

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR-22

Festival and Anti-Festival:
World Youth in Vienna

Vienna

II, Obere Donaustrasse 57/1/6
17 August 1959

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The World Youth Festival for Peace and Friendship is over. The 16,500 delegates and the 1,050 journalists have left for their homes, and now everyone has settled down to try to figure out who won. Because, if the slogan was Peace and Friendship, the Festival was in fact the Cold War writ small, and - as with all Cold War battles - the press on both sides of the Iron Curtain has been primarily concerned with toting up the points given and received. Both sides are claiming a triumph, of course, and the Communist commentators, in their eagerness to play the game, seem to have forgotten their claim that the Festival was non-political and had nothing to do with the power struggle.

Who actually did win? Perhaps before-and-after polls of delegate opinions and philosophies might have provided an answer, but, failing such polls, there will never be one. There was no flood of defectors from the delegations of the People's Democracies, to the disappointment of the West and despite rumors rampant. Many delegations from western and neutral countries produced vocal and unexpected non-Communist or anti-Communist majorities and were far from tame, to the flusterment of the East.

Objective observers of the Festival were hard to find, and objective news reports were non-existent. The Vienna press - except for the Communist Volksstimme - decided to boycott the show completely, cultural events and all. This irritated the Communist organizers far more than I should have expected, but it also seems to have made an unfavorable impression on many of the Asians, Africans and South Americans, who found it a peculiar demonstration of the West's much-vaunted Freedom of Information.

To be sure, Fritz Molden, publisher of Die Presse, founded a special newspaper in seven languages, the Vienna Daily News, designed for the delegates and subtitled: "Nonpartisan democratic information for visitors to Vienna and participants in the World Youth Festival". It was approximately as non-partisan as the Volksstimme on the other side and lost whatever effectiveness it might have had through the bluntness and naivety of its slant. (At least this was true of its English-, German-, and French-language versions; someone told me the Russian and Hungarian editions were more subtle.)

Indeed, for anyone interested in proving that objective journalism does not exist on either side of the Iron Curtain, the Festival provided a field day. In the Western press, every Festival event was a flop and the show was a failure from the first day. In the Eastern press, the world was never rosier, and only the "anti-Festival" of the Austrian students was a failure.

A specific example of this "collation" problem is provided by the opening festivities on 26 July (a Sunday) in the Vienna Stadium in the Prater.

The 16,000 delegates to the festival paraded, alphabetically by country, from the Fair Grounds that were festival headquarters over the Prater Hauptallee and around the inside of the Stadium. The Communist press counted 101 countries represented (others of us counted only 89 countries including such entities as Gambia and a Ghanaian delegation that later turned out to be made up entirely of Nigerians) and reported an enthusiastic reception. Typical was Mlada Fronta of Prague:



The Opening Parade -
How many onlookers?

"The most striking proof (of the popularity of the Festival among the Austrians) is the participation of Vienna in the festive opening on Sunday. The 60,000 Viennese in the Stadium were documentation for all to see that all efforts to isolate the Festival, the effort to build a wall of fog around it, are splintered. **The Austrians came...**" Reported the Associated Press from the same event: "There were no violent incidents, but a crowd of only 30,000 - less than half filling the Vienna Sport Stadium - greeted the show's opening. There was also scant applause from sparse street crowds for the thousands of delegates from many countries as they marched to the stadium."

What was really the case? The Vienna Stadium holds 72,000 people, and I would have estimated that on this occasion there were perhaps 40-45,000 there (the organizers, rather naively, had hung out "sold out" signs - after covering about a third of the seating area with bright banners so that these seats were not available). The audience was undeniably enthuseastic, especially when delegations from East European countries or from Africa marched in, and the arrival of the strong Soviet delegation was greeted with

fireworks as well as with cheers (the coincidence of the fireworks was much belabored by western journalists at subsequent press-conferences). Viennese friends, who have good eyes for such things, told me that almost the entire audience in the Stadium was composed of Austrian Communists, and since the Communist Party polled 64,761 votes in Vienna in the May election (an insignificant number except when assembled in one spot), this is quite possible, and quite without significance.

