

Christmas is Merry, Even Under Communism

Bonn, Germany (NC)—The Communist regimes of eastern Europe apparently have quit trying to abolish Christmas. This year church-going, gift-giving and family celebrations will mark the feast day.

In an attempt to do away with the feast, the authorities had tried to replace Santa Claus with a Soviet-style Father Frost and called Christmas the "Winter Holiday."

An indication of how things have changed is that when East Germany this year abolished most religious holidays to compensate for the introduction of the five-day working week, it did not touch the two-day Christmas holiday because of long-standing traditions.

Along with Poland and Czechoslovakia, East Germany even provides extra pay for those who have to work on the holiday. It also provides Christmas bonuses under certain conditions, although not on the lavish scale of Poland, where workers receive an extra month's pay in December.

However, not all news is good in East Europe this Christmas. Although there are more toys and other gifts and a better choice of Christmas foodstuffs, prices have risen. In Poland, in late November, increases in the price of meat and poultry, in some cases up to 32 per cent, made prospects for Christmas dinner bleak. In Czechoslovakia, price increases are expected as the regime battles to control developing inflation.

For hundreds of families there is the misery of separation: the inability to cross the borders freely for family reunions with those who escaped to the West.

Christmas Day is celebrated at the same time as in the West except in Bulgaria and parts of Yugoslavia where, according to the Orthodox calendar, it falls on Jan. 7. In Bulgaria, Rumania and Yugoslavia there is no Christmas holiday, but the other regimes generally allow two days.

Toys for children are a characteristic feature of Christmas. In most of East Europe, they do not normally include military weapons. Many are related to space and science. One of the big buys in Hungary this year is a moon rocket which chugs along until it hits something when it automatically straightens around and the cabin door flies open so the pilot can eject.



Christmas Festival in Hungary

In Kalocsa, Hungary, the people have for centuries held a Christmas play in which many of the townspeople take part. This photo shows the actors in the play kneeling before the Crib. (RNS Photo)

Interest in the better life is shown in toys (many from East Germany) such as model Fiat and Mercedes cars. Working models of Soviet jetliners are also popular.

Such things as walking dolls, radio-controlled model aircraft, and various mechanical toys are available in small quantities, but are extremely expensive. In Czechoslovakia, a radio-controlled model airplane costs about half the average man's monthly salary.

Goose, turkey and ham are the usual main fare on Christmas tables with carp and other fish traditional on Christmas eve.

In Poland and Czechoslovakia

the main meal is eaten on Christmas eve. The festive table contains mushroom soup, fish prepared in various ways, noodles with poppyseed, and lots of cake, nuts and fruits. In Hungary, Christmas eve is a fasting night, and traditionally there are light meals of fish and Christmas cakes and a midnight snack of meat in jelly.

The main meal on Christmas Day generally features goose or turkey, although in Yugoslavia there is a suckling pig roasted on a spit. In Hungary, also, there is mostly pork.

Even under communist atheism, the Christmas symbols and their religious basis persist.

Communism's pseudo-Santa

Claus, "Father Frost," today lingers on only in Bulgaria and Rumania (and in the Soviet Union, where he originated).

In Poland, he is once again Swiety Mikolaj (St. Nicholas), a fourth-century bishop who helped a poor father save his three daughters from disgrace and gave each of them a sack of gold for dowries. In Czechoslovakia and parts of Yugoslavia, presents are distributed by the Child Jesus.

In Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, children are also visited on Dec. 6 by St. Nicholas and his helper, who reward the good and punish the bad.

Carol singers still troop through the snow-covered villages. Only in Bulgaria do they totally disappear. They are discouraged also in Rumania, particularly in the towns and cities.

Generally, the children are dressed as the three kings who followed the Star of Bethlehem, and are followed by an entourage dressed as angels, shepherds and other characters from the Bible. The child in front carries a long staff with a star at the top. In the center, a group carries a model of a stable with the Christ Child in a manger surrounded by Mary, Joseph, the kings and angels.

Standing in the snow outside a house they sing traditional local carols in return for a few coins, or biscuits or sweets.

Traditionally, the most important church service for Catholics in East Europe is the Christmas midnight Mass.

For Protestants in East Germany the main service is on Christmas morning.

Everywhere, however, the churches are packed and with rare exceptions Christians worship the birth of Christ in peace.

COURIER-JOURNAL
Friday, Dec. 22, 1967

5A Seminarians Attend Diocesan High Schools

San Antonio (NC)—Students at St. John's Minor Seminary will receive their scholastic education in archdiocesan high schools beginning in the fall, according to an announcement by Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio.

