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Trip to Bulgaria
Joan Roelofs

Last May and June, I spent three weeks in Bulgaria. I had several motives for this trip. I wanted to see another communist country (I had been to Cuba and USSR) to prepare for a course I teach: "Capitalism and Communism." As the course deals heavily with "quality of life" issues, a visit can provide details (and slides) and also help me to evaluate the written materials: official pronouncements often say everything is fine, and Western journalists are inclined to say that everything is terrible. Bulgaria was reputed to be an "orthodox communist country," so I thought it might be good to study the species before it vanishes. It was also said to be an unusually egalitarian country, with less occupational stratification by sex than elsewhere. In addition, I had heard from several sources that the prime leisure time activity in Bulgaria was the growing of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, an occupation dear to my heart as well as my Fourierist ideology. I had hoped to see socialism joined to environmentalism and other "Green" values.

I had read an article by Burton Bernstein in *The New Yorker* of October 26, 1987, entitled: "Laughter in the Balkans." He described his visit to the Biennial Humor Festival in Gabrovo, Bulgaria. The idea of it intrigued me; I am a sometime writer of infamous parodies, and have an ambition to make the worst puns in the world (my friends tell me I am getting close). Since another round of the Festival was due in 1989, I decided to check it out. I speculated, correctly in this case, that being in a smaller city would be more useful for my researches into normal daily life.

I was also interested in the music and dance, and art and crafts of Bulgaria. An exhibit of Bulgarian printmaking at the Thorne-Sagendorph Gallery in November 1988 had led me to write to the Bulgarian Cultural Attaché in Washington, Chavdar Popov, to explore the possibilities of a trip. Finally, I had had a childhood friend who was Bulgarian, and very much ashamed of it. I wanted to investigate this "national inferiority complex," also mentioned by Burton Bernstein.

I would have preferred travelling with a group or a friend, but there were no scholarly tours scheduled for Bulgaria this year (and I did not want to shuttle between beaches and churches) and no friend was bent on a similar mission. My alternatives were to go by myself or stay home, and I decided to take the chance. My resolve was strengthened when I finally heard from Comrade Popov, in late March, that site visits and interviews with officials would be arranged by the Ministry of Education. A grant from the Faculty Development Fund of Keene State College would help to pay for interpreters. I knew no Bulgarian and didn't intend to learn it beyond a few useful phrases. I did brush up on French for use in a pinch; this turned out to be very helpful, and, especially when the subject was food, my vocabulary was adequate. I also prepared for the trip by reading recent articles on Bulgaria listed in the *Social Sciences Index* and a 1988 book, *Bulgaria: Politics, Economics and Society*, by an American economist, Robert McIntyre.

After studying the tourist literature, and noting that the prices seemed very reasonable, I made travel arrangements for a three week trip through the Bulgarian Tourist Office in New York, with a flight from Logan to Zurich on Swissair, and then Bulgarian Airlines to Sofia. I booked a hotel for my arrival night in Sofia, and for six days in Gabrovo, and the arrival night back in Sofia. After that, I wanted to be able to travel around the country, or perhaps stay in a private home. Large financial inducements are given for prior reservations, but they cannot be altered for a refund. As it turned out, hotel space in late May and early June was scarce, and I was fortunate in my choices, despite some imperfections. I was repeatedly assured, both by Popov and the tourist agency in New York, that Bulgarians were exceedingly friendly and helpful (that was no exaggeration, as it turned out), so I left with only slight apprehension, looking forward to a great adventure.

My flights went smoothly. At the somewhat run-down Sofia Airport, formalities were brief, I changed some money into Bulgarian leva, and took a taxi to my hotel. (The cost was very low by American standards, but I experienced the minor annoyance of being asked to change money illegally. I was usually offered 7 levas for a dollar, instead of the official rate of 2 1/2, by young Bulgarian men, as well as occasionally by men from third world countries who work in Bulgaria, which has a labor shortage.) The Hotel Bulgaria, older and somewhat seedy, was centrally located in a car-free plaza, which contained the former tsarist palace, now a museum, and the tomb of Georgi Dimitrov, an important leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party. I went for a walk around Sofia, to see what I could see, and noted many parks and cafés, as well as the American Embassy in a rather ordinary office building. As I was tired and wanted dinner without too many complications, I went to the very luxurious Sheraton Sofia Hotel, where I knew there would be English-speaking personnel and menus I could read. The hotel is a joint venture between the Bulgarians and the Sheraton chain, owned by ITT, an unlikely partner for an "orthodox communist country."

