

Fighters Against Inhumanity

By JOHN T. BUTTERWICK

MANY AMERICANS are closer to the Germans living in the East zone than are some Germans living in the West." This tribute to American understanding of problems confronting East German residents in the postwar period is the opinion of Dr. Rainer Hildebrandt, young and courageous founder and leader of the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity, with headquarters in Berlin.

Nominally a German political organization, the group ironically considers itself non-political — their main fight is directed against concentration camps located in the Soviet occupation zone of Germany or in German territory which now lies east of the Oder-Neisse line. Hildebrandt is quick to point out that the group is equally concerned with crimes against humanity whether they are committed in the Eastern or Western sphere of influence.

Hildebrandt also insists on the prime importance of the distinction between Russians on the one hand and Communists and Stalinists on the other. For those who have just returned from Soviet concentration camps and tremble at the mere mention of the word "Russian," this rather neat but indubitable difference is particularly difficult to embrace.

The *raison d'être* of the Fighting Group rests on the fact that since the close of the war, the majority of all the inmates of Soviet concentration camps located in East Germany have been starved to death or otherwise annihilated or deported, and that the surviving prisoners face the same fate. This is revealed by the latest statistics compiled by the group, according to which at least 185,000 persons have been arrested since 1945 and thrown into



"F-for-Freedom" (in German the "F" stands for "Freiheit") has been the symbol of the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity since July 1949. Thousands of stickers like that above, pamphlets bearing the same "Down with the SED Regime" message and "F's" painted on walls and doors have penetrated many areas far behind the Iron Curtain.

concentration camps. Of these, 37,000 have been deported to the Soviet Union. Of the remainder 96,000 have died from hunger, privation, tuberculosis and other diseases. Nor does it seem that this diabolic situation will alter materially so long as the Communists remain in control.

Because of this it is the purpose of the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity to place the whole world in the position of being aware of this system of terror and slavery which is contrary to the accepted laws of humanity. The group reasons that each man will thus be confronted with a decision of conscience and believes that whoever tries to evade the decision and not transform his conviction into deeds becomes an accomplice in crimes against humanity.

A MIMEOGRAPHED BOOK, entitled "Concentration Camps in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany" and issued in March 1950, lists the location of the following 13 main concentration camps in Soviet-occupied Germany since 1945:

- Weesow, near Werneuchten.
- Tost, Silesia.
- Landsberg an der Warthe.
- Posen.

Reminders of the need to fight for freedom mysteriously bob up in the Soviet Zone: Left, outside a Soviet-licensed "Free Shop" in Halle, in Saxony; center, on wall at intersection in Kamenz, also in Saxony; and, right, on Halle post office door.



Hohenschoenhausen, near Berlin.
 Ketschendorf, near Fuerstenwalde.
 Jamlitz, near Lieberose.
 Torgau and Forst Zinna.
 Muehlberg.
 Neubrandenburg.
 Buchenwald, near Weimar.
 Sachsenhausen, near Oranienburg.
 Bautzen.

Three of these camps — Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Neubrandenburg — existed as concentration camps in the SS State. Muehlberg was a prisoner-of-war camp prior to 1945, Bautzen and Torgau were penal institutions as well as old prisons, Jamlitz was an SS penal camp, and Weesow was a temporary camp where male and female inmates were crowded into the barns and stables of the village. Included in the important innovations introduced by the Soviet Secret Police (MVD) was the fencing off of the individual barracks buildings by barbed wire and the segregation of criminal elements from the political internees.

FROM THE MANY reliable reports of former inmates of concentration camps in Soviet-occupied territory, collected by the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity, the following picture of the MVD system of political internment on German soil as a political weapon is revealed.

The arrests by Soviet military forces began immediately after occupation. At first they were carried out by the

Soviet Army or at any rate under the direction of the Soviet secret police, formerly called the GPU and currently designated as MVD, with central offices in Moscow. Since the spring of 1946, the East Zone German police (*Volks-polizei*) have been entrusted more and more with carrying out arrests as ordered by the MVD.

Those arrested may be divided into two main groups. The first was composed of former members of the Nazi party, war criminals, Nazi criminals and those guilty of crimes against prisoners of war and foreign workers. According to information of the group, most of these were "little" party members. In 1945 this category comprised 50 percent of those arrested for political reasons. However, after 1946 the percentage of former Nazis arrested not only decreased, but they almost exclusively composed the first two waves of releases in 1948 and 1949.

This was after the founding of the National Democratic Party (NDP), the Communist stooge party designed to appeal to former Nazis and extreme rightists with ultra-nationalist training who would be averse to joining the Socialist Unity Party (SED) — the avowed German Communist party.

The second group was composed of the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie; members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) who were taken over by the SED in the Soviet-forced merger of the German Communist Party (KPD) and SPD in 1946, but who could no longer go along with the Communists' program which became progressively transparent; and those suspected of sabotage.

