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East Berliners dashing across the line for food distributed in the Western sector—"their crime was a simple one."

BERLIN, 1953

By NORMAN COUSINS

In this first instalment of a two-part report on Berlin today SR's editor describes his encounter with two women from the Soviet zone in a West Berlin food distribution center. Part Two, coming next week, tells of a visit to East Berlin's famous Stalinallee.

BERLIN, 1953.

LET me begin by telling you about two German women.

I can't tell you their names; I don't know their names. Nor did I have any right to ask. They were from the Soviet zone of Germany and they were wise to conceal their identities. They feared that if what they were doing became known they and their families might be hurt.

Their crime was a simple one. They had violated an order and had come from the East zone to West Berlin. They came simply because they were

hungry, and they came to get free food.

I should like you to know about these women because you might like to know more about a situation in which it is a crime for hungry people to accept free food. When I met them they were at one of the six free food distribution centers in West Berlin. One of the women was about fifty-five, the other about forty. In common with countless thousands of other Germans from the Soviet sector of Berlin or the surrounding Soviet zone outside the city, they came because the Americans were providing emer-

gency food packages. They knew that they could get only one package per person per month. They knew, too, that one package would meet the basic nutritional needs of one person for only one week. But even this was necessary and welcome.

By word of mouth or by secret radio, the hungry people had learned the address of where they would be given food. When they arrived at the factory they found an efficient and swift-moving distribution system in operation. A large area on the first floor of the factory had been cleared away; long tables had been set up and dozens of Germans were at work, unpacking the crates of food. The hungry people moved by the tables at the rate of about twenty a minute.

Near the door was a West Berlin policeman, a tall youth of about twenty-two, who was answering the questions of anxious and bewildered people, many of whom were in West Berlin for the first time since the end of the war. To those who came without proper cards he explained that it is first necessary to have their East Germany or East Berlin papers checked

at the nearby town hall, where food cards would be issued. One person could obtain as many as seven or eight food cards if he had that many people in his family—so long as he could prove it with their identification papers, and so long as he had the strength to carry the food away.

I was astounded to see women of sixty or seventy years make off with bundles that must have weighed sixty or seventy pounds. An elderly woman who couldn't have weighed more than one hundred pounds herself was carrying at least half her weight in two old burlap bags, one in each hand.

For an hour I had been watching the East Germans as they came to collect their food. They were of all ages. Mostly, though, they were people in late middle age or older. All were poorly dressed, some in clothes that had been patched and repatched. Even the younger people had a drab look about them. And almost all of them had come on foot. I saw at least a dozen young mothers with baby carriages.

At the beginning the crowds would average 20,000 to 30,000 people per day at this particular food center. But that was at a time when it was feared that the giveaway program might last only a few days or so. Now that the food package distribution plan is being set up on a continuing basis, providing for one package per person per month, the East Berliners have leveled off to a steady rate of about 4,500 per day at each of the six distribution points.

As you have no doubt read, the East Berlin authorities have tried every trick in the book to keep the people in the East zone from getting the free food packages. It is impossible to build barriers at every one of the thousands of streets which connect Communist Berlin with Free Berlin. But the authorities have tried everything else—including threats, force, and propaganda persuasion. They even sent thousands of Communists to apply for the food packages; no questions are asked by West Berlin, of course, concerning a person's political ties. These Communists would then trail the other East Berliners back to their homes and inform on them.

THE resultant punishment would take various forms, of which confiscation of the food package was the most lenient. In some cases people would be deprived of their identification papers, which had enabled them to move about the city. Some were deprived of their jobs. I have no way of verifying the story, but I was told that some East Berliners were sent to jail.

The Soviet authorities even set up a food distribution center of their own in East Berlin for the "relief of" 300,000 unemployed West Berliners. This plan was advertised over the radio. It turned out that the food packages were the very ones that had been confiscated from people returning to East Berlin. Thousands of West Berliners went over to East Berlin in response to the offer, collected their packages, and returned to West Berlin, where they promptly handed over their packages to the same distribution centers where the East Berliners had picked them up in the first place. There was some speculation that some of the packages might have shifted back and forth a dozen times or more. The shifting stopped, however, when the Communist authorities realized their plan had backfired.

