

EUROPEAN DOCUMENT



WEST OF THE WALL

by William McGurn

Berlin, the guidebooks all agree, does not get very hot, but at this conference for German and American journalists the 90-degree heat wave is the major source of complaint. The conference organizers—the American Council of Young Political Leaders, the City of Berlin, Atlantic Bridge, and the U.S. Information Agency—have booked us into a hotel lacking air conditioning and featuring windows of a particularly nasty Teutonic design that makes them virtually impossible to open. On the first evening of the conference, during a dinner with Ambassador Arthur Burns at the Harnack House, U.S. Minister Nelson Ledsky elicits a warm round of applause for his diplomatic suggestion that we dispense with our jackets. But we continue to sweat.

The Harnack House is an intriguing building, formerly the workplace of German scientists like Albert Einstein and now the U.S. Officer's Club. Recently it has been redecorated, in a style one guest described as neo-bordello: heavy maroon carpet and drapes, set off by pink and white. Over cocktails the Germans and Americans exchange jokes about their respective political leaders; the Germans are bemused at the keen interest the Americans display for the Green Party, who despite their two million votes in the last election are considered to be of minor importance.

As might be expected, what most of these journalists have on their minds is missiles: specifically, the Pershing II's scheduled to be deployed on German soil at the end of the year. Ambassador Burns has a few strong words concerning Petra Kelly and her Greens, and describes as "hooligans" the five-to-seven hundred demonstrators who made headlines in June by stoning Vice President Bush's car in Krayfeld. A white-haired grandfather figure

complete with suspenders and gold-rimmed glasses, the Ambassador fields questions from the reporters. An American journalist, endeavoring to reconcile Burns's statements on the missiles with those received from Administration officials in Washington, admits she is confused. The Ambassador is sympathetic. "Talk to some more people," he tells her, "and you'll be more confused still." What the Ambassador does not say is that this is perhaps the nut of the problem: how can there be popular support without popular understanding?

Over on the other side, reaching some 1,209 feet up into the skyline, is the East Berlin TV tower. Built largely with funds exacted from the faithful in the form of a "church tax," the tower is modeled after a similar one back in Mother Moscow. Close to the top is a glass-enclosed sphere called the Telécafé, a revolving restaurant that completes one full turn each hour. After building it the East Germans discovered to their chagrin that on sunny days the light striking the orb produces a giant cross, visible for miles. Locals call it "the Pope's revenge," and rumor has it that the authorities have tried everything they can think of to get rid of it. In Berlin, the metaphors are rarely subtle.



During the course of our program, I am finally introduced to a bona fide Green, the Honorable Uwe Tietz, a member of parliament as well as of the Alternate List Party. Herr Tietz is about 35 years old, charming, and as he informs me a "practicing capitalist" in the Schumacher mold—the proprietor of a small Rent-A-Van concern. To the delight of the Americans, he is even dressed the part: yellow T-shirt, plastic sandals, and a striped sports jacket that more closely resembles a pajama top. Unlike most of his fellow Greens, however, Herr Tietz is a born and bred Berliner.

From our conversation, rendered comprehensible by the able translation of Stefan Simons of the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, a definite lack of consistency becomes apparent. In fact, aside from making a program out of opposition to everyone else, the Greens have no real plans. In response to my query as to whether he is against all nuclear weapons or would accept German nuclear weapons, he says, yes, he could accept German nuclear arms. He asks me if I believe in that. I tell him that I believe what he is saying—but am not sure *he* believes what he is saying. There is a pause, for translation. Then he laughs. "Perhaps you are right," he tells me.

Later that night, most of the journalists decide to take advantage of the German beer and the evening breeze by parking themselves at some outdoor cafe. Even as late as one or two a.m. the Kurfürstendamm—Berlin's main drag—is still hopping. I order an *orangesaft*, and am ripped off for 8 deutschemarks (\$3.50). Not far up the block, a topless dancer beckons from the red-lit doorway of a seedy cabaret. A German asks me about Will Rogers, and after a day of INF discussions I yield to an overwhelming temptation. "A well-known Communist radio commentator of the 30s," I say, seriously. High overhead, the revolving blue-and-white Mercedes-Benz

symbol dominates the dark sky, a beacon of capitalist light: another blunt metaphor, like the Wall.

In the end, of course, everything comes back to the Wall.

Over its 22 years of existence the only changes have served to make it both technologically and psychologically more forbidding. Even at inherently scenic scapes like the Glienicke Bridge—where Francis Gary Powers was exchanged for Colonel Rudolf Abel back in 1962—the Marxist propensity for the crass asserts itself. The result here is a snapshot so close to parody that any grade-B Hollywood set designer who attempted to duplicate it would be laughed out of his job. Divided by a white line smack in the middle, the steel bridge features a Western half freshly painted, neatly paved, and with boatloads of happy West Berliners cruising by underneath. The East Berlin side sports a faded, peeling coat of light green paint spotted with pigeon droppings, weeds sprouting all along its crumbling roadway. Those of us who venture out toward the line have our photographs taken by East German soldiers guarding the "anti-fascist barriers" on their side.

I told you it wasn't subtle. Nevertheless, to suggest that the shamefully blatant crudeness of the Soviet presence only intimidates the Germans would be a mistake. Rather, this seems to bolster the Germans' sense of *superiority* to the Russians, reaffirming the feeling that they better than the Americans know how to handle Moscow. As the *Spectator's* precipient managing editor reported in these pages a year ago,* the Germans are firmly committed to détente—at almost any cost. In practical terms, Ostpolitik means that some 80 percent of the East German population regularly sees the West German population, and families and

*Wladyslaw Pleszczynski, "A Separate Peace," *TAS*, August 1982.

