NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

AS-13
To Warsaw and Back (1)

Birčaninova 28b
Belgrade, Yugoslavia
July 2, 1963

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue, New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Last month, we drove the 2,000 miles to Warsaw and back. The route (shown on the map on the next page) took us up through Hungary and western Slovakia, and down through Moravia to Vienna. In Poland itself, in addition to a week in Warsaw, we had a look at such important cities as Krakow and Lodz, and historic places as Oswiecim (Auschwitz). The trip as a whole gave us a considerable sense of the various historical and contemporary cross-currents blowing through Mitteleuropa, and of the complexity of the various issues agitating what is wrongly called the Soviet "bloc." Some notes on the journey follow:

Despite all sorts of statements about new Yugoslav-Hungarian "cooperation," traffic at the frontier post near Szeged does not seem to have picked up appreciably since we last passed through in January. The barbed-wire fences and watchtowers are still there, even though the Hungarian customs shack has acquired some new tourist literature (in German, French, English and Russian -- though not in Serbo-Croatian). As one guard went through our luggage, another covered us discreetly with a machine gun, while a third presented us with flowers.

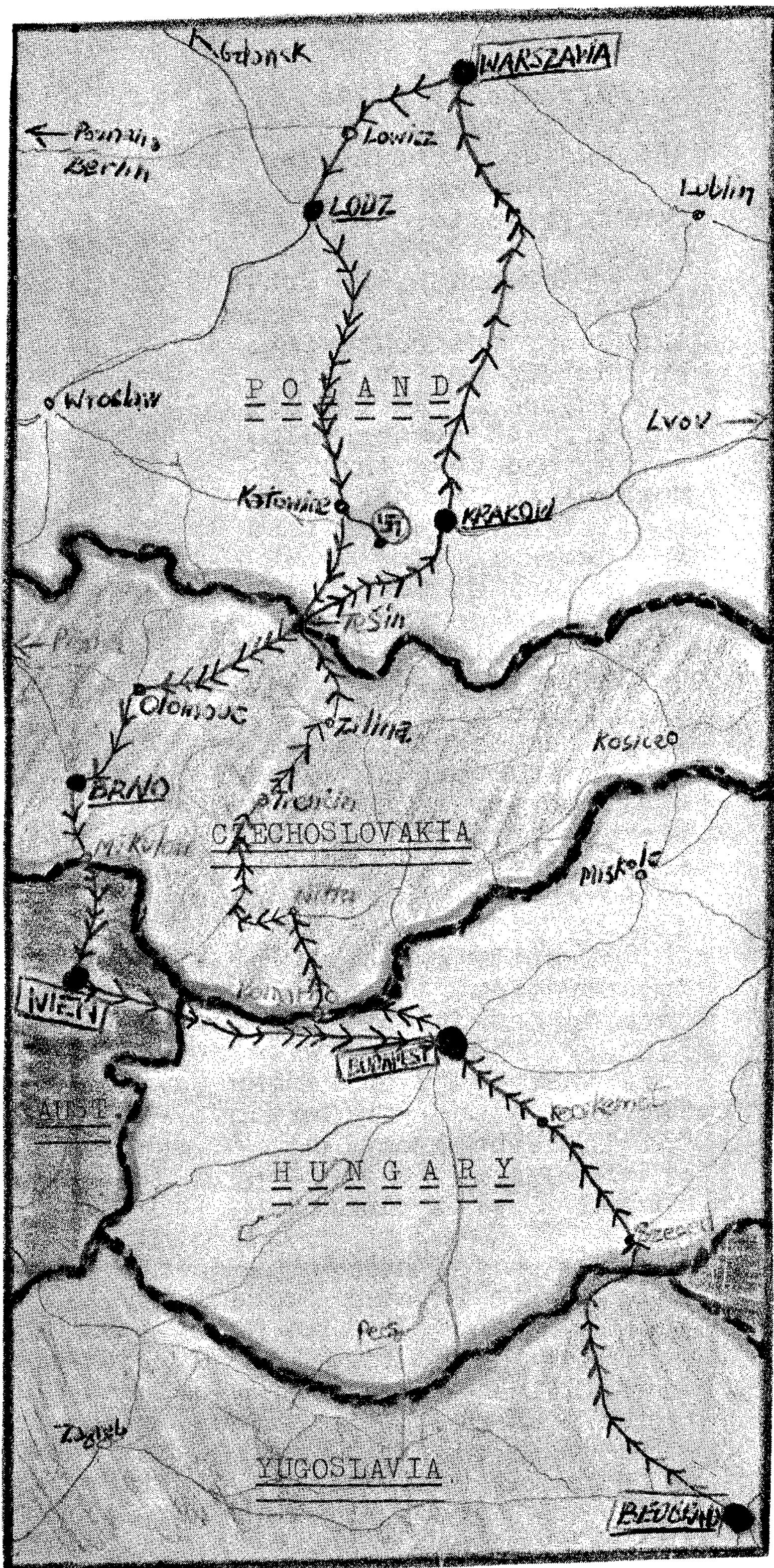
"Have you heard the news?" asks my friend in Budapest. "Khrushchev has resigned!" Incredulity. Explanation? "Yes, he wants to be the new Pope." At this point John XXIII is still in his final agony; and this is the first of many jokes we are to hear about the putative Vatican-Kremlin distenzione. The Hungarians seem particularly anxious about the impending change in the Vatican. They had hoped that Pope John would get Joszef Cardinal Mindszenty off their hands-- or, more accurately, out of his refuge in the U.S. Legation in Budapest. Such a development, following the recent amnesty for political prisoners and other "liberalizing" measures, would permit the Hungarians to "normalize" their relations with the United States. The benefits of such normalization for the Hungarians would not be merely psychological; Hungarian trade with the U.S., for example,

