



A STUDENT'S

BERLIN. Christmas comes to Berlin just as it does to any other large western metropolitan city. The drably dressed old German ladies in their black overcoats and fur hats can be seen dragging their Christmas trees homeward. The fir trees in the parks are decked with candles; the streets are crowded with holiday shoppers. The Christmas simplicity is complicated only by the occasional American tank transport rumbling through the city streets, by the night artillery fire coming from the Grunewald, by the *Passierschein* stations where the Berliners must apply for permission to visit relatives in the *Ostsektor* and by the border searchlights not more than two blocks away from the *Studentendorf* (student village) of the *Freie Universität*.

To study in Berlin is, for an OU student, a three-fold experience: First and perhaps most important of all, the former abstract academic approach to comparative economic, social and political organizations becomes an immediate experience on the streets of Berlin. Instead of studying from the outside looking in, one studies from the inside looking out. Secondly, study in a German university provides the American student with the opportunity to become a part of an academic way of life in many ways completely foreign to the American system. Thirdly, life in Berlin is a cultural experience. The West Germans fear that Berlin someday, because of its encirclement, will be-

come a dead city; therefore, all facets of life are actively promoted which will make the city a more attractive place to live. The Berlin theater is a German center of creative activity, and the *Berlin Philharmoniker* is perhaps the best orchestra in Europe. Also many well-known creative authors, composers and poets are currently in Berlin working under the auspices of Ford Foundation grants. All performances are financially accessible to students (if they are willing to stand in line) at very reduced student rates. For example, a student can go to the theater on Saturday night for 40 cents.

Although the majority of the German students rent single rooms in private homes, various *Studentendörfer* and *Studentenheime* are scattered throughout the city to absorb the teeming student population. Although the *Studentendörfer* and *Heime* serve as the general equivalent to our dormitories, they are not, as at Oklahoma, located on the campus. Our *Dorf*, the largest in the city, is, for example, some 20 minutes from the University by bus.

The *Studentendorf*, built, by the way, under a Ford Foundation grant, is made up of 32 houses, each house containing some 32 students. All the rooms are single. About one-third of the houses are coeducational and are liberally dispersed among the men's houses.

In keeping with the general rule of academic freedom, there are few disciplinary rules for the *Dorf* occupants to



Russian soldiers pass before Berlin's famed Brandenburg Gate.

BERLIN DIARY

By PAUL GREGORY

follow. In fact, the majority of my OU fellows would consider themselves in a student paradise in Berlin. There are no restrictive alcohol regulations (there is a bar in the *Dorf* cafeteria), there are no visiting hour rules and girls are allowed in boys' rooms and vice versa. There are cases of married students living secretly in the *Dorf* without undergoing any emotional difficulties, if one can phrase it so. The word "counselor" is unknown. The *Dorf* is run completely by the students themselves. The students have control over all the *Dorf* finances; the money is distributed by the student council.

Yet despite the atmosphere, or possibly because of the atmosphere of complete freedom, the *Dorf* seems to run itself without any chaos or anarchy, as the American visitor might expect. The *Dorf* life seems to function more smoothly than the dorm life at OU where I lived in the rather restrictive athletic-dorm atmosphere of Jefferson House.

The *Studentendorf* is a self-contained living unit with a grocery store, cafeteria, beer parlor, washateria, TV rooms, athletic field and photo lab. Most of the students do their own cooking in the kitchens which are located on each floor of the houses. In this way, student life is very cheap in Berlin. If one eats in the University cafeteria (*Mensa*) for the main noon meal (25 cents) and then cooks the remaining two meals himself, the food cost for one day is

approximately 50 cents. This sum added to the monthly rent of 75 marks (about \$19) makes up the main expenses of the Berlin student. In my acquaintanceship there are students living on 150 marks per month. The only other major living expense is the bus fee for transportation between the *Dorf* and the university for 10 marks per month.

The amount of academic freedom which the German student enjoys is the most striking feature of the German system of higher education. In Berlin, however, the concept of free academic thought acquires a special meaning. As the name itself indicates, the *Freie Universität* (Free University), is founded on this basic principle.

