

RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

RAD Background Report/17
(Hungary)
27 January 1978

Notes on Freedom in the Arts

(A translation with comment by the Hungarian Section)

Summary and Introduction: The following is a translation of an article published in the HSWP daily, Nepszabadsag, written by Pal Pandy, 51, a professor of literature at Budapest University, editor-in-chief of the periodical Kritika, and a member of the Cultural Policy Working Collective of the HSWP Central Committee. He is, therefore, in a position to write with considerable authority about his views on freedom of the arts. He cites cases in which artistic freedom is restricted and explains the official meaning of artistic freedom, which in communist (Marxist) philosophy, can only be "the recognition of necessity." He repeats the well-known policy line that in artistic life only Marxism has hegemony and it cannot be said yet that Marxism in Hungary is a universally recognized Weltanschauung.

X X X

A friend of mine who is living abroad asked me how freedom of the arts is developing in Hungary. . . .

Following 1945, our entire artistic life was filled with the ecstasy of freedom. This is understandable, because the Horthy regime's conservative, fascist official circles had banned not only communist-oriented literature, but also repressed avant-garde art and culture representing radical bourgeois democracy. Against this despised background of antirevolutionary criticism, the liberation brought the joy of a freedom intolerant of censorship and full of intellectual effervescence. There was also a good measure of naivete in this rapture, and even more of bourgeois illusion. Simultaneously, all noted creative artists of the era considered it a natural criterion -- in the interest and defense of freedom -- that creations redolent of fascism and the counter-revolution could and would not be allowed. In this public spirit, the philosophical interpretation of the concept of freedom took shape, consciously or not, bringing both older and younger Marxists, progressive populist writers, and the bourgeois close to each other. . .

Today, on the basis of 32 years of Marxist democratic experience, I should begin interpreting artistic freedom by defining the terminology. First, in our country, all citizens are free to create what they will, to the extent that this creativity is an individual activity, requiring neither the people's nor the state's material support. Therefore, the freedom of a sonnet-writing poet differs from that of a feature length film-maker. Naturally, everybody is free to write a scenario, but in this field, producing a work of art can also create problems. To clarify this line of thinking, let us use the example of the poet, the writer of fiction, and the painter, i.e., the freedom of individual artistic creativeness. It is well-known that this kind of nonpropagated creativity, whatever its content, cannot be administratively regulated. But we can exclude this extreme case of individual creativity from future discussion, as it is not in the interest of a true creator to write a work only in order to store it away at the back of his bottom drawer, nor is it in the true public interest to waive access to a truly creative work. It is obvious that the test of our principles is not to be found in the above-mentioned extreme case but in publishable works of art.

Secondly, and this might seem to be a paradox . . . in our country, no work of art can be published which is antihumanistic, profascist or attempts to incite readers against other races and people. Nor is there room for pornography which, however, does not mean that we ban artistic eroticism. These proscriptions are part of the stable fundamental principles of our general policy and cultural policy. There is essentially an agreement in our country on this matter between party member and nonparty member writers; among the older ones who remember the years of dogmatism, of the cult of personality, and the revisionists' attacks, and among the younger ones who did not experience as adults the difficult times in the 1950s. Tension and conflict have not been caused by the practical interpretation of these proscriptions, especially not in the last 20 years, but rather by other things. Our experience teaches us that it is impossible to speak of a single, continuous basis for conflict, but one must, instead, reckon with various types of tension or conflict. In order to delineate these, the positive side of our standpoint must be made clear and unequivocal. We see maximal freedom for art developing in close connection with the deepest possible appreciation of the esthetic value of reality. The sine qua non of supporting realism, therefore, is to urge our creative artists to present a well-rounded picture of life. I can only repeat that Marxism is totally valid; thus the strength of the socialist artist lies precisely in the fact that he is able, with his talent, to produce artistically a comprehensive and all-expanding picture of the world. If, therefore, artistic truth is the precondition for the freedom of artistic creativeness, we can also state that freedom of art is the precondition for the truth of creativity. In this context, I understand by the term freedom freedom according to our philosophy, i.e., the recognition of necessity.

In artistic life, in our cultural policy, and in criticism as we practice it, however, not only is this philosophical interpretation of freedom raised, but so is the practical concept of freedom,

the question of freedom for creative works which need publicizing. This problem is not independent of the philosophical concept of freedom and in certain ways it is closely related -- a relationship that can eventually lead to a conflict situation -- nevertheless the two are not identical!

I am selecting here only two from among the multitude of problems concerning freedom that we have experienced. Our party states that Marxism plays a strong directive role in molding the intellectual-ideological situation in our country, and simultaneously, that the ideological situation of the masses denotes the hegemony of Marxism. We cannot yet, therefore, say that Marxism is a Weltanschauung that is universally successful and that has been thoroughly assimilated in our country. In the 1950s, the top authorities determined that the aforementioned desire had become reality and therefore spoke of the united Marxist conviction of the Hungarian people -- but this was a mistaken evaluation of the situation for which we paid heavily. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of hegemony does not mean that the party and the state wish to preserve this ideological situation; it does, however, mean that they wish to carry out their historical work based on reality and also that they wish to follow the path leading from Marxism's hegemony to the universal acceptance of Marxism by society at a normal speed and with great patience. We associate with those who work with us on weekdays and go to church on Sundays, and we do not exclude from our society those who respectably carry out their duties in the daytime, while pursuing various petit bourgeois or bourgeois illusions in their free periods or when among friends. The work of achieving general acceptance of Marxism will only be completed by our descendants, or their progeny; till then we only wish to follow the rougher and more difficult path of reality, devoid of illusions, instead of overhastily proclaiming ideological homogeneity.

