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HUNGARIAN DAILY BACKGROUND
(Special on Writers' Union)

Meeting of the Members of the Hungarian Writers' Union

On December 26, the Hungarian Writers' Union met in BUDAPEST. The only point on the agenda was the report of the Secretary General Sándor KÖRÖSI, on the activities of the Union during the past two months. In preparation for coming debates and comments, as well as possible resolutions, Hungarian Research here summarizes the activities of the Writers' Union during the past three months:

a) The Writers' Union Before October 23

On September 17, the struggle between the Hungarian writers and the SAPOSI-GÉRŐ regime reached a turning point. The occasion was the election of a new Presidium, which was greeted with great interest. In the new Presidium (26 members) the exponents of Stalinist policy, Bela ILLES, former editor of the "Socialist Worker," and János DARVÁS, Minister of Public Education (who had for years been the President of the Writers' Union) and other Stalinists were excluded. Writers were also excluded who took part in the resistance only later or in a moderate form, such as the Stalin Prize winners Tamás ÁRKAI (now in KRASNOJ) and Sándor MÁTY, József KÖRÖSI and others. Writers who had for years been considered in alliance now became members of the Presidium, as for example the Social Democrat Lajos KISSAI, the mystic Catholic Áron TAMÁSI, the third way traveler Leó Székely, the National Peasant's Friend János VILÁG, and László SZABÓ, the liberal anti-Fascist János TÓTH, and the Socialist Imre KÖRÖSI, who had been released only in March 1956 after nearly eight years' imprisonment.

The Presidium was elected secretly, and in this the Writers' Union won its first serious victory in the over two years' struggle with the Stalinists. As a consequence of the far-reaching changes in the Presidium, the leadership of the Union was cleared of Stalinists and semi-Stalinists, and came under the direction of the men of the "show." This was the first organization, during the peaceful period of the Hungarian revolution, to slip out of the control of the Hungarian Communist Party. (See also Evaluation and Research background paper of September 13 1956 "Congress of the Hungarian Writers' Union.")

The extent of the changes in the Writers' Union Presidium can be seen by comparing the 1956 list with that of those elected on September 17 1954, showing 13 changes in the Presidium of 26. Thus the Union became even more the intellectual center of the peaceful revolution.

1954

- Thomas STEEL
- Leslie SULLIVAN
- Joseph SUTYAL
- Tibor SZOT
- Samuel SZURENYI
- Sala SZYDLO
- Sybil SZYDLO
- Frederic SZYDLO
- Isidor SZYDLO
- Lejzer SZYDLO
- Peter SZYDLO
- Lejzer SALT
- Samuel SALT
- Paul STANO
- Sam STANO
- Peter VERES
- Salomon WEIN
- Sybil WEIN
- Tibor WEINBERG
- Tibor WEINBERG
- Samuel WEINBERG
- Samuel WEINBERG
- Samuel WEINBERG
- Tibor WEINBERG
- Samuel WEINBERG
- (resigned in Nov. 1955)

1956

- Leslie SULLIVAN
- Tibor SZOT
- Samuel SZURENYI *
- Sybil SZYDLO
- Lejzer SZYDLO *
- Irvin TARRAH *
- Isidor WEIN
- Leslie WEINSTEIN *
- Lejzer WEINSTEIN
- Peter VERES
- Sybil WEIN
- Sam J. WEINBERG *
- Lejzer TARRAH
- Paul WEINBERG *
- Lejzer WEINBERG *
- Frederic WEINBERG *
- Frederic SZYDLO
- Joseph WEINBERG *
- Paul STANO
- Isidor WEINBERG *
- Peter WEINBERG
- Isidor WEINBERG *
- Sam C. WEINBERG *
- Sam WEINBERG *
- Frederic WEINBERG

Persons whose names are underlined in the 1954 list are not members of the new Provisional.

Those whose names are marked by an * in the 1956 list were recently elected.