is only a fraction of the trade Czechoslovakia does with the U.S. Normalization with the U.S. might also make it easier for the Hungarians to follow the recent example of the Poles and obtain credits from West Germany.

My Hungarian friend suspects that Cardinal Mindszenty personally drew out the recent negotiations on his fate because he knew that Pope John was ailing. An American who has been somewhat closer to the actual negotiations doubts this: The bargaining, in his opinion, is about much larger issues -- in fact, about the very future of Catholicism in Hungary. From the Vatican standpoint, Mindszenty, whatever he himself may think, is only a bargaining counter, albeit an important one. The negotiations and the entire policy represented by the encyclical <u>Pacem in terris</u> have broad implications for the entire "socialist commonwealth"; they may explain, the American thinks, the recent secret meeting of Kadar and Gomulka. (The Americans in Warsaw think economics or the Russo-Chinese struggle may just as well have been involved; and nobody really knows.)

Along the Danube quais one sees new restoration projects. What is that vast building? "<u>L'ancien palais royal</u>." And why does that new bridge end with such congested approaches, in such a clog of old buildings and narrow streets? "Because that's where the

BELGRADE - WARSAW - BELGRADE



Arrows= Route. Swastika= Auschwitz

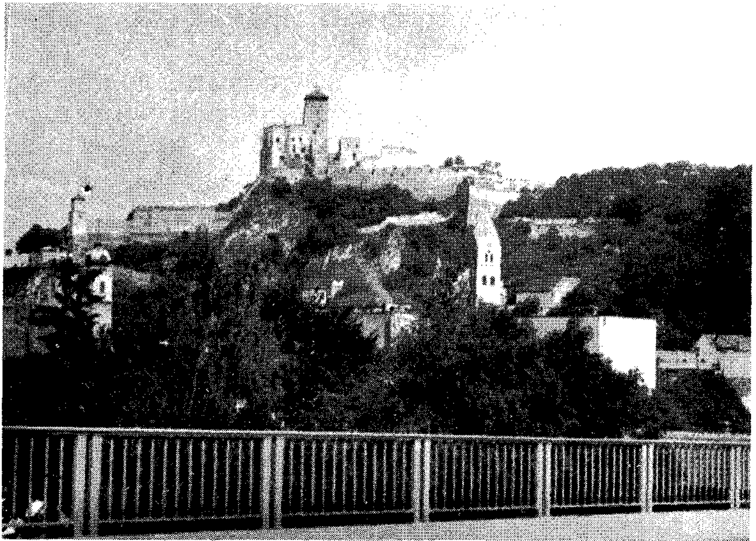
bridge was before the war." The strength of traditionalist sentiment is not surprising, considering what the present generation of Hungarians has gone through. What is interesting is that Kadar and his associates oblige the sentiment. Somehow they -- and Gomulka, Khrushchev and others of the post-Stalin era -- remind one of the July Monarchy in France, that well-intentioned but uneasy attempt to have the best of both worlds while evading the hard choices posed by the Revolution and Restoration.

