

BWB-2
World Youth Festival I
Papa's Communism Is Dead

Im Rosental 96
53 Bonn
West Germany
9 September 1968

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Moscow's bigwigs and Bulgaria's littlewigs thought they had covered all the contingencies. Those communist rebels of the revolutionary left--Cuba, China and Albania--were not even listed among the 142 national delegations represented at the Ninth World Festival of Youth and Students for Solidarity, Peace and Friendship, held this year from 28 July through 6 August in Sofia, Bulgaria.

A group of "counter-revolutionary" Czechoslovakians had been stopped at the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border. Israel's delegation toed the Moscow party line of "support for the Arab peoples" and protest against the "Israeli aggression." The young French firebrands of the May Revolution, the Union Nationale des Etudiants de France, were refused delegate status in Sofia, and Festival bureaucrats "officially registered" Soviet-trained students from Iran and Greece, turning a deaf ear to the outcries of the National Union of Iranian Students and Greece's leftist Lambrakis Youth. Although Algeria officially boycotted the Festival, the Bulgarians welcomed Algerian representatives--probably another case of what the Yugoslavs called "some participants representing no one but themselves."

Sofia's city fathers spared no expense preparing for the 18,800 young people and tourists who came from all parts of the world. One official told me the government spent \$2,500,000 to put on the ten-day extravaganza. He shrugged off the suggestion that Russia had kicked in a lot more with the oblique comment, "Every country pays for its own delegation." Gift shops, the shelves stocked with colorfully costumed dolls, bright-flowered ceramics and wooden intaglio handicrafts, sprang up hastily on vacant lots and empty shops in the city center. Three hundred of the nation's "progressive" students were persuaded to vacation at workcamps in the provinces for the duration of the Festival. To protect the morals of the visiting youth, Sofia's two hundred prostitutes were hustled off to tourist resorts along the Black Sea.

But the city didn't lack for native population. To take up the slack, perhaps to offer "cordial hospitality to all who come with purity of thought and intention," as Peter Mladenov, secretary of the Bulgarian National Preparatory Committee, told the press, thousands of "civilian police" roamed the broad cobblestone avenues of Bulgaria's capital city,

loitered around the dormitories of the "dangerous" delegations such as West Germany or Czechoslovakia, and even joined the students in not-so-rapt attention during the symposiums. Estimates of the secret police force ranged from a conservative 15,000 to a Bulgarian Interior Ministry official's guess of 50,000. West German and Czechoslovakian delegates came to know many by sight, and they offered cheery greetings to the "bulle" as the young Germans called them, but received stony stares or pretended indifference in return.

The gift shops, the missing prostitutes, the secret police were probably all for naught. Although no one, after Russia's rape of Czechoslovakia following the platitudinous peace and friendship paeans in Sofia, would predict that Moscow shys from any outlandish scheme, the Ninth World Youth Festival is probably the last. Such heavy-handed, sincere-smile propaganda has begun to cloy Russia's Eastern allies, and the Western nations, including their Communist parties, view it with disgust. As one West German student told me with a trace of sad irony: "It's hard to be a communist when you see such crap as this."

My acquaintance with the Sofia "crap" began on Saturday, 27 July, when I arrived with three Canadian Festival delegates, a reporter for the liberal German weekly, Die Zeit, and a Dutch television journalist at the small Sofia air terminal built on sun-baked plains several miles outside the city. "All Youth Festival delegates please come right this way," a slight, hunchbacked young man told us in English. "If you'll wait here just a moment, we'll send you a bus to take you to your hotel."

Eager to deposit our luggage and see the sights of Sofia, the German reporter and I attempted to hitch a ride with some West German delegates who had arrived on the same flight and were being picked up at the airport in a small Fiat by Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund president Karl Dietrich Wolff, K. D., whom I'd interviewed briefly in Frankfurt the week before and with whom I hoped to talk more during the Festival, commented on my fire-engine red suitcase ("That's a good color here"), but said the car was full. The little hunchback ushered us again to the waiting room, where assurances of "No, no, you don't need to call a taxi--your bus will be here in just a few moments" at intervals of fifteen minutes held us impatient prisoners for at least two hours. It was the first taste of velvet-gloved organization that became more iron hand as the days wore on.

