

FROM THE EVALUATION AND RESEARCH SECTION

BACKGROUND REPORT

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THE REBELLIOUS JOURNALISTS: FRYER, PEET AND LEVI

During November 1956 three Communist journalists working in three different countries chose to defy their masters. For two of them - an Englishman reporting in BUDAPEST and a Yugoslav assigned to the UN - the gesture has meant nothing worse, perhaps, than a change of employment. The third (John PEET,) an Englishman who defected to the service of the East German regime six years ago, is playing the altogether riskier game of openly criticising the totalitarian state with no assurance of escaping reprisals, and this at a time when threats against "hostile elements" are becoming louder and more frequent. PEET may be naive about Marxism; he can hardly be ignorant of the personal danger he is running. The epilogue - or epitaph - is still to come.

The three men are

Peter FRYER, special correspondent of the London "Daily Worker" in BUDAPEST;

Jakov LEVI, New York and UN correspondent of the Belgrade "Borba";

John PEET, former Reuter correspondent and latterly editor of Pankow's English-language propaganda organ "German Democratic Report."

The motives for resignation in the first two cases, and for protest in the third, were various. Only FRYER was concerned exclusively with Communist policy toward Hungary, but the Hungarian issue has played a certain role in all three stories.

Peter FRYER.

FRYER's story has a free-world simplicity about it, with no tangle of conflicting loyalties or personal anxieties. When his assignment to BUDAPEST was announced in the "Daily Worker", its editor, Mr. CAMPBELL, wrote that since the paper was interested only in the facts, it was sending "an experienced and skilled reporter," than whom "no one is better qualified" for the job.

To BUDAPEST Mr. FRYER came. He saw, and he conquered- his own preconceptions. "The Soviet troops who entered BUDAPEST on November 4," he wrote later, "did not fight fascists; they fought workers, soldiers and students; and they could find no Hungarians to fight alongside them." ("Manchester Guardian" of Nov. 16.)

FRYER was apparently surprised that the "Daily Worker", for which he had been "proud to work for almost nine years," would not print all his despatches; one of them was even bidden from the editorial

staff. So he resigned (in a letter reproduced as Appendix A) and gave interviews to several non-Communist papers, including the "Daily Express." These naturally evoked a blistering attack from his former chief. FRYER answered with a long and revealing letter to the "New Statesman" of November 24 (given in Appendix B.)

Despite his observations on "a paper which can spit on a nation's anguish and grief" - i.e. the "Daily Worker" on Hungary - FRYER's optimism has not altogether left him. Together with several other "Worker" colleagues, he has left the paper but not the Party - which he hopes to "reform from within."

Jakov LEVI.

LEVI's break, by contrast, came only after a prolonged period of hesitation and debate. A "Borba" employee for ten years, and a Communist ticket-holder for 12, he resigned from both paper and Party on Nov. 25. "He and his wife," said Arnold BEICHMAN, in the "Christian Science Monitor" of Dec. 8 (C-12 to 15 of Dec. 15) "had discussed their dissatisfaction with Communism many times before, but had never reached the point of doing anything about it." For LEVI it appears that the last straw was the arrest of DJILAS (Nov. 19.) The two had "worked closely together" before DJILAS' downfall in 1954.

Loyalty to TITO must have become a habit, if not a conviction, with LEVI during 1948-1950, when according to BEICHMAN he wrote "four to six anti-Cominform articles a day" in the special page of "Borba" devoted to that theme. "It was a popular page," says LEVI, "because at last the Yugoslav people could give some expression to their feelings... We attacked STALIN, but we had to go slowly because STALIN had received a bigger build-up in Yugoslavia than even TITO."

His next assignment - to cover the PANMUNJOM negotiations in South Korea at the end of 1951 - no doubt confirmed LEVI in his anti-Stalinism. "The Chinese correspondent refused to talk to him. The North Korean correspondent did - once - and was never seen again..." But "his major difficulties were with the two English-speaking reporters Alan WINNINGTON and Wilfred BURCHETT, who used to attack him and Yugoslavia as an 'imperialist stooge' and 'traitor to proletarian internationalism' in front of all the correspondents in PANMUNJOM."

