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THE PEN AND THE SWORD WORD

Within the framework of orthodox literary criticism an 80-year old Latvian writer, A. Upits, has produced the sharpest condemnation of Stalinism and Stalinist literary policies published in the Soviet Union since XX Party Congress. Although the old Baltic Bolshevik, a participant in the 1917 October Revolution, combines his defense of Partiinost in literature with a violent attack on the intellectual leadership of the 1956 October Revolution in Hungary (and Poland), he actually repeats the theses of some of the most destructive self criticism by the Hungarian writers who had broken with their Stalinist past in the summer of last year. Unlike the demands for political freedom formulated by those now held in Budapest jails--Upits himself was imprisoned in 1918 by the German military and 1920 by the Latvian authorities--the Latvian's conclusions, while containing a suggestion for more "response from the writers of the numerous small republics" (see below, p. 5), leave unchallenged not only the precepts of socialist realism in literature but also maintain intact the principles of subordination of national interest to Soviet socialism. Since this outlook defines clearly the ideological position of Upits,* his castigation of the Stalinist perversions are far more significant than his condemnation of Hungarian and Polish deviations (see below, pp. 2-4). In conceding the rout of socialist realism in Poland and Hungary, Upits has rephrased an old relationship between the pen and the sword: "In countries such as Hungary and Poland the immature socialist realism could not hold its ground in the way the Hungarian People and their Workers Party kept their regime intact, with the support of some Soviet Army units (see below p. 6). For a brief moment the Hungarian pen was, indeed, mightier than the Soviet sword. In Hungary--and throughout the orbit--Soviet arms can, perhaps, maintain satellite governments in power; they cannot produce a national literature.

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*One notes with satisfaction the recent article in the newspaper Cina by A. Upits, Latvian People's Writer and a classic Latvian writer and literary critic. It is true that there are a number of controversial propositions in his article; but one must give him due credit when, with Bolshevik frankness and paternal concern for the fate of Latvian literature, he gives a worthy rebuff to the unhealthy manifestations and tendencies that creep insistently into the works of young writers, and when he justly reproaches Latvian critics and magazine editors for their heedlessness. In A. Upits' critique and analysis of the works of young writers one hears a paternal, though severe, exhortation to the whole family of Latvian writers, a warning that literature cannot be allowed to sink into the morass of philistinism and banality, any more than our entire life. (Sovetskaya Kultura, Oct. 12, 1957)

A NEW PERIOD IN OUR STRUGGLE

Cina, September 21, 22, 24, 25, 1957 (Excerpts)

By Andrejs Upits

The Communist Party Central Committee's frank statement dealing with Stalin's unlawful excesses and ordering immediate elimination from our life and literature of the anti-Marxist and antisocialist cult of the individual leader, a cult that had become established not long ago, provided, as was to have been expected, a direct weapon of unprecedented international attack on socialist realism. To the dramatic liquidation of this profoundly shocking hindrance in the Soviet Union was added the tragic fascist putsch and its rout in the Hungarian Socialist Republic. The help given by Soviet troops to the democratic Hungarian people's forces in suppressing the imported cadres of Horthy officers and bandits, incited by the reactionaries of imperialist states (U.S.A., West Germany), as well as the lackeys of landowners and the Catholic Church who had lain hidden in their own native land, infuriated all the emigre elements, together with the bourgeois nationalist writers and journalists serving the reactionaries, in every land where there are DP camps. When they failed to wreck even one corner of the young socialist edifice in Europe, they tried to bespatter with mud the Soviet land and its socialist realism.

The Hungarian attack on socialist realism gained rapid momentum immediately after the 20th Party Congress disclosures and the courageous and open liquidation of the cult of the individual leader in Soviet life and literature. The Central Committee pointed out the errors of the individual who had headed the Party and the state and who had thought that he ruled alone and was above criticism. This shook the Soviet people deeply and painfully, and especially the comrades who had been firmly loyal to the state and the Soviet idea. The Soviet people themselves believed that the imagined infallibility, unforgivable and unforgettable, and the unlawfulness were to be redeemed only by such bold disclosure. In this way, they thought, it would be possible to demonstrate more definitely, more clearly and more convincingly than before the lofty human qualities which only a socialist system can create. Such an attitude helps to recognize the faults in the leadership of the Party, to correct them, and to advance toward communism.

