

# FF Newsletter

FOUNDATIONS  
FOR FREEDOM

Dear faithful reader,

We hope you had a nice Christmas and here we go with our new year Newsletter. In this issue you will get to know more about the Belarus Visiting Course. Those who missed cold Prague can warmly catch up on the next two pages. Although the future is unpredictable, we give you some hints on the last page. All the best in 1997.

Yours sincerely,

Jarmila and Gabra

## Drama & Diplomacy

At the end of October/beginning of November the eleventh Visiting Course came to Minsk. We had been invited by Marina Naranovich, who has since VC3 rounded and now chairs the Belarus Union of Social Pedagogues and Social Workers, (BUSPSW) the first institute for these professions in Belarus. Her hope was that the VC would help some of the mainly young people who are helping her develop and staff this new institute. In all we had 16 people including Steve McLghlin from Melbourne, co-worker Liz Carlisle and Sheila and Erik Andren.

On the first morning, the 28th October, we gathered together with the participants for an 11 am. departure by special bus to the 'House of Writers', about 35km from Minsk. Here we got ourselves installed in adequate accommodation with a reasonable meeting room just big enough for our party. This was all the cosier for having a fireplace in the corner since the weather was overcast and chill though not biting.

Everyone threw themselves into the activities and thinking of the course - but with one exception. One person was unable to enter into the open spirit of the course, and (after lengthy efforts to resolve the difficulties) had to be asked to leave. Some valuable practical lessons from the

course were unexpectedly learned in this whole process.

The cost of this VC was underwritten by the 'Know How Fund' on the recommendation of HM Ambassa-



The British Ambassador (second from right) with participants

sador in Belarus, Miss Jessica Pearce, who joined the course one day from 10 am. to 5 pm. and participated fully in the morning sessions. Thirteen members of the Board of BUSPSW arrived the same midday and after lunch everyone met in a conference room to hear from HM Ambassador and the participants.

This has been a more eventful VC than any before. Circumstances of language and selection were against us, but we feel that about two thirds of the participants are likely to make something of the material and some are specifically keen. One, a lecturer in the University of Culture, intends to present the VC material to deaf children and two other young participants have volunteered to help her. Whether the VC has realised the exact expectations of BUSPSW is questionable, but the MRA group in Minsk

has been strengthened and unexpected spin off can be expected over time.

*The Ambassador opened by saying*

'The issues discussed are fundamental stuff we all know but never stop to consider. All this is not only important in day to day life, but at diplomatic level too. I am convinced after one morning that if we go to the roots like this, intelligently and with concern, it will bring a better world. I hope there will be many more VCs; they deal with simple issues but no one has managed to put them together before.'

*Erik Andren*

### Participants' Quotes

'Knowledge alone makes people into machines, this gives the spiritual dimension.'

'I have decided to always do things for unselfish and pure motives. All will become a lie if one does not recognise one's conscience.'

'All problems start from simple things, but I was never offered prescriptions, always asked to think my own way. The VC focused necessary knowledge for understanding life. Now I'm able to think independently and to be independent.'

'I never had time to ask and think before, but suddenly I see it is possible to change history by starting with myself. I discovered that it is not what you know but the way you think that matters.'

'This is the first time I have expressed myself clearly, honestly, openly. It's wonderful to hear others do this too.'

'Very strong practical orientation. I will use much of this in my future work.'

'I have not been honest to myself or God and we all need to be honest. I have decided to go back to church after the VC.'

# Cool Prague - Warm hearts!

*Sveta Bednash from Ukraine observes the Prague Gathering*

An international group of 60 young and eager people from 20 countries, connected by a shared spirit of friendship, gathered in one of the many hearts of Europe, the architecturally beautiful and cold (-25°C) PRAGUE. For some it was the first encounter with MRA. It was quite clear however that all enjoyed the occasion immensely. The theme of this youth gathering was "What makes

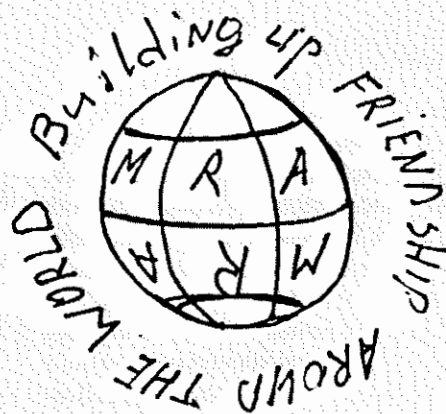
friendship real?" It was structured around specific topics like Friendship and Friends; Friendship and Family; Friendship and Cultures; Friendship and Countries. The sessions were presented in a very interactive way that made everybody think, concentrate and contribute to the discussion. More intimate and personal things were shared in small communities that met every day.



*During one session participants were asked to draw something which expressed their understanding of MRA*

who came during the last morning to share with us his personal views on church, faith and youth. He spoke about the difficult times in the past and his own journey, and answered many interesting questions. One afternoon we visited an orphanage, where we spent some hours playing games and singing with 25 children.

