

The Writers Meet in Paris

MICHAEL GOLD

PARIS, July 4.

THE streets of Paris were covered with flaming political posters. Every wall had scrawled on it, in chalk, such political hymns of love and hate as, "Death to the Soviets!" and "Long Live the United Front."

Every day the papers reported a new aggression by the armed fascists and a new victory by the United Front that opposed them.

De La Roque, the fascist leader, made a boastful speech, in which he told an enormous meeting of his followers to "Prepare! Be ready! Tomorrow or the day after I will call on you to take power!"

In the fascist papers gun makers openly and shrewdly advertised their wares and offered special discounts to members of the mercenary bands.

It was known that De La Roque was receiving heavy subsidies from the Metal Trust of France. At one of his demonstrations a hundred aeroplanes were brazenly mobilized. It was known that he had intimate political affiliations with the Ministry of Air, besides having allies among the generals, the industrialists and bankers.

All the Hitler tactics had been slavishly copied; windy, I-Am speeches by the "Leader"; mystic rhetoric and pseudo-indignant attacks on the democracy and its corruptions; military discipline among the bands, to the accompaniment of revolutionary promises of glory and personal gain; and, not least of all, attacks on foreigners and open raids into workers' districts.

Several workers had already been murdered by the fascists. The police did nothing. When the fascists were in danger the police protected them; but it did little else. Workers discovered a truckload of revolvers and knives parked in readiness near a fascist meeting; they turned it over to the cops; and the cops shrugged their shoulders and undoubtedly sent the arms back to their owners.

It was like Hitler in Germany—except for the one immortal difference.

The working-class and the middle-class republicans had formed a united front.

When the fascists threatened to visit a workers' town, all the church bells were rung, the fire engines rushed through the streets, the Mayor put on his sash and thousands of miners and textile workers and tradesmen answered the summons of bells and sirens and gathered in the public square—

Waiting grimly for the fascists to come.

But they dared not come.

This was happening day after day, in one place after another.

And in the last elections, the United Front

had registered a wonderful victory all over France.

The reactionaries sneered at this united front, intrigued against it, tried to set Communist against Socialist and both against the bourgeois democrats like ex-Premier Daladier.

But nothing availed; everyone in France now knows that only the United Front can save France from being Hitlerized. And people say the fascists plan a *putsch* in the fall, "when their bourgeois vacations are over," but there will be a civil war to answer them.

THIS is the atmosphere in which the Writers' Congress is held and this is what gives each word spoken at the Congress the historic gravity and importance of words on a barricade.

André Gide presides with André Malraux over the opening session of the Congress. With them at the long table of the presidium sits a galaxy of distinguished authors that any American publisher would give his eye teeth to have in his catalogue (that is, if the bankers have left him a solitary molar):

Martin Anderson-Nexo, proletarian giant of Scandinavia, author of those immortal working-class epics, *Pelle the Conqueror* and *Ditte*; Anderson-Nexo, the man, who with Romain Rolland, was the mightiest influence on my own generation of revolutionary writers in England and America, gray, ruddy, benevolent and powerful as an old master-mason who still leads the young men at their trade, a figure out of our own Walt Whitman—

Heinrich Mann, voice of the Republican middle class of Germany, one of Hitler's enemies in exile, shy, serious and burdened with the conscience of all humanity, a conscience too pure to compromise with fascism, his novels coming out of the profound soil of European culture—

Alexei Tolstoy and Michael Koltzov, two of the Soviet writers who are leading humanity into a new world—

Aldous Huxley, author of *Point Counter Point*, and E. M. Forster, who wrote the sensitive *Passage to India*, spokesmen of the middle-class liberal England that still holds to democracy—

Jean Richard Bloch (*The Kurdish Night and And Company*)—

Lion Feuchtwanger (*Jew Suss and Power*)—

Henri Barbusse (*Under Fire*)—

Ilya Ehrenbourg (*Out of Chaos*)—

Waldo Frank, president of our own League of American Writers—

And André Gide rings the bell that is at the hand of the presiding officer of every

European mass-meeting and declares the Congress open.