My first night in Sofia was not propitious. The next day, May 24, was a major holiday in Bulgaria, the anniversary of the Slavic alphabet created by the brothers Cyril and Methodius in 855. This was celebrated with parades of schoolchildren and quiet literary discussions. In addition, I learned of the "tyranny of the party." Students occupied the nightclub of my hotel, right under my window, for a dance that lasted until 3 a.m. The music was very loud and cottonwool in my ears helped not a bit.

The next day I needed to get to Gabrovo, and was told by the clerks at the hotel to take a taxi to the bus station at 3 p.m. and buy a ticket then. (There was one train, at 5 a.m., which I decided not to attempt). At the bus station, on the outskirts of Sofia, no one spoke English. I could read the Cyrillic for Gabrovo, and got on the correct line, but was told "nimmo," all sold out. So I took another taxi, to Balkantourist in the center of Sofia, and asked the English-speaking clerk there to find me a driver. This she did, within an hour, and waited with me in the street until he arrived, when she presented me with a box of chocolates. The cost was \$77, high by Bulgarian standards, but not a bad use of my emergency funds, considering my exhausted state, the cost of another night in Sofia (in addition to my unrefundable reservations in Gabrovo) and the distance, 250 kilometers.

The very pleasant middle-aged man drove as crazily as all taxi-drivers, but I relaxed when the expected crashes didn't occur. He knew a few words of English, and taught me some Bulgarian, naming the many animals we saw grazing (unfenced) along the highway. Farms had tractors, for operations, as well as decorated donkey (probably mule) carts for hauling. Archaic shepherds with long cloaks and crooks added to the picturesque scene, but they also indicated the aging of the rural population. Although Bulgaria has efficient modern state farms, with a pay scale perhaps higher than comparable urban work, young people are drawn to factory work in cities. The countryside is being depopulated. Love for growing things does not help matters. Almost every Bulgarian has access to some small plot of land, a family farm, country cottage, or an allotment offered by the government to city workers. Because family ties are close and the country is small (about the size of Pennsylvania), people leave their villages but can visit frequently. The food supply is augmented by this part-time farming, which can also be a source of additional income.

The farms blended into charming villages and small cities, where every private house had a garden with fruit trees, grape arbors, vegetables and many garden flowers but especially roses. Modern flats, mostly of concrete block construction, alternated with the brick and tile older homes. Commercial farms of lavender and roses lined either side of the highway; Bulgaria produces 90% of the world's rose oil. On the other hand, factories emitting filthy smoke also intruded on the lovely countryside. There were few wooded or uncultivated areas along the highway, and even on the Balkan peaks (which can reach 7,000 feet) pastureland appeared at very high elevations. After a stop for dinner and a very steep climb over the Balkan mountains through the Shipka pass, we reached Gabrovo and my driver returned to Sofia.

Despite its mountain location, Gabrovo is an industrial city of 100,000 people, producing textiles and computer software as well as, traditionally, the source of self-deprecating humor in Bulgaria. The modern incarnation of this, the Museum of Humor and Satire, is a very serious edifice, with marble galleries, a high-tech discotheque, computerized archives, and UNESCO sponsorship. It has folk art, paintings, photographs, cartoons, sculpture, masks and other tribal art, collected from all over the world, although the communist countries are disproportionately represented. Yes, much humor does not travel well. I found the photographs frequently sexist or sophomoric (kindergartenistic?), e.g., women in demeaning poses, many bare bottoms. (I did not bring any of my own parodies, as I have recently concluded that much humor, including mine, tends to be oppressive. Besides, I had read a booklet about things not allowed in Bulgaria, and my stuff might have fit into one or two of the categories.) Hoping to raise the level of the exhibits, I donated a poster of drawings by my friend Simi Berman, the cartoon sculptor. I vowed to hold a fund-raiser among those who share the mania for Charles Fourier, so that the French edition of his works might be placed in the museum. Socialist, brilliant, slightly mad, and very very funny, Fourier belongs in Gabrovo if anyone does.