4) Demands Made by the Writers' Union on October 21

After September 17, the writers became more aggressive, their tactics gradually changing from debating to demanding, and the spirit of the "Irodalmi Újság" spread into certain daily papers ("Népszava," "Magyar Nemzet," "Szabad Ifjúság.") Among demands were the exclusion of Stalinists from key positions, the ending of the privileges of the Party aristocracy, ending of censorship etc. The cultural debate gradually turned into a political and economic debate, and the intellectual revolution into a political revolution. This was demonstrated in the role played by the Writers' Union on October 21.

Peter VERES, President of the Union, read the proclamation of the Writers' Union to the crowd gathered at the Rem monument. It was called "The Proclamation of the Hungarian Writers." This proclamation, which included seven demands, was also printed in a special edition of the "Irodalmi Újság" on October 23.

In its introduction it said:

"We have reached an historical turning point. We can only stand our ground in this revolution if all the Hungarian working population unites in one disciplined camp.

"The Party and the leaders of the State have not given any acceptable program so far. For this those men are responsible who, instead of a social democratic solution, have in the past planned, and continue to plan, to reinstate KÁROCSI terror regime.

"We, the Hungarian writers, have put the demands of the Hungarian nation into the following seven points:

1. Independent national policy on the basis of socialist ideology. Supervision of international agreements and economic contracts.
2. An end should be put to the nationality policy among the people, because it has a disturbing effect on their friendship.
3. The economic situation of the country should be made public.
4. The enterprises should be led by the workers and experts. The wages and norm systems should be readjusted.
5. The agricultural policy should be changed.
6. László RÁKÓI should have a position worthy of his.
7. The people should elect their representatives freely and secretly.

("Irodalmi Újság", Oct. 23 1956)

c) Representatives of the Writers' Union in the
Revolutionary Organizations

Today we do not yet know which of the writers took part in the fighting after October 23. In BUDGARYE Tamas ACSEEL said to a reporter of the "New York Times" that he had been on the barricades. It is very probable that others were also fighting. Some of the writers were arrested, and some are still in prison.

The Writers' Union played a leading part in creating the Revolutionary Committee of Intellectuals. This committee was formed on October 25. It published a manifesto which stated that the revolution had won, and proclaimed war against Stalinist or counter-revolutionary attempts at restoration. The manifesto made ten demands:

1. The government should forthwith settle our relationship with the Soviet Union on the basis of equal rights. Soviet troops should begin their withdrawal from the entire area of the country.
2. The government should cancel our disadvantageous contracts in foreign trade. The fruits of the Hungarian soil, bauxite and uranium, and the fruits of the peasants' work, should not be sent abroad by secret treaties for extremely low prices.
3. General secret elections should be held at which the people can nominate their candidates.
4. Plants and factories should really belong to the workers.
5. The government must put an end to the exploiting wage system. In proportion with our economic possibilities it must raise the low wages and pensions.
6. Trade Unions must truly protect the interests of the workers and their members must be freely elected. The working peasants should also have their own organizations for protecting them.
7. The government should assure the freedom of agricultural production as well as its protection by supporting the voluntary peasant associations. The hated compulsory delivery system must be cancelled.
8. Let there be a fair deal and let the peasants who have been burdened with unjust parceling of their land, and other illegal measures, receive financial compensation.
9. Let there be complete freedom of speech, of the press and of meetings.
10. The government should proclaim October 23, the first day of our fight for national liberation, a national holiday.

Signed: The Revolutionary Committee of Hungarian Intellectuals."

This proclamation was signed for the Hungarian Writers' Union by Sandor KESSEI, Gyula SIKOS, Tibor KESSEY and Sandor BAKACSI. The committee also included representatives of all important intellectual organizations, the Revolutionary Committee of the Universities, the Journalists' Association, the Petöfi Circle, etc.

With this committee as its center, the Revolutionary Council of Hungarian Intellectuals was formed in BUDAPEST on November 21. This was commented by the trade union paper "Nepkarat," as follows:

"This council originated from the revolutionary committee formed by the intellectuals after October 23. Today the demands the committee made at the time are widely known; the uprising achieved a part of them and the others are identical with the further lawful demands of the workers and the whole population."

