Education in the Shadow of the Iron Curtain[1]

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN, one of the youngest in Germany, was founded in 1810 through the efforts of Wilhelm von Humboldt. For 123 years, through changing times and political upheavals, it fulfilled its task with success and dignity. In 1932 I went to Berlin from Heidelberg and thus had occasion to witness the last year of its full and untrammeled activities.

When the National Socialist party came into power in Germany in 1933, the University of Berlin lost many outstanding faculty members. Unfortunately, too, part of the faculty and student body strayed from the academic fold.

The University ceased functioning in the spring of 1945 with the collapse of the Nazi system itself. Because of persistent air attacks we were not able to carry on any teaching during that year. There were hardly any students; buildings had disappeared; there was no water, gas, or electricity. I was forced to abandon work in my fairly well-preserved department for nearly a year. In January of 1946 the occupation forces allowed my return, just in time for the opening of the school by the Russian forces.

Obviously the name of the institution had to be changed. The new administrators—sworn Communists—emphasized that this was not to be a reopening of an old, but the formation of a new, school. First it was called Linden University after the street on which it is located; later the name was changed to Humboldt University, after its founder.

For three years, as Dean of the Medical Faculty, I had opportunity to observe at very close range the organization, as well as the spiritual structure, of this university and the changes and disturbances that occurred. It became evident very soon that the Russians would not tolerate the University as a school of higher learning for its own sake; they would use it as a place for education of "specialists" who would serve, through their knowledge, the advancement of the "working" people. Subjects like religion, law, history, Greek, and Latin became superfluous. Russian and other Slavic languages took preference over others (at the high school level English disappeared entirely). In the biological sciences, especially in genetics, the teachings of such men as Mendel, Correns, and Morgan had to be abandoned. However, the study of pedagogy, physics, chemistry, medicine, and agriculture were greatly encouraged because they obviously could benefit the working population.

[1] An address presented at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, Chicago, on October 1, 1952.

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Regulations and policies regarding admission to the University were altered. Children of factory workers and small farmers received preference over the sons and daughters of lawyers, doctors, teachers, and ministers. This often led to misstatements on the questionnaires: students applying gave their fathers' profession simply as "laborer," if they were formerly professional men now compelled to perform manual labor for a certain period because of participation in the Nazi party.

For members of the low income groups special preparatory courses were instituted wherein the talented student could acquire some sort of high school training in about a year and a half. Many of the more intelligent ones succeeded, but there were some who could not attain the desired level in such a short time. Unfortunately it became my duty as dean to refuse admission to students without sufficient preparation. Sometimes, when my conscience did not permit me to accept a student on the results of the matriculation examination, the Communist Ministry of Education reversed my decision. This situation led to my resigning my position as dean.

On the whole, teachers in any of the accepted subjects were well treated; they received sufficient salary and the so-called "Pajoks"—monthly packages of meat, sugar, butter, potatoes, some coffee, and Russian cigarettes—in those days items valued higher than money. Teachers were also granted admission to certain cultural clubs where journalists, politicians, artists, actors, and professors could receive meals without surrendering ration tickets. This attitude was impressive. For a while it looked as if we in certain professions might hope for recovery from our fourteen years of degradation. However, we were soon to experience pressure directed against another part of our University, the student body.

At first the students relieved from military and Nazi party discipline were organized freely and according to their own inclinations. Soon, however, their elected officers were relieved, and indoctrinated pro-Communist enthusiasts were substituted.

The first victim of this regime was Gerhard Wradzidlo, a medical student and leader of the first student organization after the war. In March of 1947 he was arrested because he opposed attempts of the Communists to exert influence on the University and raised particular protests against the adorning of the old buildings of Berlin University with Communist emblems. One day he received a telephone call, ostensibly from a friend awaiting him in a cafe. Only policemen and soldiers awaited him. In the Russian

Occupation Zone he was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Similar cases in other universities also aroused the students in Berlin. In Jena in 1948, the election of five members of the student body was not confirmed by the occupation forces, and they were replaced by students who were more compliant with the wishes of the government.