I became immersed in the intense, rather than zany, atmosphere of the Humor Festival. Most of the participants were invited guests, who were filmmakers, cartoonists, journalists, TV producers, film exporters, etc. There was a British stand-up comic (who was one of the judges of comedy films) and a couple from Zimbabwe who had brought an exhibit of tribal sculpture for the Museum of Humor and Satire. I was the only political scientist, as well as the only United States citizen there (although two had been there earlier and left). I felt that I had to be the funniest person in the world, or bomb, as a true representative of my country.

I was treated very well, despite my unofficial status, and discovered that the Festival provided free transportation to and from Sofia, which I took advantage of on my return, thus averaging my expense. The festival also assigned free interpreters, who were at best handsome communist men, with bourgeois tastes and aristocratic manners, at my disposal day and evening. With such resources, I did not spend too much time watching silly films such as *A Fish Called Wanda* or *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. I did see a

Finnish TV film; before I left Keene, I had joked about the possibility of viewing such hilarity. Not unexpectedly, it was not very funny but showed Finns making fun of themselves. A Cuban TV film had a theme which appeared in many variations at the Festival: a communist man wants to marry a Catholic woman and the families are furious. I liked the line: "To love someone because she is beautiful is against dialectics," for its debate potential, and enjoyed the dispute about whether the Internationale was to be sung at the wedding. Unfortunately, it was long and drawn out, with little action. I was surprised since Cuban cinema art is generally highly regarded. Too short was an Albanian animated cartoon--I never get to see those around here. A portable plastic device with earphones, called Polyglott, provided simultaneous translations in any of six languages. The festival was very well organized, aided by a remarkable woman of impeccable English, Galina Boneva, who headed the Information Department.

My first interpreter, Svilen, a man in his thirties, was a translator in a computer company. He loved poetry more, but his work required him to express everything in computerese. I asked to explore the city; our first stop was a storefront bookbinding shop. Bookbinding has replaced Balkan dancing as my leading weekend hobby, so I was very excited to make this cross-cultural contact. The three women who ran the bindery apologized for their equipment, but it was quite adequate. I showed them the home-bound items that I normally carry around with me, and noticed that one of their projects was putting several issues of the American literary journal, *Grand Street*, into library binding.

We then walked through the street market, where the private farmers produce was beautifully displayed: fruit, vegetables, flowers, fresh herbs, seedlings, baked goods, live rabbits and chickens, homespun wool and other items. On the side, the state stores were selling a small selection of vegetables dispensed from burlap bags. Several of my Bulgarian friends told me that they preferred to shop in the state stores, as generally fewer chemicals were used in growing produce on government farms. The peasants' produce is tested for nitrate level before it can be sold,

but the controls over so many thousands of producers are not very effective. If rejected, the crops are not seized, and the farmers may move on to the next town, hoping to evade the tests. Although there are probably too many chemicals in all cases, in theory at least, this demonstrates one of the major differences between capitalism and socialism: some principle other than maximum profit can guide economic decisions. On the other hand, private enterprise wins hands down on marketing, advertising, public relations, and looks. I was puzzled as to why a communist government couldn't simply forbid the sale of chemical fertilizers, and enforce less toxic methods generally. Bulgaria has been a fertile land, and current methods are not going to ensure good soil for the future. Part of the problem may stem from "Horticultural Imperialism," combined with a blind admiration for Western technology. The latter is firmly supported by the authority of Lenin, whose revolution extirpated the deep strain of Fourierism in Russian communism. The Bulgarian government is now showing concern about environmental degradation, so perhaps some changes will eventually occur. All over Bulgaria I gave out my secret compost recipes, and suggested that a delegation be sent to Emmaus, PA. where the Rodale Press runs experimental farms for commercial organic agriculture.

I was taken to some tiny shops housing private businesses of craftsmen: a shoemaker, tailor, and goldsmith. Everyone was happy to interrupt his work to talk to me through my interpreter. The tailor, who was making a suit of denim, asked me whether I lived near Canada or Cuba. Although the goldsmith was a man of 23, most of the shops were run by quite old men, and I suspect that as in the United States, few young people would elect a career in traditional crafts. (How many teenagers do you know who want to be tailors or fishmongers?) Bulgaria does have cooperatives of craftspeople, mainly women, who produce knitted and crocheted goods; and leather, metal and woodwork items for sale in state craft stores. I was surprised to see that doilies such as my grandmother made are still being produced and sold. (How many teenagers know what a doily is?)

