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EAST GERMAN REPORTAGE ON PRAGUE'S "TVORBA"

Summary: The East German cultural weekly Sonntag carried a feature article on its corresponding Czechoslovak publication Tvorba. The reportage was written by Sonntag's editor-in-chief Bernt von Kùgelgen who, among other things, spoke of his Czechoslovak counterpart Jiri Hajek. This paper describes von Kùgelgen's article, noting the East German's whole-hearted approval of the aims and methods proclaimed by the "normalized" Tvorba. An analysis of Sonntag's entirely positive assessment leads to the conclusion that, not surprisingly, the orthodox cultural policies of the CSSR and of the GDR are currently in complete harmony.

In one of its recent issues, the East German political-cultural weekly Sonntag (1) featured a review of the history, aims and staff of Tvorba, the corresponding Czechoslovak publication. The article, written by the editor-in-chief of Sonntag, Bernt von Kùgelgen, was full of praise in its evaluation of Tvorba.

Von Kùgelgen opened his article with the statement that he immediately felt at home with his Tvorba colleagues because of "the same political atmosphere which prevailed." He then described his meeting with his counterpart Dr. Jiri Hajek whom he characterized as "a literary scientist of international fame" -- a fact which cannot be denied as Hajek is a well-known

literary critic. (2) Giving some of the highlights of Hajek's life, von Kùgelgen mentioned that he spent time in concentration camps during the time of the "protectorate"; that after the liberation, he published a literary magazine for many years, and that

...during the "episode," as the time of the counter-revolution is circumscribed here, he was deprived of his work, his salary and his livelihood. (3)

But now, von Kùgelgen continued, Hajek is one of the leading cultural politicians in Czechoslovakia, a founding member of Tvorba (two years ago), member of parliament, and so busy "that the day should have thirty hours."

Turning to the editorial staff of Tvorba, von Kùgelgen enumerated Kalcik, Jelinek and Krenek, whom he described as not only editors, but in accordance with old tradition, professional writers. In actual fact, these people are second-rate writers at best, known for their faithfulness to the orthodox party line. Rudolf Kalcik, for example, outlined his future literary plans to von Kùgelgen as follows:

Above all, I am looking for my material in the realm of the People's Army and of the Security Service.... For the coming year, I am preparing a book with co-author V. Janecek which deals with the postwar creation of the Czechoslovak border guards. The story evolves during the years 1946 to 1949 and concerns six members of a small border troop unit of the National Security Corps. Besides, I am preparing a television film which depicts the fight of our state Security Service against hordes of Ukrainian nationalists in Slovakia in 1947.

Kalcik's planned works concern subjects that he has used almost exclusively in the past, namely the "heroism" of Czechoslovak Border Guards on the western frontier. He is a typical representative of socialist realism, and has been reported to be slated as editor of a future literary monthly (4) where he can be expected to become a faithful protector against all revisionist influences.

Having praised such mediocre artists as Kalcik, von Kùgelgen added that other authors collaborate with Tvorba on a free-lance basis. Among these, there is Ladislav Fuchs -- one of the few

contributors to the magazine deserving the name of "creative writer" -- and Dr. Prosek,

...a social scientist who lost his previous position in 1968 because of "political unreliability." After the end of the "episode," he found his way to Tvorba and discovered his taste for journalism.

Von Kügelgen's characterization of Dr. Prosek clearly indicates the latter's political position, making quite plausible Sonntag's comment that Tvorba's staff:

...rejoice in the success of their paper and are able to say that the time of isolation of committed creative writers belongs to the past.

In another part of his article, von Kügelgen discussed the monthly supplement of Tvorba to which an ever larger circle of authors contribute. The supplement is called LUK (first letters of the Czech words for literature, art, criticism) and, according to the author, it is different from previous cultural publications in that it grants equal space to both Czech and Slovak writers thus exerting a salutary influence in the Czech lands as well as in Slovakia.

In relating the history of the present Tvorba, which is only two years old, von Kügelgen praised the help granted during the difficult initial period of the magazine by the Czechoslovak CP (the Party still is the publisher of the paper) and by "the practical internationalism of all fraternal states whose cultural-political forces assisted Tvorba." The author mentioned various Soviet writers who have contributed articles to the magazine, as well as the Hungarian György Aczél and the East German Minister of Culture Klaus Gysi. In this manner, Tvorba has succeeded in breaking out of the "national ghetto," the author remarked, citing a phrase used by the famous Czech journalist Egon Erwin Kisch.

Tvorba, the author continued, is not a purely cultural journal. Intending to encourage "socialist thinking, especially of the younger generation," the magazine includes discussions of political and economic problems as well as such topics as sports, education, health, etc.

One may find in the paper contributions on the anti-communist function of Zionism as well as on the winter Olympics; on the influence of socialist integration on science; parliamentary elections in Finland as well as on the forthcoming film festival in Karlovy Vary.

In the last part of his article, von K^ugelgen described the regular column "Forum" of the magazine where discussions are carried out:

For months this column was devoted to airing problems of cadre-policy with the aim of emphasizing, for example, that important positions must be occupied by people who actively support the policy of the Party, who have specialized knowledge, who have character, and who have the personalities of leaders.

Another problem discussed in the column "Forum" centered on the subject "when does knowledge become a force?" Such topics, according to von K^ugelgen, widely contribute to the ideological education of the nation.

Finally, the author mentioned the drama section of Tvorba which is filled with reviews of films and plays shown in the CSSR, and of books published there. The article remarked that the reader is struck by the predominance of Russian classics and Soviet authors performed and published.

The only possible comment which can be made on the reportage about Tvorba is that Sonntag's editor-in-chief von K^ugelgen appears to have felt at home with Tvorba's staff and with editor Hajek.

Dorothy Miller

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- (1) No. 14, 2 April 1972.
 - (2) The article included a photograph showing Hajek and von K^ugelgen conversing in the editorial offices of Tvorba.
 - (3) Having been editor of Mlada Fronta publishing house from 1953-1958, Hajek joined Plamen in 1959. It will be recalled that this monthly played an important role during the period leading to the Prague literary spring; it was during his time as editor-in-chief of Plamen that Hajek played a progressive role in helping to organize, for example, the 1963 Liblice Kafka conference. For partly personal reasons, he quarreled with the editorial staff of Plamen in late 1967, had to relinquish his position in early 1968, and joined the "conservative" literary faction at that time. Being a very ambitious man, he has been among those figures at the helm of literary "reconstruction" in the CSSR ever since.
 - (4) See Radio Free Europe Research (EERA), "Panegyrist of the Border Guards -- the Future Literary Arbiter?", Czechoslovakia/8, 2 March 1972, by Hajek and Machan.