



Letter From Eastern Europe

by Rolf Dammann

Let's Go Poland

Conversations with those who have traveled throughout the Eastern Bloc reveal that group tours, not solo travel, are the rule rather than the exception. For a hefty fee, vacation moguls will relieve the prospective tourist of three major brain drains: consular relations (visas), hotel accommodations, and transportation. Group tour-guides will provide the serious history enthusiast with spectacular points of reference, such as the exact location where Vladimir the Impaler planted a spike in the forehead of some nameless peasant. Gray areas are all but eased with the aid of old standbys such as Harvard University's *Let's Go Europe*, which offers valuable insight into the realm of local cuisines and washroom oddities.

If your idea of adventure, however, is to foment encounters with local police officials, veer into restricted areas, pound a few cold ones with East Bloc soldiers, and subsidize your trip in some perfectly acceptable ways, you won't get much help from that soft-cover you've been touting. Based on a recent sojourn in Poland, I thought it appropriate to offer some casual advice to those who are flirting with the idea of driving, rather than flying or railing from West Berlin to the Polish city of Wroclaw.

For openers, you will be required to leave the 750-year-old city for East Germany through the Drewitz checkpoint, so don't waste the time going to Checkpoint Charlie (for East/West Berlin traffic only) as you will be turned away. If, upon entering the complex of DDR transit routes, you suddenly realize you have neglected to discard publications of a political character, resist the temptation to conceal them under the seat—they will be

found. I chose to scatter my copies of *The American Spectator*, *Chronicles*, and *National Review* around the inside of the car so as to suggest their presence was a mere oversight on my part.

Although I did not expect the East German soldiers to recognize Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn on the cover of *The American Spectator*, I was surprised to find they didn't acknowledge the bold-faced "Marxism: A Dying God" caption on the *Chronicles* cover. Moreover, most of their attention was directed at an art book that featured tasteful surf scenes with female bathers and plastic chairs. The border police at the Forst and Zasieki checkpoints responded accordingly, thus ensuring that I could leave the publications with English-speaking friends in Poland.

In transit through the DDR, one might consider taking a brief but forbidden detour, off the highway and into the surrounding villages. Driving at night, we passed an oblong billboard adorned with the U.S. commander in chief and an upright cruise missile. Searching for my camera in the back, I matter-of-factly glanced out the back window in time to see a set of headlights pull out from a side avenue 100 yards to our rear and dim. Expecting we would be scanned with binoculars, I turned on the interior light, raised a road map for 30 seconds, and wound my way back to the highway—a set of headlights in tow. When we reached the border, an officer glanced at the license tag and asked me why I had stopped 40 kilometers back. The phrase "I was lost and reviewing a road map" is an indispensable accessory for the East Bloc traveler.

Shortly before crossing the East German/Polish frontier, you are asked to declare, in writing, every gold watch, diamond ring, and dollar in your possession. After completing said task, you are asked to give verbal confirmation of your itemization. Immediately after nodding your head in the

affirmative, you are hustled into a broken down shed for a game of "hide and go seek." Much to my chagrin, the soldier found the \$100 I had "forgotten" to declare; and to my relief didn't bat an eyelid. When he discovered a \$50 bill in my friend's back pocket, he spouted a torrent of abuse, although he never did confiscate that \$50, as is customary. I can offer no insight as to why they go through the motions of playing out such charades without actually enforcing the rule of law, but it certainly adds to the charms of a trip behind the Iron Curtain.

At the conclusion of business on the East German side, you might elicit a smile rather than a frown by asking the distance to Breslau (city in German province of Silesia renamed Wroclaw by Poles after the war). Refrain from asking the same question of a Polish soldier on the other side unless you care for a 15-minute history lesson covering some 500 years of Prussian occupation.

After passing through the Polish checkpoint, attempt to maintain the posted speed limit for the first 15 kilometers or you will be ticketed. Although the maximum fine is 1,000 zloty, don't be deceived: the smiling Polish police officer will gladly hand you two 1,000 zloty fines—payable on the spot, of course. Even though the speed limits change every 50 yards along some stretches of road, and even though the signposts are literally hidden behind bushes, don't waste your breath arguing. Two-thousand zloty is only \$3.00 dollars on the black market anyway.

Under optimum conditions, the fun begins with the hunger pangs. Traveling south on a near-deserted roadway, we came upon the lone rest stop, some 60 kilometers into Poland. The only people visible when we pulled into the lot were three youthful soldiers loitering behind an army personnel-carrier. Inside the cafeteria, as one might imagine, were numerous Polish sol-

diers and a handful of patrons in civilian garb.

Although we didn't seem to attract a lot of attention from the soldiers, we were immediately engulfed by a swarm of greenback hunters mumbling something about "Lincoln" and "Washington."

