

BWB-3
World Youth Festival II
Papa's Communism Is Dead

Im Rosental 96
53 Bonn
West Germany
11 September 1968

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The shadow of the Cierna conferences between Russian and Czechoslovakian leaders fell over the Ninth World Youth Festival on Tuesday, 30 July, as the Bulgarians' continued repressive measures against the CSSR delegation aroused sympathy for the valiant Czechs and Slovaks among Eastern and Western delegations.

"Unidentified persons" dismantled a podium in front of the Czechoslovakian cultural center on Sunday night, and the Bulgarian police later claimed the tribunal was harming the grass. Curious, for the podium was built on concrete. Thirty-four Czechoslovak youth were stopped at the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border, beaten and jailed for three days. Since they had hiked 15,000 kilometers to join the Festival delegation, it was no wonder they were "dirty...with long, greasy hair, their faces not washed for weeks." But the Bulgarian border police refused them entry, claiming "it is the unquestioned right of a nation to refuse admittance to its territory to such people who arouse fears that they carry disease."

Border police also stopped a combi-bus carrying printed supplies (copies of the CSSR Action Program in English, French and German), dance costumes and sport medals for the Czechoslovakian group. A Bulgarian policeman climbed aboard and accompanied the driver into Sofia, refusing to allow him to stop at filling stations along the road. At Sofia he forced the Czech to drive the bus to a warehouse, where the material was impounded; then the bus and driver were released.

At the "meeting against neo-Nazism in the German Federal Republic" on Tuesday evening, a young man who suddenly appeared in the audience waving a swastika was labeled a "Czech" by Bulgarian police--because he had no identity papers on his person. When later investigation proved he was a Bulgarian, the police said the young man was "irrational," but they in no way apologized for their slander of the Czechs.

Despite the official harrassment, the Czechs and Slovaks--505 delegates, some 1000 tourists, and 100 journalists--displayed amazing self-confidence at the Festival. Their enthusiasm and hope was infectious. At the Hotel Hemus, a "luxury hotel of the worst quality," as one reporter

described it, where I repaired after my first conversationless breakfast with the Bulgarian family, reporters crowded around the Czech journalists to hear the latest word from Radio Prague. "I may be in jail tomorrow, or dead," said one young Czech sports reporter on the last day of the Cierna talks, "but I'm going to talk until I've no breath left in me tonight."

At a Czechoslovakian news conference, the Czechs parried questions with humor. When a Pravda reporter asked why the Czechoslovakian delegation yelled "Awake" when they entered the Vassil Levski Stadium on Sunday night, the spokesman retorted smilingly: "Everybody was so quiet we thought they had gone to sleep...we wanted to wake them up."

Constantly tailed by secret policemen, the CSSR youth laughingly told of ten delegates who drove out into the mountains near Sofia, followed by two Bulgarian motorcycle police, a bus filled with thirty secret police, and behind the bus two more motorcyclists. The Czechoslovakian delegation soon labeled the Youth Festival: "police sport festival."

After the Cierna conferences ended, the Bulgarians slacked up on the pressure, and Bulgarian newspapers headlined the complimentary remarks Czech leaders of the delegation made to their hosts about the Festival. Nonetheless, in an interview carried by Radio Prague on 5 August, the head of the CSSR delegation admitted that "the atmosphere of friendship did not include the Czechoslovak delegation."

What the Bulgarians didn't offer, the other delegations did. The Czechoslovak delegation was one of the Festival's most sought-after for "friendship visits." Representatives of sixty nations, including delegates from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, East Germany and Poland, met and talked with the CSSR delegation.

While the Czechs propagated free discussion within the Communist camp, the New Left student groups, led by West Germany, stirred the political brew among the delegates from capitalist and "third world" countries. At the Wednesday afternoon teach-in on the fourth day of the Festival, delegates from Norway, England, Ireland, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Canada, U. S. A. and several Latin American countries heard students protest against the Festival's dogmatic inflexibility.