ANDRE GIDE is one of the dominant figures at the Congress. He is already one of the classics of modern French literature; a man whose name is linked in the anthologies with those of Marcel Proust, Anatole France, Romain Rolland. He is past sixty and his life has been a long and stern philosophic adventure that several generations have attended with painful interest.

For in him was incarnated the conscience of modern Protestant liberalism. He was the heir of the Renaissance and the French Revolution striving to bring order into all the contradictions he had inherited. Every book by Gide was another research in ethics and in the struggle between the honest mind and the moralities of capitalism.

Step by step, this thinker had hewed his path through the confusing jungle of contemporary thought, to a clearing where a new sun was shining. In defending internationalism against the Nazi chauvinists, he said:

For my part, I claim to be strongly internationalist while remaining intensely French. In like manner, I am a fervent individualist, though I am in full agreement with the Communist outlook, and am actually helped in my individualism by Communism. I have always contended that the individual can best serve the community by being most effectively himself. To this may be added today as corollary, the contention that individuals and their peculiarities can best flourish in a Communist society; or that, as Malraux writes in a recent preface that has already become famous, "Communism restores fertility to the individual."

Do not think, however, this was a congress of writers in defense of Communism.

It was a congress built on the united front; it was a congress possible only because there is a raw, grinning young sadist in Nazi uniform, who shrieks with cannibal joy at the bonfire he has made of the modern books.

There were Socialists, Communists, Protestants, Zionists, liberals and democrats at this Congress. There were "skeptics" like Aldous Huxley, "Olympians" like Julien Benda and Catholics like Lenormand.

There were enemies of Communism like the Italian professor, Salvemini and the Trotskyite, Magdalene Paz.

No censorship was exercised over their speeches, even when the Trotskyite lady, in typical fashion, created the only disruptive attempt at the Congress. To a noisy claque that came in with her, this fat, flabby fool with the marcelled hair delivered a slanderous speech full of the usual clichés against the Soviet Union, because a Trotskyite named Victor Serge was in prison there.

To her mind, and those who applauded

her, this Congress was a "fraud" unless it went on record equally against fascism and the Soviet Union. These people can see no difference between a Nazi concentration camp and a Soviet collective farm. They were invited to a United Front Congress dedicated to literature; but their idea of literature and a United Front was to create a shrieking scandal and to charge all of us with being "tools of Stalin."

Such are the little Trotskyites everywhere, pathologues living in a self-centered world and helpful only to the enemy.

IT WAS noteworthy that their little raid had not even the effect of a mosquito's sting. The Congress moved on its serious way; a laboratory where the writers of Europe met for the first time to orientate themselves in a new world.

It would be impossible even to suggest the speeches and discussions; if printed in full, they would make a volume of several thousand pages.

It can be said that such a volume, in abridged form, will be printed and it will be an historic document of our time. For these writers were too serious for bombast or rhetoric; they came, many of them, in a state of alarm. Their world was threatened with destruction, as in Germany, and they knew they must examine this world and their own ideas, to weed out all that was false and vulnerable, so as to preserve what was worthy of one's sacrifice.

From Germany, Italy, Spain, France, England, China, Australia, Greece, South America, the United States, they came with their reports of conditions strangely similar; of the closing of schools and a tightening censorship and an increasing vulgarization of culture as capitalism sank into decline.

E. M. Forster, a sympathetic figure breathing a rare kindness and humanity, described the appearance of a new trend in his England, that he wittily named, "Fabian fascism."

Others had a bloodier tale to tell. It was not with books, but with guns and blackjacks, that the fascists were uprooting the grand traditions of the Renaissance.

