

"Who are you?" said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for conversation. Alice replied rather shyly, "I— I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I was...."

Alice in Wonderland



Reflections of a Revolutionist In Exile

*The last Chairman
of the Petofi Circle, the
intellectual center of the
Hungarian Revolution, reflects
upon the reality of exile.*

Pal Jonas

WITH THE crushing of the Hungarian Revolution five years ago, the odd phenomenon known as the political exile was increased by several thousand persons. A political exile is the typical "has-been." The most troublesome question for him is "Who are you?" It is terribly difficult for him to answer this question because he *is* a person who *was* (or claims that he was) somebody before he left his own country and believes that he *will* be somebody again. When a political exile can answer this question without thinking about who he was; when he can dampen his optimism about the political future for the country of his origin, his period of exile is over. He then becomes an ordinary immigrant.

There is no rule about the length of time an exile period should last. Sometimes this state of mind is incurable. The fifth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution finds many political exiles on the brink of "adjustment." This position permits them to view problems quite differently from the manner in which they viewed them at various times during these past five years.

The road to this juncture was certainly not an easy one, and not without many contradictions. The problems these exiles confronted were more complex than many they faced in their own country. The presentation of the ideas in which they believed and even a simple description of the historic event in which they participated gave rise to serious difficulties.

In Hungary, where you belonged was clear, at least to yourself. The major problem was that life itself was a physical risk.

In 1948, the "year of the turnover," the Hungarian Communist Party took power and established a monolithic regime under the slogan of "the dictatorship of the proletariat." During this period, Hungarians who had enjoyed democracy and political freedom from 1945 to 1948, learned what this slogan meant in practice. It became clear all too soon that anyone who voiced criticism of the regime would be sent to prison and the silent but potential enemies of the Party would be sent to concentration camps or deported to remote parts of the country.

At the beginning of 1953, it was estimated that there were approximately 200,000 political prisoners in Hungary, which meant that every tenth family had a member in prison or in a concentration camp. During the same period, the forced collectivization in agriculture, the big "show projects" in industry, the falling standard of living and shortages in consumer goods alienated not only the majority of the nation, but dramatically transformed the beliefs and the behavior of the Party membership.

The political ferment which began after Stalin's death in 1953, plus impressive moves toward liberalization on the part of Imre Nagy who became Prime Minister at that time, began to transform the political scene. Many of those who were faithful followers of the Party line became "true Leninists" and began voicing criticism of the Party leadership for its failure to interpret properly Leninist principles. Many took another dangerous step and began advocating "democratic socialism" which, during the Stalinist period had been considered a cardinal crime. The liberalization produced Party members who became "admirers of the West," an attitude all too common outside the Party ranks. The latter types were semi-officially called "non-Party Bolsheviks." As can be seen, Hungarians learned the meaning of semantics in practice.

IT IS INTERESTING TO RECALL that by 1956 in Hungary, a so-called "communist state," it was difficult to find anyone (including a great proportion of the middle and lower Party cadres) who was not disillusioned by the injustices practiced in the name of "administrative methods," by the political and economic rigidity, by the aristocratic seclusion of high Party officials, by the waste in planning methods. It was difficult to find anyone who agreed with the rigid control of literature and was not bored with the official style of "socialist realism" in the arts, who was not nauseated by the superlatives used to describe every phase of Soviet policy.

Public opinion began to crystalize not only around general criticism of the regime, but around the idea of a "third road," the ideology expressed in the works of the Populist writers and most clearly expounded in the writings of Professor Istvan Bibó who is now serving life imprisonment in Hungary. Briefly, this policy proposed a neutral Hungary, a parliamentary multi-party system, a price directed economy with consumer sovereignty in which heavy industry and central financial institutions would remain under state ownership under the direction of democratically elected workers' councils, and a privately owned small and medium industry and peasant farming.

It was difficult to find anyone who believed in the revival of the "old regime," the semi-feudal Horthyite period. This was clearly demonstrated

during the victorious days of the Revolution when the newspapers and those who spoke for the Revolution launched attacks on the Muscovites and the Horthyites in the same breath.