After a rest, my interpreter took me in his car, a small Skoda, to Etur, an archeological village 8 km from Gabrovo. Craftspeople demonstrated 16th century techniques in this reconstructed village. This was a lovely place to walk and talk; interpreters were prime informants for me. I was interested in the roof construction of flat stones stacked on top of each other, which required an enormous number of wooden posts to bear the weight. A blacksmith making knives had a sign in his shop "ESPERANTO." I had forgotten about that; would it have been easier and more democratic than English as a dominant international language? IN Bulgaria, English as a third language (Russian is the second) is taught to students in specialized high schools, such as selective mathematics and science schools; majoring in English on the university level is permitted only to the best qualified. This was enjoyable for me, as my English speaking contacts were usually highly intelligent people. On the other hand, I could not have profound conversations to learn about the lives of non elites.

We had dinner in a privately-owned restaurant. I heard from everyone that these were better than

the state-owned restaurants, at first. Then they deteriorate to the same rather poor quality. It is a common problem in any egalitarian society; cheerful efficient servants are hard to find. Here we employ large numbers of students in such jobs, but I am not sure that it is educationally sound. After dinner we walked and talked some more, and planned to meet the next day. That was not to happen.

The next day, Svilen had a family emergency, and I was given a new interpreter, Nikolai. Nikolai was an English teacher in a mathematics and science high school. We visited the Museum of the History of Education, which was located in the building used by the first secular school in Bulgaria, established in the mid 19th century. The current educational system includes several types of specialized schools. In addition to mathematics and science high schools, where English is compulsory, there are separate schools for humanities, foreign languages, music, art, folk music and dance, and technical subjects, all selective in admissions. There are also unified secondary schools where anyone may study. From my researches and other evidence collected on this trip, I would conclude that their system is more meritocratic than ours, because education is a prime determinant of career opportunities (rather than class status, contacts, luck or even looks, all of which may figure heavily in our system). On the other hand, having the right political connections helps some Bulgarian children get into schools more easily, and can land them in a prime location in their chosen occupation. The school system appears to be technically efficient, possibly too much so, as an increasing number of highly qualified people tend to flood the labor market, while manual workers are imported from Asia.

Some values seem to be effectively imparted. Later, in Sofia, officials of the Ministry of Education gave me copies of an impressive peace education curriculum, and I attended a "Banner of Peace" children's concert. These lessons may be taught well; I never heard personally or found in the literature any expressions of bellicosity from Bulgarians (even though all men must serve in the army--perhaps they don't indoctrinate them into vicious hatred of other nations). On the other hand, political socialization on the subject of socialism is not impressive. I was told that there are required courses in Marxist dialectics which are not taken very seriously; these are unlikely to employ the videos, music, dance, role playing, etc., which peace education might include. Bulgarians seem to take for granted and hardly appreciate the security, long vacations, and social services which they enjoy. Many are disdainful of egalitarianism and lust after the accumulation of consumer goods. They tend to admire the Western, especially United States life-style uncritically, which they learn about mainly through Hollywood films. Some believe that every one in the U.S. is rich, has a large car and works very little. They do not think much about racism or sexism (or even recognize the terms) in their own country or elsewhere, and are not especially concerned with conditions in the Third World (despite a close relationship between Bulgaria and Cuba). Even educated people didn't seem to know very much about capitalism, perhaps because Bulgaria hadn't had very much of it before the Communist Party came into power in 1945. As in other communist systems (e.g., Albania, Yugoslavia, Vietnam), theirs was not a revolution against developed capitalism, but part of the struggle against fascism and foreign occupation.

Environmental education is now being introduced in the schools, but much work will have to be done to convince people that their dearest pleasures may be on a collision course with the environment. Noise pollution, including blaring American rock music everywhere, was an insult to human life, and probably the birds also found it obnoxious. Many educated women, as well as those still at the university, took it for granted that it was always necessary to be "in the latest style," despite the phenomenal waste of cloth, human and mechanical energy this entails. Furthermore, the government has declared that the Bulgarian cosmetic industry is obsolete; to be high-tech, 20 to 30 new shades must be introduced each year. To remedy this calamity, a Bulgarian company has signed a contract with a West German firm to produce under license lipstick, mascara, nail polish, and eye shadow.

