

ICASSI 1993 Brno, Czech Republic

ICASSI 1993 in Brno, the Czech Republic, was one of the most exciting and challenging of summer schools. It was the first serious move to bring the Dreikursian concepts of mutual respect and democratic living to the fragile new governments in the Eastern Bloc. The Soviet Union was still crumbling, the Baltic States were discarding the Russian methods and Czechoslovakia had just split into the two countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This political and social instability provided many new challenges.

One problem was barriers that prevented the arrival of some participants. The border guards in Poland allowed the Latvian men to continue on the train to Brno but aggressively made the women leave the train early in the morning, and the Slovakian guards stopped the Israelis. Only after negotiations with several government officials were the Latvians and Israelis allowed to continue travelling and arrive at ICASSI.

Two difficulties involved transportation and theft. The bus and tram system were still run according to communist bureaucratic rules, and it was almost impossible to find the bus and tram schedules of the city. Some participants had valued possessions (money, a car) stolen. Most problems were solved, however, by the efficient board and faculty, and ICASSI '93 began with an impressive opening ceremony.



Lubomir Kostron, a psychology professor and a strong local liaison, worked with Bill Linden who had come to teach at the university prior to ICASSI. The two of them drove with a secretary to

the Presidential Palace in Prague. They requested that President Vaclav Havel come to welcome ICASSI to this new democratic country. Although he was much too busy to attend himself, he did write a welcoming speech and they convinced the minister of Art and Culture to drive to Brno and deliver the welcome for him. He graciously did so and in return, Eva D. Ferguson autographed her book, *Adlerian Theory: An Introduction* and sent it to the President. Anyone familiar with Havel's writings can easily see how close his thinking is to Adlerian theory.

The 26th summer school was held at Masaryk University and the adjacent Institute of Advanced Education for Nurses. The host group was the department of Psychology headed by Vladimir Smekal.

Brno is a lovely city in Southern Moravia with pleasant parks and streets and is a center of art and culture, especially known for its famous Opera. Although Prague at that time had many signs of American businesses, there were no McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken or other clashing evidence to reduce the sedate charm of Brno.



Language was a problem. Many of the older people spoke German due to the long occupation by the Nazis, and many of the young students spoke English. Most of the Eastern Bloc participants, besides having their own languages, spoke Russian. This challenge was met by having classes in English and Russian, English and Czech, and English and German.

Since there was a wide variety of participants and languages, only three of the ten Bloc I presentations were theoretical lectures: "Adlerian Theory and its Applications" (E. Ferguson),

“Adlerian Psychology in Former Communist Countries” (V. Smekal) and “In a Changing World, Cultural Diversity” (J. Brown/H. Byrne). The other seven sessions were all practical demonstrations of types of counseling: Family (Young Children), Parent and Teenager, Couple, Lifestyle, Conflict Resolution in the Workplace, Class Discussion in Schools, and Metaphors in Psychotherapy.

Unfortunately, a change in the way classrooms were assigned led to a highly creative confusion for the first day of class. A few people never found their classes that day. One instructor finally discovered his class after a half hour of searching and when he did, he found a witty student had written on the board: “Today’s Topic: Chaos Theory”. This problem was faced with humor, classes settled down the second day, and the entire two weeks became a rich experience of learning and living in a new and challenging international family.

The ICASSI board is to be commended for its courage in taking a chance of outreach to an Eastern Bloc country. This bold step was not only of benefit to those in the Czech Republic, but it planted seeds for the future development of Adlerian groups in adjoining countries.