The announcement also said that archdiocesan priests will assume the administration of

(the seminary which has been staffed by the Vincentian Fathers since 1941. Students will continue to live and receive training for the priesthood.

The Vincentians will leave St. John's at the end of the school year.

St. John's, founded in 1915, currently has some 150 students and is staffed by nine priests.

Pope Urges

Remember The Poor At Christmas

Vatican City (NC)—Pope Paul VI has urged Christians to avoid making Christmas too luxurious this year and forgetting the needs of the poor.

While appreciating the exchange of gifts "on this unique and great day of Christmas which marks the decisive date for the salvation of the world and for each one of us," the Pope also called his listeners' attention to other aspects of the feast day.

"Permit us to recall to you," the Pope said, "two things most beloved sons and daughters: First, do not let Christmas be too luxurious and only an external holiday, an occasion of immoderate dissipation or of wasteful luxury and superfluous vanity enjoyed at the expense of others. Let us recall that the true richness of Christmas is an interior and religious one.

"And, secondly, let us remember on Christmas the needs of our neighbors. Let no one forget the poor on the day of the poverty of Christ, but let each search out and find a means of doing some good deed on this holy and most human holiday. Mary is watching us."

School Aid Bill Passed

By JOHN R. SULLIVAN
(NC News Service)

Washington — It took six months of public debate and private haggling, but Congress finally voted to extend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—the nation's giant school aid bill—for another two years.

The act was passed by the House and Senate on the last day of the 90th Congress's first term and sent to President Lyndon B. Johnson for his signature.

The final vote on the Senate House compromise bill was 286-73 in the House and 63-3 in the Senate. That vote came just six days shy of six months after the House approved its version of the bill in a marathon session June 22.

The final bill authorizes \$9,229 billion for two years of aid—the largest portion of which will go to students in the nation's poorest schools.

Other programs provide textbooks and other teaching materials for public and private schools, special programs for the handicapped, migrant and Indian children, and those for whom English is a second language.

Two issues accounted for most of the anguish—and the time—in winning final passage: the needs of private schools and the opposition of Southerners to strong desegregation guidelines.

The latter threatened for a time to erupt in a Southern filibuster in the Senate. But the threat was stopped when Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare John W. Gardner assured Southern schools that no funds would be cut off during the school year, and that none would be cut off without at least six months' notice, and the scheduling of a public hearing.

The private school issue—which involved church-related schools almost exclusively—was resolved by a series of compromises and, in the end, by firm House action.

The largest compromise involved funds for the development of innovative programs, over which the states want to exercise full control. Representatives of church-related schools objected, claiming that if states controlled these funds—about \$500 million—many of their children would be shut out by state law and constitutional barriers. They asked for retention of full federal control.

The final bill authorizes \$4.3 billion for fiscal 1969 and \$4.8 billion for fiscal 1970. It also permits Congress to pass appropriations a year in advance—a boon to educators who will now be able to base long-range plans on what they know will be coming from the federal government.

Consider St. Thomas More For Westminster Plaque

London (RNS)—British government authorities are considering placement of a plaque in historic Westminster Hall to commemorate the trial of Sir Thomas More, who was canonized in 1935, exactly 400 years after his martyrdom as a Roman Catholic.

Sir—now Saint—Thomas was arrested for refusing to recognize English King Henry VIII as supreme head of the Church after his break with Rome, and was beheaded at the Tower of London on July 6, 1535. Before his death he had been High Chancellor of England and a Speaker (or chairman) of the House of Commons.

This parliamentary service was recalled when Norman St. John-Stevens, Roman Catholic writer, broadcaster and member of Parliament, asked in the House of Commons if a plaque would be placed in Westminster

Hall to commemorate Sir Thomas's trial.

He was told by Robert Mellish, Minister of Public Buildings and Works, that "I have already approached those who have authority over Westminster Hall."

(Westminster Hall was built in the 11th Century and is now part of the Houses of Parliament. It has been the scene of many historic events in English history, including the trial of King Charles I in 1649.)

Mr. St. John-Stevens commented: "I am extremely grateful for that sympathetic reply. He was the only Speaker of this House to be both beheaded and canonized—in one of which precedents I hope you, Mr. Speaker, will follow him."

Laughter greeted this exchange, as well as the Speaker's retort that he hoped he had guessed the right one.

Welcome Gift Scotch The World Over!

DEWAR'S "White Label"



\$235 1/2 PT. \$369 4/5 PT. \$725 4/5 QT. \$899 QT.