The majority of the Hungarian writers (as well as theoreticians and publicists) did not seek to find out and could not know how Soviet literature survived the terrible disclosures. They did not realize that, after each trial, it has come closer and closer to the irreversible, unshakable life of socialism, the foundation of Soviet literature's edifice of realism. Socialism did not yet have deep and firm roots in the Hungarian state and its people. In all the years from the establishment of the democratic republic until 1953 (the death of Stalin) the majority of the (Hungarian) writers felt continued contradictions between the needs and aspirations of the people and the attitude of a bureaucratic and haughty regime which was under the influence of the cult of the individual leader. The Communist Party of Hungary was doctrinaire, dogmatic and always subservient to Stalinist instructions. Uncritically it joined the dogmatic and orthodox Communist haters of Yugoslavia. It was utterly intolerant toward writers not belonging to the Party and toward those who were

in opposition. There were pressures, concentration camps, prisons, death penalties (on Laszlo Rajk and his comrades in 1949). All this could not establish in the country the socialist life in which a socialist art and literature could have flourished.

Long before the fascist putsch there was widespread dissatisfaction in Hungarian literary circles with the instructions on the development of socialist realism--particularly with those instructions concerning the needs of life and the ideas of the Party that the state and the Party laid down. The memories of the former "free" literature grew stronger and stronger. It was thought that formerly every writer had been able to contribute something original, very personal, individual in form and content, something that was beyond imitation. There were longings for the "free" foreign, European literature which was imagined to exist, without any demands, purely for the sake of the writer's imagination, fantasy and individual pleasure. After the 20th Party Congress and its important disclosures, unrest, memories and hopes created an upsurge of hatred of all realism in literature. It caused a flood of praise of European idealist romanticism in all possible and newly-created variations.

Gyula Hay had already demanded for the Hungarian writers "literary freedom, complete freedom, freedom without limits, freedom such as one can only imagine among peoples belonging to a civilized society." In particular, such freedom was claimed for the following categories: "Spiritualists, Catholics, anarchists, individualists, formalists, pessimists, decadents and nationalists." However, he asked, if not very logically, that certain limits be put on the "fullest" and "unlimited" freedom and "that inciting of crime, arson, plunder, the overthrow of the republic and racial persecution be prohibited." As far back as in July, 1956, and then after the writers' conference in September, Hungarian newspapers published stormy articles, in connection with the many discussions about the ideology of socialist realism in literature, which in the same breath attacked "sectarianism" (i.e., "Stalinist communism in literature") and debated how to bring Hungarian literature closer to the heights of European literature. This was particularly a concern of the magazine of the Hungarian writers' association, Irodalmi Ujsag. Its board of editors urged turning away from the path of Soviet realistic literature. "Members of the Party and those who did not belong to it unanimously condemned all the former political mistakes and called strongly for liquidation of the survivals of the cult of the individual leader and of the sectarian, dogmatic ideology. Absent from the writers' conference were only those writers who were the most arrogant and eager defenders of sectarian Stalinist dogmatism and demagogues who had preached the cult of the individual leader and had abused democratic principles. The election of the new board and of the new secretaries of the writers' association is only the first step toward a healthy flourishing".

Many other anti-sectarian writers glowed over this future "flourishing," but all of them found special, ugly and hideous words to describe "the collapse of Stalinism and Hungary and the people's disillusionment with Stalinist socialism" (Szandor Nagy). In expressing his doubts that socialist realism is the only true Marxist-Leninist, Communist ideological form in art, and in saying that the progressive foreign authors are a thousand times more valuable than the Azharyevs, Popovs and Babayevskys of socialist realism, Ire Kosi reached this stage of "impartiality" and "unlimited possibilities": "Even while criticizing the Hitlerites and Horthyites, we have to note carefully that they were intuitively much better aware than we of the relationship between art and politics. They branded this as 'cultural Bolshevism.'"

However, the well-known literary historian and critic George Lukacs, who definitely considers himself a Communist, was willing to grant at least something to socialist realism. He asked only that Lenin's 1905 thesis on the Party nature of literature be discarded. He claimed that it has relevance only in the context of its times and was meant to apply to Party journalism. And then, under the strong influence of nearby foreign capitalism and colonialism, he forgot all his "Marxism" and "Communism" and began a grand reorientation of the Hungarian intelligentsia. (See his lecture on "The Struggle Between Reaction and Progress in Contemporary Culture.")

