

Mission to Berlin-1966

MARTIN M. WEITZ

NEWS of the Grand Coalition of the Christian Democrats, led by Kurt Georg Kiesinger, an admitted one-time Nazi who claims "de-Nazified" status from the Allies shortly after the War, and Willy Brandt, Anti-Nazi through the War years and recent Mayor of Berlin, is a dramatic and traumatic event, not only for Germany but for the world. Victories in Hesse and Bavaria for the "New" National Democratic Party-up to ten per cent of the total vote and fifteen seats out of 204 in the Bavarian legislature alone—are an indication of a new national mood, but if seen in perspective, do not diminish the significant gains made by the two leading parties that now comprise the Grand Coalition.

In 1963 we beheld how history was made, before our very eyes, for in Bonn, a day after our arrival, the Government changed from Adenauer to Erhardt without revolution, and the day of our arrival in Cologne, October 13, we shared in the opening festivities of "Monumenta Judaica."

In 1966, we had a different set of circumstances, from June 26, through July 7th. On our first day we met with a delegation of former Prisoners of War, who were sent in 1943-4 to a war Camp in Trinidad, Colorado, where we first saw some of them as a Chaplain in the U.S. Army, while on leave. In the days that followed, beyond the formal and informal amenities, there were self-imposed responsibilities.

I.

Since this was our fourth tour of West Germany within six years, many

RABBI MARTIN M. WEITZ is Director of Religious Affairs at Cedar Knolls and Linden Hill Schools at Hawthorne, New York, for the Jewish Board of Guardians of Greater New York.

of our impressions and observations are in the nature of "double exposures," with greater clarity as well as recency, comprehension as well as communication, vertical as well as horizontal estimates.

1. An exposure to the total Jewish Community in general (ca 25,000 in the Federal Republic) and a cross-section survey of the Jewish "Gemeindes" of all cities we visited, with conferences with leaders and rabbis and visits to rebuilt synagogues, centers, libraries, hospitals and homes for the aged.

This is but 5 percent of the total of German Jewry (600,000 in 1933). This includes about 5,000 as survivors from Nazism via a variety of travails with aid of Christian friends, about 6,000 who came from a score of D.P. camps all over Europe, about 7,000 returnees from thirty-six countries—with approximately 3,000 back from Israel, and the balance from other sources. There are 500 locales with Jews as residents, but only the major cities claim resident rabbis, rebuilt congregations or centers. One year ago in October, the Jewish population of West Germany, including West Berlin, was 25,694, an increase of 630 over the year. Of these 13,944 were men, 11,700 were women, with an average age of forty-five-and-a-half years. Of these, 6,032 lived in Berlin. Only five others of the seventy-one Jewish Communities in West Germany had over 1,000 people: Frankfurt, 4,159; Munich, 3,333; Hamburg, 1,490; Dusseldorf, 1,443; and Cologne, 1,232. There were sixty-eight births and 465 deaths, while 1,202 Jews returned from abroad, and 464 left the country.

At present there are no training centers for rabbis, and most of the teachers—about fifty in all the "Gemeindes"—are young Israelis. In 1965-6, a slight increase in the total—especially

in the larger centers—was due to “interim” passage on the part of hundreds of Jews from Rumania, enroute to Israel. With the top heavy age structure, spreading religious decay in many centers, continuous intermarriage on all levels, the “Zeitgeist” of living it up by the general population, the trend in elections during November 1966, and the “survivors” trauma among many Jews in Germany—and in spite of all the efforts of the Federal Republic as a Government and millions of Germans in all the Lander who genuinely are interested in their welfare and share their work and who seek to make amends, even after a generation—, it is difficult to predict a brilliant future for Jews in Germany today.