Western journalists received a slap of the iron hand when they applied for credentials. Since I had been told that observers without official ties to a delegation would be refused admission to symposiums, I decided to register for the Festival as a Newsweek correspondent. Press accreditation, nonetheless, was no easy matter, and for several bewildering hours on Saturday evening and Sunday morning I felt I was retracing the steps of Kafka's land surveyor K, trying to get into the castle. Ironically, the Festival bureaucracy and

Kafka's The Castle, which I was reading at the time, made Marxist philosopher-sociologist Herbert Marcuse's description of alienated, totalitarian post-industrial society seem most real to me in Bulgaria. Sofia seemed to symbolize Marxism gone astray, a symbolism I believe was evident to the Western and Latin delegations, even to some of those beginning to peek through Russia's Iron Curtain.

"Why didn't Newsweek write us four weeks ago?" asked one official peevishly. But even that wouldn't have helped, as the case of former Fellow and Washington Star correspondent Smith Hempstone proved. When he applied for credentials on Monday, having written well in advance, the press officer told him brusquely, "We have enough Western correspondents here already. You can't be accredited." Smith told him to "stop being ridiculous." Amazingly, he did.

My first night in Sofia I bunked with a Bulgarian family whose tall, dark-haired daughter, a student at the University, worked as a translator for the Festival. But the daughter wasn't home when I arrived, and my attempts to find a common language were fruitless--the mother spoke only French and Bulgarian, I only German and English. We managed to agree, however, upon a morning bath (the tile was cracked, the fixtures badly in need of repair, but the water was warm and plentiful) and the hour for breakfast. With at least a bed secured for the night, I hailed a cab and returned to downtown Sofia to meet a young American Yale graduate who had just finished a year in Asia with the Peace Corps. Attempts to talk politics or student protests with this young man fell on rocky soil--he was trying to gain entrance to the Festival for a group of American singers who wanted to participate in the concerts, not the symposiums, and he was wary of being labeled a CIA agent. (For good reason, since the Bulgarian Preparatory Committee had already accused the West German delegation of harboring CIA provocateurs. Despite my protests, K. D. Wolff later passed the charge along to me, gratuitously booby-trapping my planned interviews with Swedish and Dutch student leaders, who then refused to see me.)

After dinner the "Yalie" and I walked to the Alexander Nevski Square, where Yugoslavian and Bulgarian dance troupes were performing rousing folk dances. Fun, and colorful, but just such performances were scorned in the following days by the politically volatile New Left of the Western European delegations as "inappropriate for our time."

The language problem stymied my attempts at finding out what the local young people thought of the Festival. But three young Bulgarians whom I met in a cafe on Sunday afternoon taught me some rudimentary phrases in their language--"molle plashtam" (the check, please), "blagodara" (thank you), "doviadane" (goodbye) and "vsichko chubaro" (best wishes). The most important nicety of the Bulgarian language I figured out a day later after several taxi drivers had practically thrown me out of their cabs. "Da," which means "yes," is accompanied by nodding the head from side to side, which for my money meant "no." To gesture "no" for "nyet," the Bulgarians shake their heads up and down.

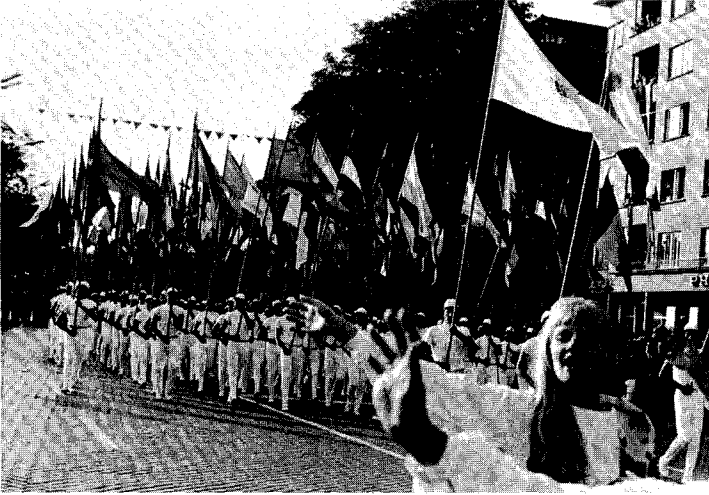
I'd ask for a taxi, get what I thought was a sign for "yes," and climb in, only to be wildly gestured out onto the sidewalk again.