ANOTHER device they tried was to publicize the propaganda line that President Eisenhower's offer to 15,000,000 Germans in the Soviet zone actually averaged down to about only eighty-five cents per person. No more than the price of a handful of telephone calls, the argument ran. This argument began to lose its charm when writings began to appear on walls or on the bottom of public signs to the effect that eighty-five cents might not be very much, but that was still eighty-five cents' worth of food more than the Communists were providing.

Whether eighty-five cents is a lot or a little, the fact remains that it is being translated into effective emergency food supply units. I watched the attendants as they filled up the individual packages. This is what an individual card obtained: one and a half pounds of lard, two tins of condensed milk, one packet of powdered milk, one packet of lentil beans, one pound of flour or rice. It is enough, the experts say, to meet the average food requirements of a single person for one week. Besides, there's another food package available next month.

The people left the main counters and made off for one side where they would unpack their food kits and then reassemble them in somewhat more concealed form. The women with the baby carriages were carefully stuffing their tins and packets under the mattresses. It was then that I met the two German women I am anxious to tell you about. They were stuffing small tin cans into pockets of their coats or into the sleeves of sweaters or coats to be carried over their arms. Other items were stuffed into oversized pocketbooks or valises or shopping bags carefully covered at the top

with camouflage materials. Each seemed to have at least six food supply units.

As I looked at these two women with their extra food parcels I knew that no matter how many sleeves and coats they filled, they wouldn't be able to conceal the fact that they were carrying American food into East Germany. I went up to them and asked if I might talk to them.

I don't think I shall ever forget their look of horror as they stared up at me, eyes and mouths open and faces taut. After a brief moment one of them said they had nothing to say. The other said there was no way for her to know that I wasn't someone who was trying to get information about them in order to report her to the Communist authorities.

I told her I knew exactly how she felt; then through an interpreter, Werner Dietrich. I explained that I had come to observe the food distribution plan in action, I didn't want to have her name; all I wanted to know was how she was going to manage all these bundles and how far she had to go.

The young policeman who had been standing nearby reassured the women and little by little they began to show confidence. After a few minutes the older woman explained her fright and caution by saying that her friends had advised her against coming, saying that the food was merely bait and that she might endanger her family.

ALREADY we have suffered much," she said. "My husband owned a flour factory. When the Communists came in they said he was a capitalist and took it away and made it a people's factory. They gave him nothing for the factory but they said he could work as a foreman at the shipping station for the flour. He had to take the job or there would be no work and we would have no food.

"My son, he was in the war and lost both legs. When he came home from the hospital my husband had given him a job as an accountant. Then when the Communists took over the factory they told my son he could keep his job if he joined the SED (*Sozialistische Einiger Demokratische*—that is, the local Communist Party). My son, he didn't want to join because of what they had done to my husband, and they took away his job and said he could have no other. They said all he could have would be a veteran's pension, which is only seventy-five East Marks a month. [About \$4.]

"We have had enough trouble already."

All this while the younger woman

had been searching my face. I could tell she still wasn't quite sure. I thought it might be a good idea to show her my passport and my wife's photograph. She asked me how many children I had. It developed that she had the same number of children, four; and she said, "Ach," with a slight play of disbelief and amused solicitude when I told her all my children were girls. She said she had two boys and was certain that my luck would change if I kept trying. Everyone joined in the laugh, including the victim. That broke the ice and the women spoke freely.

When I asked how far they had come they said they were from a town some seventy miles from Berlin. They had started their journey at five A.M., that morning, taking a train and a bus and then working their way across the city in order to avoid the checking points.

WEREN'T they concerned about getting all the food out of West Berlin? What about the other people on the trains and buses? Some of them might be party functionaries or informers, *nein*?