As late as March 1948, the members of the student council in Berlin were ordered to a conference with Professor Solotuchin, the Chief of the People's Culture Division of the Soviet Military Administration. At this conference the professor deplored the study of "foreign" cultures by the Berlin students and recommended instead the study of Communism. Later, disciplinary proceedings were instituted against these council members because they had called a student assembly in the British sector of Berlin (no decision was reached in the case).

The spying on students and betrayal by their colleagues and the feelings that permeated the lives of the students are best reported in the words of a medical student:

"It all started during a meeting of the German Social Democratic Party during the election campaign in Berlin in 1948. The meeting was held in Zehlendorf, in the U. S. sector, but the Communists had sent a delegation of their own: young men with wild hair, dressed in windbreakers, who tried to break up the assembly by singing and chanting. The reaction of the audience was as much against the oppressors of Berlin as against the actual disturbance, and the disturbers of the peace were driven from the hall —not without the use of some force by some of us.

"At that time I was studying at the Humboldt University. A few weeks after the meeting I have mentioned I was sitting in the University dining hall: a great dark room with shored-up walls and windows repaired with cardboard. Pale, poorly clothed students ate their soup, after presenting their ration cards. I noticed suddenly that several students at another table were watching me; I seemed to recognize their faces—then I knew: they had belonged to the group of hecklers at the meeting in Zehlendorf. I grew uneasy; my skill with my fists might mark me, as an opponent of the Soviet regime, for several years of forced labor. I got up quickly and left the dining room with my heart pounding.

"A few days later a friend approached as I was working in the anatomy laboratory and said, 'There are three men outside; they want to talk to you.' I knew immediately what his words meant. I thought of the possibilities of escape: there was only one exit and I couldn't jump from a third story window. So I went down—my mouth dry, my heart pounding, and with a feeling in the pit of my stomach that made me know the meaning of 'hypochondria.' I was horribly afraid but sure it couldn't be that this was happening to me; it was like one of those dreams in which one knows one is dreaming. They were standing in the entrance hall: a lean, little man with sneering features and two big 'bulls' with blunt, brutal faces—the usual SS or GPU types. The little one came up to me and said with exaggerated politeness: 'Have I the honor to speak to Herr R.? Unfortunately we must ask you to come with us. We'd like you to identify a certain K.' I answered that I had never heard the name before. 'Certainly, but he makes precise reference to you and we have to prove it just as precisely.' I objected that I was extremely busy and would prefer to testify the following day. 'No, the business is pressing. You must come immediately, but it won't take much of your time.' During this exchange my brain was working feverishly: three men coming to get me to make a deposition? Highly improbable. It is a typical NKVD method not to give the reason for an arrest, but always to talk of a short, harmless conversation. These 'conversations' frequently lasted several years. There was only one thing to be done, fly!—quickly!—anywhere! I gave the little one the dissecting kit which I still held in my hand and said: 'Hold this a minute; I have to sign out before I can go with you.' I ran down the steps and out of the building, with one of the officials right behind me, guarding me. As soon as I got into the open I began to run as fast as I could. I glanced behind me to see the officer staring after me, speechless, and then signaling with his whistle. I paid no attention but ran as fast as I could through the crooked streets and passages of this old part of Berlin. Stalin looked down on me from the Russian headquarters; the words on the sign said: 'Praise to the great Stalin, savior of the people.' A Russian sentry gazed in astonishment at the sight of a young man in a white coat and rubber apron running past him. Every few minutes I looked behind me to see if I was being followed. Every automobile seemed to contain my pursuers, and I waited for each to pull up beside me, but they all drove past. Ahead of me I saw the Sandkrug bridge, end of the 'democratic' sector. Two of the People's police were checking the papers of a lorry and paid no attention to me. I ran over the bridge. Panting, with a racing heart, I sat on a curbstone, safe in the British sector."

More and more, the dissatisfaction and apprehension among a large part of the student body became outspoken. With their experience of military service, war imprisonment, extreme hardship and deprivation of the postwar years, these men and women knew what they wanted. Most of them had lost a number of years of their lives and were anxious to finish their studies. They had had enough pressure and regimentation, and, although their physical resistance might not have been great, they were vocal and they made themselves heard.

