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AS-14
To Warsaw and Back (2)

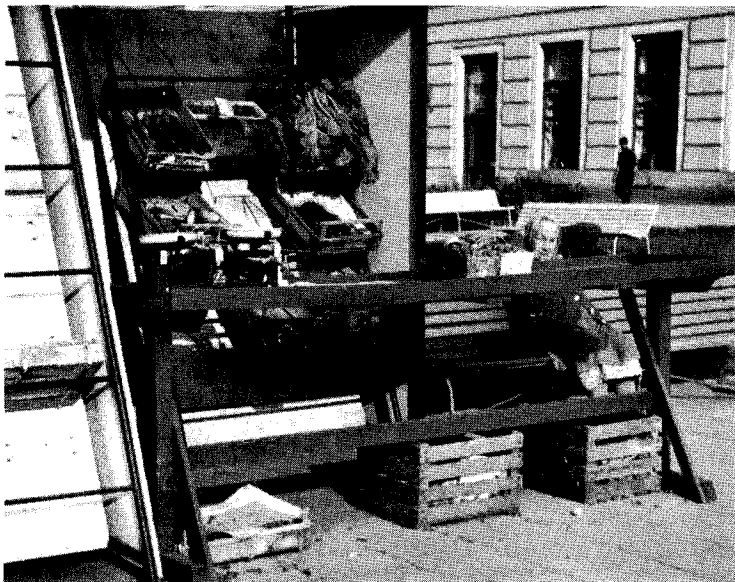
Birčaninova 28b
Belgrade, Yugoslavia
July 4, 1963

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

In Warsaw, which we reached last month after a 1000-mile drive from Belgrade (see AS-13), we found people as well informed as elsewhere on the two most intriguing new developments in Central Europe: the burgeoning crisis in Czechoslovakia and the negotiations initiated by Pope John XXIII for a relaxation of tensions between the Vatican and the Kremlin. Yet the Poles we met seemed far more concerned, and considerably better informed, about still another development: namely, the Russo-Chinese struggle. In Warsaw I heard, as I had in Budapest, all the latest jokes about this conflict -- such as how Encyclopedias in the year 2,000 will describe Khrushchev ("a minor literary critic in the era of Mao Tse-tung"). But in Warsaw I also heard, as I had not elsewhere, the frank prediction that "the Rumanians are going to go with the Chinese" -- this before the Rumanians had reprinted the famous Chinese letter which Moscow dared not, well before the Rumanians chose not to be represented at the East Berlin conclave of Communist chiefs. In Warsaw, too, I was told, before the June 18 plenum of the Soviet Central Committee on ideological questions, that it would foreswear attacks on rebellious young Russian writers in order to concentrate on party unity against the Chinese. And in the Polish capital I was also told of a semi-secret memorandum by L. F. Ilyichev, Soviet party secretary, purportedly outlining Russian strategy for the July 5 meeting with the Chinese;

the Russians, according to this, will make no further ideological concessions but will offer to renew large-scale economic aid to China. The Soviet party is prepared to blame the cessation of such aid in the Fifties on such people as Marshal Bulganin and V. M. Molotov -- or so the story goes.



WARSAW VEGETABLE STALL

In any event, it is plain that, if there is any proper "listening post" for Soviet affairs outside Russia itself, Warsaw is it, far more than Belgrade or Budapest. Geographical proximity is only the most obvious reason for this. There is also the relatively greater freedom with which the Poles talk politics -- among themselves and

with Westerners. There is the close relationship which apparently has sprung up between Gomulka and Khrushchev, attempting to maintain a "centrist" position between the Chinese-Albanian extremists and Italian-Yugoslav "revisionists." Perhaps most important, in my opinion, is the realization among the Poles since their October 1956 revolution that their own future evolution depends almost entirely on developments within the Soviet Union itself. A movement back toward Stalinism in the Kremlin would almost immediately be felt in the Polish party; while Poland's only hope for moving beyond the 1956 Gomulka compromise lies in some sort of break-through for "revisionism" in Russia, whether due to internal pressures or to the exigencies of the struggles with the West and with the Chinese. Thus, because their own national life has been at a standstill (ideologically speaking) for six years, the great questions raised in 1956 still unanswered, the Poles are extremely sensitive to every new twist and turn in Russia which offers some hint of possible future answers.

