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RFE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION DEPARTMENT

Background Report
Rumanian Section

THE SPEECHES OF BENIUC AND OTHER WRITERS AT THE NATIONAL
CONFERENCE OF THE RUMANIAN WRITERS' UNION

If anyone expected from the leading man of the Rumanian Writers' Union a report on the burning issue of new "de-Stalinization" measures, he must have been disillusioned. As one could anticipate from Gheorghiu-Dej's address to the Writers' National Conference, very few formal concessions to the demand for relaxation of the Stalinist pattern of Party control were discernible. On the contrary, Beniuc associated such former Politburo members as Miron Constantinescu -- who were charged (among many other things) with liberalist, petty-bourgeois tendencies at the November-December 1961 Party CC Plenum -- with Stalin's cult of the individual and accused them of having caused damage in the cultural sector by their anti-Party methods which allegedly led to the "isolation of the best representatives of intellectual life".

Beniuc followed in this respect the ambiguous path of Leonte Rautu (November-December 1961 Plenum), Borila and other Party leaders who connected Miron Constantinescu, Chisinevski and the 1952 anti-Party group with Stalin's personality cult, although their statements clearly implied that at least some of the opponents had criticized and had tried to put a brake on what one may call "Stalinism".

Both the reelection of Beniuc as leading man of the Writers' Union and his report to the Writers' National Conference showed that his protector and the "evil genius" of Rumanian culture, Leonte Rautu is determined to continue his Stalinist line as Agitprop chief despite the self-critical attitude he was compelled to display at the recent CC Plenum.

Otherwise, Beniuc's report could have been made several years ago, as far as content and tone are concerned. The number-one man of the Writers' Union went even farther than Gheorghiu-Dej's address and praised what he called "the special interest with which our writers watch the successes of Soviet literature".

"We are called upon," Beniuc stated from the beginning, "to devote all our efforts to the true mirroring of reality,

through works of great artistic value, to contribute to the development of the conscience of the new man, educated in the spirit of a Communist attitude toward labor and society."

In contrast to the vehemence of the critical remarks made by Gheorghiu-Dej at his 12/13 March 1960 speech delivered in Cluj and the following self-critical attitude displayed by the Writers' Union leadership at its April 1960 Plenum, Beniuc's tone was rather moderate this time when he spoke of the present, but his reference to the "ideological unity of our writers" contrasted nevertheless substantially to reiterated criticism he thought necessary to level at practically every field of literature.

What Beniuc had to say in fact was the old song, known from his servile congratulation composed on the occasion of Gheorghiu-Dej's 60th birthday anniversary: Rumanian literature is not up to the regime's expectations.

After placing the onus of "Stalinism" on the anti-Party groups, Beniuc was violent only on one more occasion, namely when he spoke of the "provocation of the writer Alexandru Jar (purged in June 1956) who tried to calumniate the principle of leadership in literature, agitating for the compromised idea of liberalism."

Speaking about current problems, Beniuc was rather cautious in his criticism, but it is no coincidence that this criticism was often aimed at personal opponents (Zaharia Stancu, the former No.2 man in the Writers' Union) and other writers who have not been reelected to the highest positions in the Union (Zaharia Stancu, Aurel Baranga, Cicerone Teodorescu and the critic Paul Georgescu). This shows, together with the fact that more than half of the Bureau members have been dropped, that serious problems are dividing the highest echelons of the Union. The political revelations made by Beniuc indicate that the problems are more of an ideological than of a personal nature.

Beniuc admitted openly that "literature is lagging behind life". "In novels, poems and plays," he said, "the pathos of socialist construction is not sufficiently reflected." The speaker referred then to certain works in which, due to insufficient knowledge of "new realities", an "exclusively descriptive style, a lack of a clear artistic idea and artificial ways of resolving problems manifest themselves." With reference to poetry Beniuc complained about deficiencies such as an "obscure tight, (secluded), strange and absurd structure of some poems". The bad influence of noted writers such as Cicerone Teodorescu and Aurel Rau on younger writers, involving "obscure forms of expression" was criticized along with the "evasive tendencies" of some poets writing in the review "Steaua" which was also criticized in the past (example A.E. Baconchy).