In their newspaper, *Colloquium,* they branded and ridiculed conditions at Linden University and made them widely known to the public, to the dissatisfaction of the Russian occupational administrators. Finally, during the winter of 1947–48, the three re-

sponsible student editors and writers of the paper, Otto Hess, a medical student, Joachim Schwarz, a law student, and Otto Stolz, a student of political science, were dismissed from the University by decree of the educational administrator of the German Soviet Zone, Paul Wandel. In vain the University Senate protested the illegal dismissal of the students. This disciplinary action of the Minister created a great storm among the students. Soon voices were heard saying that a new and different University was necessary. Many well-attended meetings were held by the students, not in the Soviet section of Berlin because they were forbidden there, but in the western part of the city, mostly around Dahlem, in the American sector. With the encouragement of officials—the mayor of Berlin, Ernst Reuter; the art historian, Edwin Redslob; many professors; and, last but not least, the American General Howley—a decision was reached in the summer of 1948: a new "Free University of Berlin" was to be founded.

Within a few months a skeleton staff of teachers was hired, buildings were evacuated by the American forces in Dahlem, and a large hospital in the British sector of West Berlin was designated as the University teaching hospital. In November 1948, the opening of the new Free University of Berlin was celebrated. At the opening General Howley and Thornton Wilder made excellent and significant addresses.

In all these efforts—administrative discussions, correspondence, difficult and often secret communications between the eastern and western sectors of Berlin, and the sheer manual labor of preparing classrooms, furniture, bookcases—the enthusiasm of the students carried the project along and led toward final success.

The first president—or as we call it "Rector"—of the Free University was the eminent historian Fredrick Meinecke, then 86 years old. Although, because of his age, he had been professor emeritus for a number of years, he consented to take the honorary presidency but left the administrative responsibilities to Edwin Redslob, his successor in office.

At the time of the opening of the Free University I was still a member of the faculty of Humboldt University, in the Russian sector. However, since the bombardments, our laboratories and experimental stations had been housed in Dahlem, in the American sector, in one of the buildings of the former Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft. I asked for, and promptly received, release from Humboldt University in March of 1949. During these months, the friction and repeated incidents between Russian and American occupational forces prompted General Howley to decree that all Humboldt University property in the western sector be incorporated into West Berlin teaching institutions. Thus it became possible for us in the pharmacology department, housed as we were in Dahlem, to transfer immediately, without having to move personnel or equipment, to the Free University of Berlin.

I received the offer to serve as head of the pharmacology department in May, 1949. Although I had doubts about accepting another call at the age of 72, I have since served another 3½ years in teaching and research. Therefore, after very close and careful observation, I can relate some of our experiences at the Free University of West Berlin.

From the history of its foundation, it is evident that the student body has taken a very special part in the function of the University, at least as compared to other German universities. The students were the ones who were exposed to Russian methods first, and therefore, acting in solidarity with their fellows and reacting most violently against those methods, they became most vocal in calling for a new school.

Members of the first classes of students, some of whom have graduated and serve as instructors, consider the Free University *their* creation. They have, therefore, received and accepted considerable rights in the administration of the school. In this way there was created a spirit of cooperation between the oldest professor and the youngest student. After 44 years of uninterrupted teaching, this spirit has contributed tremendously to the enrichment of my life. Perhaps to you in the United States there is nothing new about this, but we in Germany are enjoying such fraternity for the first time at the Free University of Berlin. We have student participation on all committees and administrative bodies; the students have a voice (and very often excellent judgment) in admissions to the school. On the other hand, the faculty is always invited, although not always present, to attend their meetings, discussions, and social gatherings. It happens that one of their meeting places is right across from my house. Thus, I may even be called upon somewhat more frequently than others, occasionally even at times not too convenient. However, contact with youth exerts the same influence on age as the earth had upon Antaeus; some of the girl students are very pretty, as even baldness and white hair will admit.

I would not have wanted to miss these years of close cooperation with the student body. The friendships that have developed on this basis will certainly last longer than my lifetime, because these experiences are by no means mine alone.