("Nepkarat", November 27)

Secretary General of the Council was György MAROSI, economist, who was also a member of the revolutionary committee formed after October 23. President was the widely esteemed Imre KODALY. From the Writers' Union Tibor DEK and Béla ERNESTY were members of the council. The Council of Intellectuals was in close contact with the BUDAPEST Workers' Council, which was dissolved by the government on December 9.

d) Formation of the Revolutionary Committee of the Writers' Union

On November 3 the Writers' Union held a general meeting, at which the speakers included Gábor KÉPES, Peter VERES and Gyula ILLYÉS, who stated that the presidium of the Union was elected on September 17 in a democratic manner, therefore fundamental changes were unnecessary. However, the general meeting elected six new members to the presidium: Dezso KENNEDYFÜRY, from the Petöfi Party, János KÖCCSANTTI, István BINKA, Gábor FÉLÁ, the Catholic György RUDAY and István LAKATOS. The increased presidium was transformed into the Revolutionary Committee of the Writers' Union. This general meeting proves that the leadership of the Writers' Union was already purged of Stalinists during the period of the peaceful revolution, thus there was no need to make fundamental personal changes after the armed uprising.

The general meeting furthermore agreed that the constitutional form and literary basis of the Writers' Union should be retained. It was at this time that the proposition that the Writers' Union should send an appeal to the writers of the world (through the PEN Club) to help by every means the independent, democratic and neutral Hungary, was voiced for the first time.

e) Writers in Politics

When the political parties were formed, several members of the presidium of the Writers' Union, the most famous Hungarian writers, received positions in the leadership of the Petöfi Party. The Petöfi Party was formed from the former National Peasant Party. A special directing body was formed which was placed above the temporary leadership of the party. Only writers were elected to this directing body. Among them were Gyula ILLYÉS, Peter VERES, Lorincz SZABÓ, János KÖCCSANTTI, Gábor FÉLÁ, László KENNETH, Dezso KENNEDYFÜRY, István BINKA and Aron TAMÁSI, all of them members of the Writers' Union presidium. We have no information as to whether well known Communist writers like Tibor DERY, Gyula HAY, László BENJAMIN etc., joined the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (which succeeded the Hungarian Workers' Party.)

The opinion of the most significant writers on the revolution was summarized in the November 3 issue of "Irodalmi Újság," which had a special edition in PARIS in French. In the same number, an appeal of the Writers' Union was also published which urged people not to take the law into their own hands. It ran as follows:

DECLARATION OF THE HUNGARIAN WRITERS' UNION

"The greatest virtue in the carrying out of our national revolution, freedom and independence has been: morality.

"The Hungarian writers took their part in the preparation of the revolution. It is also their duty to guard the purity of the revolution.

"They demand the calling to account of all those who committed crimes against the people. They demand with the same determination that the criminals should account for their crimes before a free Hungarian court. The people should not administer justice in the streets but in the court-rooms!

"We appeal to everyone to hand over the criminals apprehended to the national militia of honored patrols. Personal retribution is unworthy of us. We are convinced that the Hungarian people agree with their writers in this.

"The eyes of the world are upon us. They admire the purity of our revolution. Let us not tarnish it!

BUDAPEST, November 1 1956

The Hungarian Writers' Union."

During this phase of the uprising the Writers' Union was in permanent contact with the government and with Imre NAGY personally, acting as a kind of advisory body. Aware of its responsibility, the Union fought for the purity of the revolution. It organized a collection in BUDAPEST; boxes and baskets were placed on street corners in which passers-by dropped their contributions. We ourselves guarded the boxes. It was concern for the purity of the revolution which led the Union to publish its November 1 declaration. On November 1 it published another proclamation in which it assured Imre NAGY of its support:

APPEAL OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE OF
THE HUNGARIAN WRITERS' UNION

"We Hungarian writers elected our revolutionary committee. We approve and support the Declaration of Prime Minister Imre NAGY, the pronouncement of the neutrality of our country, the repudiation of the KEREKES Pact. We agree with the government's appeal to the UN for the assurance of its demands. We greet the revolutionary councils' appeal to resume work. The course of the revolution is threatened if work is not immediately resumed. Workers, soldiers, members of the national militia!

We ask you to protect and guard the achievements of the revolution. We are with you with all our strength.