Revolutions in Europe are rare historical phenomena. A revolution without foreign intervention, without being preceded by the demoralizing effects of war, occurred for the first time in the middle of the 19th century. The student and worker led Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was fought for universal ideals. There was no choice but to join this uprising and give it the kind of practical and moral support that it received from the entire population. The Revolution was victorious, but the fight for freedom against one of the largest military machines in the world was, as expected, lost. The choice for revolutionists was between exile and prison. Confronted by this choice, I remembered my prison term in 1944 under the German occupation and my five years in a forced labor camp during the Stalinist period. I decided that I had benefitted sufficiently from all those years spent in seclusion and decided to leave Hungary.

"Who are you?" I was asked immediately on crossing the Austrian border. I knew that they really meant, "Who *were* you?" and that was not too difficult to answer. I was many "former" something or others and because of that, I was allowed to proceed to Vienna where I found many of my friends engaged in feverish planning. They had already been transformed into political exiles. It was not difficult to join them.

WE CERTAINLY WERE LUCKY exiles. I don't believe that ever in history was such a large refugee group (there were 200,000 Hungarian refugees in 1956) received with such unanimous and sympathetic warmth in so many countries. Even Yugoslavia, a Communist state, gave these refugees a kind reception and fair treatment.



Those whose names were linked to the Revolution had as many opportunities as they wanted, during the early months of exile, to participate in press conferences, appear on television and radio, speak at congresses and conventions and participate in debates. They were frequently asked to lecture before political, religious and academic groups. There was enormous eagerness to meet those who participated in the Hungarian Revolution and to learn about their political ideas.

At first, this role was simple to play and extremely rewarding. My friend, Tamas Pasztor, the first Hungarian revolutionary to arrive in Paris, attracted several thousand people to a meeting at which his

performance consisted of displaying a bloodied Hungarian flag. My first appearances before sophisticated audiences, which I addressed in common-places, were real successes. At the Council of Europe in Strassbourg ("Monsieur le President" said I, "si notre Revolution aurait ete victorieux, vous pourriez donner les instructions pour les menuisiers, de mettre un nouveau drapeau, le drapeau Hongrois, sur l'edifice du Conseil de l'Europe.") and in the French Parliament ("Messieurs les Deputes, nous avons commence la Revolution en chantant la Marseillaise.") I had better than average receptions and flattering introductions. It was impossible not to read in the faces the thought, "look, he can even speak."

As time went on, however, the fulfillment of our duties became more and more difficult. The situation was aggravated when we arrived in the United States, the country of research groups. Here, we were immediately made the subjects of various projects. Cornell University, in co-operation with the Society for Investigation of Human Ecology, examined us several times, physically and mentally. During this project, Alexander Weinstock, psychologist, asked us such disturbing questions as "What is the meaning of 'raincheck,' 'sundae,' 'Bufferin,' " etc. (Later, he explained that he made a frequency distribution from these answers showing the degree of adjustment of the different Hungarians.)

Being interviewed by Columbia University's professor of political science, Paul E. Zinner, made us feel very insecure. We were made to realize that there were serious gaps in our ability to describe the events of the Revolution and its causes. Professor Zinner's wide knowledge of this subject led us to study systematically the political and economic events which occurred before and during the Revolution. We didn't want to goof again.

Meeting the American public was most instructive. Someone called my attention to the unwritten rule that the best way to start a lecture is with a joke. At the time, I was in Los Angeles about to address the convention of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. I looked around hopelessly for appropriate jokes. I had to drop them on learning the tragic news that Imre Nagy had been executed.

Someone else advised me that the best way to start an article is to quote from "Alice in Wonderland." This, I was told, is very appealing to the "average American" and people in all the English speaking nations.

During the question periods after lectures we were asked such questions as: "Was the Hungarian Revolution anti-semitic?" "No, it was not," was the answer. "How can you say that when Isaac Deutscher says that it had serious anti-semitic tendencies?" "Who is Isaac Deutscher—was he there?" "For heaven's sake, you don't know who Isaac Deutscher is?" "No," I said, (in my present state of sophistication I fully realize what a mortal sin it is not to know of Isaac Deutscher) and I felt that everything was collapsing about me. It was necessary, it seems, to read everyone who made critical comments on the Revolution, as well as those who praised it. (By the next time, I knew that the best way to counter Deutscher was to quote Silone.) We had to adjust; we had to become more sophisticated.

