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CZECHOSLOVAK WRITER CALLS FOR FREE ELECTION

A Slovak scholar has publicly argued that some representative government based on free elections is a first step for a just socialist society.

Michal Lakatos, writing recently in Pravny Obzor states, that public participation in government must reflect the popular will, and that the popular will can best be expressed by free elections.

Lakatos' conclusions are startling for an avowed Communist, but his methods arriving at these proposals are perhaps even more startling in view of what he does to Communist ideology. In an earlier contribution,⁽¹⁾ Lakatos played equal havoc with socialist political theory in stating that the unity of the socialist society represents a misrepresentation of the actual interplay of heterogeneous interest and pressure groups, likening them to the relations which exist in any modern western industrial society. From this analysis, he concluded that progress is best achieved by the confrontation and reconciliation of these opposing interests. He therefore proposed that the only possible method of harmonizing divergent group ambitions would be to harness them directly to the electoral apparatus.

His latest article does not differ in its conclusions, but only in the manner by which he comes to them. He sees no qualitative difference between socialist and bourgeois government practices. In one form or another, he argued, the rulers manipulate the ruled by

(1) Lakatos, M., Pravny Obzor, "Some Problems of Socialist Democracy from the Viewpoint of the Citizen's Position in Our Society," No. 1/1964, Czechoslovak Press Survey No. 1770.

(2) Lakatos M., Pravny Obzor, "On Certain Problems of the Structure of Our Political System," 1/1965. See also KGB Background Report 05.Rivelsae, "Interest Groups in Czechoslovakia: Form and Theory," 3.1.65.

economic, political, or social devices. Of course, the distinction between the rulers and the ruled becomes blurred lower down in the governmental hierarchy; nevertheless, the author feels that, as a general notion, his argument holds true. "There exists in every society," he says, "the slack between the ruling and the ruled, between those who rule and those who are the object of rule." Lukator's main object is not the Utopian elimination of all manipulation by governmental power but its maximum diminishment. He does not accept the cherished Communist assumption that with the installation of rule by the working class, or even by the proclamation of socialism in Czechoslovakia, the conflict of the people with their rulers has disappeared.

In the past, he states, governmental reforms in a socialist society have aimed at the perfection of the political apparatus, and this has had the effect of making political manipulation more efficient, of increasing the degree of political direction and public obedience to centrally determined policy. If men are to have the greatest degree of communication with their rulers, sovereignty has to take on the aspect of "self-manipulation," as Lukator calls it. Self-manipulation does not represent the elimination of central direction; it places policy within the control of society. In order to manipulate itself to the greatest degree, the society should have free choice in the selection of representatives. By those means, manipulation without public control will spontaneously wither away.

The Slovak philosopher, Julius Strizka,⁽¹⁾ has expressed the irony of Communist rule in the following way: "Thus the paradoxical situation may arise that in a society which is bubbling over with criticism, in which criticism is even officially encouraged, no criticism actually exists." Strizka is referring to the absence of any institutional forum for the expression of public opinion and for the debate of current issues. Muted criticism which has no influence on public policy produces political indifference. The justification of every socialist institution by its identification with the socialist order itself creates an increasingly greater distance between the population and their government.

Those who govern can turn those ruled into a passive and apathetic nation that yields to any pressure exerted by the manipulators. If this pressure continues for a long time, it can influence the mentality of the citizens. The aim of subjecting society to the highest degree of manipulation is irreconcilable with socialist society.⁽²⁾

(1) Strizka, Julius: "Socialist Dogmatism and Revolutionary Realities," *Kulturny Spis*, 26.11.65. See Czechoslovak Press Service No. 271.

(2) Lukator, "Some Problems of Socialist Democracy..." *op.cit.*

Lakatos defends himself from attack from the right by stating that support of socialism does not mean acceptance of its methods of monolithic government. His disagreement with the political status quo lies in his belief that the existing institutions of government are neither effective nor moral. The burden of his argument unless it appears that the degree of manipulation in Czechoslovakia is greater than that which exists in the bourgeois West.

He is not opposed to conflict between the rulers and the governed; he considers it natural and even desirable. He has clarified his position with regard to interest groups, in that the very clash of opinions represents the dynamic of progress. He is seeking primarily a channel wherein the inevitable conflicts of interest -- whether they be among various groups or between the rulers and the ruled -- can resolve themselves. Otherwise, the frustration of the population, unconsulted by their government, will become a real threat to socialist rule.

Lakatos' arguments are scholarly and at times rather involved. But his main point is clear to grasp. This is the strongest -- and the most cleverly defended -- call yet for free elections in Czechoslovakia.

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