The Gomulka compromise preserved Communist rule and Poland's military alliance with the Soviet Union at the cost of liberalization in four principal spheres: religion, agriculture, police activity and cultural life. In the broad long-term view, there has been little dramatic change in any of these areas since the compromise took definitive shape in the spring of 1957. However, the Poles measure such things not in miles, but in millimeters; and there have been various changes from time to time in each area.

In the field of religion, the regime tolerated for about three years the virtually complete reassumption of control over Polish education by the Roman Catholic Church. Not only was the Church permitted to operate its own schools, but nuns moved back into the public schools, and the teaching of religion with them. In the winter of 1959-60, apparently, the decision was taken to begin restricting Catholic prerogatives in this field. Since then, the Government has moved slowly and cautiously, timing its actions for the least possible disturbance (closing down Catholic schools, for example, during the summer recess). In most areas now, apparently, the nuns are out of the public schools; a number of Catholic high schools, primary schools, kindergartens and orphanages have been shut down, too. Of 300 Catholic kindergartens four years ago, less than 100 are open now. There are those in Western embassies who are alarmed by these developments. For the sake of perspective, one should note that (a) there is no interference with religious worship, training of seminarians, religious publications or other internal Church activities; (b) the Church in Poland appears to be quite rich; and (c) the resistance to clerical control of education is by no means limited to Communist party members (some of them are, in fact, quite devout), but embraces broader secular elements.

In the field of agriculture, Poland remains the most liberal of the Communist countries, Yugoslavia included. More than 85 per cent of the land is privately owned and farmed, with the maximum holding 50 hectares (Yugoslavia: 10 hectares). Most of the rest of the land is occupied by big, mechanized state farms. As for collectives, their number shrank in October-November 1956 from some 10,000 to 1,500, and there are even fewer now. (In official circles they are often referred to as "milk collectives" -- not because they are engaged in dairy farming but because they are constantly "milking"

the state for subsidies.) There are no delivery quotas for milk and eggs; those for grain, potatoes and meat are substantially lower than before October, and delivery prices considerably higher. Contracts for export production offer ample incentive, and the state marketing system operates so as to "support" prices on the free market. All of these liberalizing measures tended to produce a dramatic upsurge in production in the years after 1956 -- an upsurge which in the view of the Soviet and other Communists committed to collectivization was the only conceivable justification for the Polish heresy. The agricultural surpluses not only relieved domestic living standards but underpinned Poland's foreign trade, based largely on the export of farm produce and particularly of ham. Since freedom for the peasant did thus contribute to the almighty goal of industrialization (by permitting the import of machinery), the dogmatists were compelled to tolerate it. However, once liberated, the peasants could not produce a dramatic new upsurge with every passing year. By 1959 it became evident that they had virtually reached their possible limit, given the rather low (by Western standards) level of farm technology. Then it was that the regime began organizing so-called "agricultural circles," which are in fact cooperatives for the purpose of buying and sharing new equipment. The progress of this movement, given peasant suspicions, has been rather modest, but it has been sufficient to move farm production past the dead end it seemed to have reached in 1959. At the same time, the Polish Government (like the Yugoslav) has been steadily increasing its own investments in agricultural modernization. Gomulka is well aware that unless his farm policy shows results, in ever increasing production, he will be faced with new demands for collectivization -- not so much from within his own party as from Moscow, which has not dared (for a multitude of political-historical reasons) to take the great step he took in 1956. He is also surely aware that, despite the rising exports of farm produce (partly, perhaps, because of them), the Polish market is itself not all that richly supplied, either in quantity or variety. Our own impression was that Poland is considerably behind Yugoslavia in this respect; and observers who know both say that the discrepancy is even more marked in winter.



WARSAW GHETTO MEMORIAL

In the third field in which Gomulka liberalized Polish practice, that of police activity, the pattern is somewhat similar to that in religion. The post-October honeymoon lasted roughly to the winter of 1959-60. Since then, there have been signs of increased police efficiency, a bit tighter control over visas, somewhat greater surveillance of diplomats and foreign visitors, etc. There has also been created, on the Soviet model, a voluntary reserve militia. However, there has been nothing resembling a return to Stalinism; the authority of the party and government over the police is unquestioned,

the police's chief concerns are "economic" rather than political crimes, and I can testify that people talk more freely about politics -- and in public places -- than in Yugoslavia, for example.