On the Prater Hauptallee outside, the street crowd was lined up three deep, and if it started out to be unenthusiastic about the youth marching by, the dances performed by African, South American and Asian delegations soon warmed it up and applause grew in volume. Whether such a crowd is "sparse" and such applause "scant" is, I suppose, a matter of definition.

I have spent many hours since the Festival ended making this sort of collation, with excerpts from Hungarian, Czech, Polish and Rumanian papers and the Austrian Communist Volksstimme on the one hand, and the Associated Press, the Vienna Daily News and the news releases of the Austrian National Union of Students on the other. This was a frustrating and downright irritating endeavor, from which I really learned only one thing: that I would personally make a very poor and very unhappy Cold War propagandist.

What follows is therefore only an informal sketch of some bits of the Festival that I saw - rough notes because I do not feel qualified to write anything else.

That the western journalists encountered difficulties in reaching the people they wanted to talk to goes without saying. But these difficulties were much exaggerated, and it is my personal conviction that more of them were the result of inefficiency, bungling and disorganization on the part of the Festival organizers, and less of them were due to deliberate efforts to hinder reporting than most westerners believed. Delegations from the Communist countries were carefully controlled - the black Tatra sedans of the Czech police, for example, were rather conspicuously in evidence, and the delegates were herded from place to place in their own busses, with a crowded Festival program as an excuse - but they were freer to enter into discussion with westerners than most reports indicated. Those who had a desire to talk with us - and they were many - had opportunities to do so.

Typical of these was a young Czech engineer from Prague with whom I spent most of one afternoon. He had been picked up by an American girl, not a delegate but a representative of Radio Free Europe accredited as a journalist, who suggested that we all drive out to Grinzing for some wine. He looked embarrassed and explained that he should not take a ride in our car, "because we are not supposed to accept gifts". But we could all take in a movie together. Nearby a Viennese cinema had been taken over by, curiously enough, both the Festival and the Austrian anti-Festival organizers: in one studio of the cinema were Communist films offered as part of the Festival "cultural program", in the other were films like "Hungary in Flames" and George Orwell's "Animal

Farm, offered by the Austrian youth organization! We looked in on both. One film was in an oriental language none of us understood, the other in English, which the Czech did not understand. The usher helpfully explained, "That one on the right is Commie, the one on the left (!) is anti-Communist," but we suggested that our problem here was linguistic, not political - an idea that tickled the Czech engineer - and we retired to a coffeehouse to talk.

The Czech was a Party member, presumably in good standing, but his approach to the party line was as free-thinking and critical as that of an intelligent American to his party line. That all careful observers of the Festival found this very often the case among East European delegates is definitely an answer to the western suspicion that Communist delegations were hand-picked from among Party Apparatchiks and Marxist-Leninist enthusiasts.

The young engineer warmed to our talk of American admiration for inter-war Czech democracy and when he admitted that Eduard Benes was "a good Czech, if perhaps unprogressive", the ice was broken. The sole sanction for Soviet bloc unity and subservience to Moscow, he thought, was the existence of an opposing bloc dedicated to the destruction of the present form of government in East Europe. The Russian intervention in the Hungarian revolution of 1956? "It seemed to most of us to be very analogous to the British intervention in Suez." Did that mean that both were good, or that both were bad? "Both were understandable."

It would be interesting to know how many East European young Communists share this line of thought.

A Hungarian emigre writer, 1956 vintage, made a number of attempts to contact the Hungarian delegation, among whom he found ex-colleagues. He was turned out of a restaurant where the delegation ate amid cries of "Traitor, you're not wanted here," and then was followed by several delegates who apologized for the behavior of their friends.

The Polish delegation appeared to be the most chic and the best-looking of the East Europeans, and here a much higher percentage of the "youth" seemed to be really under 35. A well-dressed, clean-cut looking group, whom I watched taking great delight in the election of their beauty queen in a Volksprater beergarden one evening. The girl they selected was the most Americanized in appearance - and artificial - of the candidates.

A young Viennese friend of mine, who spent the war years in Prague and speaks Czech like a native, engaged in conversation with a group from the Czech delegation. He was wearing his favorite costume, blue jeans and an old sweater. One of the delegation apparatchiks approached the group in anger and told him: "You know you're not supposed to be dressed that way. We're trying to make a good impression. Go back and change into your good suit." "I wasn't issued one," ventured my friend. "You most certainly were!" exclaimed the group leader, and then suddenly got suspicious: "You're not one of us?" The exchange disintegrated in confusion.