This may change perhaps more positively when the Economy will expand further via the Common Market and require more merchants and professionals—including available and interested Jews especially from nearby countries such as Algerian Jews, who increased Jewry in France to 600,000, as well as likely Jewish numbers from Iron Curtain Countries with increasing thaws in the Cold War. It may be enhanced via Religion when the Dialogue of a Cardinal Bea and Frugg deepens downward, when new institutes on Judaism as at Tuebingen, take root, and the efforts of Dean Gruber in Berlin and others like him make for a revival of values and not Reformation but Transformation of spirit. It may be aided by Education too, with changes in all the areas beyond silent treatment of the Nazi era and increased travel of youth between Germany and Israel.

It certainly will be served by increasing vigilance in Politics with no lapse in the statute of limitations, in the recall of German scientists from Egypt, in new arrangements for restitution, and other areas as needed by those with genuine claims.

2. A series of visits with “foster children” or “Graduates” from the Ventnor Foundation, whereby 900 or more medical students from Germany, Holland,

France, Poland, Israel, Japan and other countries were able to serve as interns in American Hospitals one or two years, thus combining American know-how, techniques and Democracy with European training and culture for the benefit of doctor and patient and for the world-community.

3. For the Jewish Chautauqua Society of New York City in its interest in intergroup appreciation on college campuses, in summer camps, as well as in great libraries in America and, increasingly, the world. We were able to have pilot-seminars with graduate students in Bonn, Hamburg, Tubingen, Frankfurt, Munich, and Berlin, and conferences with leading university libraries so that select volumes of Biblica and Judaica in English be gifts of good-will from Jews of America to German students and professors interested in values beyond all barriers.

4. Conferences with outstanding leaders in intergroup-communication in every city we visited. These included distinguished priests, pastors, rabbis, and civic leaders—all engaged in dialogue at its best, in units similar to our National Conference of Christians and Jews, but ahead of our American experiment in many ways, probably because of the great need in Germany to make up for lost time and lost lives in the past.

5. Visits with groups of former Prisoners of War who shared a reunion in Trinidad, Colorado in 1964, and who now met us in Bonn, Cologne, Frankfurt, and Berlin.

II.

When we were in Cologne in 1963, we arrived just in time for a great event, “Monumenta Judaica”—the masterful exhibit of Jewish life in the Rhineland for 2,000 years, and a luncheon in the Synagogue of Cologne, where the swastika epidemic ignited several years before!—tendered by the Lord Mayor of Cologne, Theo Burauen, in tribute to Jewish life—yesterday, today and tomorrow. In 1966 we had an-

other meaningful conference with Bur-gomeister Theo Burauen, who led us to the subterranean "suburbs" of Roman life directly beneath the patio of the New Municipal House. The ruins were remarkably preserved, especially since they were uncovered partially by a bomb-hit during the war and by excavating for new foundations. Thus ancient and modern are one—with many historical walls, fortresses, water conduits, a variety of initialled brickwork, Roman air-conditioning, and manifold tombstones, weapons, and utensils.

Cologne still has its three-ring ram-parts of ancient, medieval and modern cities in one, and a vast park-like circumference, established by Konrad Adenauer when mayor of the City before he was taken into custody by Hitlerism. It helps filter industrial smoke, conserve land and provide scenic landscape.

Dusseldorf is the workbench of the Rhine and a city that knows more wealth than culture perhaps. Impressive were visits to the leadership of the local "Gesellschaft für Christlich-Judische Zusammenarbeit," roundtable of Christians and Jews, and conferences with Father Albrecht Schrader, who dared to defy the Nazis in days gone by.

Hotel Atlantic Hamburg an/Der Anster was our "home" and Hamburg was our "world," for a few days. That afternoon we toured the giant harbor and saw the "incubator" of the "Bismarck" and other war craft and recently "cradle" for most of ZIM ships for Israeli reparations and sea faring vessels for West Germany and many other countries. We learned that a colony of Israelis lived here to help with ZIM ship designs, labor and construction.