In respect to our actual work, the teaching and learning process, we are far from being in a desirable position. In Berlin we are living on an island of the Western World surrounded by high and threatening seas. The significance of this is recognized, but its impact can be fully understood only through day-to-day living. Every morning we become aware anew that only the ready and determined preparedness of the Western powers is the dam which prevents our island from becoming completely engulfed. Let us not forget, however, that in the area around our island, in the Russian Zone, there live thousands of people, suppressed and often threatened. Daily, over a period of years, there has been a stream of people entering Berlin, more than one thousand a day during the last few months. They come empty-handed, in need of money, clothing, work, and housing. The citizens of

Berlin, hard-working and persevering as they may be, are unable to cope with this endless river of misery and want. Although there are public funds for the expensive and often dangerous air transportation of these refugees into the western part of Germany, the waiting period in Berlin is costly and tedious, and often long.

The burden of refugees and unemployed upon the budget of the city is reflected at the University in decreased funds for scientific books, supplies, and apparatus. West Berlin supports the University by tax money. We are profoundly grateful for the many and magnanimous donations, above all of books and expensive apparatus, which American philanthropy has sent us through both private and official channels.

There are many students among the refugees from Eastern Zone. They come with hope and great expectations because they know that the Free University was created for those who want to study as free men and not under the yoke of a doctrine. Of course, we cannot admit all of them; their number is far too great, and we have to insist on the same scholastic standards for applicants from both East and West Berlin. It is often heart-rending to see the plight of these hopeful young men and not be able to help them. I remember many penniless students who had walked long distances to escape from the East. I have had to give them money to make a phone call to friends, to be able to ride the streetcar or to buy bread. Most of our students have no support from their parents, but are forced to apply for scholarships, to work part-time, or both. I understand that many of the American students support themselves. However, it is infinitely more difficult for a student in Berlin to find part-time work with decent pay. Harassed by worry about his daily bread, he has too little time for study and too little money for buying books. He also suffers from a mediocre and deficient grammar school and high school training. The level of such training was deplorably low under the Hitler regime, and it can be improved only gradually because good teachers are scarce. In spite of all this, the average scholastic achievements of our students are satisfactory. Performances of the best students of the class appear, fortunately, to be comparable to those in former classes.

Interest in science is lively, although often overshadowed by worry about the future. It is my impression that, compared to the ground swell of optimism I find in America, the attitude of our students toward their future is often pessimistic. Therefore, quite a few young men, often the most promising, wish to emigrate, especially to America, where they hope to find better opportunities. Apart from practical reasons, the interest in the countries of the Western World, in their people, and their ways of living is great. Every opportunity to meet with foreign students and visitors from the West is eagerly sought. Foreign visitors, students and professors alike, are welcomed and invited to discussion groups whenever it is possible. This constitutes a sharp reversal from the days of Hitler's propaganda, which antagonized and defamed everything originating outside Germany. It has become only too clear, how false and irrational his insularity and chauvinism were.

The Free University does not tolerate anti-Semitic tendencies. Occasionally one hears mention of a revival of anti-Semitism in West Germany. I have not seen evidence of it. I know for certain that our University views with suspicion anyone with anti-Semitic attitudes. Jewish men and women take an equal and successful part in the leadership of the student organizations.

Our students have actively resisted all attempts to reintroduce the dueling organizations. Regulations of the Free University expressly forbid the revival of such long-outmoded customs, although the students have the democratic right and privilege to organize clubs and athletic activities of all other kinds. I am confident that professors and students at Berlin will maintain a clearly progressive attitude and resist any reversion to undemocratic customs.

Naturally, it is a great help to all of us to see that large parts of this earth are ruled by tolerance and love of freedom. This explains my happiness in speaking to our American colleagues, to whom we of the Free University of Berlin feel akin.

Those Flying Saucers

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RECENT articles on saucers (SCIENCE, 116, 640, 693 [1952], *Griffith Observer,* XVI, 138 [1952]) fail to mention the fact that a satisfactory explanation for the original and typical saucer was published soon after the first reports were given prominence in the press, and again at later times. The new book debunking the saucer stories (*Flying Saucers,* vii, by Donald H. Menzel, 1953) includes "distant planes, jet aircraft" in a list of material objects responsible for saucer reports, but the list includes objects which do not produce the typical saucer and have never been reported to me as saucers.

The typical saucer is seen only on clear days and has the appearance of a round or oval disk of bright aluminum. Perhaps the most widely circulated of the