The origin of the Free University is coupled with the immediate post-war history of divided Germany and divided Berlin. As the war ended, Berlin was divided into four occupation zones; the traditional Berlin university, Humboldt University, was in the Soviet Zone. The West Berlin and West German students in the first post-war years in good faith attended the traditional Berlin university, but with the ever increasing political domination of the academic life, they soon found it impossible to get an education free from Communist control and bias. Thus began the campaign for a free university in West Berlin which resulted with the founding of the Free University in 1949.

The incoming American student comes face-to-face with

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German students are free to

this academic freedom first during enrollment. Enrollment in our sense of the word does not exist; instead the German equivalent is divided into two processes: *Immatrikulation* and *Einschreiben*. In order to immatriculate, you go to the immatriculation bureau where, after standing in line for about an hour, you declare your faculty of study and hand over your records with two passport photos. Two days later, you return to the same office, pay the tuition costs of 65 marks, and receive your *Studienbuch*. The *Studienbuch* serves as the only record of your academic studies. In this book, the student must list all attended lectures and all examinations which he has passed or failed.

Armed with the magic *Studienbuch*, you are free to attend any lecture in the University from Middle Gothic to Advanced Surgery. If you want to receive credit for a certain course, you simply write the name of the course in your book, and then you are officially enrolled. The enrollment process is complete when you have the completed *Studienbuch* stamped at the registrar's office. This last complicated process is called *Einschreiben*.



Gregory first visited Berlin in the summer of 1963 as part of the seminar on Russian studies sponsored by the University and by the Institute for the Study of the USSR. Fourteen OU students attended.

As attendance is completely voluntary and the idea of roll call is foreign to the German university, the student is free to attend class at his leisure and to stay at home when the desire strikes. There are no generally required courses as at OU. It is the student's own responsibility to prepare himself for the eventual final examination which comes at the end of his studies, usually after 5 or 6 years of study. This is one of the basic differences between the American and the German system: The American student prepares himself along the way for many smaller exams, whereas his German counterpart prepares himself mainly for one final exam. The advantage of the German system is that the student at the end of his studies emerges with a better overall picture of his field, whereas we tend to lose the general perspective along the way. The greatest disadvantage of the German system is that an unqualified student can waste 5-7 years studying for an exam which he cannot pass.

Lectures at the university are held on subjects which are much more limited than in American universities. For example, in the history department one cannot find such general lectures such as Modern European History or History of Russia. Instead, a typical course lecture reads, History of Russia from 1890 to 1917 or European History from 1930-1933. Lectures in a particular course are usually held once a week, meeting in a two-hour session.

THE LECTURE itself (*die Vorlesung*) is a formal procedure: The professor sweeps into the lecture hall with an air of regal majesty accompanied by the sound of the students, 100 to 200 strong, rapping their knuckles on the wooden desks. Surprisingly enough, you are free to hiss the professor during the lecture if he says something which you find disagreeable. This is usually performed good-naturedly by the student and accepted good-naturedly by the professor. There is no, or little, opportunity to ask questions during the lecture. Perhaps this is a precautionary tactic developed by the professor, for the German student, once given the opportunity to speak, will gladly expound his philosophy of life for any given length of time.

There is also only limited opportunity to speak with a professor outside of class. The professor usually has office hours (*Sprechstunden*) once a week for one hour. Therefore the student must report to the professor's secretary at least a week ahead to get his name high on the list. This lack of personal contact between the student and teacher is, in my opinion, one of the greatest defects of the German system. It is, of course, caused by the overcrowded conditions in the German universities.

The lectures themselves are held on a high academic level. They are directed at the top student, not at the average student as is often the case in American state universities. The lecturer is not especially worried if the listeners are following the subject matter. As a result, one can sit for a whole semester in a particular lecture without understanding a thing. This, in itself, is no immediate

Miss their professors

tragedy for the student because the course does not end with a final exam.

ORGANIZED social life such as is found at OU does not exist at the Free University. The possible exceptions are the several balls held by the different faculties which no one attends anyway and the student political and sport organizations. Of the latter, the political organizations are predominant numerically. A typical evening consists of meeting in a local *Kneipe* (small restaurant) to drink beer and listen to a guest speaker, after which lively discussions follow until the wee hours of morning.

