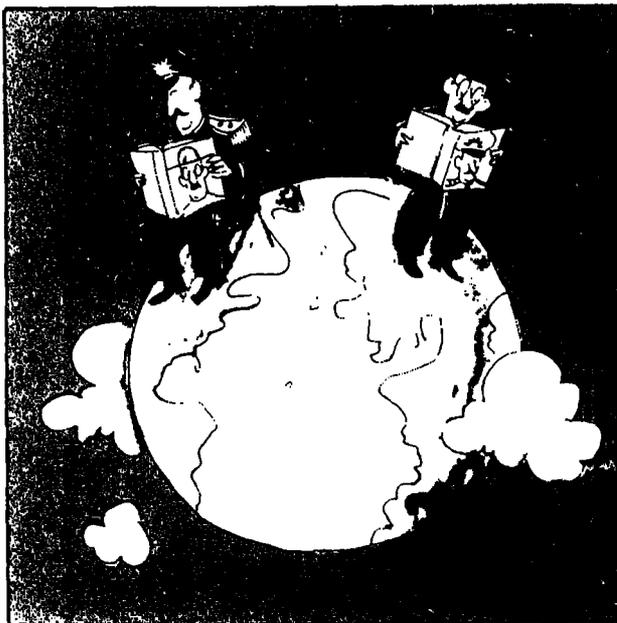
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Those laws are undoubtedly a reaction to Germany's awful past. Anyone who arrives at a German port or airport and claims to be seeking political asylum must be granted temporary refugee status for two years while the courts reach a decision. A resourceful person can manage to remain in the country for as many as ten years while his case wends its way through the myriad layers of appellate courts. The trouble is that all the other West European states are far less generous, and so would-be refugees have zeroed in on the Federal Republic and on West Berlin in particular.

Every year for the past few years several thousand of these young male immigrants have arrived in East Berlin on special charter flights sponsored by the Soviet airline *Aeroflot* and the East German *Interflug*. Both airlines earn much-needed hard currency. The bewildered Asians and Africans are then given a ticket for the U-Bahn or S-Bahn from *Friedrichstrasse* to the next stop, just two minutes down the line but in West Berlin. Here they head for the nearest Social Service office to claim their two years in the lotus land of the German welfare net until they are finally sent back to their homelands.

The Socialists and Alternatives accuse the present West Berlin administration of discriminating against these "refugees" on the basis of race. But interviews with officials who deal directly with these people largely support the CDU's claim that the East Germans and unscrupulous Third World middlemen are simply exploiting a liberal law for their own profit and amusement. Heinrich Lummer, the city's deputy mayor and interior minister, believes that anybody coming from East Berlin must retain the right to enter West Berlin and that the only possible solution is for the West Europeans to harmonize their legislation dealing with political refugees. In the meantime, the presence of such large immigrant populations in West Berlin has aggravated the city's already precarious financial health. And here lies the greatest threat to and greatest hope for Berlin's future.

ROUTE 128 NORTH

Before 1939 Berlin was the largest industrial city in Europe, often known as "Chicago *am Spree*." Its strengths were in chemicals and electrical manufacturing. Siemens and AEG are just two of the companies that opened shop in nineteenth-century Berlin. Of course the Second World War changed all that. Companies like Siemens soon moved their headquarters to the safety of West Germany, abandoning assembly lines in Berlin. In the last twenty years the remaining assembly lines have been rationalized and modernized, throwing thousands of middle-aged Berliners out of work. Between 1961 and 1983, 50 per cent of all industrial jobs in the city were lost. Business confidence plummeted, and Berlin's image as the sick city of West Germany scared off the potential investor.

But in 1985, Berlin may have turned the corner. Last

year, for the first time since the war, more jobs were created than were lost, and over two thousand new companies set up shop in the city, including seven venture capital companies and twenty-four high-tech firms. The Senate is now going all out to portray Berlin as Europe's answer to Boston's Route 128 or California's Silicon Valley. Whatever the truth of their claims, they appear to be winning the battle to change the public image of the city. The giant ICC convention center is host to a constant round of technological fairs and symposia. Even the skeptics who argue that computers and microchips alone cannot create sufficient new jobs are forced to acknowledge West Berlin's new image of self-confidence, as well as the spillover effect it appears to be having in West Germany.

The plan's supporters freely admit that they cannot hope to rival Route 128 or Silicon Valley. But they point to the same happy conjunction of a large technological workforce and over 190 scientific research institutes, all able to feed off each other. At the same time, there has been a recent and un-Germanic liberalization of the city's banking laws to allow venture capitalists to set up shop in the city. Against all odds the gamble appears to be paying off. New joint ventures are starting; the city has bent over backwards to grant every conceivable tax break to lure European and U.S. companies to set up research laboratories and manufacturing plants. And they're coming—not in waves, but steadily and with confidence.

West Berlin will never be a "conventional" city for geographical and political reasons. The absence of an economic hinterland means that there are high add-on costs to its products, which must be marketed and sold in the West. All its food (or almost all: The city still maintains 38 farms, 170 cows, and innumerable chickens and pigs within its boundaries) has to be imported by land or air. The Bonn government subsidizes the city budget to the tune of 50 per cent. For years West Berliners felt defensive about this massive subsidy, while visitors saw it as a sign of the artificiality and unsustainability of the city in the long run.

Today's Berliners have a new sense of identity and are no longer so defensive about those subsidies. Notably, much of this new self-confidence comes from the young—even from supporters of the AL. They see the city's seeming geographical and political disadvantages as offering positive advantages on which a new Berlin—as a meeting place of East and West, and not just for trade—can be nurtured. Its indeterminate legal status means that any East European can spend up to thirty days in the city without a visa—something ideal for quiet, or public, meetings with Western counterparts.

Berlin may no longer be the capital of Germany or Europe, but it is emerging as the de facto capital of détente and contact between East and West. Despite its bisection by the Wall, it remains the largest West German manufacturing city and still has more lakes and forests than any other European city. Its people have begun to come to terms with their precarious existence behind the Iron Curtain. The Wall still divides and insults the senses, but human contacts are increasing and strengthening. The Wall is now permeable, thanks to years of patient diplomacy. For all its wounds, self-inflicted or otherwise, Berlin has come back from the dead and promises to become once again the most exciting city in Europe. wv

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