Finally, there is the field of culture -- where there has been no great change in the past six years, although the intellectuals have been most sensitive to day-by-day oscillations. Freedom in the cultural field actually preceded, and was the motive force behind, the October changes; but the decisive move here was the closing of Po Prostu a few months after Gomulka assumed power. Since 1958, the situation has been more or less "stabilized" -- a situation of relative freedom (great freedom by Yugoslav standards) but discreet party control. The news of the outside world is quite well reported; foreign broadcasts are not jammed; the non-Communist parties of the People's Front, as well as the Church, publish their own newspapers offering some variety in emphasis and freedom from propagandistic exhortation.

However, perhaps because they have achieved so much, the Polish intellectuals are wary of all possible incursions by the regime. When I was in Warsaw, there was much worry about the merger of two magazines, Nova Kultura and the slightly more liberal Przeglad Kulturalny, into a new periodical to be called simply Kultura. The unconfirmed rumor was that the editor of the new journal would be a Stalinist. When I pointed out that the merger of three old magazines in Czechoslovakia last winter had -- contrary to expectations -- produced a new one far more liberal than any of the old, the instant reply was: "What is liberal in Czechoslovakia is nothing here."

The intellectuals' major complaint is that, while they are free to work and write, they are discreetly prevented from enjoying a mass audience in Poland. Many of the most impressive Polish works are, apparently, mostly for export. Such items as Andrej Wajda's film Ashes and Diamonds, or Jan Kott's profoundly political Shakespeare Our Contemporary, made the domestic rounds once, and that was it: no more showings or reprintings, except abroad. The poet Adam Wazyk, whose "Poem for Adults" epitomized the anti-Stalinist revolt of 1956, still appears -- but only in small reviews that few people see. The philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, potentially the theoretician of "revisionism" (and not only for Poland), is said to write only for his desk drawer.

Nevertheless, the situation is in no way comparable to that which existed before 1955. As one writer puts it: "They can tell us what not to say; but they can no longer tell us what to say or how to say it." The intellectuals bemoan the fact that nobody in Gomulka's inner circle understands or cares about cultural matters; they worry about pressure from Moscow; but they are fearful not of arrest or unemployment, but rather of restrictions on their travel to the West. "As long as we can go to Paris, or Rome, or New York, everything is all right." Because the standard of Polish literature and art is high, foreign-exchange income from translations, exhibitions, fellowships, etc. is available; and the Polish intellectuals eagerly seize every opportunity to travel. I had the feeling that this would not change appreciably even if Poland were not ruled

by Communists. Warsaw's westward orientation has a long history, and is perhaps implicit in the Polish situation between Germany and Russia. Paris was the magnet for the Polish aristocracy in the eighteenth century, for its revolutionaries in the nineteenth, and for its intellectual emigres in the twentieth. One wonders what the effects might be if, as rumored, General de Gaulle begins to unfold an active "Eastern" policy, whose first tools surely would be cultural; the credit that France has built in Poland (as in Serbia) is enormous. (One should add, however, with respect to the General himself, that his recent treaty with West Germany was not at all popular.)

In this rough summary of Polish developments, I feel I have not done justice to Warsaw itself -- preeminently a European city in its subtlety and style, in the wit and sophistication of its people, and of course in the tragedy of its history, ancient and recent. Leaving it after a week, I was determined only to return at the first opportunity. I had no such feelings about the other Polish towns in which we stopped on route home.

The first of them was Lowicz, the junction of the main roads from Warsaw to Lodz and Poznan respectively. It was from Lowicz

that my wife's mother emigrated to the United States before the First World War. The physical appearance of the town surely had not changed much over the decades; most of the buildings appeared thirty, forty, fifty years old. Yet there had been changes. Before 1939 a large part of the Lowicz population had been Jewish. Now not a trace. "There is no synagogue. There are no Jews here. Why have you come? Why are you bothering us?" The insistent question on our minds, as we journeyed through the region where Nazi genocide had reaped its greatest toll, was how much the neighboring Poles had known or cared. In Warsaw we had heard more than one story of mutual aid in those awful days.



