

CONSEIL DE L'ATLANTIQUE NORD
NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

MF

EXEMPLAIRE N° 164
COPY

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH
9th September, 1959

NATO SECRET
DOCUMENT
AC/52-D(58)40/9

COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

SEVENTH WORLD YOUTH FESTIVAL

Note by the United States Delegation

In response to the invitation of the Chairman of the Committee, the United States Delegation submits the following comments on the Seventh World Youth Festival:

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The August 4 closing of the Seventh World Youth and Student Festival for Peace and Friendship, held in Vienna beginning July 26, concluded the first experiment in holding such festivals outside the Communist bloc. Although organized by two Communist "fronts," the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students, this Seventh Festival had been declared by its sponsors to differ from its predecessors in being a "noncommunist" affair - a strictly sports-and-cultural expression of worldwide youthful concern for peace and international friendship, devoid of political propaganda and encouraged by the Communists only because of a coincidence of aims. This pretext, difficult to maintain in the face of a boycott by all noncommunist Austrian youth and student organizations that forced the Austrian Communist Party to assume openly the role of host, was demolished when the young Austrians, under the slogan "Friendship - yes; communism - no," mounted a vigorous campaign of their own, with free discussions and rival attractions contrasting pointedly with the controlled and stereotyped events of the Festival. With the noncommunist Viennese press and radio refusing to give the Festival any publicity, and the public determined to be courteous to the delegates as individuals but not to lend itself to the stylized popular demonstrations that the Festival organizers had been able to count on in bloc capitals, the affair was lack-luster and had little of the excitement that prevailed at the Moscow Festival in 1957. Despite extravagant claims of success by satellite representatives and the Festival chairman, there have been

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admissions from Soviet sources that Communist expectations were not met.

Causes of disappointment

Communist critics are blaming for this result the clumsiness of the Austrian Communist Party, which combined inept propaganda with strong-arm tactics that embarrassed the Soviet delegation; miscalculation of the effectiveness of counteractivities by Austrians, certain bloc refugees, and sympathetic Western groups; indifference of the Viennese population; underestimation of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Austria; and allegedly extensive financial backing for anti-Festival demonstrations supplied by Western, especially United States, sources. Noncommunists have complained of primitive living conditions, transportation difficulties, and bad food; interference of Festival officials with the composition and procedures of national delegations; overlapping programme events (about 80 a day) scheduled to eliminate leisure for sightseeing of casual conversation; "seminars" with resolutions composed in advance and passed without change, despite opposition; intimidation and beating of delegates by guards and "goonsquads" both on and off the Festival grounds; and use of force to bar noncommunist delegates and Western press representatives from Festival events.

All of the bloc delegations are said to have been infiltrated by their respective state security police or police informers posing as delegates. Bloc participants were moved about in sealed busses, herded in groups from one function to another, and kept under guard in isolated encampments or on river boats in the Danube. Although available reports are still few in number and sometimes contradictory in detail, there seems to be agreement that, except for certain arranged "get-togethers" between delegations, systematic efforts were made to prevent contact between bloc and nonbloc delegates. The Poles seemed able to talk freely with Westerns (as were also the Yugoslav observers), but the Rumanians and the Chinese were almost inaccessible, and roving Communist photographers took pictures of bloc delegates seen talking to Austrians at the information booths set up throughout Vienna. Nevertheless, without the controls available in bloc capital, the organizers' plans went awry and the saturation of programming backfired. Despairing of attending so many functions, often considerable distances apart, many delegates wandered away from their national groups and explored Vienna - exactly what the multiplicity of events had been intended to prevent.

Aftermath of the Festival

What effect this display of "noncommunism" has had on its principal propaganda targets - the Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans - it is too early to say. Many delegates from those areas are being treated to post-Festival tours through bloc countries, or are travelling through bloc states on their way hom; thus they are being subjected to propaganda pressures in circumstance manageable by the Communists. These tours, which might crowd from the delegates' minds any doubts inspired by events in "gay Vienna," are tied in with the expanding youth tourism programme now being pushed by the bloc, especially the Soviet Union and Communist China. In addition, students from the target areas are being offered scholarships in bloc countries, and many will embark on courses of study instead of returning home with their Festival delegations.

Some Westerners, impressed by the opportunities for counterpropaganda that Vienna revealed, are urging that the West stage festivals of its own, an idea that has reached the ears of the International Preparatory Committee for the Vienna Festival. Awed by the power it ascribes to the Austrian Church, the IPC has been reported as saying that if an anti-communist youth festival is held, Communists will counter it by extensive use of controlled religious groups, particularly from the Near East. The IPC is also considering a plan to hold regional, rather than worldwide, festivals in the future. Whatever the Communists do, there seems to be general consensus that they are unlikely to attempt again to hold a festival in a West European capital, with the possible exception of Helsinki, where they believe they would have the requisite control of the local population.

Palais de Chaillot,
Paris, XVIIe.