Boutiques are full of rather nice stuff and much denim and leather clothing. Electronic goods shops display posters of Marilyn Monroe and John Wayne. An elegant cookware shop was not very busy, but there was a long line outside where steel wool was being sold. All these things are being sold to Bulgarians, who can somehow afford them. I was told that the private farmers are especially avid purchasers of luxury goods. Greeks also visit in order to buy consumer goods which are cheap by their standards. Virtually every Bulgarian household has a television set. Car ownership is rapidly increasing; yet the highly-polluting cars do not even fit in the narrow city streets built in another era. They are parked on the sidewalks, so that it is often necessary for pedestrians to brave the streets. Smoking is unbelievable and ventilation barely known. There are indications that health standards are declining, despite a rising standard of living (or possibly, because of it). At some point, people will have to realize that long-range survival (not just in Bulgaria, of course) requires that the many interesting pleasures of a steady-state economy be substituted for those of incessant consumerism.

One pleasant day was spent in a small village outside Gabrovo, Brunitsi, where Nikolai's family had a garden plot and cottage. The land was given by the local council to city-dwellers, who are permitted to build a cottage of modest proportions. His family built the very attractive cottage, purchasing the materials and hiring some of the labor. There was a large inner room with tables, beds, refrigerator, stove and wood stove, and the sun porch had a masonry fireplace. There was no indoor plumbing, but a faucet and a privy outside (Turkish style but the external architecture was universal). The land appeared to me to be about 3/4 of an acre, most of it uncultivated. There were two small gardens with fruit trees, strawberries, onions, garlic, herbs, a few vegetables, and flowers, including long-stemmed roses. Nikolai explained that no one in the family was a very serious gardener; they just came there to picnic and relax on weekends. Always ready with my secret compost recipes, I suggested that they incorporate manure from the adjacent sheep farm into the rather clayey soil, but was told that that wasn't usual because people were unsure of the animals' drug history.

Nikolai had brought his 6 year old, very charming daughter, and his mother had baked a cake and sent it along for the occasion. At first, I was called upon to give the English name of the wild and cultivated plants (one reason interpreters are released from their jobs to escort people is so that they can improve their English). Of course, in this case, many of the names were Latin, but I found that I really enjoyed "Teaching English as a Second Language" to advanced students. It is actually a family tradition, as both my mother and my sister did such work professionally. One is called upon to produce every stray bit of information, sometimes to draw, or to sing (not my strong point). Often terms have to be translated into others that are more meaningful in a different culture. This process was similar to one of the best experiences of my life-- raising children, in which a whole culture and the terms for it must be introduced. Of course, my translator was in the same nurturing position towards me, as I wanted to learn the rudiments of Bulgarian life and culture.

We discussed work and pay scales, and I heard the typical complaint from Nikolai that teachers earn less than ditchdiggers; he believed that mental work deserved higher pay. I expressed surprise that one of the waiters at the hotel had previously worked as a hotel manager, but he said that it was usual for people after retirement to take lower-status jobs (they get paid in addition to their pension). Nikolai, not unlike men the world over, found the implications of women's equality somewhat of a threat to male status. He told me that the family suffers from equality, as career women did not have enough time to take care of children and some didn't even know how to cook. I asked him whether in the case of a married couple, it was important for the man to be taller. He assured me that it was simply more beautiful for the man in a couple to be taller; when I suggested that his beauty standards might have an ideological basis, he couldn't relate to this Marxist analysis.

I met Nikolai's wife, who was a translator of German, when we attended an "Experimental Variety Theater," part of the Humor Festival. I was anxious to see some live theater to report back to my daughter, who has a double major in theater and politics. Although Nikolai translated occasionally, considerable use of mime and the predictability of the story, *The Naked King*, made this superfluous. It was a pastiche of *The Princess and the Pea* and *The Emperor's New Clothes* with some ballet sequences thrown in. All agreed that more experimentation was needed. After the show (during which smoking was forbidden) the place converted into a disco. I noted that the vast majority of the dancers were women, but I wasn't ready to join in. However, the next evening I went with Nikolai to "The Inn," a traditional restaurant where diners sat around a courtyard, in our case, on the balcony. There was a folk music band, and after some performances, Balkan dancing for any who wished to join in. At that point I did go down and dance; I never spoke and was amused at the thought that the others in the circle had no idea where I was from. At crowded Bulgarian restaurants it is usual to share tables. We sat with an older working-class man and his wife, who was one of the cooks at the Inn. He was delighted to meet an American, and insisted on buying us a bottle of champagne (Bulgarian). I had this experience repeatedly, of being treated like comrade No. 1 from outer space. This was true also of my reception in Cuba and USSR, although the friendliness of the Bulgarians was extraordinary. Possibly I was regarded as an exotic curiosity, as Gabrovo, unlike France, sees few Americans; but I had the feeling that there was something of a cargo cult in their pro-Americanism. It also helps that, unlike many parts of the world, American troops are not in occupation in Bulgaria.

