

BERLIN - AUGUST 1946

The pretentious architecture of Berlin, apeing a style which, before the invention of the arch used columns with lintel over, was every-where to be seen. These columns are monstrous here even after so many have been destroyed. Those which remain often reveal their spurious nature when the plaster has fallen away, exposing the bricks beneath. Possibly the style pays tribute to a national character - Prussian perhaps. These patches where the plaster has fallen seemed significant.

We drove through the Russian sector, through the Brandenburger Tor, and later into the French sector. To visit the IVSP work-camp at Nikolassee we had to go into the American sector. The USSR army guards were very impressive-looking. People on the streets looked better fed than those in the west, but not so cheerful. In the S-Bahn the crowd was cosmopolitan. A group of returning POW from the east came by. They looked so "driven", so "gutted"; their eyes were the eyes of men utterly demoralised and subdued. In a shop in the Unter den Linden (Russian Sector) there was an impressive exhibition of the immediate past, present and hoped-for future of Berlin the scheme for the new street plan, the figures for the repairs of dwellings, 50% of which had been destroyed, for the recovery of education - the intake of the universities, the census of teachers and the training of new ones. This was the most hopeful half hour I spent in Germany. I paid one Mark for a packet of pictures, and the man showed me a photograph of himself as he had been, and patted his jacket now so ample for his shrunken frame.

An old woman was grubbing out roots of a pavement tree, long since brought down. The Tiergarten no longer exists as a place where trees grow. Almost all have gone. There remains a company of destroyed statuary. Among the new things are the giant Bunker which has taken the Allies so much and so long to destroy; and the allotments.

In the Russian sector I spoke with the gangs of women, clearing away rubble by chains of baskets, out of basements to the street above. They had been apprehended as collaborators. They were of all ages. I did not discover whether they received heavy worker's rations for this futile work. I visited several flats, often only partially habitable, all shabby, where large families were housed in few rooms. We were distributing clothes from the clothing store. We visited a settlement of bombed-out families. As elsewhere, the conditions varied with the will of the women to make do. Some of the huts let in rain and the sanitary conditions were unspeakable bad. If only this situation were an emergency of short duration.

We went to collect several old women from Spandau to move them to another home in the outskirts of the city. Before our journey was completed, one old woman had lost her dinner and we had to get the people at the destination to swill out the vehicle, for the vehicle was to take our rations back to the billet!

Extracts from a Diary
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