Paul Zinner Finds Freedom of Thought And Belief at Tufts

by Barbara Davis

We have with us on Hill this fall students from several foreign countries—a girl from France, a boy from Czechoslovakia. I hope to bring to the “Weekly” an interview with each of these students from South America, and students so that we may all know something of how they happened to come to Tufts, a little of their life story and certainly something of their views and opinions about present generalities.

If you attended Tufts Night you heard Professor “Pop” Houston introduce the boy who had come the greatest distance to Tufts, Paul Ernest Zinner from Prague, Czechoslovakia. It was that night that I decided that I wanted to talk with Paul and one day last week he very obligingly told me his story.

Born in Kosice

He was born in Kosice, a little town in the very eastern part of Czechoslovakia, on January 16, 1922. As a boy, an only child, Paul spent much of his time out in the fields playing with the peasant children. He has known how to skate and play soccer for as long as he can remember. All of his schooling has taken place in Prague—five years in grammar school and seven years in a French high school. In high school Paul received a very liberal education, becoming greatly interested in French philosophy and culture. It was the hope of his father and also his own that he should go on to college in France or England, study diplomacy and someday become a diplomat in the service of his country.

While Paul was in high school he traveled with his father and alone, several times to Italy, Switzerland, Poland, Hungary, Germany and France. He learned much about the fine arts. He found time for much reading and for music. He went out for sports, too—plays tennis, soccer, football, hockey, cricket.

German Invasion

In 1938 the Germans came into Czechoslovakia and Paul’s school didn’t reopen. It was to have been his last year there. He couldn’t go to France to study, or to England. Two alternatives remained. One was to study at a German University where there is found but one point of view—whor one is not allowed freedom of thought or expression. The other was to try to come to America. Paul couldn’t hear the thought of studying under German domination, so in July, 1939, he took the first step toward coming to America. He made trips to officers in Prague, to Hungary and to Italy before he was finally able to leave Czechoslovakia in March 1940. Paul says that he is one of the few lucky people who were allowed to leave the country.

Arrival in New York

Upon arriving in New York Paul knew only two people—one ex-cousin of his father, the other a boy from Czechoslovakia. He attended a preparatory school from March until June. He had never spoken the English language before coming to this country and knew only what he had gathered by himself from a few books which he had picked up. During the summer months he worked at a camp in New Jersey, talked before various groups throughout the state and met several influential people.

Soon after his arrival in America, Paul started writing to various colleges listed in a catalogue which he obtained. Tufts was merely one of more than thirty schools to which he wrote. Dean Wessell replied, referring Paul to Mr. Peterson, president of the Alumni Association. It is to the influence of this man that Paul attributes the fact that he is now a student at Tufts College.

Thoughts on Tufts

Paul likes Tufts. He is still in the process of getting used to American methods of education, although we think that he has adapted himself in a remarkably short time. His greatest complaint is that he has absolutely no free time. The day is not long enough. He rushes through day after day—from Fletcher to the Cafe, to classes, to the Cafe, to lab, to soccer practice, to the “Lhbo”, to the Cafe, to study, to bed. But here and there he manages somehow to find time to visit the Kursaal, play a concert or to spend an evening dancing. Paul is a member of the Psychology Club and as we might expect is one of the high scorers on the freshman soccer team.

Hopes for the Future

Paul’s fondest hope now is that sometime in the future his parents will be able to join him here in America. He worships freedom and democracy. He says that he did not have to learn about democracy from text books. It has grown within him as he has grown, from his earliest contacts with the peasant children, through the years of his liberal education in Prague. And from him who has seen his free country enslaved by Germany, those of us who do not appreciate our free and democratic nation should take a lesson in present-day values of life and liberty.

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