In the artistic field, too, this situation has made a real impression; there, too, Marxism is now in a hegemonic position. Let us now disregard the cellist who may be atheist, the fact that the tenor may be harboring liberal ideas, or the actor flirting with existentialism. We shall discuss writers whose works reflect their Weltanschauung or perception of the world in a different manner, more directly than in the esteemed playing of the cellist or the captivating singing of the tenor. A considerable number of our talented writers and creative artists have a picture of the world that is tied into the variant known as fideism (Janos Pilinszky), or is related to existentialism (Miklos Meszoly), or expressed in a poetical criticism, a nostalgia for a Utopian world order (Gyorgy Konrad). The works of these authors are published -- occasionally following some discussion -- in book or magazine article form. Their reception is varied: the esoteric novelist, for instance, becomes the much interpreted sensation of a narrow circle of readers. . . .

In the course of building socialism, a type of art has developed that does not adopt the socialist Weltanschauung in every respect, but one that is nevertheless not opposed to socialism's great, history-changing labor. . . . We are of the view that our public thinking and critical public life are able to overcome these problems

openly. And public opinion, on the other hand, is able to respect, within acceptable bounds, the principle, translated into practice, that greater everyday freedom -- even with all its very real risks -- does not mean less socialism, but does necessitate the intensification of socialist creative efforts. The state has and will continue to have sufficient power to make it possible for the appropriate authorities to place the the above-described types of creative works in locked files. There have even been times when the authorities were compelled to do more than merely lock up creative efforts. But we have gone beyond this stage. Our artistic life is shaped and formed in the -- at times harsh, at times stormy and scathing -- current of publicity based on fundamental principles.

I would now like to turn to another matter. Among creative artists, publishers, critics, and maybe also public servants, with a common Weltanschauung and political principles, differences of opinion might occur over the philosophical, and possibly the practical view of freedom for artistic endeavor. In the last decade, or two, so far as I know, larger or smaller shocks and collisions have occurred after the appearance of certain works over the question of circulation or publication. In principle, however, and also in practice, differences of opinion before publication, that is to say, concerning the publication or withholding of the work, cannot be excluded. Here, I am thinking only of cases involving such essential problems as the foundations of society, which cut to the heart of things. In this -- often tense and polemical -- process, an exchange of ideas, circumspect publishing procedures, and Marxist criticism all play an important role.

In these clashes of opinion, which are unavoidable in practice, one problem raised concerns the philosophical interpretation of the freedom to create from the practical aspect if freedom is the recognition of necessity. . . . then who is qualified to ascertain what constitutes necessity? Who is to determine the criteria of necessity? And so on. A real answer to this question can be given only if we strictly abstain from any judgment based on any kind of unquestioning faith or subjectivism. In this case, it is obvious that so far as the fundamental problems of society are concerned, it is the Marxist-Leninist parties that contain within themselves the means and methods whereby the objectively important social spheres can be influenced, that can sensitively take the pulse of public opinion, and that can integrate the methods and results of the sciences. The party, therefore, is no propagator of a necessity based on mystical foundations, but instead struggles for recognition of the necessity, and is always prepared, to correct any possible errors or to continue to alter a standpoint evolved on a concrete question in the wake of any change in circumstances. Furthermore, my experience has been that the party does not consider itself as competent, or the sole competent arbiter in elucidating and pronouncing needs in many spheres. The party -- properly so -- concentrates its efforts on the main problems in domestic and international affairs, but does not consider that it is its task to find operational solutions to all detailed questions or matters of secondary importance. It is also a fact, however, that the communist

movement very often serves to inspire the right sort of attitudes and standards, and the correct manner of approach between humans which can, of itself, help encourage a socialist humanism in understanding and managing "small matters."

The party -- we repeat -- is able to carry out its essential and historically justified work solely in close contact with science and public opinion. It is not a question, therefore, of one or two people declaring what necessity is, but -- and socialist democracy makes this increasingly evident -- the question that the party, working in close unison with the nonparty masses; can achieve the point where it can make the best possible approach to determining what is really necessary on fundamental social problems. . . .

The stress is on truth and not on the problem of prestige: who was the first to find a solution. In a sanely functioning socialist social life, the results of the art world's productive attitude to problems become a part of the party-directed political course of thinking and the party does not regard such initiative and revelatory vision as a deprecation of its own competence; on the contrary, the party finds it to be a communal-artistic attitude that should be approved and encouraged. Under such auspicious circumstances, however, the artists also cannot decline those party directives that promote a deeper artistic understanding of truth. This example is, of course, an ideal one, presenting the process in a more harmonious light than the real situation. In daily life, all this is inevitably accompanied by friction and conflict. There are artists who fear the sovereign quality of their art will be tainted if it is politically inspired, and there are some public servants who are unable to grasp either the primacy of policy or the fact that there are nontransferable features in artistic creation and its typical methods of expression. Despite everything, however, we must all strive to develop a partnership between politics and art, the politician and the artist, and to help consolidate these relations.