

Travel Outlook

Marxism in Poland: is that Karl or Groucho?

By DIAHANN NADEAU

Poland was a series of bizarre events linked by daily insults and minor skirmishes. My favorite night took place one Tuesday in Gdansk. This evening owed more to Groucho Marx than to Karl.

There were five of us on the tour: Earl L., a Georgetown native, David M. of Toronto, Mark P., formerly from Poland but residing in Toronto for over a decade, Claude B., of Trois Riviere, and me, the lone female, except for Anna, our guide. Anna was proving to be a total snob, not to mention a recalcitrant and pig-headed babysitter. She treated us as if we were in Grade 2 and we nearly had to beat her up in order to be allowed off the leash for one evening. We were desperate to get away from hotel food; our hotel in Gdansk was great in other areas, but cuisine was not their forte. (Try eating a plate of grey vegetables).

We wanted to eat in a restaurant unconnected to an hotel, but Anna kept telling us: "Ees impossible, impossible; you will not get food. Zere es no food in Polish restaurants. Ees veery expensive, veery expensive". No food was better than hotel food, so we girded our loins and entered the lion's den, the Sodom and Gomorrah of downtown Gdansk, prepared to starve for the night as long as we were away from Anna.

Mark, David and I took a taxi together from the hotel. Because we

had been told that taxi drivers will try to rip you off if they know you are foreign, Mark sat in the front seat and conversed with the driver in Polish while David and I sat in unnatural silence in the back. We arrived at our destination and gave him 800 zloty, which is slightly less than a dollar, and congratulated ourselves on our cleverness. We found the restaurant and settled in to wait for Earl and Claude.

The waiter approached us and we ordered vodkas, neat. "No" said the waiter, "you cannot have just vodka". "This is Poland, everyone drinks vodka neat," we said in amazement. Licensing forbade the restaurant to serve vodka neat. Being from Ontario, we were no stranger to quixotic liquor laws, so we accepted this. Looking at the menu we saw gin and tonic offered. "O.K., we'd like three vodkas and tonic." Again the waiter shook his head. "Not possible," said the waiter. "Have you run out of tonic?" we asked in surprise. "Oh no, we have tonic, but only for gin".

We were in shock now, knowing we had entered the Twilight Zone. The waiter then explained to Mark, in Polish, that tonic water was an exotic mixer and they saved it for gin, because that was a popular cocktail. We were a bit stunned, but we rallied valiantly. "How about vodka with blackcurrant juice?" we suggested.

This is actually a very good mix

we had discovered at lunch one day. "No, no blackcurrant juice". Chastened, but still undefeated, we finally asked what mix we could get with vodka. 'Pepsi-cola or lemonade'. As none of us could imagine vodka with Pepsi we went for the lemonade. The drinks arrived and we sat back in our seats, exhausted.

Three vodka and lemons later, Claude and Earl arrived. We triumphantly asked how much they had paid for the taxi. Four hundred zloty for one way they told us. We laughed. Our cab driver was no slouch; he had charged us double the going rate. So much for our masquerade. We admired his nerve, his perspicacity. The dinner turned out to be best we'd had to date. We all ordered our own food. This was a priceless luxury, because for the last four days Anna chose every meal without consulting us. We nearly cried for joy at the sight of a menu. "Absolutely no pork," the men declared. I guess Anna liked pork a lot more than they did. Contrary to Anna's expectations and warnings, the restaurant had plenty of food and none of it was grey.

It also cost under \$25 Cdn. for five people, with wine and cocktails and tons of food. Never have so many been delighted by so little. We finally emerged from the restaurant, elated. Once again we had proven that our esteemed guide, Anna, was probably a pathological liar.

We separated again, Earl and Claude taking the first taxi. David, Mark and I returned to the hotel, paying only 400 zloty this time. We decided to exchange some money at the legal exchange desk for a change. This was my first attempt at legal exchange. But once again Rod Serling stepped in. I gave the man at the counter five dollars and waited for the zloty. He said something to me in Polish and I repeated my request.

