

Democracy Is on the Move in Hungary

Several weeks ago there was a stormy meeting among Hungarian writers at the Petofi Circle (club) in Budapest, concerning the present political and cultural situation. The meeting was widely reported on in the world press.

In the dispatch below a special correspondent for the London Daily Worker, who was in Budapest, describes the press reaction to the meeting.

After the meeting the Communist Party newspaper Szabad Nep printed an unsigned article headed "Sunlight of the Intellect," which said in part: "The will for democracy and the wish that we should develop the democratic functions of our state and party life, emerge with great strength."

Discussing the noisy interruptions at the meeting, it said that people had resisted exaggerated and unruly interventions, but added: "We have no reason to wonder at some of the exaggeration. Thoughts and passions throttled away, burst forth. Not only thought and passion, but in more than one case bitterness.

"But the more freely discussion flows, the more permanent will become the possibility for free discussion without exaggeration."

NOT DUMB EXTRAS

The Petofi Circle discussions, it said, "contributed to the formation of a sincere public opinion to be listened to, which we have unfortunately goes without for years.

"People don't want to be the dumb extras of history, but people

who take a role, thinking with their own heads."

But afterwards Szabad Nep got a public rap from the Central Committee of the Communist Party, for not having countered "enemy, demagogic views" expressed at the meeting and for having "exaggerated certain healthy lines of the discussion."

The Central Committee resolution welcomed constructive discussions now arising everywhere, but warned that "this healthy development is endangered in places by demagogic behavior directed against the party and the People's Democracy."

It declared the Petofi Circle had become a focal point of attacks by reactionaries and charged party people there with having failed to answer such attacks because of fear of giving the appearance of throttling criticism.

FAULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

It accused some speakers, naming in particular the writer Tibor Dery, with having overstressed faults committed by the party while keeping silent about solid achievements, in such a way as to have a destructive effect.

Organized groups had prevented a proper hearing to speakers putting the party viewpoint at the Petofi meeting "in a scandalous way."

It accused the press of having failed to counter anti-party views; indeed of having encouraged them by applauding the meeting and by printing articles with "provocative content."

It stressed, however, that it was determined to develop further democratization in state and social life, to ensure by creative discussion the stamping out of every form of the cult of personality, dogmatism and sectarianism.

It is evident that the Central Committee was influenced to some extent by the Poznan events, for it wound up by stressing that this was a warning that enemy forces were still capable of causing disturbances.

When the news of the Poznan disturbances came through I asked people who were in a position to know whether there had been any unrest in Hungarian factories.

All gave an emphatic "No." Nor did they consider such action likely, as they said conditions were different and the Hungarian standard of living was higher than that in Poland.

(In fact, things were so normal in Budapest that two days after the Poznan affair King Karmal ruled the streets and I found tens of thousands of people dancing in Sztalin Square to the music of three jazz bands.)

UNSAVORY PEOPLE

Szabad Nep next day followed up the Central Committee resolution with a leading article, three columns long, admitting that the Petofi Circle meetings had attracted elements whose sole aim had been to damage the party and government, and that the press had not adequately countered their harmful attacks.

But it said the party did not re-

ject all that was said at the discussions, in which a great many party and non-party people who supported the new Hungary had taken part.

Some Communists with whom I talked thought the Central Committee had come down too heavily, too quickly, on the Petofi Circle meetings, and said so openly—a thing in itself which would not have been possible a year or two back.

But right or wrong, one thing is clear—democratic life is on the move in Hungary. Concrete results have already appeared, and more are to come. In the coming weeks separate meetings of journalists, of writers, of scientists, of musicians and many others are taking place to hammer out the new democratic forms.

PRESS RELAXATION

In the press field alone, where newspapermen have long been isked by bureaucratic refusal of information, good results are to be seen already.

The general secretary of the journalists' union, Ferenc Vadasz, told me that they had already secured from the police agreement to give out on demand information of social consequence, such as crime and other facts—something unknown in Hungary for years.

He said the government had undertaken to give fortnightly press conferences, and in addition every week one or other minister will come along to the Press Club to answer journalists' questions about

modeled on types made to navy specifications.

The deck officer on a ship equipped with radar no longer depends solely on the trained eyes and ears of himself and his look-outs when fog envelops his vessel.

A radar screen on the bridge shows an electronic beam constantly probing all about. Targets show up on the screen as little blips which can be charted and plotted. Maneuvering boards enable the deck officer to figure the course and speed of the other ships and to note when they change course.

Curses—Get Life

CLEARWATER, Fla., July 26. —Anthony Gillenwater cursed Circuit Judge John U. Bird yesterday when he heard his 30-year sentence for second degree murder pronounced.

Bird, who had given the Negro 10 years more than the minimum sentence on the charge, promptly increased the sentence to the maximum—life imprisonment.

the work of their ministries.

"Yes," he said, "we are getting results. Naturally there are people who take destructive advantage of all the discussion now going on in Hungary, but on the whole the atmosphere is healthy. We have to be careful, as I think you say in England too, not to throw out the baby with the bath water!"

As I left Hungary the talk was still going on and much may yet emerge from it. Fuller democracy is a heady brew for people long accustomed to unfettered discussion. Some get a little intoxicated by it, some abuse it, but most people use it as a medicine.