Loyalty to TITO in the KHRUSHCHEV age, however, requires different qualities from those which bound men in self-defense against the ageing STALIN. Especially for people who have "worked closely" with DJILAS. "The promised liberalization and democratization of my country," LEVI told Harry SCHWARTZ of the "New York Times" (B-27 to 29 of Nov. 29,) "have reached a dead-end." He conceded that there was "some freedom" in Yugoslavia, but the press was far less free there than, for example, in Poland. Bureaucracy

was rampant, and "even those who publicly oppose the rule of bureaucracy are involved in that rule." But the main signposts were DJILAS and Hungary. After DJILAS' arrest, he said, "we now know the limits. Socialism must mean internal democracy and freedom, and not only independence in foreign affairs."

Not could LEVI stomach TITO's (modified) approval of Soviet intervention in Hungary. "If people disapprove of socialism they should be permitted to change from it...The present Yugoslav leaders believed that socialism can be preserved only by denying full democracy. They feared that if NAGY had succeeded in making Hungary really neutral, it would have become non-socialist and would have caused the Russians to tighten their grip on Eastern Europe."

The last sentence might have been the prelude to a defense of TITO. But no; LEVI continues: "I believe the Hungarian people should have been allowed to decide their own fate without the intervention of Soviet or any other troops."

LEVI has applied for asylum in the US.

John PEET.

The last case-history, being set entirely within a Communist country, is the most obscure but the most dramatic. PEET first attracted attention in 1950 by resigning from his post as Reuter's correspondent in East BERLIN on the grounds that the Western press told lies. Subsequently he became a show-piece of East German propaganda, and editor-in-chief of a propaganda journal for English-speaking readers, "German Democratic Report."

But complete happiness was still denied him. As a professional journalist with a Western background he could not, even after six years' practise, reconcile himself to the meagre trickle of foreign news which filtered through from Pankow's censorship departments. The failure of the SED press to inform readers of GOMULKA's Oct. 22 speech to the Polish CC plenum, or of subsequent Polish press articles (though it happily reproduced Pravda's replies,) seems to have been the last straw. PEET now took a grotesquely daring step.

About the same time as Jakov LEVI was performing his anguished reappraisals in New York, another Yugoslav, the "Politika" correspondent Leon DAVICHO, was walking round East BERLIN with his ears very wide open. Among other acid comments that he sent back to his paper was the statement that PEET had sent a telegram to the Polish journalist Edda WERFEL, who had complained of the misreporting of Polish affairs by "Neues Deutschland" and received an insulting reply from that paper's editor-in-chief, Hermann AXEN (Nov. 27.) PEET's cable expressed agreement with Edda WERFEL and disapproval of AXEN and "Neues Deutschland."

This, it might be thought, would be enough for the time being. But shortly afterwards PEET chose the most unseasonal of all possible occasions to return to the attack. This was a public discussion on Nov. 13 in the East BERLIN State Opera house of the question whether the Hungarian events stood a chance of being repeated in East Germany. The debate - held for the benefit of "cultural workers" - opened with a pre-arranged answer by propagandist Gerhard EISLER. His thesis was simple: "No - because we are neither fools nor suicide candidates."

Among his sparse audience, however (cf. "Sueddeutsche Zeitung," Dec. 15,) was one man who might seem to fall into the second category at least. EISLER had quoted as a suspicious circumstance the presence of so many Western journalists near the Austrian frontier at the start of the Hungarian rising. "It is the duty of a journalist," PEET blandly replied, "to be at the focus of world interest." And it was silly to blame the events on Western propaganda. "If the press and radio of the socialist states were up to the standard required of them, no one would need to listen to Western stations any more." PEET, evidently, had needed to, and thought it very natural.

The sparse audience dared to applaud.

It remained for another official spokesman, Harald HAUSER, to point out that Eastern journalists had a harder task than their Western colleagues, since "they were restricted to telling the truth." PEET had had his answer. We shall see whether it was the final one.

APPENDIX "A".

Text of Peter FRYER's resignation to the London "Daily Worker," as released in the "Manchester Guardian" of Nov. 16.