"The Revolutionary Committee of the Hungarian Writers' Union."

The Writers' Union as an organ, as well as the writers individually -- with the exception of a few Stalinists -- also most emphatically sided with certain aims of the revolution (e.g. neutrality) which were rejected by the present government.

(1) The Writers' Union under the Second Soviet Intervention

The last broadcast of Radio Free EUROPE on November 4, at 0737 hours, was the dramatic appeal of the Writers' Union to the writers, scientists and intellectuals of the world:

"We ask for the help of every writer and scientist of the world, of every writers' association, of every academy, of intellectual leaders. Time is short! You know the facts, we do not have to tell you these. Help Hungary! Help the Hungarian people! Help the Hungarian workers, scientists, workers, peasants and intellectual workers. Help! Help! Help!"

The Soviet attack put an end for a time to the activities of the intellectuals', students' and workers' revolutionary organizations. But after the first shock was over these organizations again became active. Armed resistance was replaced by political resistance.

On November 12 the Writers' Union published a mimeographed proclamation entitled: "To the people of the country - from the Hungarian Intellectuals." The appeal was joined and signed by every notable intellectual organization. The essence of the proclamation was:

1. Hungary should become a neutral state, free of any foreign domination.
2. The economic and social regime of the country should be Socialist, built by democratic methods and taking national traditions into account.
3. They agree to the land-reform of 1945, also to the nationalization of factories, mines and banks.
4. The resolution does not demand the multi-party

system and free elections, but protests against the re-introduction of dictatorial methods of the past and every kind of terror and despotism.

Ten days later the Writers' Union published another independent declaration, which it presented to the organizations which signed the November 12 declaration that they should also be able to join. This declaration reported on the visit paid by the Writers' Union delegation to the Soviet commander, on which occasion they referred to the statement of KEROLOV that no one would be taken from the territory of Hungary, and that every case would be heard before a Hungarian court. The Soviet commander promised the delegation that in case of aggressive arrests he would start an inquiry on request from the Writers' Union, i.e. would make amends. In connection with the strike, the declaration was of the view that this concerned only the workers. It agreed that the workers should resume work without giving up any of their demands. In the interest of the earliest possible resumption of production, it said the government should start negotiations with the "representatives who have the full authority of the workers." The third point of the declaration discussed writing the truth:

"The most precious right of literature and art achieved during the revolution is that of freedom and veracity. We will defend this right and use it with responsibility toward our people. In the future we will continue to participate in such press work (including radio etc.,) which has as its main principle veracity and the service of the people's cause."

This resolution is unique in the history of literature, in that it is a call to strike which allows writing -- in radio and press -- only if the truth can be said. Since the publication of the declaration more than five weeks have passed, and till now we have not come across any work by a notable writer, either in the press or the radio.

On November 22 the Hungarian Dramatic Art Association held a meeting to which Gyula ILTOS, László NEMETH and several other members of the Writers' Union presidium were invited, when the Association announced its association with the November 21 declaration of the Writers' Union.

The November 21 Declaration was ratified by another, published by the Writers' Union on December 2. This last declaration was not published in the NEPAJEST press or broadcast by Radio BUDAPEST. It was broadcast one week later by Radio GYOR. One of its paragraphs reads:

"We are not counter-revolutionaries -- no reasonable, decent Hungarian could be one. At present, we refuse to write... We are deeply hurt by the slanders cast

at us. We will write again only when official forums acknowledge that we are not Fascists but true Hungarians. We will write in the interest of the people and our fatherland."

These declarations and appeals show that the Writers' Union was still, after November 4, actively opposing the attempts at restoration made by the government. Although they did not insist on the multi-party system, free elections and neutrality -- obviously considering the Russians -- they still clung with unchanged determination to the writing of the truth.

g) The Writers' Union and the GREAT-BUDAPEST Central Workers' Council

It is still not possible for us to ascertain exactly the extent of co-operation between the writers and the workers' councils. On November 14 the Writers' Union delegated two of its members to be present at the formation of the Great-BUDAPEST Central Workers' Council. The November 21 declaration of the Writers' Union approved the November 18 and 21 resolutions of the workers' council. The Union's point of view on the subject was the following:

"The presidium of the Writers' Union discussed at its November 21 meeting the November 18 and 21 resolutions of the Great BUDAPEST Central Workers' Council, which is making arrangements for the resumption of work. In these resolutions the workers fully maintain their demands and retain the right to strike. The Writers' Union wishes for the earliest assurance of peaceful work and a free life, and that we should be able to fight unhampered and (although with new mediums) with unchanged force for the preservation and further development of the achievements of the revolution. It is for this reason that the Writers' Union finds it right that production should restart as soon as possible, and where it is already in process it should be increased. It also finds it necessary that in the interest of achieving all this the government organs should speedily start negotiations with the representatives endowed with full authority by the workers."

Nevertheless the government organs did not start to negotiate, but instead, in the first days of December, arrested the "representatives endowed with full authority." A delegation, with a list of the arrested, called upon the government on December 8. The delegation consisted of Gyöngy RÁCZ, president of the Central Workers' Council; Péter VERES, president of the Writers' Union, and Aron TAMÁSI, a member of the Writers' Union presidium.

The delegation wanted to present a memorandum to Prime Minister János KADAR, urging that "the government should take immediate steps to stop unjustified and illegal arrests." The memorandum, which was displayed in every enterprise, emphasized: "The government should recognize the patriotic, democratic, socialist, progressive character of the revolution and should separate itself from all Stalinist and truly counter-revolutionary forces."

8) Writers in Prison

We have no exact information so far how many writers were arrested consequent to the revolution, or how many of them are still in jail. On this subject we have only two references. Police-colonel György KOS, head of the HUNGARIAN police, in an interview with the correspondent of the daily "Mai Nap" on December 16, said that "the activities of some writers are more harmful than those of ordinary criminals." He added:

"Those against whom we have ground for suspicion we detain, with the approval of the prosecutor. Thus the writers Gyula FÉRENY and István MOLNÁR have been arrested by the HUNGARIAN police, and, as the investigations are still going on, I cannot make further comments.

"As to the detention of Tibor DENY and Miklós MÉRSEZ, there can be no doubt that a mistake was made. These two writers were arrested under unusual circumstances. But this has already been remedied..."

We have ^{no} information about other writers. We are sure, however, that the number of those arrested is more than two. Radio KOS-SZTÁR broadcast on December 27 that Bela ILLES, in a letter to "Nepcsinnyog," asked that the writers and journalists who had been arrested should be set free. No further details are available.

9) No Official Move Against Writers' Union

The KADAR government has not made any official move so far concerning the activities of the Writers' Union during the revolution. According to KADAR's analysis, the revolution started with good aims but was later misused by counter-revolutionary forces in their own interest. On the other hand, no declaration on behalf of the Writers' Union mentioned counter-revolutionary forces. While KADAR reserved the right to take a stand on the subject, the "Irtok" magazine of December 1 came out with an article attacking in person Gyula FÉRENY, Endre VESZÉ, István CSÉNYI and Peter KUNKA. On the Writers' Union in general it said:

"It should be stated with profound regret that an objective study of the role of the Union of Hungarian

Writers in the Hungarian events does not give grounds for any positive judgments. Moreover, we can now state with all responsibility that some writers have played the role of secret allies of the reactionary forces in these events. After the defeat of reaction, which was effected without their participation, they took up a false, ambiguous and essentially anti-government position...."

The most probable aim of the government is to break the unity of the Writers' Union. This is reflected in a Radio MOSCOW program called "Today in Hungary," broadcast on December 26:

"A meeting of HUNGARIAN writers is planned for December 28. Some of the writers sincerely want to participate in the people's task of restoring life in all fields. It is true that some of the intelligentsia still maintain a so-called neutral position, a position of "sitting on the fence," of "wait and see."

"But the Hungarian people do not approve of this attitude. They want their intelligentsia to occupy progressive positions and not to shy away from the difficulties."

These attempts aimed at polarization and disruption do not have much chance of succeeding. The present unity of the Hungarian writers came about in much more difficult and more dangerous times. This unity has already produced outstanding results. It is hard to imagine that the leaders of Hungary's literary life might forget this fact.

End