Although there wasn't that much hilariously funny stuff in Gabrovo (I had missed the parade of satirical characters which opened it, and the stand-up comics had been rained out), I certainly had a lot of fun. As I waited for the bus to for Sofia, Svilen showed up with three roses, which managed to survive for several days. On the bus, I met Tinka, a student at Sofia University who was returning from a visit to her folks in Gabrovo. She was to guide the bus and make sure that all the distinguished and undistinguished festival attendees reached their destinations. Tinka was a graduate student in biology, specializing in petunias at the

Floriculture Institute, and like all scientists, fluent in English. She knew of Charles Fourier, expressed concern about chemicals in food, and I sang my usual theme song about organic gardening and ZOO DOO. The following week Tinka and I had a great night on the town. She met me at my hotel with flowers and we then had drinks (vodka and kiwi juice) at the rooftop café of the Lyudmila Zhivkova Cultural Center, overlooking the entire city. The view was spectacular, although marred by industrial discharge. She took me to a really good restaurant (which none of my male acquaintances seemed to know about). On another night, Tinka cooked dinner for me in her flat. We had many profound discussions about circumstances facing women which appear to be universal (the Chinese woman film exporter would also agree). Although Tinka baked a cake during the course of that evening, she hadn't made the promised pancakes, so when I left Bulgaria, she met me at the airport with a bag of pancakes.

When I arrived in Sofia, I went to Balkantourist and requested an interpreter, someone who could help with the official meetings and political information I was trying to collect. They said it would cost \$14 a day (not a lot, really), but when Nenko arrived (with flowers, of course), he said I didn't have to pay him. Consequently, I picked up as many restaurant checks as I could fight for, bestowed a few small gifts, and plan to send stamps, which he collects. Nenko worked as a freelancer; he guided tourists, translated, and taught English here and there. As it turned out, I went to the official meetings by myself. There was always someone who spoke English, and I enjoyed finding my way around Sofia with a map. I could easily have taken taxis, as they were plentiful and cheap, but I preferred to walk.

Nenko was invaluable, however, for general information, and for helping me with practical matters, such as paying bills or making phone calls, as the person answering the phone might not speak English. When I did not have another dinner engagement, he helped me find some place where "non-party members" were welcome. Usually, restaurants were reserved for high school proms, busloads of West Germans, the Association of zinc dealers, etc. We could simply have called in advance and made reservations, but rarely did. Nenko was also funnier than anything in Gabrovo; some of the routines we developed might have been worthy of the experimental stage. It turned out that he had been Bob McIntyre's interpreter, so we had some discussions of Bob's research.

On my return to Sofia I also checked in at the American Embassy, after frisk, electronic search and removal of embroidery scissors and camera. I made an appointment with the cultural attaché, John Menzies. In the U.S. library next door, I met an American political science graduate student, in Bulgaria for 18 months. We went to lunch and I found her delightful and helpful. She spoke Bulgarian, and could fill me in on the political situation from a reasonable perspective, that is, from a different point of view than the official U.S. or official Bulgarian. Although she was on an official exchange program, she was not working for the U.S. government as members of the diplomatic community were. Her interest as a graduate student was in finding out what was happening, not proving a predetermined point. I was able to pass along to her some of the contacts I had made; I also slipped into the role of a political science professor, discussing possibilities for dissertation topics.

I went unannounced to the Sofia Press Agency, which publishes a weekly newspaper in several languages as well as government documents for the public. I had a short interview with the head of the International Department, a woman who had formerly taught political theory in the Communist Party School. She was very pleasant, but never did arrange for me to see a political meeting, which we had discussed. Officials such as she were much more positive about socialist values than the average educated person I had met. In addition, on the basis of a very small sample, I received the impression that women appreciated socialism more. They had benefitted from legal equality, a great increase in occupational equality, generous provisions for motherhood, and the commitment to equality (however imperfectly realized) that every socialist society makes. Perhaps to educated men, socialism represents a loss of possible elite status and certain domination in the family. I left the Agency with a pile of government documents, plus a Sofia Press Agency bag.