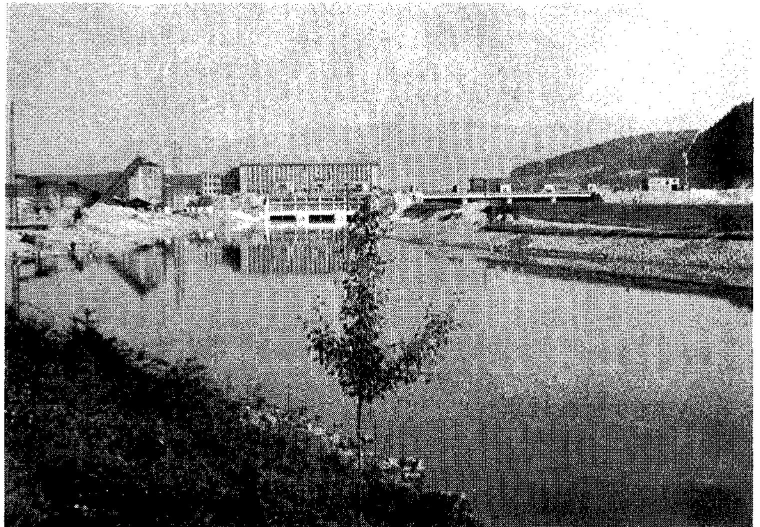
At the superb Matyas Pince, one of the great restaurants of Central Europe, the sense of tradition is even stronger. There, as in other Hungarian restaurants, the authority of the old head waiter has been completely restored -- and the result is service (as well as food) worthy of Franz Josef. The "gypsy" violinists play songs of disappointed love which every Hungarian, our friends tell us, has known since childhood. But at a nightclub afterwards, the music is for Twisting, the lyrics mostly American. The finger-snapping young singer, with his "elevator" shoes, doublebreasted suit and wide lapels, is a deja vu; I must have seen his cousin at the Roxy, or in a second-rank U.S.O. company. The big tune is "Speedy Gonzalez" -- and within the next two days we are to hear it on the radio in Trencin, Slovakia, and whistled by a ten-year old in Krakow.

"You know," says our friend, "the people here have been pretty indifferent to politics the last few years; they mostly mind their own business. But now, for the first time, there is some excitement-- about Czechoslovakia. Everyone is asking what will happen there." Since my visit to Prague in March (see AS-10), Czech President Novotny has been unable to still the ferment among intellectuals and party dissidents. He has had to sacrifice a number of his fellow-Stalinists, most notably the Slovak leader Karol Bacilek. Under pressure from former victims of Stalinism, particularly in Slovakia, "rehabilitations" of the victims of the Slansky and "Slovak national communist" trials has gathered momentum. The late Slovak leader Vladimir Clementis has been publicly rehabilitated by the writer and former prisoner, Laco Novomesky, who appears to be emerging as the leader of the opposition -- centered in Slovakia but not restricted to it. "Have you heard," says our friend in Budapest, "about the congress of the Czech Writers Union?" They had rejected the official nominees for leadership of the union, and elected their own officers instead. "We know that sign very well. That is how it started here in the spring of '56. When the old machine breaks down...."