These amusing asides moved into the background by Sunday afternoon when the official parade opening the Festival got under way. Here the pomp and circumstance was strictly hard-sell Soviet propaganda. Dashing young men in white gymnast suits, sitting ramrod-straight astride their motorcycles and carrying streaming white banners (they reminded me of the Ajax knight), led the parade down Ruski Boulevard past the Alexander Nevski Memorial Church and the University.

The delegations trooped by according to the Cyrillic alphabet (which put Guiana and Mozambique not long after a lively rumba-dancing group of Brazilians), with Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Hungary and the German Democratic Republic all spruced up in almost identical suits, distinguished by different colored shirts and blouses. Of the Eastern bloc nations, only the Czechoslovakians, tossing plastic beach balls imprinted with peace doves into the air as they marched, avoided the rubber-stamp similarity of an official Festival costume. The Vietnamese delegation wore their battle fatigues. The American delegation, about fifty strong, looked the scruffiest.

Despite strong-arm tactics by the Bulgarian hosts--secret police trying to wrench pictures of Che Guevara and Mao Tse Tung from the West German delegation and large photographs of Alexander Dubcek and Ludvik Svoboda from the Czech and Slovak marchers--the idyllic picture of solidarity among youth and within the Communist world was shattered from the Festival's opening moments. While thousands of spectators hospitably greeted other delegations with applause as they wound into the Vassil Levski stadium, the audience fell embarrassingly silent when the Czechoslovakian delegation appeared. Undaunted, like cheerleaders rooting for David against the Russian Goliath, the Czechs and Slovaks bravely roared their greetings to the crowded stadium--"Dubcek, Dubcek, Svoboda," and "Our Democracy Is Our Own Business." The Slovak journalist sitting beside me cringed a little at the temerity of his countrymen, but when the delegation marched below our seats, he raised his head and joined a handful of other spectators in timid clapping.

The anti-American imperialism, pro-peace and friendship rhetoric by Bulgarian First Party Secretary Todor Zhivkov and others made clear the Festival's emphasis on Vietnam. But the speakers' calls for unity (followed by the ceremonial lighting of the Festival flame and jet sprays of Bulgaria's famous, to me vile-smelling, rose perfume) made little impression on the West European delegations or the Czechoslovakians.



White-clad Bulgarian youth
carry the flags of 142
Youth Festival nations

Young Czechoslovaks
with their dove-
imprinted beach balls



North Vietnamese delegation
in fatigues and ao-dai

On Monday, the "Day of Solidarity with the Heroic Struggle of the People and Youth of Vietnam Against the U. S. Imperialist Aggression," K. D. Wolff and a group of West Europeans seized the Vietnam issue as a pretext for protesting the absence of free discussion at the Festival.

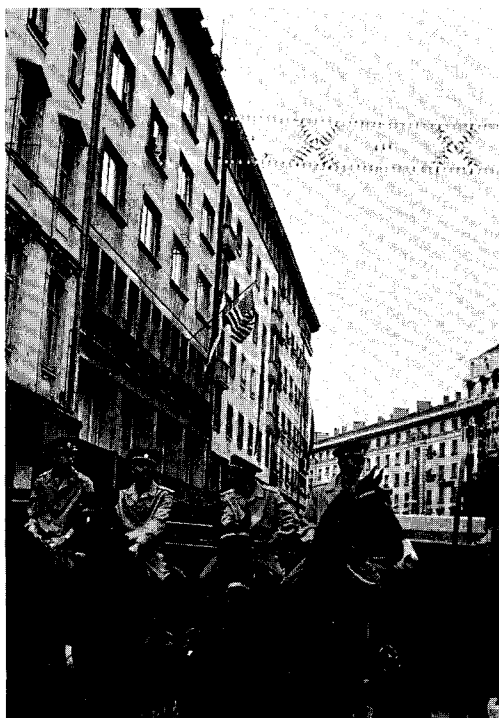
The Festival program promised "open political meetings and discussions" on such topics as "Israeli aggression against the Arab people," "the struggle against the resurrection of Nazism in the Federal Republic of Germany," "the unity of the anti-imperialist forces in the struggle for peace and national independence," "the guarantee of European security and world peace," "neo-colonialism and national independence," and free tribunes on "socialism and capitalism," "youth and politics," and "the individual and society."