Here too we met a staff member (Nissen by name), son of Nazi parents who so reacted that he fled his near-Frankfurt home, went to Israel in expiation, and there become a convert to Judaism, a soldier in Israeli army, married an Israeli girl, daughter of

concentration camp victims, and again lived in Hamburg.

During this visit and in company of Mr. K. Hoffman, a legal expert on "Nuremberg Race Laws" and their effects, I visited the offices of the Jewish Gemeinde, beheld the remains of two libraries—one in German and the other in Hebrew—which were shipped to the East for incineration in the Nazi-era, and which, by a miracle, were recovered in forgotten warehouses and returned after the War to their source of origin, Hamburg. Here too was mute evidence—in the steel bars to all windows—that this very "Gemeinde gebäude" for Jewry was made Gestapo Headquarters!

A full afternoon was invested with many visits. Professor Kraus of Old Testament Seminary at the University of Hamburg; Mr. Rolf Ahlers of the Seminary for Systematic Theology, and with many graduate students of the Theological Seminars of the University of Hamburg. We learned much of the spirit of the new church leadership in West Germany—its frank reality, its questing for values, unity beyond chaos, and its search for things of the spirit even more than for the spirit of things—so rampant in Germany. Of interest too is the fact that Dr. Weichman is now the first Jewish Mayor of an important city—Hamburg.

Frankfurt am-Main is probably the city with the most American influence in West Germany, due to vast industrial network, river, rail and air facilities and U. S. Army administrative headquarters in the Farben Building. The city seemed completely free of severe war scars it bore even a visit ago, with its business center, industrial complex, rebuilt bridges, avenues of commerce, and many U. S. military installations. It revealed a thriving community, an energetic populace, an industrial boom served by river, rail, air, and "auto-bahn" communications in all directions.

A reminder of the past was visible in small swastikas, embedded in tile and ceramic, in a former Luftwaffe Hos-

pital, now one of the largest of General American Hospitals overseas! It was revealing also to see the vast dimensions of the I. G. Farben works and to learn that the entire complex was "saved" during the War—with no Allied bombs near it—and that it continues as a giant source of production for the new economy, geared to the West.

Frankfurt am-Main is a burgher's metropolis with commerce its seeming major consideration. A tour of the city introduced us to many new varieties of industries, most of which were rebuilt completely in plant and personnel since the War days, together with a perspective from high buildings to see and sense this central city of communication and commerce which was broken in war and which was healed from almost all its scars. It is as if a new economy took hold and a new industry had outpaced anything known in previous decades. Among notables met was Dr. A. Lichtegfeld, oldest resident rabbi throughout West Germany today.

I learned here about the contemporary tempo of Jewry throughout Germany: the vacuum of great Jewish leadership, and that the future was altogether uncertain, except that the Government was doing its best to aid returning Jews, stabilize their communal and cultural life, rebuild their shattered synagogues and centers, restore their libraries as well as make compensation and expiation more than a gesture and safeguard for these "returnees" from any latent Nazism. But it was in reality a race between "returnees" for repatriation which trickles to an end soon and new settlers, Jews among others, who care to come for a share in the expanding "Inner Six" (Plus "Outer Seven" soon?) Europa Mart, continental, world-wide economy, with its basic built-in premises and promises for continued world-peace. After four successive visits, we were able to understand better the content and extent of the "leadership

vacuum," the hesitation to remain on the part of some returning rabbis, the preoccupation with things and "living it up" on part of many, and the apparent willingness to drift along with abundance and national numbness.