When he hesitated again I called Mark over to translate. It seemed the man would not legally exchange my money. Instead he was offering me 500 zloty per dollar, about twice the legal rate but only two-thirds the going black market rate. I accepted because I was completely out of Polish currency. David exchanged \$20 at the same rate. We were astonished. Here we were, being virtuous at last, and unable to do even this simple transaction properly. We headed downstairs to the nightclub for nightcaps, a place appropriately named Hades. Of course the waiter promptly gave us 740 zloty per dollar (still not a top rate). At least I'd only change \$5 with the thief upstairs.

In Hades, the clientele had shifted dramatically from the night before. Instead of tall-bait German beauties

dancing there was a gaggle of young Polish women, decked out in Tammy Fay Bakker make-up jobs, dancing sensuously together in an effort to attract customers. We went to sit at the bar but just then, this large woman (?) in a blonde wig turned to scan us. "No way am I sitting near that," said Mark, "that whatever it is - let's sit at a table." So we found good seats with a great view and discussed the blonde's actual gender for a while.

We sat and drank vodkas neat and watched these amazing women. Our favorite, nicknamed Lolita, was a rather lovely girl under the make-up, (so we suspected), with a nice figure. Not content with dancing with the other young ladies, Lolita began a sensuous encounter with one of the pillars on the floor. She hugged it, nuzzled it, loved it. We were speechless.

The music in this club was so bad that I begged Mark to tell the disc jockey to stop playing it, or to tell him that he was the worst d.j. we'd ever heard. Mark wouldn't, so I gave the waiter a small bill to insult the d.j. for me. I had never paid anyone to do my insulting for me before; it was kind of fun.

The music finally stopped for a minute and we checked to see which businessman had ended up with which hooker. To our surprise,

Lolita was still alone. Maybe she was just too wild for the average guy we decided. The noise started again and we turned to look at the dance floor and discovered a young woman dancing in nothing but a see-through lace top and a G-string.

We had accidentally stumbled on to a Polish striptease show! We all started to laugh and hummed the Twilight Zone theme. The show consisted of two performers, one after the other, taking all their clothes off fairly quickly. The second one, named Camilla, even did the splits.

"So much for socialism", I said after the shock of the performance had ebbed. I then decided I was outraged, that women in so-called socialist country still degraded themselves in this fashion. "So what can you do about it?" asked Mark. "I will make a stupid and futile gesture" I declared. (After enough alcohol I tend to like making stupid and futile gestures.)

I then proceeded to find Camilla and gave her \$10 Canadian. She spoke no English or French so she never understood why I was giving her such a large sum of money. (It is a lot in Poland.) No doubt she suspected my sexual tendencies, but I didn't care. However tipsy I was, I had made my statement. Unfortunately, no one understood the language.



The Palace of Technology and Hotel in Warsaw. (Photo by Diahann Nadeau)

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Sitmar cruises are sold exclusively through professional travel agents.

A Tasty Recipe

DARK FRUIT CAKE

- 3 cups seedless raisins
- 3 cups sultana raisins
- 1/2 cup chopped glazed cherries
- 1/2 cup chopped candied pineapple
- 1/2 cup chopped citron peel
- 1/2 cup chopped mixed peel
- 1 cup chopped nuts
- 1 1/2 cups all purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. allspice
- 1/2 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. mace
- 1 cup shortening
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 6 eggs
- 1/2 cup molasses

Line two 9x5" loaf pans or two 8" tube pans with heavy waxed paper. Prepare fruits and nuts; dust with 1/4 cup of the flour. Stir remaining flour, salt, baking soda and spices together. Cream shortening and brown sugar together until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Add molasses; mix well. Blend in dry ingredients; fold in fruit and nut mixture. Fill prepared pans 3/4 full. Bake in a slow oven (300°) 2 hours or until done.



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