That wasn't the way it worked, they were prompt to reply. What you did was to leave the big items of food with friends in West Berlin who would carry the packages into the East zone, without too much vulnerability. Besides, the homes of friends were good parking stations, and you could have the food picked up by other friends from East Berlin who happened to be going into West Berlin for one reason or another.

"Ach," she said, "there are so many ways to get the food through."

We offered to drive the women to their friends' home in the French zone of West Berlin, and they accepted. As we drove away from the food center the younger woman, who up until this time had been the more shy and hesitant of the two, spoke up.

"I am sorry I am so soon having to go home," she said. "This is the first time since before the war I have ridden in a private car. And never have I seen so many autos before—"

Our car swung into the Kurfürstendamm near the Wilhelm Memorial Church. We passed some big department stores, their windows displaying oversize Persian rugs, attractive furniture, and stylish evening gowns.

"It is so hard to believe," she continued. "The Communists tell us that there is luxury in West Berlin but it is all owned by the Americans, and that the new buildings and the new stores are all paid for by the Americans, who are going to make the Ger-

mans pay for it many times over with high interest. They have said that the working people cannot afford to buy these capitalist goods. But where do all these rich people come from? Everywhere I look I see people going into the stores and coming out with packages. Maybe these are not just rich people. Maybe the working people have enough money to buy these things, too.

"In the Soviet zone we have to use these"—she fished some rationing coupons out of her bag and waved them—"but even then it is no good. A spoonful of butter for one person has to last a full month.

"Not enough milk. My young boy has tuberculosis. In West Berlin you can buy butter and milk enough for your family. I will tell my husband about this."

This was the first time the younger woman had referred to her husband. When I asked her what her husband did there was an awkward pause and the women looked at each other as though trying to decide whether they ought to answer the question. I was afraid I had touched on a sensitive point and started to change the subject when the younger woman replied.

"He is a clerk who does bookkeeping and he is a member of the Communist Party. But he is not a real Communist. I swear he is not a Communist. He joined because he had to. When they came and invited him to join the SED he knew he would lose his job and not find another if he did not join. He is always thinking of his family. He surrendered and joined the SED.

BUT he is not a Communist. I would know it if he were. He doesn't bother to read the literature they give him, and many times he doesn't go to the meetings. He promises me he won't inform on his friends, like they want him to do. And he knew I was coming today and what would happen to him if I got caught, and he said it was all right for me to come. He listens secretly to the radio from West Berlin and he knew that America was giving us food and he didn't say, as the other real Communists say, that it is only a cheap trick to get us into trouble."

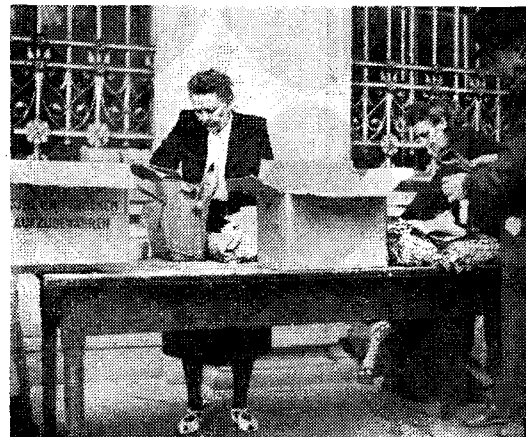
I looked first at one, then at the other, then asked the inevitable question. If conditions in the Soviet zone were as bad as all that, why stick it out? Why not come over to West Berlin and make a fresh start?

The question didn't go down too well.

"It is not so easy, just to come over
(Continued on page 40)



A policeman directing.



A woman repacking her carton.



—Photos by N.C.

A boy very much happier.

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The Fifth Freedom

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This week's guest editorial is by Seymour St. John, headmaster of the Choate School, Wallingford, Conn.*

MORE than three centuries ago a handful of pioneers crossed the ocean to Jamestown and Plymouth in search of freedoms they were unable to find in their own countries, the freedoms we still cherish today: freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of speech, freedom of religion. Today the descendants of the early settlers, and those who have joined them since, are fighting to protect these freedoms at home and throughout the world.