The American delegation, on the other hand, spent the Festival in dirty khakis or blue jeans, dirty sweatshirts - or no shirts - and several days' growth of beard. What they were trying to prove was obscure to most of us - unless it was that the "State Department money" many confidentially admitted had brought them here (?) was not really adequate.

Most American press comment on the Festival, incidently, seems to have been devoted to the trials and tribulations of the anti-Communist majority of the American delegation in their efforts to get their representatives recognized by Festival authorities. Each day brought new reports of internecine strife in the American camp, and by the third or fourth day most of us were tired of watching. The Festival organizers, under the able direction of International Preparatory Committee Chairman Jean Garcias, a very slick and very disagreeable young French Communist who became the pet hate of western journalists, sat back and patronizingly advised the Americans to settle their differences and all would be well. Garcias had apparently prepared a number of technical hurdles for the non-Communist Americans - he managed, for example, not to receive the entrance fees of a number of them, although the money had in fact been submitted in plenty of time. But these precautions proved largely unnecessary. The American anti-Communists spent their strength and their time on their internal squabbles and lost whatever effectiveness they might have had.

In the last days there was a concerted effort by many of these anti-Communist Americans to make up for their ineffectiveness by issuing strongly-worded Statements To The Press denouncing the Communist nature of the Festival. The Festival organizers had charged all along that these delegates were sent by either (a) the U.S. State Department or (b) West German capitalists (?) to "sabotage" the show, and in these last days the Americans seemed determined to confirm the basic truth of this charge. They were very ready to admit that they had been "sent" by someone or other "to show up the real nature of this circus". Their eleventh-hour press statements looked, as an Austrian journalist working on the Vienna Daily News put it, "as though they were desperately trying to justify their presence here to whoever paid them to come."

The Americans, with a few happy exceptions, made a generally bad impression. One felt they were amateurs and dilettants, playing in a very professional league.

The Austrian youth, luckily for Our Side, knew the rules of the game and how to play. Their teachers from the older generation - Old Socialists and Old Catholics alike - had their training in the desperate ideological struggle in Austria in the 1920's and 1930's, and the youngsters on this occasion had considerable money at their disposal, much of it, by tacit admission, from American sources. (Indeed, there was something faintly ridiculous about the attitude of outraged virtue struck by Westerners in charging that the Festival was financed by "tens of thousands of Moscow rubles" and by the Communists in charging that the counter-Festival was financed by "tens of thousands of American

dollars and German marks" - when both charges were so palpably true.)

The development of the Austrian youth organizations' attitude toward the Festival had been gradual. As far as I can determine, the decision to hold a formal "non-participants" show alongside the official Festival (the Communists dubbed it the "Anti-Festival") was taken only after the middle of March this year.

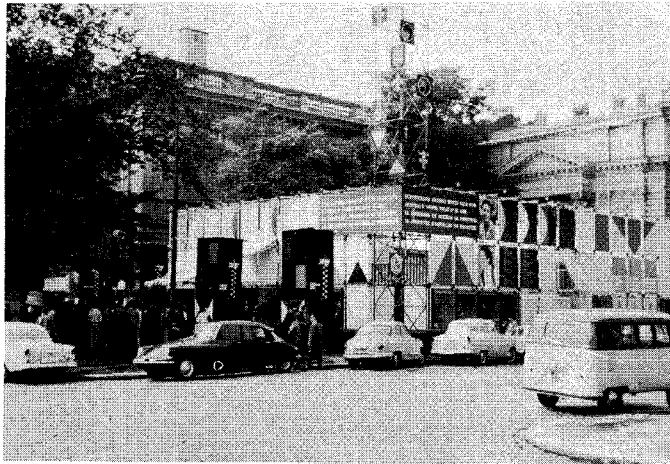
The group in charge of this effort was the Austrian Bundesjugendring, a roof organization for all the non-Communist youth associations in the country, reinforced by the National Union of University Students (Hochschülerschaft). The Bundesjugendring had announced its non-participation in the Festival as early as June 11th, 1958. In January of this year, along with the Hochschülerschaft, it issued a memorandum, which was sent to all appropriate youth groups and government agencies throughout the world, explaining this decision and inviting the attention of these bodies to the Communist nature of the Festival and its undoubted use as a "Communist propaganda swindle".