Therefore, what was free speech? Where was its limit in a world of revolution and counter-revolution? Were the Nazis right in saying that no national culture must learn from another? What was true nationalism in culture? Was Milton wrong in having spent his studious youth in Italy and borrowing from its culture? Were Carlyle and Emerson traitors to their countries for having read Goethe and Hegel?

What was individualism? Was not the individual thinker above all the political battles? Fascism, said he, was not; it "co-ordinated" him. But did not Communism do the same? If it didn't what then precisely did it do, asked Julien Benda, to whom Communism and Humanism seemed enemies. Paul Nizan made a classic and eloquent answer.

John Strachey pointed out the reason why fascism threatened culture; "the capitalist system no longer makes sense, hence it is the enemy of all rational thought."

"Tradition is not something fixed for all time; it is a perpetual flow of invention," said Jean Cassou. "Fascism is akin to the academic spirit in so far as its interests lie in fixing cultural tradition."

Here are the words of the mystic Zionist author, Max Brod:

As for me, I remain in my original thought: The Dream belongs to the Individual and his profound soul: Reason, clear, luminous and without myths, belongs to society.

These two factors should not destroy each other, but on the contrary, should be bound together by the most enigmatic word in the language . . . by this supreme and magic word . . . by this simple word, "AND!"

Dream and reason; night and day, profound belief in God and collaboration, rational and active, with the Soviet Five-Year Plan.

Perhaps the romantic Heine, who threw off the cowl, could tell us how to realize the supreme union of these contradictions, not easily, indeed, but after great internal struggle.

I walked about the streets and was shown the little alley near Notre Dame where Francois Villon brawled over his wine. Across the way was the cellar-oubliette where he lay in darkness for his sins. Here was another street; it is sacred to us, for the men and women of the Commune fought here behind their last desperate barricade.

This is the house of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the great Negro Liberator; this the square where Robespierre was guillotined. Here is where the fascists, only last February, made their attempt at a *putsch* that would establish a new inquisition. Here is Pasteur's house and there the crumbling foundations of the Bastille; and this is the House of Workers' Culture, an old, old Parisian house, filled with a new meaning.

Paris, for centuries has been a word that has stirred humanity, like the word, Moscow, today.

The Writers' Congress in Defense of Culture held its sessions in the biggest hall owned by the city, Maison de la Mutualité. Every night from two to five thousand intellectuals and workers paid their way into the meetings. They listened intently, they cheered, applauded, made notes. Our Hemingways have reported to us only the cheap and nasty tourist side of Paris; but here was the heart of it, the Paris of revolution and thought, the Paris of Diderot and Vaillant-Couturier.

MUCH discussion and many papers were read around the question of nationalism. The fascists have made the national tradition of each country their chief point of demagoguery. As in America, where Daniel Boone and the tradition of landless, hungry pioneers is used by capitalists and their intellectual valets as a club against the hungry proletariat of today.

We have learned in America, how to answer these parasites. We are beginning to

unmask their false claims and to reconquer the revolutionary traditions of our land.

At the Writers' Congress, it was of absorbing interest to find men from many lands wrestling with the same problem. They were discovering that the history of the folk is the true tradition of the nation. One hated one's country's exploiters, but one loved one's country and its people. It was precisely because one loved them that one hated and fought the oppressors; this was the true nationalism.

And internationalism meant an alliance with the struggling peoples of other nations, a source of strength, both in culture and freedom. Writers of Germany, France, America and England joined in this common thesis.

THE French writers, even those who correspond to our liberals, gave one the impression of men who may soon be called upon to fight for their lives and who made themselves ready.

Here were the German writers to greet them, a delegation of those whom Hitler could not kill: such figures as Bert Brecht, Erich Weinert, the people's poet (he will soon be with us in America), Anna Seghers, Johannes Becher, Egon Erwin Kisch, Klaus Mann, Ernst Toller, Alfred Döblin, Alfred Kerr and others.

