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(General)

In its issue of 2 April the Italian Communist Party daily, L'Unità, published an eight-page supplement on Hungary, to mark the 25th anniversary of that country's liberation -- some twenty articles, all but one of them by Hungarian writers.

Skillfully presented and covering many aspects of life in modern Hungary -- foreign and domestic policies, the economy, art, literature, music and sport -- the supplement amounts to a joint public-relations project by the Hungarian regime and the PCI. The interesting question is: what kind of image are they trying to convey to the readers of L'Unità?

In general, the image is one of a progressive society, one which recognizes its many problems realistically and copes with them energetically. Two articles in particular stress another aspect of the progressive image: democracy, debate and the overcoming of sectarian dogmatism. These are the essays by Mihály Sükösd, on "Young Intellectuals in Hungary," and by Sándor Novobátsky, on "The 'Atmosphere' in Hungary."

"A Certain Indifference"

The first of these is notable for its apparent frankness. Thus, in claiming that Hungary has been unaffected by the wave of student rebellion that has affected many other countries (including Czechoslovakia and Poland), the Hungarian sociologist Sükösd admits that "a certain indifference" is among the contributory factors. On the other hand, he regards "common sense" as one of the main virtues of Hungarian youth. For example, "they have enough common sense to realize that [peaceful] coexistence [and economic] competition will for a certain time yet, in some fields, be marked by a certain material superiority on the part of capitalism." The great majority of young Hungarian intellectuals, he goes on, are concerned mainly to get on with their chosen career, "find a good job, and earn the highest salary

* The Unità article by Sükösd is, in fact, an abridged version of one which the author published in the Hungarian youth publication, Magyar Ifjúság, of 30 January 1970.

possible." This has further consequences:

It is undeniable, however, that this attitude is also characterized by a certain apolitical content, a certain lack of ideology. The youth take note of the importance of politics and ideology, its phenomena and changes, and the developments in this field which affect them. But they have the impression that they have little scope for intervening in these developments, for action: they feel that they have no possibility of influencing changes.

Disruptive Influences

Anti-Marxist tendencies, he claims, are to be found only among "a very small part" of Hungarian youth. On the other hand, it is also a minority of students who "have acquired a Marxist ideology solid enough to enable them to find their bearing among the many ideological phenomena of this complex world of ours, and also among the present polemics of international socialism." Still another minority is more exposed to disruptive influences:

Under the influence of international discussions and of certain contradictions in the national situation, certain limited sectors of the youth have moved toward the extremist socialist ideals of our time. Some dream of the idealized humanism of "socialism with a human face"; others are attracted by puritan-military communism -- Mao, or still more the heritage of the mythicized teachings of "Che" Guevara.

All of these tendencies of committed youth, Sukösd repeats, represent small minorities. "The majority of the youth, today, is not sufficiently active politically and ideologically." And this, precisely, is the problem: the contrast between "the professional preparation [of Hungarian youth] and their relative political indifference." Since the fate of socialism in Hungary will some day be in the hands of this indifferent generation, he concludes, "we would like to prepare them well for their promising future, in the fire of discussion."

Debate and Polemics

"The fire of discussion" -- this is a major theme of the article by Sándor Novobâtzky. Somewhat defensively, he notes that "one cannot assess Hungarian democracy by the standards of capitalist societies. Parliamentary debates, for example, attract less attention and, since a diversity of parties does not exist, the conflict of opinions does not take on dramatic forms." But, he insists, "the substance of democracy" is there.

He goes on to give one example of "non-institutional democracy in modern Hungary -- a regular television program, on which listeners can 'phone in questions to government ministers. "Anyone can raise any questions, can criticize the errors of governmental bodies, can put forward his own proposals." Similarly, "a proposal to increase prices, a measure in wages policy, or a mistaken declaration by a minister provoke a real wave of contrary opinions." The Government cannot even close down an unprofitable factory without "taking account of the opinion of the workers at the plant in question." Freedom of debate, he affirms, extends to the newspaper:

The Hungarian press is full of polemical articles. Debates are going on about the question of increasing the birth rate ... about education, about the economic mechanism, about cultural policy, and so on...

This common commitment, the affirmation of the right of intervention, healthy indignation over social ills -- these are the strands linking leaders and led, Communists and independents, workers and intellectuals.

If Novobâtzky's article is less sophisticated than that of Sükösd, the "public-relations" intent is correspondingly more obvious. What is significant is the character of the image thus built up in the pages of a fraternal organ which has frequently criticized the more conservative regimes of Eastern Europe. The PCI used to look to Prague with excitement and hope; now it looks to Budapest with a more cautious satisfaction.