Slovakia itself proved to be an unusual and pleasant surprise. The "traces on our minds" had been uniformly negative: We had remembered Father Tiso's clerical-fascist regime in Slovakia and its place in Hitler's New Order; we had read, in both Communist and Slovak-emigre propaganda, of how backward Slovakia had been in comparison to the Czech lands before the war. When I had been told in Prague last March that most of the postwar construction had been in Slovakia, I had been skeptical; I thought it an excuse for the run-down condition of Prague itself. Yet Slovakia, even allowing for the mellowing effects of June sunlight, proved a wonderland in comparison with northern Hungary and the southern regions of Poland which adjoin it. Fields and orchards were carefully terraced

and tended. Villages were bright and neat. The towns were most impressive, with well-kept baroque churches, town halls and castles blending handsomely with new garden apartments and office structures. And almost everywhere there seemed to be a neat little new factory or power station or rail terminal. The only apt comparison is with Slovenia, most industrialized of the Yugoslav lands, with the same Alpine-Germanic orderliness as well as the same Catholic piety. But there are differences, too: In a small town between Nitra and Trencin, we learn from the black flag hanging before a massive baroque church that Pope John has died; in the same village, and others, loudspeakers blare speeches about socialist construction. Neither could be expected in Slovenia, where Communism exercises power both more effectively and more discreetly. Slovenia is perhaps more developed, but Slovakia is newer -- and from its transformed face one understands the confidence of the opposition now gathering force. The regime is apparently trying to blunt that opposition by presenting it as a strict Czech-vs.-Slovak conflict; but, although Slovak self-government is certainly one of the issues involved, nobody who has read the speeches of Novomesky and some of the other rebels can believe that their demands for democratization, decentralization and liberalization are limited by sheer Slovak nationalism. The great question now, of course, is whether enough of the Czechs can recover from the demoralization induced in 1938 and 1948 to join hands with the Slovak rebels. It would be altogether fitting if the leadership of a new Czechoslovakia were to come from Slovakia, for Thomas Masaryk, for all his years in Prague, was a Slovak, too.





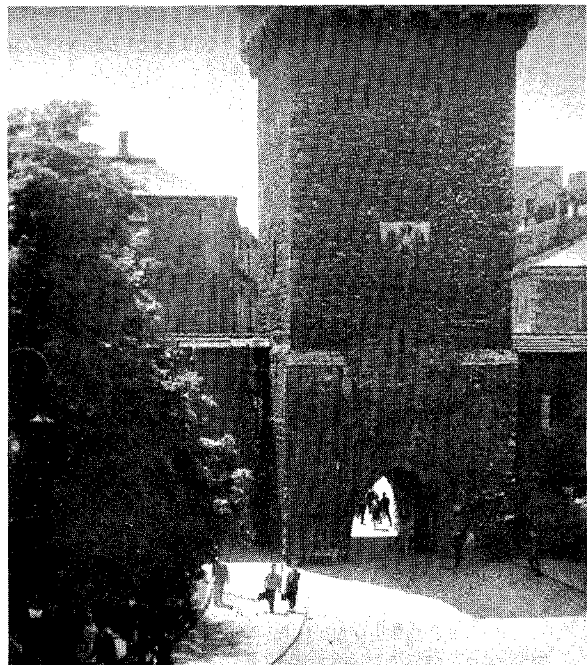
SLOVAKIA: CASTLES & POWER STATIONS

Liberalization in Czechoslovakia still has a long way to go: The death of "Papez Jan XXIII" rates only a paragraph at the bottom of the page in Prague and Bratislava dailies, each of which give far more prominence and space to the death the same day of a Turkish Communist litterateur. Yet one cannot escape the feeling that once

democratization really gets under way, once the gates are really thrust open, Czechoslovakia could go further than any of the others. It is surely the most modern country under Communist control, with the most deeply ingrained Western traditions -- not only those of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, but those of Social Democracy (which is, after all, as Mao Tse-tung properly recognizes, the very meat of "revisionism"). A Czechoslovakian "Gomulka" would have to be more "revisionist" than the Polish original, or Tito, or Kadar -- if the current crisis can indeed be stanched by such compromises. Perhaps it is because Khrushchev appreciates this that he has enabled Novotny to hang on so long.