Beniuc complained that the attitude of poets inclined to

consider themselves strange human beings from another planet, is a remnant of defunct concepts regarding the aristocracy of art and that intellectual snobbism tends to the belief that art is not destined for everybody but for an elite. Beniuc also criticized the cycle "The Roots Are Bitter" (by Zaharia Stancu) for "replacing large artistic generalization by an agglomeration of insignificant deeds, heroes and episodes".

Playwrights were criticized for "substituting actual problems only in the form of pretexts for their poor and superficial knowledge of new realities." He cited in this connection Virgil Stoenescu's "Love Letters". Beniuc also said that even Aurel Baranga in his comedy "Siciliana" did not subject enough to a whipping satire old-fashioned (lagging) elements but displaced tolerance toward them. Horia Lovinescu was criticized for achieving a deformed vision of some aspects of reality in his play "Above Everything".

After complaining about trivial expressions and pseudo-innovations as a substitute for a genuine dramatic conflict, Beniuc criticized the Ministry of Education and Culture and the theaters (Stancu and Baranga are director and deputy director respectively of the National Theater) for deficiencies revealed by some plays.

Beniuc underlined "the necessity to direct the writers' efforts increasingly toward achieving volumes of poems with "actual themes" particularly in the field of literature for youth. He emphasized the importance of "heroic themes", in the process of the education of children.

Beniuc devoted only five lines to works of ethnic minority writers, saying that "together with the (literary) creating of Rumanian writers that of writers belonging to national minorities is developing a creation marked by the same ideals of socialist construction."

Efforts in the direction of a more consequent application of the principles of Marxist historiography in the critical analysis of the literature of the past and hard work are contributing to the achievement of the "Treatise of the History of Literature", Beniuc said.

Beniuc also said that "the future leadership of the Writers' Union will have to concentrate its attention -- more than it has been done in the past -- on problems of (literary) creation, which emerge in everyone's literary activity, and to discover new means and ways for the intensification of the ties between writers and socialist realities."

Sustained criticism was directed by Beniuc against the literary critics. Recalling some "achievements in the domain of the study of universal literature, the role of contemporary works in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, revisionist

phenomena and decadence," Beniuc underlined also "serious deficiencies which continue to affect our literary criticism, the most important of which is poor combativeness."

Beniuc stressed in this connection the persistence of "apologia" in the sense of undue praise of literary works and tolerance of deficiencies.

He complained that George Calinescu's interesting novel "Scrinul Negru" (The Black Chest of Drawers) which deals inter alia with the "relations of an old-style intellectual with the toiling masses" has not been duely discussed by George Ivascu, M. Novicov, Radu Popescu, Eugen Simon who "ignored the novel's weak parts or mentioned them only superficially".

Critics were accused of trying to avoid on many occasions serious and detailed criticism. The critic Paul Georgescu was particularly criticized for "cautious silence" in his discussion of important literary works. Other targets for Beniuc's criticism: Silavian Iosifescu, Dumitru Micu and other critics. Beniuc concluded this chapter by admitting that "our criticism is far from corresponding to the demands of the literary front as far as its theoretical level is concerned." And he added: "It is necessary to raise the theoretical level of criticism strongly tying it to the concrete problems of our literature and the realities of socialist construction."

It is interesting to note that some of the remedies offered by Beniuc are in flagrant contradiction to his "Stalinist approach" to literary problems. Thus he advocated more criticism by the large strata of readers, the expansion of the struggle of opinions on a principled basis."

He criticized, however, the "unprincipled polemics" which appeared in the past in literary papers ("Contemporarul", "Luceafarul", etc.).

"The activity of the Writers' Union and its leading organs must develop in an unabated way under the sign of just and healthy principles of collective work," Beniuc added. (Does this swallow create a de-Stalinization spring?)

