

CHUMIR ON POLAND RUDOLPH ALSO ON POLAND

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drink the water, unless we craved dysentery, and not to drink the milk unless TB sounded good. As an alternative, the Poles mix both together, make lody (ice-cream), and sell it on every corner in town.

We also experienced the proverbial Polish hospitality to its full extent. (I'm going to ignore the time two members of our group were arrested for inciting a riot when they cheered for East Germany at a soccer game.) As North Americans we were objects of warmth and interest. Our ways of living and dressing were copied and our opinions solicited. The questions often proved very embarrassing because many Poles, and students in particular, seem to be experts on Western affairs and life. Thus one had to be prepared for interrogation on such diverse topics as the Marxist influence in C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* or Miles Davis' latest record.

The broad cosmopolitan knowledge is attributable to the broad freedom of individual development which the Poles have enjoyed since their "October Revolution" of 1956. It exists here on a scale only dreamed of in other Communist nations

such as Czechoslovakia and East Germany.

Western books and newspapers are available. French, English, and American movies play in the main theatres. (e.g. Ricky Nelson in *Rio Bravo*). Chubby Checker is a household word. (It's amazing how our best artists get such a foothold in Europe.) Many Poles travel or study abroad.

Most important, freedom of speech is a reality. Poles will freely give their views on the most touchy of political subjects. The Russians, and Premier Khrushchev, particularly, are a favorite butt of criticism and jokes. A typical joke describes Khrushchev on his tour of American farms viewing a herd of pigs. The caption under the picture reads: "Here is Mr. Khrushchev touring an American farm. He is third from left."

The Russians, however, have their answer in an old proverb: "When God created the world he gave the Poles a little sense and small feet, and women took both away."

One might ask how God could have created the world when it was actually Lenin.

know, our first stop, was a perfect introduction to Poland, for it had not suffered as badly by the wars as had other centres. The Poles have an abiding sense of history, and as an old seat of the monarchy, Krakow is one of the country's historically most distinguished cities. In the city's famous Wawel Castle we saw M. Duplessis' contribution to Polish culture, the invaluable tapestries that so recently graced the inside of some Quebec vaults. Side trips to Nowa Huta (an enormous steel complex built since the war) and the infamous Auschwitz comprised a horrific twin bill: a factory of the living and one of the dead, where individuals are no more than statistical integers.

Warsaw, we knew, had been devastated by the war. It is now the bustling and attractive centre of Polish political, economic, and cultural life. Its most famous landmark, however, is a gift from the Soviet peoples to the Poles, the Palace of Culture and Science, a monument to bad taste beside which the University of Alberta pales to insignificance. The Poles excuse it by joking that "It's small, but tasteful."

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In Warsaw, a westerner can very easily be laughed at for his dress (especially if he displays a propensity for Bermuda shorts and kneesox). The Poles cultivate taste not only in dress, but also in the fine arts. Poland, abstraction in the plastic arts, and atonality in music are successfully employed, the only such experience behind the Iron Curtain. One interested in music should not miss the Chopin Institute in Warsaw which boasts the finest collection of Chopin memorabilia in the world including a priceless collection of autograph manuscripts and the composer's last piano. This writer, mindful of sacrilege, declined an invitation to play on it. On the Twenty-second of July, a national festival, I stood with some ten thousand Poles by the Chopin monument in the Lazienki park listening to a recital of the composer's music in honor of the event.

Polish housing is deplorable and the authorities are the first ones to admit the problem, which is aggravated by the Poles' applying their creativity to one of the highest birth rates in the western world. The queues, to which I referred, seemed at the outset of our sojourn tangible evidence of the shortages we expected to find. This notion was soon dispelled, when we encountered lines in post offices, pharmacies, and comfort stations. Patently, there is no shortage of postage stamps in Poland, and the problem is one of distribution. Finally, and possibly most significant, the Roman Catholic Church is still an anomaly in a country professing Marxist materialism.

Apparently the Communists regard these faults as insignificant beside the greater accomplishments of full employment, universal education, and food in every mouth, or as one gathered from the frightening remarks of Roman Werfel, former editor of *Trybuna Ludu*. His justification of the Communist takeover and their tactics since, and the invective hurled at western imperialism were masterpieces of distortion, omission, and half truth. Never have I seen such a balletic forensic display; the man pirouetted circles around us. The alarming alacrity of the man's dialectical mind was evidenced by the ovation he received after calling the Canadians dupes, almost in so many words. This man would be a successful politician anywhere.

The seminar closed in Poznan, site of the famous 1956 bread riots, where one can yet see scrawled on walls and fences the inscription "Katyn", a reminder of a sordid incident of Russo-Polish relations. The summing up did nothing to allay my fears that when Poles and Canadians discussed the paramount issues of war and peace, with the best will, it always resolved to peace with . . . Yet the Poles are willing to sacrifice much to ensure peace, for they remember too vividly the horrors of war. I am uncertain whether we understand Poles any better for having been in Poland, for this of all peoples is no monolith, but we have gained an incalculable insight into native conditions and points of view from our confrontation. A book cannot talk back.



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