Also included were members of the East Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) who lacked the "correct ideological conception," and students who represented the SPD, CDU or LDP standpoint and who were almost always charged with *Werwolf* activities — in the majority of cases, without justification. Also falling in the clutches of the Soviet secret police were those denounced by informers, or those luckless persons who became involved through no fault of their own or because they knew "too much." In the "closing" of the concentration camps in January 1950, this second group, especially former Social Democrats, were not released.

AFTER ARREST, according to stories told the Fighting Group by former inmates, came the interrogation with mental torture used in addition to severe kicking, whipping with rope, and beating with steel rods in order to force confession. Other methods used were the alternate dashing of icy and boiling water on the naked victim, ceaselessly glaring light-bulbs, and awaking the victim every two hours during sleep, so that in a matter of weeks the prisoner became virtually insane.

Whether or not the victim finally signed a confession mattered little in deciding his fate, as he was either sent to a concentration camp or exiled to the Soviet Union. Now, the torture is general without violence. One method is to make the victim sit in the same position on a low stool for hours on end without moving so that the limbs swell and psychological resistance is broken.

Pronouncement of the sentence was performed by an MVD official. In this case also, signing the document



Wreath is laid at foot of Soviet War Memorial in Berlin by Hubertus von Tibien, the Fighting Group's press officer.

REIE WAHL DURCH

SCHWEIGEN

20. UND 21. JULI



At press conference in Berlin headquarters, Ernst Tillich (left), deputy leader, stands beside Dr. Rainer Hildebrandt, the youthful founder and active head of the Fighting Group.

prepared in Russian made no difference. The sentence generally called for delivery to a so-called work or correction camp but which turned out to be a concentration camp.

The difference between concentration camps of the East zone and the penal camps in the Soviet Union must be pointed out. The penal camps in the Soviet Union are labor camps from which the miserable political internees are dispatched to perform the heaviest type of work. In contrast the MVD camps in eastern Germany have been characterized by complete idleness and only very recently has work been introduced in some of them. A system of controlled slow starvation is in effect with rations diminishing day by day. The maximum caloric content of the daily ration amounts to 1,200 and the minimum 500.

The monotonous diet, never relieving the ever-present aching, gnawing hunger, is as follows: One or at the most one and one-half quarts of watery soup in the morning containing slightly more than two ounces of barley and one grated potato per person; at noon the same broth which made inmates feel like vomiting because of the smell alone; in late afternoon a pint of herb tea or *ersatz* coffee with an average of one pound of soggy and sour bread.

The body weakened by this process not only loses spiritual and mental resistance, resulting in the complete

degradation of the prisoner, but eventually fails to function physically. Incidence of severe edema, tuberculosis and infectious diseases is high with a mortality of approximately 64 percent.

CORPSES AT SACHSENHAUSEN were disposed of by strictly segregated burial squads who interred the remains either in mass graves inside or outside the camp. The latter were later camouflaged by vegetation.

The underlying reason for such barbarous and systematic extermination of elements which resist the relentless sovietization of the East zone is no doubt largely political and represents one of the main Soviet pillars supporting their totalitarian state.

Not only are the intelligentsia and bourgeois elements decimated but the knowledge of the insupportably cruel methods used in the camps, spread by released prisoners, strikes terror in the hearts of those living in the East zone and further enslaves them by paralyzing their will to resist. Russian hatred toward the Germans also probably plays a part. One prisoner was told, "You are criminals. The punishment is hard but it is just."

The work of the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity in exposing MVD methods through the press and radio was instrumental in arousing public opinion and in embarrassing German Communists to such an extent that finally the latter were granted their request to Soviet authorities for concentration camps to be "dissolved."

That, however, did not prevent the secret establishment in March of new penal camps for Germans in Silesia and in other Eastern territory, under the direction of the *Volks-polizei*. Early reports indicate that conditions have worsened since the change. MVD prisons in all the larger cities remain and the so-called labor camps in the nature of concentration camps — Schneeberg in Saxony and in Ruedersdorf near Berlin — also continue to exist.

A list of 21 non-Germans who have died in concentration camps, published by the organization, contains the names of two Americans — Otto von Koekeritz and Charles Nobies. Americans allegedly in concentration camps at present are Hopkins (first name unknown), Petterson (first name unknown), Miller (possibly spelled Mueller, who was in uniform until 1947), and Johnny Nobies, son of Charles Nobies.

ON JULY 20, 1949, the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity instituted an F-for-Freedom action which is symbolic and patterned after the V-for-Victory symbol originated during World War II by Winston Churchill. Almost immediately the letter "F" was found painted on fences and buildings throughout the Soviet-occupied area. For the massive demonstration staged at the Platz der Republik in Western Berlin on May 1 the "F" was incorporated in the Berlin Bear.

During the past year thousands of "F" handbills, urging passive resistance and a continuation of the struggle for freedom in the East zone, have been distributed at the risk of life.