Beniuc also advocated a greater diversity of literary creation. These recommendations appear to have constituted his entire contribution to what was expected to be a more creative trend in the cultural sector.

Dramatic Accents of the National Conference of Rumanian Writers

If the main report submitted by the Writers' Union President Mihai Beniuc at the National Conference of Rumanian Writers had already revealed a series of serious problems of an ideological nature, the press reports on the speeches delivered by a number of writers brought into the open determined resistance

to the regime's cultural policy and the line set by the leadership of the Writers' Union.

Thus "Scanteia" of January 28, said that "referring to the important role of literary criticism in the development of our literature, the critic Paul Georgescu (who was dropped from the Bureau) limited himself to the enunciation of generalities. During discussions, a number of speakers expressed disapproval of the position, devoid of self-critical spirit, of Paul Georgescu and of his attempts to reject criticism leveled against him and to attack in an unprincipled way those who had criticized him."

We know from Beniuc's report that "serious deficiencies continue to affect our literary criticism, the most important of which is poor combativeness," and that "our criticism is far from corresponding to the demands of the literary front as far as its theoretical level is concerned." Beniuc added that "it is necessary to raise the theoretical level of criticism and to tie it strongly to the concrete problems of our literature and to the realities of socialist construction."

Beniuc criticized particularly Paul Georgescu for "cautious silence" in his discussions of important literary works. Other critics, such as Silvian Iosifescu (President of the Critics Commission) and Dumitru Măcu were also criticized for frequently avoiding serious and detailed criticism of their colleagues' works.

The newly elected vice-president of the Writers Union, V.E. Galan, and the reelected member of the Bureau, Eugen Barbu, also ("Scanteia" of January 28) "complained about the activities of literary critics and about the discrepancy between Paul Georgescu's "private" and "official" tone and his "lack of principle which determined the critic to avoid an open polemic". In this connection the review "Gazeta Literara" was also criticized. Eugen Barbu specified that "the main cause of our literary criticism should be the promoting of passionate and valuable books dedicated to the working class." He added that Iosifescu's report had revealed that literary criticism became evasive and asked whether an "unprincipled friendship has not established itself among some writers and some critics. Eugen Barbu said in conclusion that "literary criticism should help in a principled and competent way the (literary) creation of those who write about Communism analyzing the respective works with great attention." Paul Georgescu's resolute attitude appears to go even further than former Politburo member Parvulescu's reluctance to display genuine self-critical attitude at the November-December Party Plenum.

The cases of self-criticism observed at the CC Plenum found their parallel in a self-critical attitude displayed at the National Conference of the Rumanian Writers by Zaharia Stancu and Aurel Baranga who had been criticized by Beniuc and eliminated from the Bureau and the Secretariat of the Writers' Union.

Baranga said that the Party has helped him to overcome difficulties in his literary work. He accepted the criticism leveled against his work by Beniuc. In some respects Baranga's self-criticism was qualified, when he said that he does not consider everything to be correct which was said in connection with his work "Siciliana" and that "the most important thing to do, when criticizing in a comradely way is to search for truth." He also raised objections in his speech (against the play) of another writer, criticized by Beniuc, namely "Above Everything" by Horia Lovinescu. He took in this connection the blame for non-rhythmical work at the National Theater of which he is the deputy director.

Zaharia Stancu confessed in turn that he found it difficult to separate himself from the past and to become a "new man similar to the most advanced builders of socialism". He said that even in the past years colleagues had criticized him for his slow progress toward "actuality", for the length of his works and for use of poor language. He said that the criticism was justified and promised to do everything to take it into consideration and to step up his efforts to know and to study in an improved manner the facts and the people he wants to write about.

In a somewhat sarcastic tone he stated that "criticism had been expressed (against his works) with the love workers and peasants used to have for writers."

Vasile Musat, vice-president of the Central Council of Trade Unions who attended the National Conference of Rumanian Writers, also attacked the literary critics ("Munca" of 26 January 1962), saying that "they ignored a number of works dealing with labor problems."

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