Beyond this point the united front of the non-Communist youth came temporarily to an end. The Socialist Youth and their associated organizations took the attitude that, since the Festival would be held in Vienna in any case, "despite their rejection of it in principle", attention should be concentrated on the opportunity to show youth from East Europe and the under-developed countries what good things freedom and a mixed economy are in Austria. The Catholic organizations, the Boy Scouts and the Hochschülerschaft (which is Catholic-dominated) thought that any such effort must backfire, pointing out how well financed and experienced the Festival propaganda machine has always been. They preferred to agitate against its being held in Vienna at all.

With this in mind, a mass demonstration on the Heldenplatz and a silent march of protest around the Vienna Ring were organized on March 7th by the conservative groups. The Socialist Youth declined to participate, and only the "Blacks" were present. Most of the banners they carried in their march referred to the oppression of the Church in the Communist countries, and this also served to limit the effect of the protest. The Catholic youth groups had based their hopes on the report that nervous Festival organizers were prepared to move their show to Prague at the last minute if Vienna proved too inhospitable, but the International Preparatory Committee was apparently unimpressed by the March demonstration. Defeated, the conservative organizations rejoined their Socialist colleagues in the Bundesjugendring to prepare the "non-participants" show.

The results of this effort were impressive, although their effectiveness with the delegates would probably be impossible to judge. Eleven information booths were established throughout the city, to serve primarily as distribution points for anti-Communist literature - including copies of Doctor Zhivago and Djilas' New Class in Eastern Bloc languages - and information about "non-participant" activities. In the Vienna Künstlerhaus an exhibit was organized under the title "Austria's Youth Presents

Itself". Here there was a showing of art by western youth and displays by individual Austrian youth organizations, demonstrating their activities. Of these, the display by the Socialist Youth was probably the most effective, including photographs and models of the apprentice homes, on-the-job training programs, children's homes and Alpine holiday camps for young workers sponsored by the Socialist Youth and the Socialist Party.



The Kunstlerhaus Exhibit

Indeed, the Socialist organizations seem to have done the best job throughout of sensing what the Festival delegates would understand and appreciate.

Implied in all the Socialist exhibits and literature was the thesis: All the benefits of Communism, but with true freedom and democracy thrown in. The youth of East Europe,

Asia, Africa and South America were invited to see what has been accomplished in Austria, also a poor country, without Communism and with very little capitalism.

From the Kunstlerhaus center free busses departed five times a day on a four-hour tour to the Hungarian border, where Festival delegates were invited to see the "Iron Curtain" of barbed wire, minefields and watchtowers erected by the People's Democracies. About half of the people going on these tours proved to be American tourists, who added to the problems of the sponsoring Socialist and conservative youth organizations by complaining loudly when a bus started late or delayed too long along the way. But Kunstlerhaus officials estimated that about 35% of the 200-250 making the trip each day were Festival participants.

(The Hungarian and Czech press paid some attention to this particular project. I have a translation of one article describing the empty busses before the Kunstlerhaus waiting all day for passengers who never came, while the driver of one told an enquiring Czech journalist, "If only the Festival would last six months, I'd have a wonderful holiday". Another Czech newspaper told of a carload of West German youth who drove out to see the Iron Curtain, but found instead friendly Czech border guards who served them genuine first-class Karlsbad beer and showed them that the Curtain of barbed wire was a product of the capitalist press's imagination. More insidious were the Austrian Communist youth, according to an Austrian border guard I spoke to down in the Burgenland the following week. A few always came along with

the tours to his section of the border, he said, to tell curious Festival delegates that the barbed wire and associated hindrances had been constructed by the Austrians, not by the Hungarians!)

In addition to the joint exhibit at the Kunstlerhaus, the Socialist Youth and the Catholic University Youth established separate centers in downtown Vienna to which they invited Socialists and Christians among the delegates. At the Catholic center there was a display, rather too naively done, of the treatment given the Church in the Communist countries. The Socialist center was manned by representatives of the International Union of Socialist Youth, some of them here from the Socialist International meeting in Hamburg earlier in the month.