I went with great interest to an interview with Evgeni Kirilov, the Secretary-General of a private foundation, the Lyudmila Zhivkova International Foundation. (She had been a cultural commissioner, daughter of the current president, who died at the age of 40). The meeting was arranged by Popov, as I was exploring the possibility of exchange programs. However, as my recent research has been on the role of foundations (institutions controlled by neither markets nor voters) in influencing public policy, I gave Kirilov a copy of one of my articles on American foundations, and tried to find out what his foundation was up to. Its founders include Armand Hammer, Robert Maxwell, and Ernesto Cardenal. I wondered whether there was some "cultural imperialism" involved, but Kirilov maintained that the pace set by Western technology was forcing all the rest, and Bulgaria must simply follow. Not much use in talking to him about Fourier. He was kind enough to give me invitations to a Banner of Peace children's concert, and several other events

sponsored by the Foundation.

I took Nenko to the concert, in which children from various countries performed music and dance. A girl from Lebanon sang about peace. Two of the Bulgarian children's numbers were based on cha-cha-cha and jazz. There was also a presentation of a Bulgarian specialty which combines modern dance and gymnastics. The concert ended with a folk music and dance number, which had hundreds of children on stage at the finale. I found the program very inspiring, and thought about my mother, who was a United Nations activist. It ended with Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," which I love (doesn't everyone?). Yet I wondered, why not the "Internationale?" I never heard that in Bulgaria (or when I was in Cuba on New Year's eve in 1981). Have they "burned the flag" so to speak, and if so, why?

My meeting with John Menzies, the U.S. cultural attaché was like entering a totally foreign world. I was getting used to Bulgaria, with all its strange contradictions. Menzies was affable enough, but a firm Reagan supporter and defender of U.S. covert and overt intervention. He exhibited the expected ideological stances in regard to Bulgaria, and communism in general. However he did admit that there was practically no violent crime in Bulgaria; he explained the American crime rate as the natural outcome of a free society. He gave me some useful tips about foundation activities in Bulgaria (which I am currently researching) and about the dissident ecological movement.

Officially, the Bulgarians love the Soviet Union; unofficially, it is not so certain. However, Glasnost has evoked admiration. I saw great envy of the possibilities for organizing and publishing in the Soviet Union. The Bulgarians wished they could do the same, but they assured me that it would be too dangerous. Perhaps that is true, but I sensed that there was also a lack of initiative, springing from passivity, complacency, and negativity. Why should small countries let any superpower set the pace? The official pronouncements indicate that great changes are in the works, in the economy, civil rights, the environment, travel, even smoking. There must be ways to help this along without getting into too much trouble.

For a change of pace I decided to go on an excursion with the U.S. diplomatic community, to the Rose Festival in Kazanlak. It was on a Sunday, so I had no official appointments. Nenko was leading the tour and I was afraid I would be at loose ends in Sofia, as I had not been able to line up anything for the weekend. I had schlepped my tennis racquet, but that proved to be useless, because of the daily rains and many other complications. Most of the group were women: diplomats (including the French consul) and wives of diplomats. There were a few men including some marines who could have benefitted from a peace education curriculum. (The group reminded me of the sorority and fraternity crowd at Cornell with whom I did not mix for mutual reasons.) Whether by choice or direction, they had few unofficial contacts with Bulgarians. While a few of the women ventured to the central market to shop, many lived off imported frozen foods and meat pastes. It was a long bus ride; we came within a few kilometers of Gabrovo and I wanted to jump ship.

There were massed groups of Balkan dancers in the stadium at Kazanlak, which was otherwise unpleasantly hot and crowded. I enjoyed the museum of the rose industry and picking (and eating) cherries in an orchard. Nenko finally got me into a church, a famous one at Shipka, which had been an objective of his since he met me. When we returned to Sofia we had dinner in a "Vietnamese" Restaurant, where the food was Bulgarian and the beer Yugoslav. I asked Nenko to do an unheard of thing: request of the Bulgarian waiter that the deafening American music be turned down. Which they did.

