

RFE EVALUATION AND
ANALYSIS DEPARTMENT
Hungarian Unit

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News BackgroundHUNGARIAN LETTERS STILL IN TURMOIL

BUDAPEST, February 28 (Brown) -- What has long been known to students of Hungarian literature has now provoked the official ire of Hungary's literary thought-controllers: liberalism, revisionism, modernism, decadence and a host of similar insidious trends are still rife in Hungary with all the manifold dangers these represent for the whole of Hungary's painfully re-erected Communist edifice. Criticisms of this kind are not new, but not since the expulsion of Gery and his associates in 1953, when literature became the target of Kadar's special wrath, have the Hungarian Communist (or as is now alleged pseudo-Communist) writers come in for such a thrashing. Then, the official rod is now wielded by the Theoretical Study Group of Culture attached to the Party Central Committee, and not, as in 1953, by the Central Committee itself. But the condemnation is just as significant, condemning as it does for the first time since the Revolution in attention being drawn to the similarities which exist between the liberal and revisionist trends of 1953-56 and those of 1960-61. Of the whipping boys such old friends as urbanism, populism and petit-bourgeois views get their share of ritual chastisement, but the sting is in the Study Groups' wholesale denunciation of such famous journals as Kortárs, Kiist az Irodalom and, was beside, the official Party paper Munkabeszám.

"The Group says: "The watering-down of principles and unduly lenient criticism of petit-bourgeois, revisionist and bourgeois-decadent tendencies are frequently found even in the works of leading Marxist writers and literary leaders of responsible standing. Particularly harmful is the persistent liberalism prevalent in the columns of Kiist az Irodalom, Kortárs, Munkabeszám, and the periodicals published by the Literary Historical Institute. Going to a false respect of authority these papers publish ideologically and artistically inferior and even false works without adding ideologically sound criticisms to such writings. From time to time evidence of this liberal practice can also be found in the cultural column of Munkabeszám."

In sum the Study Group is unhappy on two principal scores:

1. Revisionism and its related evils are now more difficult to detect because "anti-Marxist and revisionist views are wrapped in a Marxist cloak and presented as 'creative' and 'progressive' ideas", but these, say the schoolmen, are not to be taken lightly because they "are the most dangerous obstacles to our literary progress."
2. The journals criticized have given increasing publicity to men and ideas which are, to say the least, turned away from and, by implication, against the Party's interests and philosophy. Not only that but the Hungarian publishing houses, cinemas and theaters have reprinted, shown and staged a wide variety of Western and Hungarian classics both of older and modern vintage; here, too, the Study Group feels that a halt must be called.

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What could be more dangerous to the sanity and progress of Hungarian socialism than Joyce, Kafka, Camus or Eliot? Judging by the article the Hungarian intelligentsia is snugly spellbound by the self-tormenting ways of these men, for here the individual is lifted onto a new pedestal, his nexus with society is ignored, counter-revolution parades in the guise of revolutionary endeavor and bourgeois decadence is furtively back with us camouflaged as a splendid and modern type of "realism". Snobs add to the chorus of veneration, only "socialist" is left out in the cold.

Realism

To boost his prestige Kadar has so far wisely considered that men of national reputation and respect would help him make his government's public image more attractive. Whether the present distaste represents a change from this policy is open to doubt. In the Hungarian Party's present consternation it is within the limits of the possible that men tarred with the Stalinist brush and singularly ungifted as writers may, from time to time, take their courage in both hands indulging in therapeutic outbursts of hatefulness. Previous, although admittedly less authentic, attacks of this kind bore precious little fruit and while Isztok as Isztok dutifully prints these condemnations of itself and of its contributors, it has, together with Isztok and the other gaily journals, so far shown no intention of changing its policy. It would be surprising if the present strictures were to be more effective.

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