Roaming among the young people sprawled on the lawn in front of the West German dormitory, I asked one of the West German delegates why he bothered to come to Sofia, when he could assume in advance what the Bulgarian attitude toward free speech would be. "We didn't expect to change anything at the Festival," said Reinhard Selka, 25, a Verband Deutscher Studentenschaften delegate from West Berlin, "but

we planned to make contacts. Everybody's here, and since we're here we'll try to break the form of the Festival, which gives no chance for discussion. Here we have declamation, not discussion."

A young Dutch blonde told me she wanted to talk with other youth groups "to develop political programs, theory, more standpoints for common action. There are different ways of realizing socialism, and it's necessary to discuss how to organize socialist societies in the third world."

A Canadian delegate said bluntly that "the Festival is a bag of so far. They're using solidarity with Vietnam to cover up the splits. In the discussion on socialism and capitalism, they were speaking in generalities. It was lousy, and when I got a chance to speak I said so."

Theme of the teach-in, the first of several held by various anti-authoritarian delegations for the remainder of the Festival, was a "Fight NATO" campaign which is one of the goals for Western European student movements this fall. "NATO has fulfilled one of its major objectives, imposing a fascist regime on a country that looked as if it would become communist," said K. D. Wolff, West Germany's Socialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund president, who was the first of the afternoon's speakers. "We mustn't be fooled by a democratic facade that may come," he warned, "it will merely be applied constitutional fascism. We must use our time here for deep, analytical discussion to decide how to employ coordinated force to make life hell for Americans in Western Europe."

A Norwegian student praised the SDS role at the Festival and predicted the SDS "will take a strong lead in the international student movement." Martin Abeln, former president of the Dutch syndicalist movement (who told me that afternoon he would not talk with me because K. D. Wolff had told him I was "dangerous"), told the crowd of perhaps five hundred young people that "we are here not to confirm the unity we have achieved already, but to enlarge and effectuate it."

Translation--into Italian, French, English, and occasionally Spanish--slowed down the teach-in and limited any genuine exchange of opinions, but the group voted to arrange other teach-ins at their various dormitories. Another concrete result of the teach-in--a planned dance with beat music that night at the West German dormitory stopped just short of a real brawl. The Bulgarian "greeters" at the door refused to let the West Germans into their own rooms and turned away several other student delegations who came to visit, until someone persuaded the Bulgarians to cease and desist.

Persuasion failed on the Bulgarian "bulle" who earlier that day chased two West German students from the Chinese Embassy, where they had paid a friendship call and obtained Mao literature, into the

halls of the Sofia University. The secret police kicked and beat the students, then took away the Mao writings before setting the young men free. Loath to miss an opportunity at inciting the Bulgarians, Wolff announced at the teach-in that he would also pay a courtesy call on the Chinese Embassy--Thursday at 3 p.m.

The Chinese Embassy is located about a hundred yards away from the main University building, where all forums and political discussions were held. By mid-afternoon on Thursday, the tree-shaded street outside the Embassy was swarming with dark-skinned, muscular "bulle" in white open-knit T-shirts and dark green or dark brown trousers. On the fifth day of the Festival, they hardly bothered to make a pretense at "just happening to be there."

Shortly after 3 p.m., Wolff, a few SDS'ers, and an assortment of Swedish, Finnish and Canadian delegates walked through the Embassy gates. Greeted within the courtyard by what appeared to be a porter, the group chatted for perhaps five minutes and then returned to the growing crowd outside. "What did they say," asked a reporter as one SDS'ler, grinning from ear, strode through the gate. His reply was: "Something like--'we're working for the revolution too, but we don't have time to talk to people like you.'"

Obviously amused at the encounter, Wolff and the group of students began to walk away from the Embassy, and the press and television crews followed, cameras whirring. Evidently not realizing the show was over, or possibly spoiling for a fight, the "bulle" began to slap at the NBC cameraman's equipment. "Don't touch the camera," the NBC man scolded. But the "bulle" continued to push and shove, turning their attention now to the press instead of the students.