Two days were spent in Stuttgart—the Detroit of West Germany. I learned about the story of Jewry—before and after the War—, saw the varied institutions and met a number of leading "returnees." From all this, I surmised that Stuttgart perhaps had a model Jewish community of modern Germany, for these basic reasons: (1) There was gifted and solid Jewish leadership, rabbinical and communal partnership, with great mutual confidence and competence, free from the temporary vacuum I found in many other Jewish "Gemeindes." (2) There was a diversified and dynamic economy with many large and little industries,—as well as Mercedes-Benz, electrical and electronic plants, glass factories, breweries, heavy industry, appliances, with growing antenna tuned in to the emerging Common Mart; (3) There was a basic agriculture, notably vinticulture, to balance the economy and stabilize the culture; (4) There was an increasing flow of trained personnel from beyond Stuttgart and Germany, invited in to man the manifold industrial complex and this brought better business opportunities and more of younger Jewish returnees who cared to stay with families; (5) There was an optimism in the air—and the reckoning that here the birth rate already is ahead of the death rate among the Jews who came back; (6) Yet—sorry to note—there were several broken windows in the newly rebuilt synagogue.

We also visited a portion of the Black Forest. The hills were clothed with fall foliage and the valleys were filled with shadowland. The setting had much of beauty and a coloration on its crowning hills that named it "Black Forest." It has much in common with the Black Hills of the Dakotas, only with more of water in abundance in

pleasant streams and deep rivers and rain-saturated hills and cloud-filled skies. When sunlight penetrated, the hills glistened and the foliage was a treasury of color, while trees were natural in splendor with an autumnal reverie in the valleys and a leafy canopy o'er the irregular sub-mountains. One could see across it all into France and sense the "Great Divide" of the Rhine in the hazy distance.

III.

We arrived in Berlin at Tempelhof Airport via plane. Our headquarters was Schwiezer-Hof this tour, and our goal was achieved—Berlin, with its ebullient spirit of defiance in the air, the temper to stand steadfast in the spirit of this Bear-insignia-city from ancient days. This first day was in the nature of sensing the tempo, walking along main avenues to identify location, landmarks and renewing friendships from over a year ago.

A day later was devoted to a visit to and through the Soviet Sector—East Berlin. We entered via "Checkpoint Charlie" on Friedrichstrasse, walked along its barren, brazen "Wailing Wall" that cuts across the heart of Berlin, with homes, buildings, stores, churches as part of its back-props and supports up to and often above the third floors. We beheld the former "Stalinalee," glittering facade of Soviet "Rehabilitation"—with the vast acreage of debris beyond a block or two on either side, noted the absence of people except at "travel corners" and the emergent differences in buildings, in shops, and lives in both portions of this divided city. On our last visit, we saw the Rabbi in East Berlin, in residence on the edge of a vast Jewish cemetery with its 80,000 "inhabitants" at rest, and found him vocal—up to a point—with a "Silent Mediation" for all our inquiries on post war- and post-mortem "matters."

East Berlin is such a contrast to West Berlin in lack of building room, in emptiness of avenues, in the de-

pressed spirit of the people, in the invisible presence of the Police State, in the countless corners of broken buildings, untended mounds and general debris. Only the limited Karl Marx Allee is mimicry of Moscow, even in edifices and thresholds of subway and elevated traffic, had mobility of people on the hurry. In contrast to 1963, 1966 saw *some* change—in more people on the streets, more glass buildings near the Brandenburg Gate, more cars in circulation and more food abundant in windows, at least.

We paused at the Brandenburg Gate to see the mounds of the Third Reich, including Hitler's last "Stand." An important stop was at Berlin Jewish Community center, with a thorough tour of all its premises and its magnificent interior and colorful exterior, under guidance of its leaders. Spacious and beautiful were its halls, synagogue, auditorium, class and clubrooms, offices and lounges—with a reception there for us attended by available officers and staff of this great center, rebuilt by the Federal Government, and Berlin Senate for Jewish returnees. The first pillars and frames, salvaged from the "Crystal Night" of November, 1938, its guardians on both sides, barbed wire atop its ugly facade, and as it later turned out, mined areas and booby traps. Not far from the Brandenburg Gate, was a Russian enclosure in the British Zone—a War Memorial. Now, two Russian soldiers guard it (and each other) whereas last visit only one at a time was sentry. Two British sentries guard them, and in turn are "guarded" by four West German police! That day revealed also a picturesque assortment of views from a man-made mountain of debris (scraped up as surplus from war-caused destruction) covered with lawn, and from several anti-air raid bunkers, now covered in a Rose Garden, in the Northern section of West Berlin, as well as a ride on a road that forms part of the boundary between East and West Berlin.

