

G
18 Oct
II-1.106POLANDTRADE

Foreign Trade

The Song Of WARSAW - New Edition.SOURCE HELSINGFORS: Various interviews with Polish and Finnish sailors, salesmen and Finnish officials.DATE OF OBSERVATION: current

The Song of WARSAW in its new edition has conquered Finland within the space of a few months only. It now enjoys an ever increasing popularity and it is to be had all over the Southern parts of the country, in almost every home; in each better restaurant and at most street-corners. The Finnish police are not particularly happy about the brilliant progress of The Song Of WARSAW and some steps have been taken in order to stop it. But they refrain from too energetic interference. It might lead to a lot of trouble. Bad trouble, since it is generally believed that the new edition of The Song Of WARSAW is one of the means by which the Soviet MVD tries to get some of the dollars necessary to pay their agents all over the world.

The Song of WARSAW, nicely bottled and with an "original" brown-white label, is a genuine Polish schnapps. It has been flooding Finland for the past months and since it is very much better than the schnapps generally obtainable in Finland, the masses which have been "imported" have vanished rather fast in this country where people love to drink more and harder stuff than in most places. The schnapps is not either extremely expensive, even if it is not particularly cheap either. In the daytime half a liter, bought openly in the streets of HELSINGFORS, costs about 800 marks or about \$2.50. In the night, after the restaurants are closed, the price spring up to some 1.300 marks or ca. 34 for half a liter.

There are various theories circulating in Finland as to how the Song of WARSAW is brought to the country. Some people say that Polish sailors smuggle it directly with the silent blessings of the official Communist port authorities. Such talk is laughed at by the Polish sailors in HELSINGFORS. Never, they say, would the Polish authorities entrust Polish sailors with any quantities of alcohol. They'd be far too afraid that the sailors would drink it all themselves or that they would sell it for their own benefit, thereby creating for themselves the basis

(Over)

POLAND

(1)

for a new life abroad. Other people again say that the Song of WARSAW is handed over by Polish fishermen to Finnish fishermen somewhere at the high seas. But this is doubly impossible: firstly, Polish fishermen are so strictly controlled, it would be impossible for them to smuggle any quantities of schnapps out of Poland, and secondly, the Finns guard their waters so well, that no Polish or Finnish vessel could pass out on the seas without being stopped and questioned.

Such legends, Polish and Finnish sailors say, and Finnish officials agree with them, have been spread by the real smugglers themselves in order to remove the true traces. It is much more convenient for all to accuse the Polish and Finnish sailors and fishermen than the Russian MVD for the vast smuggling.

What really happens, sailors claim, is the following:

The schnapps is genuinely Polish enough and it is loaded in barrels, each containing about 50 liters of 98 per cent alcohol, in the free harbor of GDANSK. From there it is sent on to NARVA or TALLINN, Estonia, where the Russian MVD-men, dressed up as fishermen, take over. They carry the cargo off to the PORKKALA-waters, off the Soviet-occupied zone of Finland, to which no Finnish customs and police have access. Somewhere there, in the densely islanded area, the MVD meets some Finnish smugglers, the "engrossists," who pay for the schnapps in dollars. How they procure them is still one of the unsolved riddles.

The Finnish smugglers, knowing their archipelago very well, have no great difficulties in reaching one of the islands where they have their store. There the Song of WARSAW is made a little less strong and is bottled and nicely sealed. Even the labels are put on there.

These labels have a story of their own. It is believed that GUTMAN Aleksander, second secretary of the Polish legation in HELSINGFORS, has been quick to realize that some money could be made with genuine labels to lick on to the popular bottles. It is said that Mr. GUTMAN has been able to prepare unlimited quantities of such "The Song of WARSAW" labels.

This contention is violently contested by the men in the streets of HELSINGFORS, who do the "en details" for Finnish marks. They claim that the bottles are original, but considering that tens of thousand of liters of The Song of WARSAW have been sold during the past months, this claim has to be regarded as a legitimate effort to advertise for their goods. The trade is far too big not to be organized properly.

(Over)

POLAND

(2)

Distribution of the schnapps in the smaller towns is taken care of by Communist sympathizing merchants. Here again the Finnish police hesitate to interfere, because any such interference might be stamped as anti-Communist activities. There is really not very much the police can do: they cannot demand permission to investigate Soviet flagged vessels in their waters, destined to PORKKALA, they cannot be too conscientious in stopping the trade in the streets, which has always existed, though on a very much smaller scale since the days of prohibition in the early 30-ties; and they cannot arrest each person with a bottle in possession. Finally it might be taken for granted that the Finnish police do not care too terribly much about it all. They too, might like The Song of WARSAW. Even if they cannot wholly agree with the manner in which this Communist state-owned enterprise is handled...

EVAL. COMMENT: None