Eager not to miss any action, I found myself swept up in the developing riot. The "bulle," still concentrating on the NBC team of sound-man and cameraman, began to slug the two men, trying to dismantle their equipment. As the fight grew rougher, the press ran toward the Press Center, just beyond the University building, thinking we would be safe there from the secret police. But the Bulgarians' anger mounted--mine too, when several "bulle" pushed me in front of an oncoming car as I tried to cross the street.

By the time we reached the press center, I was standing less than a foot away from the NBC cameraman, trying to pull his press card out of his pocket while waving mine in front of the uniformed and secret police who stood two and three deep between us and the door to safety. Five men had encircled the cameraman, kneeling him and pummeling him with their fists. I received several mean shoves, and delivered a few kicks in return (the Die Zeit reporter told me later I clobbered one secret policeman over the head with my purse--I don't remember that). My cries of "press" to the uniformed police were useless for several minutes--at one point a "bulle" snatched my press card out of my hand, and I snatched it back.

Finally the deputy press director, summoned from upstairs, told the uniformed policemen to make way, and we stumbled through-- the two NBC men bloody, the sound equipment stolen and the camera in several pieces. I was merely battered, and extremely angry. I found it pretty nervy of the Bulgarians to push us around, but I found the experience strangely exhilarating as well. For hours afterward I pondered the mass psychosis of such events... Looking at the Festival program that night, I chuckled to read it was the "Day of Friendship with the People and Youth of Bulgaria." That morning, at a cocktail party for foreign journalists, the news director of Sofia television had asked me to appear on the evening program with my impressions of the Festival. I declined.

While the press battled the "bulle," Wolff and his cohorts returned that afternoon to a "free tribune" on "Youth and Politics," where Wolff told some two hundred students that "an open tribune should be an open tribune, yet here all the speakers had prepared statements exaggerating the party positions without caring about any discussions." Tearing into the French Communist party for their "betrayal of the student movement," Wolff was roundly booed.

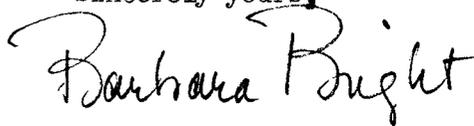
Wolff's next forum appearance, on Saturday, marked the confluence of the two divisive forces plaguing the Bulgarian and Russian "solidarity festival." Twice prevented from taking the podium, and once turned out of the hall, Wolff finally gained the speaker's platform and accused his hosts: "There is no free discussion here. Even the speaker lists are manipulated." Russians, Poles, Hungarians and East Germans booed Wolff from the stand, and a Bulgarian took over the microphone: "Thirty years ago there was someone in Germany who wanted to direct everything alone, who said that a lie, thirty times repeated, became truth."

Livid at the comparison to Goebbels, Wolff tried to regain the podium, but the secret police got to him first. In this fight Wolff lost his glasses and some tufts of hair. But he won the support of Yugoslav, Czechoslovakian and Rumanian students who stormed out of the discussion in protest against the Bulgarians' treatment of the West German student leader. Danish, Dutch, Norwegian, Finnish and Tunisian students joined the walk-out.

The Czechoslovakian delegation later filed a formal protest to the Bulgarian committee. The Yugoslavian delegation also issued a strongly-worded protest against the "undemocratic atmosphere, procedural manipulations, calculated dissemination of misinformation about the activities and positions of certain delegations, and excessive security measures."

In a summation of the Festival results, Bulgaria's Communist Party chief Todor Zhivkov later said "we have every reason to be satisfied with the Ninth World Youth Festival." If one views the Sofia Festival as a microcosm of the political world, perhaps he was right. The show of might, the military tactics that a fortnight later would snuff the flame of democracy then burning so brightly in Czechoslovakia, were all rehearsed at Sofia. But I wonder if the bravery of the Czechoslovakian youth, the anti-authoritarian rebellion of the West European New Left, didn't leave its mark on the Soviet party-liners...and if the totalitarian rigidity of "such crap" didn't shed a little light on practical Marxist politics for some idealistic Western students.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Bright". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Barbara Bright

Received in New York September 17, 1968.