My meetings at the Ministry of Education, the Center for Bulgarian Studies, the Committee of Bulgarian Women, and with a Director of a House of Culture (community center) yielded much information about the political culture, social services, and the status of women. As in most European countries, the birthrate, especially among educated women, is low. Consequently, elaborate provisions exist to encourage marriage and childbearing. For example, the government gives loans to buy a flat (most are privately owned) upon marriage. Those who have three children are forgiven 70% of the loan. University students who have children are given special privileges, e.g., they can postpone their exams for years and take them whenever they feel ready. Maternity leave at full pay is available for one month before childbirth and six months after. However, two years leave may be taken at the minimum wage, and in all cases, jobs must be held open for the person taking the leave. Most often, it is the mother, but the father, grandmother, aunt, etc. may take this two year leave, and sometimes does. Maternity leave counts as service toward retirement. Once a parent returns to work, there are also special provisions, e.g., exemptions from after-hours meetings, and fully paid leave if a child is ill under a doctor's care. Nurseries are available for working parents, but their population has declined from 40% to 20% of pre-kindergarten children since 1984. It is common for grandmothers, upon retirement at age 55, to devote themselves to care of their grandchildren. The Bulgarian way of life differs from ours not only because of socialism, but because of the persistence of a traditional family structure. Three generations sometimes live together, and otherwise often are close enough for constant visiting. The country is small (and fares, even air, cheap) so that frequent returns to old folks who live in villages are

possible, and expected. Abortion is legal, but can be difficult to obtain if the woman has not had at least two children. On the other hand, unplanned births seem rare. There are few children born to unmarried women, and I was told they are mostly to highly educated women who cannot find husbands.

Even in my talks with officials, I saw signs of the "national inferiority complex." People were so very critical of their country, often unjustifiably so, e.g., I was told, "Slavs have no capacity for organization." I inquired about this penchant and was told that "self-criticism is better than to think that you are best in the world."

Through a chance meeting with an American professor on a Fulbright in Bulgaria, I met two young Bulgarian men with whom I spent some time, including the inevitable round of six restaurants before "non-party" members could find a place. One was an economist working in industry, and the other a political philosophy graduate student. With the latter, given his bourgeois political and cultural tastes, I had some heated political discussions, as well as a lovely night at the opera, at an excellent performance of *Madame Butterfly*.

On one of my last days in Sofia, Nenko invited me to his home, to have dinner and meet his family. First we went shopping, and this was a day of torrential rain. (I had shopped by myself previously, both in the street market and at a greengrocer, to supplement my diet with more fresh produce. There was no lack of chocolate pastries at any hour of the day, but restaurants do not always serve fresh fruit.) Nenko was compulsive about the shopping; he would wait in line in one store and then decide he didn't like the selection. Consequently, we went to many stores; for me, everything was educational. I noted that at every stall, Nenko purchased a plastic shopping bag; they were not especially sturdy or reusable. I was surprised at the amount of plastic used in Bulgaria, e.g., the cheaper cafes served espresso or soft drinks in plastic cups. After buying ham, sausage, cheese, parsley, tomatoes, cabbage, soft drinks, and zucchini (I did not tell him that we regarded it as a garden pest here), Nenko decided that he had to get new potatoes, as I had admired some a few days previously. I tried to convince him that surely there was enough food, but he persisted, and we took a taxi to the central market where he bought 2 kilos of potatoes, better-looking parsley, and a flower for me "for my trouble." I waited in a gypsy cafeteria with the food while he went to get still another cab in the downpour. We finally reached his rather large and luxurious flat in the suburbs. His wife, Tanya, was an English translator in an advertising agency. She wasn't too thrilled at the vast quantity of food we carted in. Joining us were her eleven year old son by a previous marriage, and a four year old girl from the current one. (Divorce is common in Bulgaria, perhaps because of the great social pressure to marry young and have children in one's early twenties. Men also seem to have more traditional expectations of marriage; highly educated women see things differently.) Tanya served some of the things we had brought, and some she had planned, such as a tasty but unidentifiable fish. The potatoes were not served, and later I heard that she threatened to meet me at the airport with 2 kilos of potatoes.

Despite the many puzzles about Bulgaria which were not resolved, I felt my trip had been a great success. This was partly because I spent so much time learning, and sometimes teaching, with very intelligent people, and came to know some Bulgarians quite well. Because I was a comrade from outer space, so to speak, to whence I would return, they discussed their hopes and fears with much greater frankness than usual. I enjoyed the adventure of making my way in a strange place, but also all the company I had, so that I could let others steer some of the time. My slides came out well and I have a challenging research topic. I would like to go back some day, to such intelligent and hospitable people, especially if their clean air campaign is successful.



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