We kept our eyes open, our mouths

shut, and our hands taut, while our hearts made up for lost emotions. We saw what is called so often the "Chinese Wall" on both sides, or what we prefer to call the "Wailing Wall" for men today. It is not too high, yet it is formidable; it is not too thick; yet it is provoking; it is not too well built; yet it is symbolic. Every few feet a "Vopo" stands sentry. Homes, four stories high, have two or three stories from the ground bricked in and walled up. In 1966, the "Wall" is becoming more sophisticated and yet more deadly. Lawns are planted, flowers are grown, but tank traps are deeper, electrification less visible, in all directions. In time, the East Germans may make it look like a national monument instead of a deadly barrier.

Since August, 1961, families were dispossessed. Handshakes were made at first over the barbed wire—but now are "verboten." On a previous visit we witnessed the setting of a church with the wall across its chancel. People on Sunday morning faced each other while the minister turned in both directions to keep his congregation united while "Vopos" stood guard. Wreaths were placed on its West side in tribute to lives that ended when long-time residents jumped from the bricked in dwellings to freedom, but failed. We listened to the stories of many that came across through fire and water to reach safety and sanity.

The entire stay in Berlin was full of interest, excitement and challenge. Arrival at Tempelhof Airport in the heart of the city made one realize that this very enclave was the scene of the Berlin Airlift some years ago and that the city is exposed anew and on all sides to a threat from the Kremlin and its satellites. For West Berlin is out on a limb from the tree-trunk of West Germany.

We visited the now famous Denkmal (Monument) where this and thousands of other synagogues throughout Germany were burned, and are now encased in the great cement format of

this stately mansion. Eloquence in silence, too, was a gift given me of a folio of new stamps by the Federal Government—ten in number—of all destroyed synagogues in Berlin.

A tour of West Berlin reveals its old landmarks as the Brandenburg Gate, which divides East and West in the world as well as in Berlin, the new emergent Reichstag, the hollow spireless cavern of the bombed Lutheran Cathedral, the shiny, colorful forms of thousands of new homes, shrines, office and apartment buildings, factories, etc. By noon, we shared luncheon with some leaders of the Berlin Senate. In reply to some of our inquiries, some present assured us that German youth will not be left in a vacuum in the new texts, but that students will be given a complete history of Hitlerism and Anti-Semitism. They explained that a curriculum of elementary school children above ten years has been completed and that it carries a complete account of Hitler atrocities and emphasizes dangers of Nazism and Anti-Semitism, and that texts for later years are soon to be published.

A visit to the home of Dean and Mrs. Heinrich Gruber was inspiration personified—he is the Saint of Berlin, a savior in modern Christianity, helpmate to many Jews who were rescued from Nazi tyranny, camp-mate to the late Rabbi Leo Baeck at Theirsenstadt Concentration Camp. He and Mrs. Gruber were delighted with the special letters we brought from Senator Robert F. Kennedy whom we met together in Washington, D.C., in 1961, and from Dr. Sterling Brown, President of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, on the occasion of his Seventy-fifth Birthday. Dean Gruber of the Lutheran Evangelical Church in Berlin, told me—as he testified in Eichmann case in Jerusalem, how he tried desperately from 1939 to 1943 to save Jews from Hitler and Eichmann, how he experienced several concentration camps, was subjected to physical torture, related his meetings with Eich-