And here were the Soviet writers: Boris Pasternak, Vsevolod Ivanov (*Armored Train*); Isaac Babel (*Red Cavalry*); Lahuti, the great poet-laureate of the Soviet East; Panferov, Tolstoi, Koltzov, Luppol, Tikhonov, Mikitenko and others.

In this laboratory of writers, in this congress, the authors of Germany, France and the Soviet Union discovered a common cultural tradition that they would defend against fascism. The Soviets were building a new world; but as Luppol of Moscow stated in his thesis: "The proletariat is the heir of all the culture which the decline of the bourgeois regime is threatening. It makes common cause with the liberal humanists if the latter consent to revise their all-too-vague notions of humanism."

And the French writers were revising their notions rapidly, under the shadow of a fascist return to barbarism like that which drove their German brothers into prison or exile. The fight was the same in both lands.

It is true that a few French authors had been poisoned by Trotskyism, so flattering to the egotist author. Did not one of the former surrealists, Paul Eluard, rise at this Congress to say that he opposed the Franco-Soviet pact and all cultural traffic between the two lands? (All on the lofty plane of super-leftist-Trotskyite-super-revolutionism, of course.) But other former surrealists answered him. Among them Louis Aragon, one of the half-dozen great poets in the world today and one of the organizers of the Congress; Tristan Tzara, the father of Dada also answered Eluard, when he confessed, "Formerly, I believed that salvation lay through literature and the written

word; now I know that only social forces such as that released by the Soviets can give us the palaces of a new and beautiful life."

ONE must thank the French authors who arranged this Congress. It was conceived in a broad and generous spirit and was executed with skill. Painful drudgery goes on behind the scenes before such a congress is born. This "dirty work" was done by authors like Andre Gide, Andre Malraux, Louis Aragon, Henri Barbusse, Jean Richard Bloch and others. They were

not too proud or literary to be organizers for an idea.

Writers under capitalism have become effete. They have sheltered their comfort in the famous ivory tower which to my eyes always resembled the boudoir of a spoiled chorus blonde whom a millionaire was keeping. Or with the best of the writers, individualism was often a monk's cell, where in melancholy self-abuse they wasted their manhood on the follies of metaphysics.

Fascism wakes them from their vanity and dreaming. It is a glorious thing to see writers

accepting the challenge and taking their place among the leaders of humanity. Writers are, as Stalin said in his oft-quoted speech, "the engineers of the human soul."

The Writers' Congress at Paris was the birthplace of an international of such writers as have determined not to surrender the human soul to the barbarian hosts of fascism. The Congress, said Heinrich Mann, was "an important event in his life." Many other writers said the same; writers are like other men and in solidarity they find courage for the battle.

The Crisis in the Socialist Party

LOREN MILLER

AFTER a year of bitter internal conflict that began with the adoption of the Declaration of Principles at the Detroit convention in 1934, a semblance of harmony has been restored in the ranks of the Socialist Party. The conflict proved costly; membership declined by twenty-five percent, from 23,600 to 17,743. One state party resigned, another was suspended. At times, a split seemed imminent as factional organs hurled charges and counter-charges of bad faith at opposing leaders. Norman Thomas wrote that he was unable to collect money for his party because of the "general belief that we are dead or dying." In the midst of this confusion the united front, so often proposed by the Communist Party and one of the real causes of internal dissension, was shelved until the 1936 convention. A treaty of peace designed to settle questions at issue was concluded last week at a meeting of the party's national executive committee. The peace pact is only a stop-gap and because it leaves major issues unsettled must lead to more difficulties.

In reality the pact leaves control of the party in the hands of the so-called Old Guard faction, bitter-end enemies of the united front. This is the more remarkable because it was this faction that was ostensibly defeated at Detroit and also lost the battle to defeat the Declaration of Principles in a party referendum. Although he voted for the recent compromise its success marked the defeat in a real sense of Norman Thomas, and it is rumored that he will be replaced as a presidential candidate in 1936 by Daniel Hoan, Milwaukee mayor who emerged at the committee meeting as the peacemaker.