The first thing one becomes aware of in Poland is the ridiculous rate of exchange: 23 zlotys to the dollar. It is at least a third, probably a fourth, of what a realistic rate would be. A Polish writer who has traveled in Yugoslavia says that a zloty is worth roughly ten Yugoslav dinars -- which would mean 75-80 zlotys to the dollar. Our first hour on the streets of Krakow, we were offered 100. Small wonder that, by official as well as unofficial report, the Polish security police devote the greater part of their energies to combatting financial and economic speculation. Officials say that a currency reform, even on the modest lines of a special tourist rate, would upset the entire price structure. It is hard to believe -- especially since Poland conducts its trade in terms of mythical "foreign exchange zlotys" (four to the dollar!) with which, in effect, it fixes the prices of its exports arbitrarily, according to what the traffic will bear. Surely the Poles do not seriously expect to promote tourism, as they say they do, when a breakfast of juice, an egg and coffee costs $2 and more!

I do not propose here to discuss Poland's current economic troubles; they have been analyzed far more knowledgeably by Michael Gamarnikow in a recent issue of East Europe ("Poland's Economic Recession," March 1963). But I did have the impression in Poland as in Prague (and here in Yugoslavia for that matter) that the East European economies now faced a puzzling set of decisions. After a decade of postwar reconstruction and Stalinist industrialization, after the more or less limited rationalization and stimulation of the Khrushchev reforms, the East European economies have arrived in the last few years at the point the West European nations reached in the mid-Fifties, when the Common Market was born. Except perhaps for Russia, autarchic experiment is impossible; one must now take part in a wider if not a world market. And this



KRAKOW: THE OLD BARBICAN

involves a complex of rationalization and reform for which administrative forms of Communism are ill suited. Participation in world markets requires a great deal of give and take, of freedom and initiative, on the lower and middle levels of the economy; and, since the Eastern countries need Western aid and trade considerably more than the West needs them, some sort of political abatement would seem to be involved as well. Is this a "Marxist" explanation of "coexistence"? I do not mean it as such; the existence of thermonuclear weapons, so soon after the carnage of World War II, is itself I think sufficient explanation of the profound urge to peace within the Communist countries. Yet economics may yet play a role in transforming a tactically-motivated "coexistence" into something approaching peace.

The nature of the Communist economic problem is well illustrated by the following story, which Berthold Beitz, general manager of Krupp, told newsmen at the recent Poznan Fair. As part of the new West German-Polish economic arrangements, Krupp will provide a great deal of technical training and aid for Polish industry. How did this come about? The inspiration, according to Beitz, came from Brazil's President Joao Goulart, anxious to expand the market for Brazilian coffee and other exports. "I'd like to buy things from the Poles," Goulart reportedly told Beitz, "but I'm afraid the quality won't be up to standard. Why don't you send some people in there to show them how to do it?" As part of the price for German aid, the Poles have permitted the Federal Republic to establish a trade mission on their territory. One feels that this is only the beginning. The Potsdam Conference may have redrawn the boundaries of Eastern Europe, and sanctioned the expulsion of several million Germans from its Slavic states; yet it could not abolish the old economic lines of force which connect Eastern Europe with the West, and particularly with Germany. One wonders who is the dreamer, and who the realist -- Kennedy with his "Atlantic Community" or de Gaulle with his "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals"? Paris remains more than twice as far from New York as it is from Moscow; and the jet has yet to replace the freight car....

We were all too briefly in Krakow: the tour of its renaissance and baroque glories, its Barbican and Wawel Castle, served only to whet the appetite. The bricks of the Cathedral wall, each bearing the name of a donor, manifested an extraordinary piety, as did the troops of schoolchildren pouring into the Churches. Announcements of the Pontifical Mass for John XXIII had already been printed and prominently displayed. The grounds of the old University, one of the first in Europe, looked as if they had not changed in a hundred years. Krakow has the repuation, among Polish observers, of being more liberal and freer than any other city, partly because of its old traditions, partly because of the inclinations of its local Communist leaders. It was, surely, less scarred by the war than any of the other major Polish cities.