mann over a four-year period. He explained too: "We trembled with our Jewish friends the night before every Jewish holiday," and how Eichmann knew so much about Jews and every one of their festivals—seasons for special persecutions. He too was earmarked for special "penalties"—even though he did not deserve his own sufferings — at Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Thiersenstaat—how his teeth had been knocked out, how he had suffered a heart attack. When asked in Jerusalem about this, he related: "I don't want to discuss my suffering, but the sufferings of my Jewish friends." He described his labors with the Late Dr. Leo Baeck, after Nazi Crystal Night, 1938, Nazi "experiments" on Jews at Dachau with cold-water endurance, air and malaria injections, how he lay among the dead, because of his heart attack, and was able hours later to save a Jewish friend he found still breathing. Prophet Gruber also showed me recent photos of his heart-warming welcome to Israel, of forests planted in his honor that bear his name.

We had added pride—on this visit—to learn that the seventy-five engagements we and other friends of his helped to arrange for him across America, from San Francisco through Denver and Trinidad, Colorado, to New York City, gave him a sense of accomplishment, for the new mood in Germany, in his efforts to have his generation seek atonement, and for mankind, as well as Germany, to seek expiation for the curse of Hitlerism it permitted.

From our tour of ten outstanding world-renowned West German communities—Bonn, Cologne, Dusseldorf, Bremen, Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, as well as the Black Forest, the Alpine villages around Munich and other cities—we feel that West Germany today is not only an important world ally but also the economic heart of Europe.

We visited with all rabbis available as well as the leaders of the communi-

ties, saw rebuilt synagogues, sat with representatives of the 25,000 Jews who now live in West Germany, including the 6,000 in Berlin, and tried to find their motivation for returning, their present status in commerce and business, their feelings of security and answers to the possibility of a good future for the Jewish Community throughout Germany, in the years ahead.

We feel the economy of West Germany will increase considerably despite pressure from the Soviets for at least a decade, unless it is halted by war or the spread of Communism.

We feel there is a rising standard of living so people are more enamored of things than of ideas, that there is a general feeling of national amnesia regarding Nazi barbarism, not just to forget but to prevent its recurrence at any cost on the part of most Germans.

We feel Jews returning to the former homeland are sincerely welcomed by West Germans, who to this day have done their utmost to rebuild Jewish life.

Why do so many Jews return? Among the many reasons no doubt these would be major: 1. The Federal Republic of Germany has deliberately attempted to make amends to the Jewish people for the suffering inflicted by the hated Nazi predecessors. 2. Anti-Semitism is not tolerated in West Germany. Its constitutions, federal and state, and its penal codes are vigorous safeguards for all minorities and individuals, and are in high lineage of Goethe and Lessing, not of Bismarck and Hitler. Synagogues have been reconstructed, societies of Christians and Jews have been established, and history books have been rewritten. It is even against the law to give the Nazi salute in West Germany today.

We feel there is a growing pattern today of democracy in the West German government which will provide a stable, free state and a balanced economy, especially since we witnessed the change in government—a day in Bonn

—from Adenauer to Erhard in 1963 and a transfer in 1966.

We asked many questions of many people, visited dozens of institutions and meetings and probed and checked answers to our many inquiries.

Perhaps the best answer we were given was one by a recent refugee from East Germany, as we talked to him in West Berlin. He was on crutches and had difficulty talking. He was asked why his wife was not with him.

"She is now in the hospital, and I, as you see, am in this condition because we jumped from our third-story window to a waiting truck at the wall at dusk a few days ago, as we made our escape from the Russian Zone. My wife and I agree that our few broken bones,

bruises, and scrapes are a small enough price indeed to pay for freedom."

In Berlin is the Wilhelm Institute where Dr. Albert Einstein may first have written his "Theory of Relativity," while serving as its Director. Perhaps he was in Berlin when he commented: "If my 'Theory' works, the French will call me a Jew, while the Germans will call me a German. If it fails, the French will call me a German, while the Germans will call me a Jew!" Perhaps the reverse is now true! Perhaps history has changed, since France and Germany are such good friends and the Rhine is no longer a barrier but a bridge. Is it not all a matter of "relativity?"

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