Scattered throughout Berlin are numerous *Studentenlokale* or student night clubs, the most famous of which is the "Riverboat." Here, with the aid of a student identification card, the student can elbow his way into any one of the five crowded dance halls for the grand total of 12 cents. On weekends five rock-and-roll bands, one for each room, blare forth to the spectacle of some 600-800 dancers attempting to dance *Sloß* in an area of two square feet per couple.

Contrary to general opinion, the *schlagende Verbindungen*, the so-called duelling fraternities, are still active in the German universities. Most Germans believe that the fraternities have been banned by the university authorities, but the ban extends only so far that the members are not allowed to wear the fraternity colors on campus.

In response to a campus-wide invitation, I attended what could be called a "rush party" of one of these famous organizations. This consisted first of all of beer and conversation in the crowded cellar of the fraternity house, during which the members, dressed in beany caps, attempted to picture the joys of fraternity life for the prospective members. At this stage of the game, I kept my mouth shut because foreigners were not allowed in this particular fraternity.

The general shabbiness of the whole surroundings was striking. The membership was at the moment only 20, and the prospects of new members seemed slim, for the new member must attend two to three long meetings a week and is also placed under rather heavy financial obligations.

To highlight the evening, the prospective duelists, myself included, were given a grand tour of the house, culminating in a large attic which looked like a Middle Ages armory with its padded armor, swords, dummies, head masks, etc. As a special treat, the most talented saberswinger demonstrated the basic duelling strokes before the gaping freshmen. One consists of holding the sword high over the head and bringing it down on the opponent's head with a flick of the wrist. This he demonstrated by banging away at a metal dummy-head, resulting in a frightful noise. Next two of the members, looking like a combination of arctic explorer and bee-keeper in their padded suits and masks, paired off and started swinging away at each other in a duel demonstration. Full membership, they

explained, can only be acquired after a certain number of duels. A full-fledged duel is fought with only the eyes, nose and body protected, as could be evidenced by the ear and cheek scars proudly sported by the various members. To reassure the fainter-hearted prospects, they told us that during the duels: "*Gibt's immer einh Arzt dabei.*" (There always was a doctor on hand.)

An ever-recurring refrain in the divided Germany question is the West German concern that between the two German populations with the added years of enforced separation a feeling of estrangement will develop. For this reason, the Bonn government is often ready to give trade concessions, badly needed by the East German side, in order to gain visiting concessions such as the recent Berlin Passierschein Agreement which serve to keep the contact alive between the two populations.

JUST MAKING a casual visit in the East Sector of the city, the foreign visitor, dressed in West German clothes, can sense this feeling of separation as he is beleaguered from all sides with the request for cigarettes (usually from little old ladies) accompanied by the question: "*Sind Sie von Drüben?*" (Are you from over there?) I find this word usage most significant. The East Germans referring to West Germany use the word *drüben* (lit. over there)—the same word which the West Germans use in referring to East Germany.

Perhaps those most hard hit by the enforced separation are the East German university students. There exists a rather lively contact between the American students from the Free University and the East German Humboldt University students; whereas all forms of contact between the two German student populations seems to be almost totally lacking.

I have laid great stress on the German concept of academic freedom, and it is this field, in my opinion, that the real German tragedy comes into the foreground, more so than in other Communist countries, because in the other bloc countries the difference between academic freedom and strict control of academic thought is not a difference of a few city blocks. For example, the East German student of American literature must reconcile himself to an incomplete career based on the American classics and some more modern American authors such as Jack London, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. I am not saying that the average East German student is an avid anti-Communist who would pole-vault over the Wall at the first opportunity; instead I am saying that he is denied the opportunity to work in an atmosphere of academic objectivity.

PAUL GREGORY, '63ba, is studying abroad under an Institute of International Education-Free University of Berlin Award. At OU he majored in economics and Russian, was captain of the tennis team, participated in OU's first summer seminar in Russian studies in Munich and was named a Woodrow Wilson fellow.