A drive up through central Poland, from Krakow to Warsaw, suggests most of all the utter military defenselessness of the country. From Krakow to the Baltic, it is all plain, just as it is from west to east, from Berlin to the Pripet Marshes. Forest is said

to occupy 30 per cent of Polish land; yet the forests we saw were local and quite sparse compared with those, say, in Yugoslavia. No obstacle at all to an invader from east or west. And who, in the last fifteen hundred years, has not poured across the Polish plain! The peasants on the land appear to be working considerably harder than those in Yugoslavia or Hungary, but the villages do not appear to have changed much in the twentieth century. There are new one- and two-room houses of brick or stone, but there are also weathered wooden shacks by the score, and even thatched huts. Compared with what we have seen in Slovakia, this is like Arkansas compared to Iowa. Gomulka's liberal farm policies have improved matters; they cannot produce miracles. One wonders more and more whether geography is perhaps the decisive force, or whether there is, after all, such a thing as "national character."

One enters Warsaw on four- and six-lane boulevards, sufficiently ample to sustain ten times its present traffic. The city obviously believes in its future (or at least in the necessity of a vision of the future). It is also proud of its past. No less than 87 per cent of the city was destroyed in World War II. Almost all the old historic places have been rebuilt just as they were, from plans hidden and found in the cellars of the architecture school. The Old City, the "New" City, the charming old quarter just below, on the Vistula, known as the Mariensztadt -- all of these have been rebuilt in their original 15th-19th (mostly 18th) century styles. They are, thus, new baroque buildings, perhaps the only ones of their kind in Europe. The result is charming and intriguing (who would not like to live in baroque-sized rooms with modern fixtures), but also rather eerie. These old sections are too clean, too orderly, too uniform in their colors to seem real. The life that created them is long dead; and the new life has not yet taken hold. Yet one cannot help admiring the dedication of these Poles to their capital; when one considers that this work of restoration was done under the auspices of Communists, and that it involved the rebuilding not only of monarchical but religious shrines (so that there are now more churches in Warsaw than before the war), one gasps at the irrelevance of most cold-war thinking. (E.g., the Polish-American Congressman who wishes to cut off U.S. trade with Poland, doubtless because it is ruled by "atheistic Communists.") After attending Pontifical Mass in St. Anne's, one is tempted to say that any definition of Poland as a "Soviet satellite" or "People's Democracy" simply misses the point; one begins to approximate reality, rather, by saying that

WARSAW: OLD TOWN MARKET PLACE

Poland is a Roman Catholic nation located on the open plain between Germany and Russia.

Yet there is more to Warsaw than that, and more than restored baroque glories. For not everything was destroyed; and not everything that was destroyed has been restored in the pre-war style. Thus, one sees here and there a building completely unscathed, with blocks of modern row-houses or garden apartment houses built around it. (The erstwhile Ghetto, in the Muranow section, is now the site of such an apartment development.) One can date the new structures politically: Early postwar -- Stalinist style (or, rather, St. Petersburg-1900-imitation-classic), full of ornaments and pediments without function. Late Fifties -- Khrushchevian, poured-concrete boxes, economy style, all gray. Finally, the non-political or "coexistence" style -- common now in Yugoslavia as well as Western Europe, the very apartments with their brightly colored terraces and balconies, neat lines and light-metal trim, which seemed so revolutionary when the Museum of Modern Art exhibited their Latin American prototypes fifteen years ago. Standing in front of a development of this type (and there are many), one can only wince at a skyline dominated by the 30-story "Palace of Culture and Science in the Name of J. V. Stalin," a gift from the U.S.S.R. -- grotesque in every imaginable way and the subject of innumerable derisive jokes, yet visible from almost every point of a city with few hills and few other buildings over eight storeys.

One cannot close this rough sketch of Warsaw's appearance before mentioning what is, in summer at least, the most obvious and striking feature of all: its northern light, even and clear, as pale-blue in its tint as Athens' light is white and New York's yellow. People and things are defined in this light in a serene and composed manner that instantly recalls the films of Ingmar Bergman. The light also suggests the Petersburg described by Dostoyevsky; in June, it is pitch-dark for only about four hours. Thus, in Warsaw, with its Latin alphabet, Catholic religion, Franco-Italian architecture and complete absence of Pan-Slavic intimations, I felt -- for the first time since coming to Eastern Europe -- the closeness of Russia.

In my next letter, I shall recount some of what we learned in our week in Warsaw, and also some of our impressions on the long drive back.

Cordially yours,

Anatole Shub

Received in New York July 3, 1963.