There were times for quiet reflection and times for fun and laughter. Evening activities included an inspiring film, Scottish dancing and a variety evening. The highlight of the gathering was a wonderful 1960's style New Year's Eve party. New Year was welcomed on the roof of our five storey building with a glass of champagne and a panorama of colourful fireworks in the sky.



For many people from Eastern Europe it was an incredible opportunity to experience a taste of international friendship, the way trust can be built despite our cultural differences. For one young Russian it was the first time outside Russia and her first excitement of meeting so many people from different countries. This was not just fun. The long term value of such friendship can not be estimated. The overriding opinion during the final evaluation was, "To be continued next year".



*Atsushi Ohta (Japan) teaching origami to children in an orphanage*

## Participants' Quotes

A Lithuanian: "Seven days in Prague with people who first approach you as complete strangers - but you leave with feelings as if you have known them for ages. It does not matter what nationality, religion or race you are, we are all the same - seeking for love, sincerity and understanding."

A Ukrainian: "I learnt to give my friends more freedom, not to try to possess them."

A Czech: "It struck me, dancing with a Russian on one arm and a German on the other, that my grandparents wouldn't have been able to do this."

A Russian: "I am taking back to my rushing life the idea of quiet time."

Others: "The course helped me to

know myself better and to see how to change myself."

"I changed my view of certain countries by meeting people from them."



"The gathering helped me see what to do to help in my family situation, where there have been crises."

"The gathering showed me down-to-earth ways of achieving deeper communication and solving problems in the family."

"I learnt how to cope with difficult people. I learnt the value of the quiet time and I hope I will use it in my everyday life."

*Rev. Halik talking to a participant*





As autumn leaves leave their trees, Jarmila and I left our homeland and came to Oxford to work with FFF for a year. You might think that this was the end of our teamwork with our Prague friends, but believe it or not we managed to carry on. Magdalena had to find a suitable venue and arrange other things that could not be done from Oxford, and Jarmila and I, being equipped with technical and human support, did the "paper work", planned the programme and contacted possible speakers. Having agreed on 70 people as the number we hoped for for the gathering, it seemed to me impossible that we would reach this figure. As the application forms started



**H**aving no experience of organising such a big thing as a youth gathering for 70 people, this was quite an experience. The first suggestion that it might be held in Prague came about a year ago at the FFF Regional Meeting in Krakow. Seeing the whole year ahead I thought we had plenty of time. As good girls we had our first meeting already in March and discussed

## From behind the scenes

by Gabra Drgová from the Czech Republic, FFF co-worker

Accommodation, meeting place, speakers, length and topics. After a couple of months we met again and realised that things had not really moved forward as we hoped they would. All of us organisers were busy with our own lives.

Then Magdalena and I went to Caux and met every day with a group of young people to talk about the Prague Gathering.

*Happy end - a Czech farewell song*

to arrive I knew I was wrong. On the deadline day we had received over 140 applications and more were still coming. Now the hard bit came - we had to select just half of them.

We had to inform everybody about our decision and thus send out 150 letters! (Not that I had ever done such a job!) I thought the work was now over and that as soon as the gathering started we would have a rest.

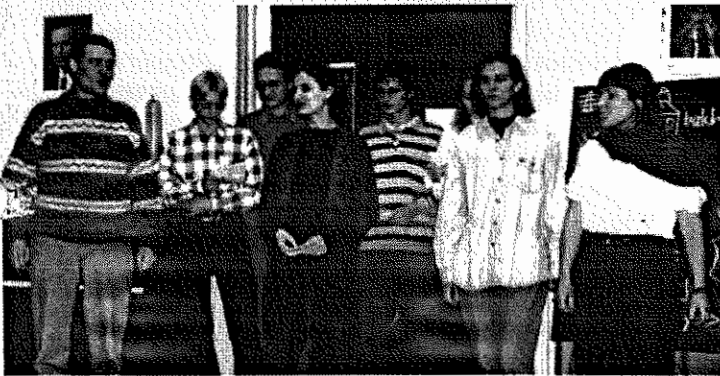
**WRONG!** The real work had only just started. A week before the gathering Jarmila phoned to say that three of our speakers could not come due to illness. For-

tunately two participants offered to fill their place! (I knew God would not let us down.)

Being one of the organisers gave me a new feeling - I could not fully concentrate on the meetings that were happening. Most of the time I thought of other things that needed to be arranged, what to re-

mind people of, what to buy, etc. I felt that I did not spend enough time with my friends and did not have enough time to go deeper with new friends either.

What really pleased me though was how well prepared the speakers were. They were very creative, used a variety of methods and nobody fell asleep. I felt pretty content with the whole happening. The response from people was mostly positive too, which encouraged us. I cannot say organising such a gathering was a 'piece of cake', but it definitely gave me some skills and confidence that I would not acquire elsewhere.