But complaints about Festival Committee discrimination in assigning speakers to the symposium and forum discussions grew by decibels as the Festival got into gear. The West German SDS, one of more than twenty youth organizations included in the two official West German delegations, voted to stage a demonstration in front of the American Embassy to protest the war in Vietnam. The Communist Party wing of the SDS held the majority in the SDS Sofia delegation, however, and the delegates split over how to carry out the demonstration-- K. D., who wanted a sit-down strike protesting the lack of political discussion at the Festival, was voted down 24-17 by the "Stalinists" who said "we don't want to embarrass our hosts."

Other West German delegates, including representatives of the Verband Deutscher Studentenschaften (the national student council), the Liberaler Studentenbund Deutschlands, and the Sozialdemokratischer Hochschulbund, supported K. D.'s motion. To the chagrin of their Bulgarian hosts, the West Germans sneaked a banner announcing the Vietnam demonstration into the Vassil Levski Stadium on Sunday evening, and unfurled it as they marched around the cinder track of the stadium.

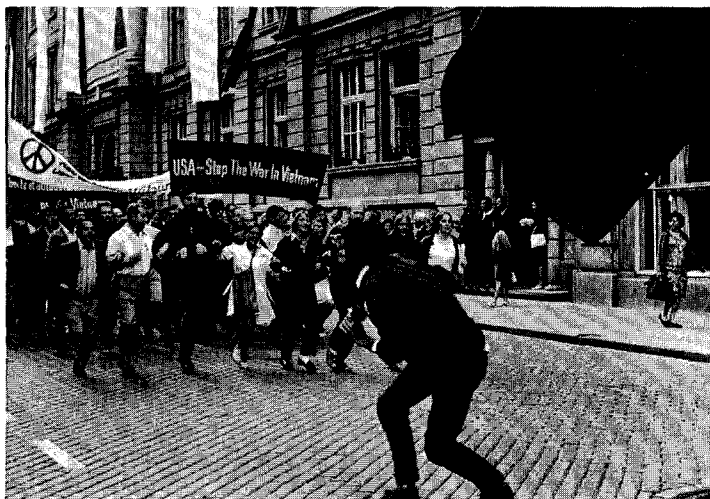
By Monday afternoon, the Bulgarian "bulle," both uniformed and in street clothes, were thick as ants at a picnic around the American Embassy. Trucks blockaded both ends of the street, and policemen on horseback stood guard in front of the trucks. Although the Vietnam demonstration was planned for 4 p.m., the Communist Party wing of the SDS, their ranks swelled by delegates from an orthodox Communist youth group, the Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterjugend, appeared shortly before 3:30 p.m. Red banners hoisted high, they began marching up and down the Sofifijska Kommuna, a street lined by business offices on one side and a park on the other.

The "Stalinistic" SDS'ers, a German reporter told me later, informed the Bulgarian police that all demonstrators were present now, expecting the police to close ranks and keep Wolff's demonstrators out. Such tactics didn't foil K. D., who arrived in his usual garb of

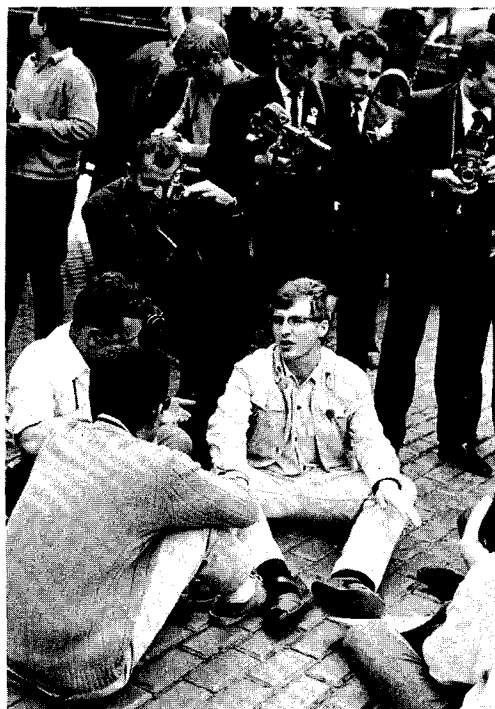


Left: Bulgarian police guard
the American Embassy

Below: "Stalinistic" SDS'lers
on the march



Above: Anti-Festival SDS and
New Left students in
sit-down demonstration



Right: K. D. Wolff, SDS president,
protests Festival rigidity

tan levis, sport shirt and tan Eisenhower-cut jacket, with two girls and two young men. The quintet moved into the middle of the street, smack before the hooves of the policemen's horses, and sat down.