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friends on both sides of the border appreciate its small but real benefits. Given this, the decision of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's conservative government to guarantee almost \$400 million worth of private loans to the East (the first loan with no strings attached) is not at all earth-shattering.

It's just the cost of doing business. What all sides know is that Germany, the first site of any East-West conflict, is the key to Europe's future. What they don't know is what that future will be. At the moment, U.S. officials, even while celebrating the 300th anniversary of Germans in

America, worry over the "new generation" of Europeans who have no memories of the Second World War. For this majority of Europeans, reared in peace and affluence, Berlin before the Wall does not exist and America is more likely to be remembered for Vietnam than for the

Marshall Plan. "You may think me naive," Herr Tietz told me, "but I do not want my peace to have to depend on how many missiles I have on my side of the line." These words are from a Berliner, inside the Reichstag, with a view of the Wall quite literally over our shoulders. □

THE GREAT AMERICAN SALOON SERIES



BIG STASH'S

by Joe Mysak

Gus: *Don't go about it the wrong way. Don't use the Democrats' approach. Don't throw money at it.*

Tom: *Forget it. What's the use? She'll never go out with me—I mean on a date.*

Gus: *Really cute, eh?*

Tom: *Oh, perfect. About so high, likes sports, yet an intellectual, a real intellectual. With all that, the kind of girl who blushes the first time you meet her. Murderous blue eyes, and this great hair, so blonde it's greenish, you know.*

Gus: *Sounds your type.*

Tom: *It doesn't make a difference. Her old man is loaded. Every time I talk to her it's like looking over a hedge at this incredible Brueghel-esque scene, filled with people with tons of money. I mean, I can't believe it, it's hilarious. I ask her about what she's going to do on the weekend, and she talks about tennis, shooting, sailing—My God, her father owns a 54-foot sailboat. On the scale of money, this guy has Money That Buys Things. She's first class. Out of my league. Way over my head.*

Gus: *Not the kind of girl you'd take to Big Stash's.*

Oh, yes, Big Stash's, site of first loves, first beers, first real drinking bouts; for some of us, the first restaurant we ever went to. The place took us through high school, college years, and even now serves as the capper to a night's real work at Frenchy's, that other famous Union County saloon, previously described in these pages.* Big Stash's: home of fabled, thick pea soup; Pabst on tap;

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kielbasi and kraut; huge overstuffed sandwiches. Big Stash's: a piece of pure Jerseyana unchanged since the 1950s, a saloon and restaurant that has even given its name to a concept, as in a line first uttered in Mr. Bierals's first-period algebra class, about a kid who has since gone into politics: "My God, is he stash."

Stash had as much to do with personal style as it does with the place. As I recall, it had to do with formica-topped tables, carpet dusty with sand from The Shore, plastic pitchers of beer, and polyester leisure suits. It had something to do with pictures of Authentic Slavic Dances on the walls, fat men in Hawaiian shirts, and beehive bubble hairdos; it had something to do with being on the prom committee, slick pompadours, driving your parents' Pontiac, and being the kind of guy who would wear a corduroy sports jacket into the 21 Club—and not on a dare, either. It had something to do with cafeteria-style steam tables, and whether or not you worried about the unwritten rules.

I said the place has not changed since the 1950s. This is not exactly true; just a few years ago Stash added banquet rooms for weddings and doubled the size of the bar, paneling parts of it with smoky, gold-veined mirror, the kind called Venetian and apparently standard issue for all homes on Staten Island. Nevertheless, Big Stash's remains substantially unchanged.

Psychiatrists and other such charlatans, I suppose, would say that

*"Frenchy's of Roselle Park," *TAS*, May 1980.

Stash's represents something we all fear, a reminder of just how fragile the veneer is. They might see in it a perfect symbol of the middle-class quicksand we are desperately trying to escape, of all the little polyester things we are ashamed of, and try to hide or deny, usually to no avail. Our entire lives are dark secrets: "Hey, I'm cool, I went to an Ivy League school, I'm okay, really, no big deal," we say to rich girls, and of course it all is a big deal.

More dispassionate observers, of course, would just say that Big Stash's is a damned fine saloon and restaurant, and leave it at that; the best kind of place to bring your wedding party after a tuxedo-sizing, the kind of place to discuss current affairs, politics, softball, and the old days, like the time the nuns taught the glee club "The Ballad of the Green Berets," which went on to become the hit of our grammar-school Christmas Assembly, just behind "How Much Is That Doggy In The Window?"

Big Stash's is on South Wood Avenue in Linden, just down a ways from Tucky's Pizza and the live poultry store with the Rhode Island Reds and other such gobblers in the windows, just across from U.S. Routes 1 & 9, now at what must be their most scenic, what with softball players dodging oil tankers and semis to field balls hit out of Wheeler Park. It is cheek by jowl with the largest refinery on the East Coast and its tank farm, part of which blows every few years, knocking out windows for miles around, sending bystanders running for cover, and causing mothers to soothe their tender babes with "There, there, it's only one or two of the tanks." It is about two

miles from the Tremley Point saloons which are really nothing more than neon beer signs in people's living-room windows, and maybe a mile from the field where Parker Bagley hit a softball 350 feet over the center-field fence and into the tank farm back in 1979. □

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