I recall, among other events, the luncheon sponsored by the Crusade for Freedom for wealthy businessmen in New Jersey (I appeared in a black suit). I emphasized that the Revolution wanted a price-directed economy. I was invited to a meeting of the Young People's Socialist League (I wore a sweater) and I reminded the audience that the Revolution wanted to socialize heavy industry. I appeared as a speaker at the Washington Heights synagogue (they put a little black hat on my head) and I told the audience about the numerous Jews who were leaders of the Revolution. I lectured, at the invitation of Professor Feliks Gross, at a graduate seminar of sociology at Brooklyn College where I tried to be as academic as possible and used expressions like "balance of power" while pointing out the leading role of students in the historic events of 1956. As the representative of the Assembly of Captive European Nations, I was the main speaker on Freedom Day at the State of Liberty (around me Marine troops) and I was as forceful as a member of a military junta. ("Your message was broadcast to East European countries where you gave cause for renewed hope," said a letter written to me by General Crittenger, President of the Free Europe Committee.)

My appearances were minor compared to those of my friends. They lectured not only coast to coast, but were invited on world lecture tours. In Asia, they emphasized the Asian origins of the Hungarian people and in Western countries, our belonging to Western culture and our Christianity. I seriously envy one of my friends, General Bela Kiraly, who had, among other duties, the job of crowning the "Peach Queen" in Florida.

LISTENING TO AMERICAN politicians as they addressed Hungarian groups (reading from notes "*jo estet kivanok*"—good evening, in Hungarian—which always aroused frantic applause) I realized that we just did what we were supposed to do, we should not feel contrite. In voicing the full and complete truth, one can be a thinker, a philosopher or even a respected political scientist but not a successful politician. This iron rule made St. Paul say: ". . . for Jews, I am a Jew, for pagans, I am a pagan, for Christians, I am a Christian, only to serve the Kingdom of God . . ." Realizing that, I believe that the readers of *NEW POLITICS* will understand and forgive me for not wanting to speak directly about the Hungarian Revolution on its fifth anniversary.

I would only like to enter my room alone and think about this event as it is guarded in my memory.

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American

*A trade unionist calls for a
new labor insurgency based
on political unionism leading to
a new humanism.*

Labor at Dead-End

sidney lens

THE TROUBLE WITH our labor movement, as we enter this decade of decision, is not that it has not done its job well but that it has *defined* it inadequately.

Who can quarrel with the great improvements in the life of the American worker as a result of the unionization these past three decades? Union successes, measured in material terms, have been phenomenal. Wages have gone up not only relatively but absolutely; and fringe benefits, medical insurance, supplementary pensions and jobless pay have given laborers a considerable measure of security. Who can quarrel with the maligned Jimmy Hoffa when he walks off with a 42¢ an hour wage increase, plus an escalator clause, plus many other concessions, for 250,000 midwestern truckdrivers?

By the standards of our society the labor movement is but another success story. Union ranks have enlarged to 600 per cent their levels at the dip of the 1930's. The trials and tribulations of the frustrated unions in agriculture, retail, white collar, chemical, etc. notwithstanding, the movement has the taste and smell of "having arrived." The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union reports assets of some \$325 million, about two-thirds of which is in welfare funds. The United Auto Workers owns a strike fund of \$40 million. The \$50,000 a year club for union officials is becoming fairly crowded, and the city of Washington is dotted with the marble palaces where many of them work. Labor's spokesmen are on first-name terms with Presidents, cabinet secretaries, and even the titans of Wall Street.

Again—who can quarrel with that? Why shouldn't union leaders be awarded the status due them as representatives of the most numerous force in our society? Why must the unions always have the "lean and hungry" look of the 1930's? These are now the 1960's and the past can not be—nor should it be—resurrected. The impassioned young men of the bygone era who built the CIO, who slept on office tables in the union office and worked the clock around for nothing or next-to-nothing, don't fit the present situation. The movement has become complex. It needs specialists today rather than evangelists. It needs public relations rather than propaganda. It needs competent bargainers and arbitrators, rather than strike-at-the-drop-of-a-hat zealots.