Berlin Youth Rebuff Bavarian Reds

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THE DAY WEST BERLIN is lost, your end will not be far off,” the earnest young man told 500 youth assembled in the large courtroom of Regensburg’s new city hall.

The speaker was Erich Weber, one of nine young men and women flown from Berlin to talk with youth groups throughout northeastern Bavaria. Every time a local Communist youth (FDJ) asked one of their loaded questions or made a typical Communist attack on Western “war mongering and capitalistic imperialism,” Weber or one of his colleagues defended the Free World with oratorical skill and logic.

This group had served as one of the committees assigned to the 48 youth homes in West Berlin during the mammoth Communist Youth Festival in August. They welcomed the FDJ members who ventured across the border into the western sectors and tried to convince their visitors that they would not be served poisoned food or be pressed into the French Foreign Legion, as Soviet Zone propaganda had warned.

Harold Kidder, US resident officer at Regen, was an observer during the final days of the festival and was impressed by the way the committee succeeded in convincing their Communist visitors that West Berlin was truly a stronghold of freedom. Mr. Kidder requested that the group be invited to visit his county.

THE IDEA WAS CARRIED further and the committee was invited to spend two weeks touring Lower Bavaria—Upper Palatinate districts, the ultra-conservative Bavarian Forest area of the American zone which fringes for almost 100 miles on the Czechoslovakian border. With the help of the Youth Activities Section, Berlin Element, and the Youth and Community Activities Branch, OLC Bavaria, arrangements were made for them to be flown to Bavaria Sept. 18.

Included in the group were: Weber, a law student at the University of Jena in the Soviet Zone until he was expelled in 1948 for criticizing the Communists’ Social Unity Party (SED), presently a free-lance journalist in Berlin and member of the Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Liselotte Abendroth, representative of the Berlin Trade Union Federation (DGB) and member of Socialist Democratic Party (SPD).

Walter Schumann, student at Hochschule fuer Bildende Kunst (College for Art).

The author welcomes Berlin youth committee consisting of two girls and seven young men as they arrived by plane in Bavaria for a vacation-tour along the Czech border.

Ingeborg Fuchs, welfare worker and member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

Heinrich Linke, youth representative of Berlin Trade Union Federation.

Michael Gromnica, student at Berlin’s Hochschule fuer Politik (College for Politics), member of Europa-Union and of Socialist Youth in Berlin.

Edgar Schulze, district committee chairman of the German Young Democrats (FDP youth organization) in Berlin-Wilmersdorf.

Guenther Weiss, student youth worker.

Edgar Bettermann, youth worker with SPD.

THE BERLIN YOUTHS were obviously considered such a threat by the local Communists (KPD) in the Bavarian Forest area that the Reds followed them from one meeting to another and even brought in some of their leading functionaries from other counties to the communities where the committee was scheduled to appear. However, the presence of the Communists with their stereotyped questions, blatant harangues and practiced gesticulations merely served to stimulate the wit and enthusiasm of the young Berliners, whose replies evoked thunderous applause, loud “bravos” and excited stamping of feet* from the rest of the audience.

Handed a humiliating defeat in Regensburg, the Communists followed the youths to Straubing where, even

* A German traditional expression of strong approval.
Absurd statements along standard party propaganda lines made by a Communist speaker draw the Germany equivalent of the razzberry at big youth meeting in Regensburg.

with their number augmented, they were again made to appear ridiculous before an audience of several hundred. After that in county after county—Eggenfelden, Pfarrkirchen, Neumarkt, Weiden, Tirschenreuth, Regen and most of the other 30 counties where meetings were held—the Communists, FDJ’ers, and fellow travelers were on hand to do their best in countering the influence of the Berliners. Only in Kelheim, were the Communists organized a whispering campaign and picketed the assembly hall, did the anti-democratic forces enjoy a “Pyrrhic victory.”

Thomas F. Hctor, resident officer of Vohenstrauß, reported that in Neudorf, a town which straddles the Bavarian-Czechoslovakian border, the FDJ tried to argue with the Berliners, “but the Berliners were so intelligent, well-informed and skillful that they quickly dominated the argument and had the audience on their side.”

In rural Pfarrkirchen, where people are traditionally lethargic about political questions, 1,100 persons turned out for the two first meetings with the Berliners. Resident Officer Terence F. Catherman reported:

“Erich Weber gave a 45 minute speech concerning the World Youth Festival, the Western social centers, general conditions in the Soviet Zone, the attitude of the Western youth and methods to be used in combating Communism. This excellent talk, made doubly effective by a combination of humor, logic and drama, was interrupted several times by a loud and long applause. The enthusiasm was overwhelming to one accustomed to the general apathy of the youth in this area. A lively and interesting two-hour discussion period followed.”

HERE ARE A FEW of the most typical questions and answers aired during the meeting.

Q. On what basis do the youth of the Soviet Zone want unification?
A. They want the Bonn Basic Law as the constitution for the future Germany.

Q. Why is the youth of the Soviet Zone so unified?

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A. A continuous barrage of propaganda from all media with no opportunity to compare this to the truth gradually wears down the most critical mind. There is no opportunity to join other organizations, but there are plenty of penalties for not joining the FDJ.