Then there were the propaganda film showings, a jazz concert featuring Ella Fitzgerald (the Bundesjugendring's answer to Paul Robeson on the official Festival program), and appearances by the Dalai Lama's brother, dispatched from India at the invitation of the Hochschülerschaft, and by Anna Kethley, the Hungarian Socialist and survivor of the Imre Nagy October government in Budapest.

The Socialist Youth, in cooperation with the Trade Union Federation, sponsored visits to factories in Vienna and Lower Austria in which the Russian delegation reportedly showed special interest.

Statistics on attendance at all these functions are not yet available. The Festival organizers scoffed loudly and daily at the "empty anti-Festival exhibits", and at the closing festivities on the Rathausplatz on August 4th the Russian delegation organized a chant: "Das ist gut, das ist gut, Anti-Festival kaput!" A Hungarian newspaper reported gloatingly that delegates had been collecting the free literature from the anti-Festival centers, including copies of Doctor Zhivago and the Djilas book, in order to tear them up. (A friend of mine photographed a bus-load of Bulgarians gleefully ripping up some of this anti-Communist propaganda and stuffing it in a curb-side waste-container. There were several reports of delegates from Eastern countries accepting literature eagerly, only to have it collected from them by the group leader and returned to the Information booth. One copy of Zhivago was reportedly returned with a note scribbled inside, "Thanks anyway!") The Austrians will issue statistics next month showing how many books were given away. How many traveled back behind the Iron Curtain? One will never know.

Some Austrian young people were involved in a different sort of activity. The Free Austrian Youth (FÖJ) is the small Communist youth organization here and counts a nationwide membership of 2600. Of these, 1000 were brought to Vienna to serve as the Austrian delegation to the Festival, and about a thousand more were assembled here during at least part of the ten-day period to assist in running it. To them, whether by order or by choice, and to some 2000 older Austrian Communists hired as guards for the various Festival encampments, fell the dirty work of the show. It was they who roughed up a few Western journalists and smashed a pair of cameras, it was they who mixed it occasionally with Bundes-

jugendring representatives distributing newspapers or anti-Communist propaganda, it was they who beat up the three British delegates - one a girl - who sneaked into the Festival Peace-and-Friendship parade around the Ring with banners saying "Remember Hungary" and "Remember Tibet". Their activities, and even their appearance, were unhappy echoes of earlier days on the Vienna streets, when the ideological struggle was always accompanied by young thug violence.

After the Festival was over, Interior Minister Josef Afritsch congratulated the Vienna police on their handling of a ten-day awkward situation. It is certainly remarkable that there were no really serious incidents, given the strong feelings that existed on both sides and the eagerness of some for a fight. At least in part this really was due to the circumspect vigilance of the Vienna police, who somehow managed to be quietly on the edge of every large discussion group and of every street dance by a national delegation, ready to intervene whenever the situation showed signs of getting out of hand. So far as I know, Charles Kerrigan of Glasgow, the lad who was imprudent enough to carry the "Tibet is not yet forgotten" sign in the Festival parade, was the only person to end up in the hospital. For their pains the police earned the praise of Minister Afritsch, the pique of a few Western journalists who felt their zealousness in fence-climbing infringed by police caution, and the criticism of at least one Hungarian newspaper, who used their ubiquitousness as evidence that Austria is a really police state.

Of the elaborate cultural program of the Festival I saw very little, rather to my regret, since the "youth" delegation from the Communist countries contained such highly professional groups as the Leningrad and Peking Ballets, a Chinese circus that reportedly was outstanding, the Moscow Youth Symphony, and professional folk-dance teams from from all over East Europe. I did see a Hungarian puppet show one afternoon, after being kicked out of a Festival Seminar for Young Journalists for lack of proper accreditation, and learned how political a beautifully produced child's fairy tale can be - one simple touch was letting the rich, royal villains in their castle speak English, while the hero spoke simple Magyar. And one memorable evening there was a Chinese dance ensemble in the Indoor Stadium. The genuine amateurs from the rest of the world looked a little silly alongside these East Bloc professionals, and one had the sad feeling that some African and Asian delegates were drawing conclusions from this contrast about the relative quality of the arts under Communism and Capitalism.

