

Since 1948 Canadian university students, with the assistance of World University Service, have been attending summer seminars in foreign countries. In an attempt to create better understanding between university students of these countries and those of Canada, delegates discuss current topics and common problems.

Last summer's WUS scholars, Sheldon Chumir and Ross Rudolph, here give you some impressions of Poland, the site of the most recent seminar.

CONTRASTS IN POLAND

by Sheldon Chumir

Last July, forty-one Canadian students and six professors invaded the Peoples' Republic of Poland. The occasion was the annual World University Service of Canada Summer Seminar held for the first time in a Communist state.

For a while we were afraid that we had been mistaken for a reproduction of the 1939 invasion: without the original cast. The Polish-Czech border is typical of frontiers in other Soviet-bloc states. Grim-faced soldiers carrying sten guns manned two bright orange iron gates; the

TOURISM VALUABLE

iron curtain. We suspected the guns might be loaded.

To our surprise there was no luggage check and the detailed currency and baggage forms were automatically stamped with only a cursory glance. I was the only casualty when I dislocated a toe in a vigorous touch football game.

We later found that the exit was equally easy—a source of relief to those who had succumbed to Mammon and had played the lucrative black market for American dollars.

The reason for the courtesy, of course, is that Poland, like the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, has discovered the value of tourism. In short it means money. In particular, it means American money to finance an adverse balance of trade with non-Communist states. Forty per cent of Polish trade is still outside the Socialist bloc and of this seven per cent is with America.

In order to close the gap in the international balance of payments Poland encourages the influx of American dollars. While the official rate of exchange is 24 zlotys to the dollar, a Pole who appears at the PKO Bank clutching such a unit can receive 72 zlotys—no questions asked. But few Poles would part with their dollars for such a measly sum.

Instead, they go to a special shop where imported goods are for sale for foreign currency only—again no questions asked.

In these shops a Pole finds a selection of goods far superior in quality and appearance to the drab items in local department stores. His sources of funds are two-fold. First, he may receive gifts from rich relatives who have made it big in America. Secondly, he is eager to relieve a tourist of his excess dollars by paying up to 80 zlotys each.

The number of Poles engaged in this latter practice and the ease of finding them indicates that the Polish government is not strictly enforcing the stringent currency laws. This is a sign that Poland warmly appreciates the benefits of its growing tourist trade and has not yet found that the abuses overbalance the benefit to be gained.

In travelling through Poland we were struck by the sharp contrasts between the old and the new. The countryside is dotted with small peasant farms (not collectivized), two thirds of which are less than 24 acres in size. It seemed that most of the work was done by horses and fat old women swinging a mean hoe.

MILLS PRODUCE

Compare this to the new steel city of Nova Huta. This magnificent complex of 100,000 persons has been built since the Second World War, and its mills produce top quality steel which helps to make Poland the eleventh steel producer in the world. This accomplishment is symbolic of Poland's determination and success in her attempts to build up strong industry.

Speaking of the old, the ancient city of Krakow has more poignant vestiges of the past than its beautiful fourteenth century Wawel Castle. We were strongly advised not to
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Market square in Krakow.

photo by Ross Rudolph

A WARSAW CONCERTO

by Ross Rudolph

A surely apocryphal story that was rife in Poland last summer during the World University Service of Canada seminar told of a meeting of Mao Tse-tung and Wladyslaw Gomulka. The Chinese leader was telling his Polish counterpart that only five per cent of the Chinese people, only thirty million of his compatriots, were not communized. Gomulka rejoined drily that that probably represented the total of non-Communist Poles, too. I recount the story not only to illustrate the attitude of Poles to the United Workers' (Communist) Party, but also to demonstrate graphically one of the pithiest ways that a Pole will depict his

jokes at their own expense, as presented in a review entitled "My Fair Pani", which satirized everything from the ubiquitous queues, to the dormitory food, to the texture of the toilet tissue. If I have adopted a chronological and anecdotal style in what follows, it is hardly to make fun of the Pole or to belittle his accomplishments.

No vestige of war could be seen during our bus ride through Western Europe, but Czechoslovakia had been a big letdown, and we hardly knew what to expect in Poland. Crossing into Poland was a unique experience. It took, with all formalities and security precautions, almost half as long to cross a bridge one hundred yards long dividing the Polish from the Czech side of Cieszyn, as it did to cross the Atlantic Ocean, which refutes in practice, for these two nations at least, the myth of socialist solidarity. Whereas the homes on the Bohemian countryside had been little better than hovels, the houses that manned the Polish checkerboard were colorful and apparently will kept. Kra-

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plight. The political anecdote numbers among the most developed arts of a most artistic people. The Poles showed themselves capable not only of laughing sympathetically at other people's problems, for example, at the French- and English-speaking Canadian's inability to understand one another, but also of laughing at

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Modern street repair methods?

photo by Sheldon Chumir