Q. What is the difference between the Nazi and Soviet regimes?
A. The Nazis were comparative beginners in the business of terror. Not everyone realized what was really happening in Germany, but every person in the Soviet Zone feels daily the oppressive weight of the Soviet terror. Also, the Nazis were at least Germans, while the ideal in the Soviet Zone is now the Sovietmensch (typically Soviet), and everyone must now strive to achieve the perfection of this new ideal man. (This was followed by a detailed account of some of the noxious personal habits of members of the Russian occupation force.)

Q. Why were the Western visitors to the festival often punished by Western authorities? (An order for a fine of DM 22 — $5.24 — was shown by the questioner.)
A. This fine was for an illegal border-crossing. Due to Russian insistence, interzonal permits still have to be issued, despite repeated Allied efforts to eliminate all travel restrictions between the zones. The fine was for a technicality and had nothing to do with the festival.

Q. What other mass organizations exist in the Soviet Zone besides the SED and FDJ?
A. FDGB (Communist trade-union organization), Kultur- bund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands (Cultural Association for the Democratic Revival of Germany), VVN (federation of persons persecuted under the Nazi regime), Demokratischer Frauenbund (Communist women’s league), Bund zur Foerderung deutsch-sowjetischer Freundschaft (federation for promotion of German-Soviet friendship).

Q. Why are there so many unemployed in the Western Zones and none in the Soviet Zone?
A. This is merely a matter of terminology. In the Soviet Zone there are no “unemployed,” but plenty of what are euphemistically called Arbeitsuchende (persons looking for jobs). They have no right to relief or welfare and receive only one mark (Soviet-Zone mark, equal to about five cents) per day. They lose this pittance if they refuse any job offered by the Labor Office and are
also subject to arrest and shipment to the uranium mines at Aue.

Q. Were there visitors from Western countries at the festival?
A. Yes, a few, but they were seldom seen.

Q. Who paid for the meals that the FDJ received in the western sector?
A. The Federal Government, the Berlin Senate, the Allied commandants, German and foreign private agencies, as well as individual citizens of Berlin.

Q. How were the participants at the festival accommodated?
A. Visitors from foreign countries were put up in separate hotels, to avoid too much contact, and received up to 50 marks per day,* free transportation and free tickets for all major events; the West German FDJ stayed in private homes; most of the Soviet Zone FDJ were crowded into halls, gymnasiums and tent camps where thousands slept on straw.

Q. Who paid you to come here?
A. Nobody, unfortunately. Who pays the members of the FDJ and KPD?"

IN NEUMARKT the resident officer, John Kormann, summed up the Berliners' appearance as follows:

"The youth center auditorium, with a capacity of 300, was filled and many persons were standing. Following a short introductory speech by the chairman of the county youth federation, the forum began in earnest. The KPD and FDJ, although negligible in number in Neumarkt, came well prepared; they had known of the event through good press publicity for three days in advance. A few FDJ personalities from Regensburg were also recognized in the audience.

"It was noticeable from the very outset that the Berlin youth had a story to tell which would play upon the heartstrings of the crowd. The first speaker, after only a few minutes, was having visible success. He told tales of miserable conditions recounted to him by Eastern FDJ members, of the Volkspolizei (Soviet Zone "people's police"), of the typhus bacilli Eastern youth were told they would be infected with if they visited the West, and of the poisoning each FDJ'er expected when crossing the sector boundary.

"The Communists could not afford to allow the speaker to continue in this vein, so, led by Herr Schneider, the only KPD member in the city council, they attempted to obtain the floor. A very lively verbal encounter ensued, with each side trying to shout the other down. Most vehement of all was Mayor Betz of Neumarkt, who would spring to his feet crying, 'Return to your Eastern paradise; we don't want you here!' Time and again Mr. Betz, in a fury, shouted from the audience.

"It was not long, however, before the Berlin group succeeded in making the Communists appear ridiculous. When finally one rather impressive FDJ'er denied the poor housing and feeding conditions at the festival, he was asked directly where he was quartered in Berlin; the Communist city councilor sprang to his feet and admonished the youth not to answer, amid roars of laughter from the crowd.

"At the close of the meeting, the seven young visitors were the guests of the chairman of the community planning board and the mayor. It is doubtful whether any other means would have been as effective in making not only the youth of Neumarkt, but the entire population cognizant of the great danger confronting Western Germany from the East. Many a Neumarkter has since given serious consideration to statements made during the visit, a visit which will not be so quickly forgotten."

SPEAKING OF THE EAST ZONE youth who came to the western sectors during the festival, one of the Berliners said, "They represented the best part of German youth, those who are willing to fight for their own convictions of democracy in a world where they are never allowed to speak openly—something which you here in the West take for granted. These young people have to stand up for their democratic beliefs day after day against a continuous barrage of vicious propaganda.

"The people of the East zone are easy to distinguish from Western Germans, for their eyes are dull. They must fulfill their delivery quotas and play the Hennecke activist. The Soviets do everything possible to change the individual to nothing but a mere number and these individuals — this we must never forget — are Germans."

Paying tribute to two Americans whom the people of Berlin consider heroes, one youth said: "For each Berliner it will always be a moral obligation and a real privilege to remember two Americans who brought us the Airlift, General Clay and General Howley. When either of these gentlemen comes to Berlin he is no longer an American general but our friend. We do not talk about 'Occupation Forces' in West Berlin — only East Berlin suffers that misfortune — but of our friends who faced the blockade under the same conditions as ourselves and to whom we are eternally indebted that Berlin did not starve."

END

* East zone marks equal approximately $2.50.

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