A search service for ascertaining the whereabouts and the fate of persons arrested in or displaced from the

Eastern zone is conducted by the group and counsel and support are given to political refugees from the Eastern zone and other victims of crimes against humanity.

It was also the idea of Dr. Hildebrandt that the names of informers be broadcast over RIAS, the US-controlled radio station in Berlin, so East zone Germans would be aware of the identity of those giving information to the MVD. Each night an announcer's warning voice calls out "*Achtung! Achtung!*" (Attention! Attention!) followed by the names of informers, their addresses and personal descriptions.

Before any person is mentioned he must be named by three separate reliable sources so that innocent people may not be harmed by inaccurate or malicious information.

Of the 30 members who work at the headquarters of the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity and who receive just enough to cover living expenses, several were persecuted and arrested under the Nazis and eight have been in MVD prisons or Soviet camps. Ernst Tillich (SPD) is deputy head of the group and furnishes strong political leadership and administrative ability. A board of six prominent citizens from various professions decides on policy as well as financial and personnel problems. It is noteworthy that each of the democratic parties of Berlin is represented on the board. This is another indication of the living unity of the West Berliners against the Communist threat.

THE DESIRE TO HELP those who are or have been in prison, according to Hildebrandt, derives from his own personal experience in World War II when three of his closest friends were executed by the Nazis and he was twice in prison for his suspected connection with an anti-Hitler group. A contact man for Albrecht Haushofer, who was killed after the July 20 plot against Hitler in 1944, Hildebrandt was first arrested in April 1943, and not released until June of 1944. He was again taken prisoner following the abortive attempt on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944, and held in a German army prison camp until November of that year, at which time he was released in order to continue his duty as a private in the German army.

Although his version is undoubtedly correct, as far as it goes, it is reasonable to assume that the origin of his crusading spirit reaches farther back into the mysticism and romantic idealism which apparently are two of his main characteristics.

Twice, unsuccessful attempts have been made to kidnap him. Last June armed members of a group from the East sector waited outside his home in the Nikolasseer section of Berlin with three cars. When Hildebrandt entered the car waiting for him, two of the cars attempted to stage an accident in order to block the street. Those in the third car were to enter Hildebrandt's car armed, place an ether sponge over his face and abduct him. The attempt failed as the street was not blocked quickly enough. Later one of the group defected and reported on the whole plan. As a result three of the 20 conspirators were arrested.

The Berlin *Magistrat* (city council) which helps the association financially for the group's assistance to the municipal refugee center, also supplies an armed guard for its headquarters. It is striking that most of the contributions to the organization come from Soviet Zone residents.

DESPITE THE EFFECTIVENESS of Dr. Hildebrandt in this field it is perhaps only natural that he should be subjected to a certain amount of criticism. Various claims have been made that he is not sufficiently rational, has displayed instability in speeches, possesses insufficient political experience, and times has not sufficiently condemned the Nazis.

Hildebrandt is of the opinion that the unification of Germany is an Allied problem so that it is impossible to predict when such a development may be successfully attained, but that if the West continues to act strongly the Soviet position in the East zone will become so difficult that they no longer can master the situation.

He believes any Western plan should provide for (1) amity with the Russian people and enmity for Stalinism (the word "Russian" should not be used in connection with inhumanities), and (2) every possible support and attention to all people living under the Communists who are willing to resist Stalinism.

For example, establishing an European radio station in Berlin which would carry programs and news to those in the satellite countries and in the USSR. He is loath to grant the inevitability of war and thinks that a 100-percent effort should be made to avoid it. In his opinion the West has no right to push back the Communists with force and war unless it knows without any question that the needed strength cannot be obtained by peaceful and moral means.

"Until today," he says, "we have employed only 25 percent of our potential strength in the East-West struggle. If we look for all possibilities, including passive resistance in the East zone and the Eastern European countries, we can find the other 75 percent to force the Soviets to withdraw and thereby allow the re-establishment of human dignity and freedom."

HILDEBRANDT, WHEN speaking of passive resistance, definitely rules out the use of sabotage, acts of terror and other violent methods. He possesses a sublime faith that, if the conditions of suppressed peoples are exposed, and passive resistance is used, the Soviet position will become untenable and the threatening totalitarian machine unable to digest the East zone. Although the power of the free press and radio is unquestionably momentous when certain human and civic rights are safeguarded — passive resistance alone certainly appears insufficient at present to make the Soviet position untenable.

It must be remembered that if it were not for the power of America, coupled with spiritual, moral and legal rights, that neither RIAS, nor the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity, nor any other democratic organization would at present exist openly in Berlin.

In the struggle against inhumanity, terror and brutality, the tremendous value of a free city in the center of Soviet-dominated territory, which gives hope to millions, must never be forgotten. There can be no question that the great majority of them are ready and willing to fight, in one way or another, against inhumanity and against the false promises of a foreign dictator. And in this fight Dr. Hildebrandt and his organization are playing an eloquent role.

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