He attacked with fierce hatred those who had sought to draw a sharp line between socialism and capitalism and their respective cultures. In his opinion it is "hard to differentiate" between the fronts of "progress and reaction."

An overflowing delight at the vistas of the literature of "free Europe" blinded Hungarian writers to the circumstances in which the cult of the individual leader had impressed itself on Soviet literary life. It was more convenient for the Hungarian writers to believe and spread the view that all literary life in the Soviet Union had been directed, controlled, permitted and prohibited by Stalin himself and, on his instructions, by the Communist Party. Armed with such views, the erstwhile Communist and socialist publicists and writers greatly multiplied their zeal for "liberation." They dismissed all "sectarians" from the writers' association and installed in their place pronounced advocates of a European course. The avalanche of articles about the liquidation of Stalinism were followed by demands to discard socialist realism completely, including the ideology of realism itself. A number of the "liberators" were well aware on whose behalf the uproar was made. The great majority, however, joined this trend out of political naivete and simplemindedness. Thus this cavalcade became the strongest and the most numerous force participating in and preparing the bloody counterrevolutionary fascist attack on the Hungarian People's Republic from Oct. 23 to Nov. 5.

Socialist realism was attacked with truly violent and destructive vigor by a seeming majority of Polish literary critics and publicists. They wanted to uproot socialist realism not only from the socialist countries but also from the whole body of world literature. One does not find that any counterforce to this surge appeared in Polish arts circles to make any appreciable effort to tone down this aggressive nonsense, caused by the blindest and the most uncontrollable hatred. Julian Przybos, Anton Slonimski and particularly Kott (in "Mythology and Truth" and "Thoughts at the Beginning of the New Academic Year") were the most pronounced enemies of socialist realism at the conferences of Polish writers and in the Polish press. To tell the truth, the Polish trail-blazers of socialist literature have not discovered a single new fact or nuance of thought that was not already there in the Hungarian arguments against realism. This is understandable, for the burning Polish anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist hatred springs from the same bourgeois, nationalist, anti-realist and romantic font. The Poles, however, attack their own and Soviet socialism two and three times as vigorously as the Hungarians. In place of new arguments they use sharper, seemingly devastating polemic sophistry and all kinds of scathing and empty assertions. They think that they have completely drowned Soviet literary figures. They reply without hesitation to any Soviet article (Ozerov, Dementyev) critical of their activities. In lengthy articles Putrament and Jadwiga Siekierska (in Nowa Kultura) belabored Soviet critics with dilettant

haughtiness and arrogantly regurgitated everything proclaimed by "theoreticians" of the Kott formation. They wanted to share with their people the same wonderful discovery of the Hungarian Europeans: namely, that socialist realism was invented, launched and supervised by Stalin himself; that all the literature of socialist realism was concocted to glorify Stalin and the Soviet system; that Soviet literature allegedly died in 1934; that socialist realism under the supervision of the Party and the state has been "a weapon for the destruction of art"; that since the canonization of socialist realism in the Soviet Union (at the 1934 Writers' Congress) literature there "has become a great art of glorification, of bouffonade, a great art of constant gilding of reality."

By such reasoning Polish and other writers would have no choice but to break the shackles of socialist realism as fast as possible and to embrace the "free," many-sided, "European" (in reality American), idealistic and romantic art.

Geographically removed from the Hungarian fascists and their putsch and its rout, but politically and ideologically quite close, were the gangs of offspring of the French upper classes who, under the benevolent eye of their Socialist government and police, staged hooligan pogroms against French Communist organizations and institutions. Expressing their solidarity with the fascist hoodlums, a large group of Frenchmen began to expound the harm of the Communist Party policies and ideology to arts and literature. Particularly prominent in this group was the wandering minstrel and theoretician Jean Paul Sartre, who had always been a decadent of the literature of marasme and who had only recently tried to find the road to the people and progressive art. On November 7, 1956, in four full pages in the weekly Express, he repeated the sense of "leaden horror" (an expression of Gorky) that publicists of the tired, old world of the exploiters had tried to create over the "tragedy of Hungary" and atrocities of the Soviet troops who were helping the people and the government to thwart the counterrevolutionary attempt to overthrow the working people's republic. The Communist Roger Garody replied to Sartre (in Russian, in Literaturnaya Gazeta, Nov. 29, 1956) and disproved one after another the "brazen falsifications" of Sartre and his cronies, who had sought to whitewash the horrible murders committed by the Hungarian reactionaries by ascribing them to the Hungarian people's army and particularly to the helping Soviet forces. Sartre completely supports the chorus of Hungarian bourgeois nationalists, "the conscious minority group of the Petofi Writers' Circle." He wants to justify the stupidly reactionary attack on the literature of socialist realism, developing, under Soviet influence, in all ideological, esthetic and creative fields.