After we placed an order for two bottles of beer and a like number of greasy fowl dishes, two soldiers sauntered over to the table, relieved the currency hawks of their seats, and commenced ordering endless shots of vodka with which we cleansed our palates at a frightening pace. After hearing the word "Wroclaw" delivered in staccato bursts, I assumed the two were interested in catching a ride to Wroclaw with us. Naturally I flashed the thumbs up sign. Shortly thereafter, one of "our" soldiers meandered over to another table where six men, four in uniform, were seated. A shouting match commenced between "our" Pole and one of the civilians, prompting his eviction and our rapid yet quiet retreat from the place.

No sooner had I unlocked the car door than one of two civilians who had followed us attacked one of "our" soldiers as he attempted to enter the vehicle. The soldier responded by flinging his cape to his compatriot, delivering a Bruce Lee-style kick to his attacker's chest. Curiously enough, the small contingent of soldiers near the truck paid absolutely no attention to the melee. For the most part they continued to smoke cigarettes and cast only occasional glances in our direction. My thoughts, though, placed us in shallow graves, forgotten in the boondocks of Poland.

During a brief pause in the action, I motioned for the two to get into the vehicle, which they did without hesitation. As I turned over the ignition, my attention was drawn to one of the civilians, who was approaching the car, brick in hand. My response was simply to lurch forward, hoping to force him to exercise evasive maneuvers—which he did, diving right into the bushes. The second aggressor took a swipe at the passing vehicle with his fist, cracking the passenger window and hopefully his hand. As we sped off, I praised my traveling companion for having the foresight to sign the insurance clause at the auto rental agency in Luxem-

bourg. To this day we are not sure what the fight was all about, or if the civilians were actually military personnel in casual attire.

When we finally reached the Wroclaw city limits two hours later, I was amazed at the number of solid slaps to the face one passenger gave to the other to wake him from his drunken slumber. Low on fuel and unfamiliar with the terrain, I foolishly expected their assistance in locating our final destination. The two soldiers tapped my shoulder every few blocks to signal a stop so they could ask directions. One cannot do proper justice to the recurring scene of six or seven people at road's edge, waving their hands and motioning in different directions. Later on, I was struck with the realization of just how inebriated our passengers were by their performance with a standard telephone. The picture of one soldier attempting to fit a large coin into a much smaller slot while the other held the phone receiver upside down was enough to prompt a graceful withdrawal—we left them standing in the phone booth. One hour and 20 cabdrivers later, we were able to find the right street address.

It would be well worth your effort, from a cultural and capitalistic perspective, to visit area flea markets during your stay. One market, located near the old exhibition hall where both Hitler and Jaruzelski harangued, is easily identified by the slogan "The Polish-Chinese border should run through the Ural mountains" scrawled on the building's side. Inside, a 100-year-old stein in mint condition can be bought for the ridiculous sum of \$20, in contrast to \$500 in the United States.

During one such shopping "spree," I met Karl, born in the Polish city of Ternopil (Tarnopol) in 1920 of a German mother and Ukrainian father. Forcibly shipped to Germany to work on a farm near Mannheim during the war, Karl returned in 1947 to Tarnopol (previously annexed by the Soviet Union) to practice his livelihood—farming. His continued resistance to Soviet collectivization efforts earned him the title of "Nazi spy" and a 22-year labor term, 21 of which he spent hauling debris from a gold mine near Kamchatka. After his release in 1969, he was granted a visa to visit his

one surviving brother in Canada. The brother, it turned out, was an ardent Castro supporter, and their ensuing political disagreements led to a permanent parting of the ways. Karl spat upon the ground at the mere mention of his brother. Unfortunately, he never did finish his story due to the lingering presence of a police informant who, standing at a distance of about 20 feet, seemed much infatuated with an apple core lying in the snow.

On those crisp winter nights, celluloid aficionados may feel inclined to retreat to the warmth of a packed university movie room to catch an old favorite like *Clockwork Orange* or *Easy Rider*. If you forget to bring your own cigarettes to the screening, you will be able to purchase an aromatic Albanian brand famous for the tiny twigs packed inside. Also, remember hearing all of that East Bloc rhetoric about how American films like *Red Dawn* are contrary to the spirit of Reykjavik or Geneva? Well, just as I had never seen *Gone With the Wind* before going to London in 1981, the first time I saw *Rambo* was in Wroclaw.

One cannot really marvel at the inconsistencies of border politics until one has the opportunity to *exit* Poland through a different crossing point. In our case that checkpoint was at Gorlitz, site of the 1950 treaty in which the DDR formally accepted the Oder-Neisse line. Upon discovering my well-worn copy of *The Third World War*, one fastidious soldier felt compelled to hold us for four hours on the premise that the fictitious piece was "gegen die DDR" (against the German Democratic Republic). It didn't matter that I had already succeeded in passing through a total of six checkpoints (including transit to Berlin from Helmstedt) with this same book. "Why are you," I asked, "so concerned about a book that has gone through every other checkpoint—and one that I didn't even bother to leave in Poland or the DDR for that matter?" "The others," he said, "must have made a mistake." He had spoken; the case was concluded.