"How long will you sit here?" an ABC television commentator asked K. D., who was readjusting his glasses because they'd slipped down his nose on beads of sweat. "As long as we see apt," the 25-year-old student leader answered. He speaks flawless English, and his protest training in civil rights demonstrations he gained as a foreign exchange student at Marshall High School in Marshall, Michigan.

"We've announced a sit-in to show solidarity with Vietnam, and to protest the lack of free discussion here at the Festival." K. D. barely finished explaining his goals to the television commentator when the earlier-arrived demonstrators pushed and shoved their way through the crowd of photographers and reporters, almost trampling K. D. and the four stalwarts. Like the U. S. Cavalry arriving in the nick of time, the main force of Wolff's supporters, some 200 strong, rescued K. D., whose glasses fell off in the rumpus, and hoisted him and the other four out of the line of march.

Here the demonstration fell to a shambles, with Wolff and his group arguing with the other "Stalinistic" SDS'lers (about 100) about whether to sit or march. The marchers won out, and some Bulgarian bystanders spontaneously joined the chants of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh" adding their own yells of "Drusba (friendship), Vietnam." With Bulgarians already in the fray, the Bulgarian "bulle" moved into the marching group and shouldered Wolff to the side, pushing him into some bushes at the edge of the park.



The Bulgarian "bulle" join in the fun

Despite my years of newspaper work, this was my first near-riot experience (my second came three days later) and I rushed, alarmed, to tell a bearded Berlin student that "they've taken K. D. into the bushes to beat him up." Stoically, hands tight on the banner he was holding, he asked if other SDS'ers were with Wolff. I nodded yes, and he assured me he would be okay.

To my surprise and relief, Wolff reappeared some minutes later, roughed up only slightly, and summoned the demonstrators to retire to the other side of the park for a discussion. The group now included Swedes, Irish, American students from the Students for a Democratic Society, Finns, Italians, Iranians, French, Argentinians, Czechs and Yugoslavians who had joined the West German "anti-authoritarian" group. We assembled in front of a wall of the Georgi Dimitroff Mausoleum, and Wolff took over a bull-horn.

"After being successful in initiating a mass demonstration before the American Embassy, even by the Bulgarian people," began Wolff in English and German as the crowd pushed forward, "we have to discuss what to derive from this experience. The International Festival Committee condemned our demonstration because they said it would provoke demonstrations with the Bulgarian police and the people. They warn that revisionist groups are here. We must conclude that the solidarity basis of the Festival is variously interpreted on different fronts."

Listing the police actions of the "united front" against the West Germans, Iranians and Greeks, Wolff compared it to the "peaceful policies the Soviet Union pursued last year, when the Americans bombed Hanoi and Kosygin met murderer Johnson in Glasboro." Although it was common knowledge that the Czechoslovakian delegation was having its problems with the "united front," Wolff neglected to add them to the recitation. Some West German students told me this was because their best aid to the CSSR was silence, but Wolff had told me in Frankfurt that the CSSR reformers were "revisionists," a catch phrase he didn't explain.



Outside the Mausoleum, More Speeches

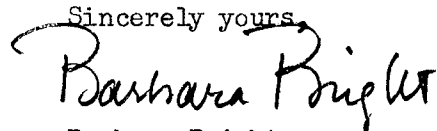
"To open the Festival as if the world were in peace, with folkloristic games," continued Wolff, "is inappropriate. We are confronted with a situation in which there are a great variety of opinions at the Festival, but those who want to follow a stronger line of solidarity with Vietnam are not allowed to participate. We think the forces of the left at the Festival should also be able to express solidarity with Vietnam."

Enthralled by the discussion, although they obviously understood little of what transpired, a crowd of several dozen Bulgarians pushed closer to the students. One Bulgarian girl offered her services as translator and actually re-voiced some of Wolff's comments. When she realized the speaker and the sentiments were West German, not of Ulbricht's stamp, she fearfully handed back the bull-horn and disappeared into the crowd.

Before the impromptu discussion broke up, the group agreed to meet again on Wednesday afternoon for a teach-in on the broad lawn in front of the West German dormitory on Lenin Boulevard.

It was the beginning of the anti-Festival, but not, by a long shot, the end of "that crap."

Sincerely yours,


Barbara Bright

Received in New York September 17, 1968.