The attack of international imperialist literary reaction on the literature of the democratic countries struck a heavy blow at the extensive and active new school of socialist realism in the socialist countries, in countries on the road to socialism and in countries which have been freed from the yoke of capitalism and the rule of feudalism and the bourgeoisie.

As we have already seen, Poland and Hungary were the countries in which the literature of socialist realism suffered most from the Anglo-American "cold war" aggression and the deluge of "free European literature." Of course, upon serious consideration, one can say that there is no reason to talk about complete liquidation and collapse of socialist realism in these countries.

However, the leading figures among the Soviet literary critics and theoreticians should have reacted much more sharply and should have been much more concerned about the obviously deep chaos in the literature of those countries.

From the preceding section we have already seen that Soviet socialist realism has long ceased to be the creation and concern of only the fraternal Soviet national republics, large and small. From the first day the Soviet regime had to guard the countries newly liberated from the shackles of exploitation against the former parasitic groups that fled or were driven away and their restorationist ambitions (the exiled fascist Horthy bandits, the Anders legion which fled Poland, and the Mikolajczyk nationalist "night watch"). Likewise, the leaders of Soviet literature should not have forgotten that counterrevolutionary refugee bourgeois literature dreams of a comeback exactly in the same way as the groups just mentioned. This literature of the DP camps all over the world is steadily nourished by the exponents of the parochial, God-ordained "free" and one-and-only ideology of militant romanticism which serves the monopolies. Unfortunately, that is exactly what the Soviet critics had largely forgotten. Perhaps now one can see from the articles and discussions which followed the severe blow to the young and still very tender realism that those who determined the course of our socialist realism have begun to examine whether their attitude before the attack and also now, after the events, was right. Was it not necessary, besides the meetings, the lengthy reports dealing with the events themselves, the reviews of them, the condemnations of the aggressors and the factual and candid information about the losses, to draft the outlines of a new, stronger and comprehensive plan for the future development of socialist realism which would be closer to the reality of the life of the democratic peoples in the present international situation?

Of course, the lessons learned from the mistakes of the period just concluded can be made the basis for the next stage of development. The international cause of socialist realism demands that the great central cadres of Soviet critics and theoreticians receive much stronger aid, support and response from the writers and critics of the numerous small republics. The latter should have a strong conviction that the development of their national literatures depends completely on their full integration with the organism of the literature of their common fatherland. They should have the conviction that they live and work in the international framework of the ever broadening realism of their fraternal neighbors.

The unsatisfactory state and vulnerability of the socialist realism of the democratic peoples is to be explained largely by the fact that the leaders of Soviet literature had neglected the diverse artistic needs in countries which each had different conditions. The central authorities and leaders of Soviet arts paid too little attention to those specific conditions and needs. First of all we must mention that in all the years since 1947 the most influential group of critics and theoreticians devoted all its strength and knowledge to the restoration, glorification and strengthening, in the ideology and esthetics of Soviet realism, of a romanticism they themselves had invented. They paid very little attention to the problems of content and form in realism and to the constantly progressing state of socialist art.

This explains why nothing was done to increase threefold and even five-fold the Soviet initiative in those countries wrested from the capitalist exploiters by the mighty forces of the Union and thus enabled to set out on the free, socialist way of life and work. Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland were countries each with an historical past, with specific features shaped by many centuries, with cultural, artistic and popular traditions and aspirations. The conceit of vulgar Marxism, the errors and self-righteousness of the cult of the individual leader, the bureaucratic poison of specialists who were sent as aides spoiled Soviet relations with Yugoslavia and