And yet there is a fifth freedom—basic to those four—that we are in danger of losing: the freedom to be one's best. St. Exupéry describes a ragged, sensitive-faced Arab child, haunting the streets of a North African town, as a lost Mozart: he would never be trained or developed. Was he free? "No one grasped you by the shoulder while there was still time; and nought will awaken in you the sleeping poet or musician or astronomer that possibly inhabited you from the beginning." The freedom to be one's best is the chance for the development of each person to his highest power.

How is it that we in America have begun to lose this freedom, and how can we regain it for our nation's youth? I believe it has started slipping away from us because of three great misunderstandings.

First, the misunderstanding of the meaning of democracy. The principal of a great Philadelphia high school is driven to cry for help in combating

the notion that it is undemocratic to run a special program of studies for outstanding boys and girls. Again, when a good independent school in Memphis recently closed some thoughtful citizens urged that it be taken over by the public-school system and used for boys and girls of high ability; that it have entrance requirements and give an advanced program of studies to superior students who were interested and able to take it. The proposal was rejected because it was undemocratic! Out of this misunderstanding comes the middle-muddle. Courses are geared to the middle of the class. The good student is unchallenged, bored. The loafer receives his passing grade. And the lack of an outstanding course for the outstanding student, the lack of a standard which a boy or girl must meet, passes for democracy.

The second misunderstanding concerns what makes for happiness. The aims of our present-day culture are avowedly ease and material well-being: shorter hours; a shorter week; more return for less accomplishment; more soft-soap excuses and fewer honest, realistic demands. In our schools this is reflected by the vanishing hickory stick and the emerging psychiatrist. The hickory stick had its faults, and the psychiatrist has his strengths. But the trend is clear: *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*. Do we really believe that our softening standards bring happiness? Is it our sound and considered judgment that the tougher subjects of the classics and mathematics should be thrown aside, as suggested by some educators, for doll-playing? Small wonder that Charles Malik, Lebanese

delegate at the U.N., writes: "There is in the West"—in the United States—"a general weakening of moral fiber. [Our] leadership does not seem to be adequate to the unprecedented challenges of the age."

The last misunderstanding is in the area of values. Here are some of the most influential tenets of teacher education over the past fifty years: there is no eternal truth; there is no absolute moral law; there is no God. Yet all of history has taught us that the denial of these ultimates, the placement of man or state at the core of the universe, results in a paralyzing mass selfishness; and the first signs of it are already frighteningly evident.

ARNOLD TOYNBEE has said that all progress, all development come from challenge and a consequent response. Without challenge there is no response, no development, no freedom. So first we owe to our children the most demanding, challenging curriculum that is within their capabilities. Michelangelo did not learn to paint by spending his time doodling. Mozart was not an accomplished pianist at the age of eight as the result of spending his days in front of a television set. Like Eve Curie, like Helen Keller, they responded to the challenge of their lives by a disciplined training: and they gained a new freedom.

The second opportunity we can give our boys and girls is the right to failure. "Freedom is not only a privilege, it is a test," writes De Nöuy. What kind of a test is it, what kind of freedom where no one can fail? The day is past when the United States can afford to give high-school diplomas to all who sit through four years of instruction, regardless of whether any visible results can be discerned. We live in a narrowed world where we must be alert, awake to realism: and realism demands a standard which either must be met or result in failure. These are hard words, but they are brutally true. If we deprive our children of the right to fail we deprive them of their knowledge of the world as it is.

Finally, we can expose our children to the best values we have found. By relating our lives to the evidences of the ages, by judging our philosophy in the light of values that history has proven truest, perhaps we shall be able to produce that "ringing message, full of content and truth, satisfying the mind, appealing to the heart, firing the will, a message on which one can stake his whole life." This is the message that could mean joy and strength and leadership—freedom as opposed to serfdom.

—SEYMOUR ST. JOHN.