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Letter From a Legislature

by Ron Gamble

Color-Coding the Pennsylvania Pension Fund

Representative Ron Gamble's speech on the floor of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives against legislation to divest Pennsylvania pension funds from South Africa:

I oppose this legislation wholeheartedly because state government has no business dealing with foreign policy. However, if we are going to initiate a foreign policy based on compassion for our fellow man, let's do it fairly and pass my amendment to do the same in every country whose practices are morally reprehensible to us. And that is what this amendment does. I believe legislation has been introduced in this House to address divestiture of companies doing business in Ireland. But I ask you, if we pass the bills before us today, how can we not pass this amendment to do the same in the Soviet Union, Poland, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Albania, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, or Angola, all countries where violations of human rights are everyday occurrences?

First off, we should not be dealing with moral issues thousands of miles away with Pennsylvania pension dollars, at the expense of Pennsylvanians, but rather through the Resolution process — memorializing Congress as we have in the past. South Africa is not an isolated case, nor is it the most inhumane country in the world.

The *Washington Post* reported in August of 1985 that the Vietnamese torture of Cambodians includes beatings, electrical shocks, and lye powder being thrown in victims' faces. The *Wall Street Journal* in April of 1985 also described inhumane torture. The *New York Times* in December of 1984 reported of the legalized arrest and detention policies in Poland, which often lead to the death of the detainees. The same paper reported in December of 1984 of the saturation bombings in Afghanistan in which many thousand innocent civilians have been killed and from which millions have fled. They also reported the habitual discrimination against several re-

ligious groups in Albania, a self-declared atheist state.

Which brings me to my constant concern: Why is it that we have singled out South Africa? Currently, all the other black ruled countries of Africa are experiencing political, economic, and social unrest far more debilitating than anything that's occurring in South Africa. Many more people are killed in these countries in one day than in South Africa in a year. And God knows of the seven million that have starved to death in Ethiopia alone, not to mention the others who have starved through corrupt and inept governments.

— In Uganda, soldiers shoot civilians with Soviet-made weapons, according to a *Washington Post* article entitled "Political Violence Has Left Scars on Ugandan Children." These kids have seen their mothers raped, their fathers killed, their houses burned, and when orphaned, they take up arms and fight.

— In Kenya and Nigeria, shantytowns are being demolished, and people are being forced to relocate into the bush.

— In Zimbabwe, there has been a sharp rise in torture of political prisoners. Amnesty International reports that in the city of Bulawayo alone, more than 350 political detainees are being held without trial.

— In Mozambique 200,000 to 300,000 people are being held behind barbed wire.

— According to the *Washington Post* in May of 1985 and the *New York Times* in September of 1986, in Zaire, in some portions of this one-party country, the armed forces routinely whip detainees with barbed wire, half-starve the prisoners, and afflict them with electric shocks. In early 1986, some leaders of the only other political party were shot and other leaders were sent into exile.

— In Angola, a one-party Marxist nation under strong Soviet influence, complete with Cuban troops, where the very worst atrocities occur, several huge American companies thrive. Here is a perfect example of a country whose economy could be hurt by divestiture.

— In many other black-ruled countries in Africa, it is common to require passbooks to go from one section of

the country to another, a practice that appalls us when it happens in South Africa.

— In many of these countries, experts now predict a new wave of mass starvation because the people cannot feed themselves.

— In many of the now black-ruled countries of Africa, since the 1950's (when many broke away from the colonial system), *four million* people have been killed. This number edges closer daily to the number killed in the great Holocaust.

I now ask you — Do we have a case of misplaced compassion? Why are these countries, which have seen bloodbaths, famine, and a lack of voting rights, not on the same or a higher crisis level than South Africa? Is it because South Africa has become the "issue of the day"? It makes headlines because it is, quite simply, a black and white issue. Any move by the South African government is termed racist. The word "racism" has become a convenient term used freely to intimidate whites in this country. Fear of being called a racist is a powerful master. Politicians who normally pound podiums tremble at the thought. Those who expound freedom of speech shrink from practicing it when it comes to black and white issues. Yes, there is an inherent fear among white politicians of being called a racist. The prime sponsor of these bills was quoted in the *Patriot News*: "I've been dealing with bills on South Africa for three terms, and each year the issue is escalating more and more. I'm going to be optimistic. I hope the commonwealth of Pennsylvania is not a racist state." Just recently, I've heard the term "bigot" kicked around on this House floor. Do you see what I mean? That is why the black agendas and liberal agendas have been so successful across this country. Don't be hornswoggled. Don't let it happen here today. It would be hypocritical for us to address the problems of South Africa and not the problems of the other countries in Africa, Asia, or Europe simply because South Africa's problems are black and white rather than black and black, and Vietnam and Cambodia's are yellow and yellow, and the Soviet Union's, Poland's, and Afghanistan's are white and white. I find the practices of all these countries