LOWICZ: STREET SCENE

In Lodz, an industrial center since the nineteenth century, in which there had once been 300,000 Jews, we met a Jewish doctor who had survived by joining the Partisans. Most of his family had not survived; those who had were mostly scattered around the world-- Paris, Israel, Australia. There were now less than 5,000 Jews in Lodz, and only a few of them had been pre-war inhabitants. The others had come from Vilna, Bialystok and other eastern cities which had fallen into Russian hands in 1939 and again in 1944; after years

in the U.S.S.R., many of the surviving Jews of pre-war eastern Poland had been repatriated in 1956-57. Some had settled in Warsaw, Lodz and other cities. Most had seized the opportunity offered by Gomulka to leave Poland forever. The reason was all too evident. Did the Poles in Lodz ever help you during the Occupation? "They helped turn us over to the Nazis."

Katowice, center of the gigantic Silesian coal-steel complex, was depressing in a rather different way; a grimy, smoky industrial town with little in the countryside or in the culture of its people to redeem it. The very next day, we were to pass through Ostrava, center of the Moravian mining district, and it seemed charming by comparison. Perhaps Katowice' fault lay in the dullness of the plains around it, perhaps in the ugliness of its architecture (almost all Victorian or Stalinist); yet there was also a singular lack of taste (any sort of taste) in the windows, in private homes, in dress. And in the faces of its people one saw no reflections of Chopin or Marie Walewska, as in Warsaw: only Stanley Kowalski.

From Katowice it is only a short ride to Oswiecim, where the Polish Government has chosen to preserve intact the Auschwitz death camp. I do not think its decision was wise. It is impossible to describe -- or to comprehend -- the horrors therein contained (from the hair of the victims and the toys left by children to the ironic slogan on the gate -- "Arbeit Macht Frei"). Despair is the only positive emotion such sights can possibly inspire. One looks at the Polish schoolchildren being trooped through the remains, and wonders if they are being chastened -- or aroused. One looks at the town of Oswiecim itself, wrapped right around the camp, and wonders how its people can live with themselves in this place.

We felt a positive sense of liberation crossing the border into Czechoslovakia again -- not merely relief at the lifting of the burden of the past, but pleasure at all the little graces with which its people continue to embellish life, even under the most "Stalinist" of Communist regimes. In such cities as Olomouc and Brno there was the sort of elegance we had not seen since leaving Warsaw, although here with a Hapsburg coloration. Yet it was not



LODZ



AUSCHWITZ

altogether possible to avoid traces of the political regime. Having lost our way a bit both on the Polish and Czech sides of the border, we were less than halfway through Moravia at mid-afternoon and needed both food and gas. We had not, however, obtained Czech crowns. We tried to get the gas first, with assorted Western currencies at hand. The attendant would have none of it: "Maybe they can do such things in Prague, but not here. I would have to bring the money to the bank, and then the police would start asking questions. Besides, I am only in charge of the Regular -- the girl (indicating a brisk young Komsomol type) is in charge of Super." We tried to assuage his fears by hailing a militiaman and explaining that we only had a 24-hour transit visa, that we needed gas to reach the border, and that the banks were by this time closed. The militiaman listened but said not a word; he was taking the part of a detached bystander. The local hotel was not empowered to change money; the local tourist office had been closed since noon. Finally, behind the closed doors of the postmaster's private office, we obtained the needed crowns. He was happy even to take pennies but not traveler's checks -- "for that a receipt would be necessary." I once saw the Soviet economic system described as "mechanical rigidity lubricated by corruption"; obviously there is some lubrication in Czechoslovakia as well. We were fortunate in that at the Czech-Austrian border we were not asked for our currency declaration -- perhaps because the guards and we were equally fascinated by television newsreels of race rioting in the United States.

In Vienna, lights were bright, traffic vigorous, prices high, tourists gay and opera glorious. There was little outward sign of the political crisis over Otto Hapsburg's wish to return to Austria with the full rights of a citizen. (He has already renounced the crown.) The Social Democrats have threatened to break up the coalition government if he is permitted to do so. Strange as it may seem to observers across the seas, they fear that he would run for the Presidency of the Second Austrian Republic and be elected hands-down. They are not the only ones fearing the heir of a dynasty overthrown forty-five years ago. Back home in Belgrade, we presently read that Otto had expressed himself in favor of the reconstitution of a Danubian Federation, which would naturally include Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Slovenia and Croatia. The followers of Marshal Tito, whom at least one prominent historian has declared to be the natural heir of the Hapsburg monarchy, seemed rather disturbed by Otto's ideas. Plus ça change....?

Cordially yours,

Anatole Shub
Anatole Shub

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