The Detroit Declaration of Principles was adopted in response to a widespread demand from Socialist Party members for a more militant organization and for clarification of the party's stand on the questions of war, fascism and the road to power. After the split in 1919, out of which the American Communist Party emerged, control of the Socialist Party fell more and more into the hands of a group of

New Yorkers led by Morris Hillquit. Hillquit, who was the brains of the group, died in 1932 and since that time Algernon Lee, James Oneal and Louis Waldman have been rattling around in his shoes, obviously much too large for them. Lee is head of the Rand School, Oneal edits *The New Leader* and Waldman, an attorney, is chairman of the New York executive committee of the party. Under the leadership of these men, who have the backing of Abraham Cahan and B. C. Vladeck, editors of the powerful *Socialist Jewish Daily Forward*, the Socialist Party became a thoroughly social-democratic organization. It formed ties with powerful American Federation of Labor leaders particularly in the needle trades. Hostility to the Soviet Union was open. Gradual reforms were looked to as a means of attaining the socialist state and all revolutionary philosophy was rejected. The very mention of united front with the Communist Party was anathema.

A vague opposition to the New York Old Guard had been growing since an attempt to unseat Hillquit as chairman of the national executive committee in 1932. The opposition was both a manifestation of an increased desire for militancy and of sectional jealousy. Thomas, who had been the presidential candidate in 1928 and 1932, gradually became the leader of the movement and those who formed it came to be styled the Militants. The Militants, as their name suggests, voiced a desire for a change in party policy but they have never formally formulated a program. Certainly, they are not opposed to the Soviet Union in the same sense as the Old Guard. They are timorously critical of the old A. F. of L. leadership and even favor the united front with the Communist Party on specific issues such as the Herndon case. Their outlook on war is colored by the pacifism of Thomas and Devere Allen and they are ready for cautious departures on the question of parliamentarianism. Trailing along behind the Militants in opposition to the Old Guard is the group of municipal Socialists led by Hoan

and Darlington Hoopes of the Pennsylvania legislature, men who resent the leadership of a group of New York politicians who are not even able to win an election.

As the time for the 1934 convention approached another group arose within the Socialist Party: the Revolutionary Policy Committee, among whose leaders were J. B. Matthews, Ruth Shallcross, George Streater, Irving Brown and Howard Kester. The Revolutionary Policy Committee proposed "revolutionary socialism" and demanded that the party throw overboard its old reformist policies. They demanded that it come out for the united front with the Communist Party and that it avow friendship for the Soviet Union. Parliamentarianism was attacked and a program of revolutionary action was outlined.

For a time it seemed that party unity would be destroyed at the Detroit convention. Old Guard leaders wanted to stick to the platform of 1932, the opposition demanded a new outline of principles. Norman Thomas, as befitted the leader of the center faction, played the role of peacemaker. The Declaration of Principles, reputedly written by Devere Allen during early morning hours, emerged. The controversial questions of war, fascism and seizure of power are dealt with in the following excerpt:

They (the Socialists) will loyally support, in the tragic event of war, any of their comrades who for anti-war activities or refusal to perform war services come into conflict with public opinion or the law. . . . They will meet war and the detailed plans for war . . . by massed war resistance. . . . It (the Socialist Party) unhesitatingly applies itself to the task of replacing the bogus democracy of capitalist parliamentarianism by a genuine workers' democracy. . . . If the capitalist system should collapse in a general chaos and confusion which cannot permit of orderly procedure, the Socialist Party, whether or not in such a case it is a majority, will not shrink from the responsibility of organizing and maintaining a government under workers' rule.

LOUIS WALDMAN, spokesman for the Old Guard, cried out that the Declaration was "anarchistic, illegal and Communis-