*Choose life. Choose Prague. Choose the New Year. Choose friendship. Choose a coach. Choose the open road. Choose an arrival time. I chose to choose life. And the reasons. Who needs reasons.*

*Choose an insight into different cultures. Choose to communicate on a new wavelength. Choose to develop amazing friendships. Choose progress. Choose to take control of your thoughts. Choose to uncover feelings. Choose to clarify your emotions. Choose to be challenged.*

*Choose reality. Choose low cholesterol and dental insurance. Choose colour TVs, CD players and electrical tin openers. Choose mind numbing, spirit crushing game shows. But why would I want to do a thing like that? I chose to choose life. And the reasons. I never felt magic, crazy as this. I never saw moons, knew the meaning of the sea. I never held commotion in the palm of my hand. But now you're here. Right in my northern sky!*

Iain Richardson

*The New Year's Eve party in 60's style*



# From the treasurer

We are extremely grateful for the more than 60 people who contributed financially to FFF during 1996, as well as various trusts (provisional figures below). We were able to end 1996 with a very small sum in hand for immediate bills in 1997. Our next prayer target is £7,500 by the end of March, to include the costs of the next Visiting Course in Crimea.

## Foundations for Freedom's income in 1996 was:

Over 60 individual gifts	16,719
Grants from MRA bodies overseas	9,656
Grants from other trusts and foundations	4,917
British Government funding	9,980
Contributions from participants	6,209
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£47,481</b>

## Expenditure for the year:

4 Visiting Courses	10,846
The International Course	9,062
2 International Seminars	6,047
Preparation for Ukrainian MPs' seminar in 1997	570
European Students Initiative	537
Costs of internships	3,331
Regional Meeting	3,598
Fees for organisers	5,400
Overheads	3,796
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£43,187</b>

## February 17

FFF committee meets in Oxford.

## March 3-15

Visiting Course in Crimea, Ukraine. The faculty will consist of Erik Andren, Nick Foster, Jarmila Vrbenská and Susanna Parczewska.

## March 16-22

European Students Initiative course at Tirley Garth.

## May

Visiting course in Novosibirsk, Russia (to be confirmed).

## May 23 - 25

Seminar: "The Search for Freedom", in Moldova, on the initiative of Mircea Eladi (International Course, 1994).

## September 4-23

International Course at Tirley Garth (invitations available).

**PEOPLE:** We are sad to inform you that two of our co-workers have left us. Ulli Raab, who spent a year with FFF in Staines, has returned home to Germany, from where she will keep in close touch. We are very grateful for all she gave to us and FFF during her year here. Karlene Archer, who was based in Liverpool, has gone to India. Fortunately there are "new faces". Jean Roberts from Australia, who is a graduate of sociology and anthropology, is based in Oxford. Another American - Allison Kenny - works with MRA Films and Videos in London.

We are also delighted to welcome Peter and Rosemary Thwaites from Sydney, who arrive at the end of January to base in London for a year, partly to work with FFF.

## Visit of Ukrainian Members of Parliament to Britain

A cross-party group of 12 MPs from Ukraine will be our guests in Britain, 21st February to 3rd March, for a programme on the theme "Making democracy work". These young MPs have been selected with help from our friends in the Ukrainian parliament who came to Britain in 1994 for a similar programme. One of the 1994 delegation, Ihor Koliushko, will accompany the group, and Oleg Savchine, who took part in the 1994 International Course, will come to interpret.

Their programme will include meeting British MPs in Parliament; Sir Nicholas Bonsor, Minister of State in the Foreign Office; visits to the BBC, a school and a farm; a day in Liverpool as guests of the City Council; and a day in North Wales where they will visit a bi-lingual school and a bi-lingual local government council. The general theme of the programme will be the importance of dialogue, trust and teamwork in a democracy.

## My first visit East

Liz Carlisle gives her view on 11th Visiting Course (see report, front page)

Communism - what does it bring to mind? A theory, Lenin, control, equality, a way of life? All these but all in a land that was out of reach and proper understanding to us. One factor that never occurred to me was the effect it had on the people. The enforcing of individual people to think and act under certain rules with no regard to the fact that each person is unique and has the right to explore their mind. The Visiting Course brings to them a glimpse of their own self worth and a chance to live for who they are not how they are told to be.

A fundamental part of the course is the establishment of friendships which are so frail in Eastern Europe. The saddest things were that the Communist regime had pacified their emotion to wrong doing, and as for self-worth and self-value it is virtually

non-existent. A group of potential leaders pacified into followers.

I constantly compared the youth in the West and the East. We, who have all the right channels to make change are so smothered by the materialism and relative comfort that change is not worth the time and the effort and in the end - will it make a difference? The East have been so repressed it has never been an option. We both suffer from the same disease of apathy and hopelessness.

There was much fun, laughter and togetherness. The VC gives a glimpse that change is possible and by using MRA principles it can be achieved with pureness of motives and reasoning trust, love and self-belief was seeded here, gently but firmly. So here's to many more VC's West and East.