But perhaps the best shows were the impromptu ones - the Africans who could never seem to move from A to B without beating drums and dancing the entire distance, the Arab delegations who produced musical instruments and collected a crowd whenever they stopped, the Polish chorus in peasant dress that sang Polish folk-songs with wonderful abandon and pleasure one evening in a beer garden, when no one was there to listen but their own enthusiastic countrymen.

For comic relief there were two balls held in the huge Vienna Indoor Stadium, providing such unlikely spectacles as coal-black West Africans in full native dress (plus shoes to which they were obviously unaccustomed) doing a rock 'n' roll, or a Cuban revolutionary in hat and Castro-beard attempting a cha-cha-cha with a dignified Indian lady in a sari. On the sidelines young Africans and Arabs, overzealous in their pursuit of Peace and Friendship with buxom Icelandic, Dutch and Scottish girls, appealed to their partners not to show color prejudice by refusing to be pawed.

No gathering of this sort could be without a cloak-and-dagger element, especially when it takes place in Vienna. I finally ran into one on the fifth day, at the regular morning press conference at Festival headquarters. A big man, who had been introduced to me a few days before as the correspondent of a highly respectable Swiss newspaper, was suddenly beside me, saying: "You have a camera with you. Could you do me a great favor and take a picture of that man over there without his observing you? I shall meet you outside, but do not let him see us leave together."

I was curious enough to do as I was bid, and when I found the Swiss journalist outside he explained that the man I had photographed was "almost undoubtedly one of the leading Soviet agents now abroad, who was in New York last year under another name." And who, I asked the Swiss journalist, are you, if not a Swiss journalist? "I am a journalist for the....," he smiled, "but I am also something else," and he presented credentials showing him to be the representative of an East European emigre organization in Austria.

And who was the man I photographed? He purported to be a Soviet journalist, is quite well known to Western journalists as a respectable Russian colleague, and was in New York as a member of the Soviet UN delegation. If he is in any sense an agent, it is certainly not in a cloak-and-dagger sense, and taking surreptitious pictures of such a public person is rather silly. But it is part of a silly game that one finds many East Europeans enjoy playing.

* * * *

The World Youth Festival is over. When it ended, even those of us who had felt the whole horrible circus to be emotionally disagreeable and intellectually unpleasant watched the East European and Soviet delegates depart with a sudden pang of regret. One almost felt that at least they had been here, within reach physically, conversationally, and in some instances ideologically. As the crowd of faithful Viennese Communists and curious tourists faded from the Rathausplatz after the final festivities on August 4th, the busses were already moving out toward the Communist borders an hour to the east and north (some of them, in fact, departed more quickly than they had expected - the Hungarians, at least, had thought they would be leaving the following morning,

then found themselves on the way to Nickelsdorf and the border instead of on the way back to their Vienna quarters). I found myself waving a very friendly and sad farewell to a busload of young Poles and feeling that it had been a wonderful thing for all these young people to get together in this way.

It is stating the obvious to point out that in this sort of reaction the Youth Festivals have their greatest success. I recalled the three young American college students - non-Communists and not even Festival participants, but only interested onlookers - with whom I had talked the first night of the Festival, when they were flushed with enthusiasm, and of how they had ended by exclaiming to me in exasperation and horror: "You journalists only look for strife and the bad side of things! Why, this is wonderful that all these young people should come together like this. If you're against it, then you're really against Peace and Friendship!"



There, on the first night, the whole story had been told: from the reasonable observation that it must be a Good Thing for young people of different nationalities and ideologies to come together and share their ideas to the emotional conclusion that anyone who is against the World Youth Festival for Peace and Friendship is against Peace and Friendship. The success of the Festival, for its organizers, must be measured in terms of the number who travel this logical road and come to this conclusion. There, on the last night, watching the young people from the People's Democracies depart, their faces flushed with the pleasure and excitement of their first experience with foreigners from the other side of the Curtain, it was impossible not to offer a small cheer for Peace and Friendship.

After all, hadn't Vice President Nixon spent that same week calling out the same words, in his brand-new Russian, from Moscow to Lake Baikal?

Yours sincerely,

Dennison Rusinow
Dennison Rusinow

Received New York September 1, 1959