prevented rapid and firm establishment of a stable order in socialist Hungary. The authorities and leaders of Soviet socialist realism did not understand how to create and gradually develop new art which would correspond to the gradual development of the structure of the young socialist states. The apologetic authorities among Soviet critics and theoreticians, obsessed by the romanticism of their own literature, did not even have the time to follow systematically the development of their own writers. They did not help them to reach an ever increasing perfection. (See my book "Problems of Socialist Realism in Literature," 1957.) Consequently, of course, very little attention was paid to the efforts of the literatures of the democratic and progressive peoples, with their own specific problems, to attain high standards of socialist art through experimentation, error and also achievements. Nobody even thought about annual reviews of the young socialist literatures. And, of course, nobody followed the development of talented and eager socialist writers and poets. Nobody encouraged them, drew their attention to their errors, gave theoretical advice or pointed out examples from the older, richly developed literature of their liberators and defenders.

The pioneers of social realism in the progressive countries received almost no help or very little help against American romanticism, always on the offensive, and the chauvinistic bourgeois nationalism of the emigres which creeps in through open and underground channels. In countries such as Hungary and Poland the immature socialist realism could not hold its ground in the way that the Hungarian people and their Workers' Party kept their regime intact, with the support of some Soviet Army units.

One of the worst and at the same time one of the most widespread characteristics of the many branches of Soviet literary theory is the superficiality with which the critics review and describe Soviet work. They always think and try to convince others that what is desired has already been accomplished and already exists as a source of joy and pride. This harmful light-heartedness comes from the deeply ingrained and uncontrollable tendency of the writers to think little and to talk much. Besides, they convince themselves that talk is deeds and that when one has talked at great length, a great deal has been accomplished. (This harmful malady has contaminated not only literary workers; from the intelligentsia it spreads to other fields and its consequences are noticeable in all our life.) Soviet articles on literature, and particularly speeches describing our literature's undeniable superiority to foreign literature, always emphasize that socialist realism is taking deeper and deeper root not only in the young countries of democratic socialism, but also in the old capitalistic and colonial countries and in the countries which have been contaminated by fascist rot. Such glorification of socialist realism is always done in a quite primitive manner. Up to now, or at least until the damage done last fall to the literatures of Poland and Hungary, the Soviet people were kept in the strong conviction that the foreign socialist realism of distant countries would follow the same road we had blazed, going through the same stages as ours and closely paralleling the work of our writers, striving to emulate it as far as possible. I have shown in my lengthy articles in what unforgivable and futile fashion the Soviet literary theoreticians and publicists, at least many of the best known, have become stuck in a rut, in old habits and cozy complacency, and how they do not want to disturb the pleasantly secure picture of themselves and society.

Since it was clear that the destruction of the organizations of Hungarian and Polish socialist realism would have immediate painful repercussions on the

structure of Soviet realism, it was the duty of the whole literary community of the Soviet republics to react to those events. Strangely enough, nobody endeavored to do this. The plenary session of the Soviet Writers' Union which convened in May, 1957, paid only scant attention to the first ugly defeat of socialist realism in its 40 years of existence. It did not discuss the real international causes of the attack and ignored where the initiative came from. In this attack the feverish bourgeois nationalists, famished emigres and rabble of reactionary romantics were industriously and brilliantly playing the role they were assigned by the forces of imperialist aggression on the small literary sector of the cold war.

One should guard against making categorical statements that our country and our literary community are immune to foreign tendencies, that such ways and tastes cannot survive or even gain a footing here. Even influential propagandists have spread these naive and smug views. First we must point out that the same cult of the individual leader, although not directly responsible for the great carelessness and dreams of grandeur, is to blame for the failure to act and to a certain extent for dulling the creative forces of literature. Then, and more emphatically, we must point to the sovereign, almighty, semi-idealist and bureaucratically constructed apologetic romanticism with its propagandistic sermons that tried to embellish life and were full of sentimentalism, illusions and no-conflict theories. All this greatly hindered strong growth of socialist realism. When the interventionists began their attack, it disappeared into hiding, to open wide the gates to the aggressive forces of romanticism. As our Latvian critics never interfered with the growth of their own realistic literature, they had no reason to participate in the struggle of the two ideological formations just described. They left matters peacefully in the hands of the leading and authoritative theoreticians of our Soviet country. They remained in the most logical position, i. e., neutrality. By taking this stand one cannot achieve much, but one also cannot make great mistakes, and thus one avoids great unpleasantness.