"As the special correspondent of the "Daily Worker" in BUDAPEST I filed three dispatches to my paper. Two of them, for the most part straightforward accounts of what I had myself seen in Hungary, were used. The other, an interview with a British Communist who has lived in Hungary for three years, was severely cut. The editor would not even allow the staff of the paper to read the story I sent on arrival in VIENNA from BUDAPEST last Sunday night.

"For almost nine years I was proud to work for the "Daily Worker". But no journalist can continue to work for a newspaper which sends him for a major foreign assignment and refuses to use what he writes. I am therefore compelled to resign from the "Daily Worker" and to seek other means of putting the truth about events in Hungary before British Communists and Socialists.

"This was my fourth visit to Hungary since 1949. I spent over a fortnight there, and I am convinced that Soviet intervention was both criminal and unnecessary. The danger of counter-revolution did exist. Austrian Communists told me that before November 4 some two thousand emigrés, trained and armed by the Americans, had crossed into Western Hungary to fight and agitate. But power was in the hands of the armed people, and they were fully aware of the danger of counter-revolution and were themselves fully capable of smashing it. The great mass of the Hungarian people have no desire to return to capitalism and want to retain all the positive social achievements of the past twelve years. Nor did the Soviet troops which entered BUDAPEST on November 4 fight Fascists; they fought workers, soldiers, students, and they could find no Hungarians to fight alongside them.

"These are the conclusions I reached after hundreds of interviews. I hope soon to publish the detailed facts on which they are based.

"No honest Communist can now ignore the truth about Hungary. The Hungarian people were the victims of tyranny and oppression masquerading as socialism. A corrupted Communist Party, swollen by an influx of careerists; a highly paid secret police (officers received ten times the national average wage, men three times) which goaled, tortured and murdered dissenters; a State machine warped by bureaucracy: these were the means by which the worst features of Soviet society were imposed on Hungary. Yet the whole police dictatorship was so rotten and so universally detested that it collapsed like a house of cards the instant the people rose to their feet. Most of the revolutionaries-Communists and non-Communists-hoped to win an independent, democratic, and genuinely Socialist Hungary. But their hopes were crushed by Soviet intervention.

(£ 2,800)

"In VIENNA on Tuesday I was offered £ 1,000 on behalf of an American newspaper chain if I would write for them on Hungary as a renegade. I answered that I had no intention of resigning from the Communist party. I will fight inside the party for a return to Socialist principles, for political honesty, and for real international solidarity. These imply as speedy and outspoken condemnation of crimes committed by those who call themselves Communists as of crimes committed by imperialism. They imply the courage to form independent judgments instead of caricaturing solidarity and Marxism alike by accepting without question the Soviet version of events.

"Only in this way can we hope to cleanse from the British Communist party the stain of having defended in Eastern Europe oppression no less brutal than, say, British rule in Kenya: and of defending Soviet aggression in Hungary while deploring British aggression in Egypt.

"Sooner or later the Hungarian revolution, tragic though its immediate outcome has been, must lead to a renaissance and redemption throughout the world Communist movement, which for so long has been tainted with the vilest features of the capitalist system which it seeks to end. The first step is that the truth about Hungary should be made known."

APPENDIX "B".

Slightly abridged text of a letter from Peter FRYER to the "New Statesman" of Nov. 24, justifying the writer's action in leaving the "Daily Worker" and replying to criticisms by his former chief, J.R. CAMPBELL, of the "Daily Worker."

Sir,-The questions at issue between myself and the "Daily Worker" are of two kinds. First there is the smokescreen of smears and irrelevancies thrown up by the present leaders of the Communist party. This is designed to obscure the fundamental questions: the character of the Hungarian revolution; to what degree "white terror" existed; and how far Soviet intervention was needed or justified to deal with the danger of counter-revolution.

The editor of the "Daily Worker", J.R. CAMPBELL, trots out one misrepresentation after another. Since I was in BUDAPEST, he says, I could not know what was taking place in the "Daily Worker" office. He calls my account of how my dispatches were handled a travesty. Since he himself was in MOSCOW at the time I imagine that I know as much as he does about what took place in BUDAPEST as well as at the "Daily Worker" office.

The sneer about my taking refuge in the British Legation was not unexpected, it was only one of a series of smears which were circulating among party functionaries even before I left BUDAPEST. "He was inexperienced"; "he was not sent to report his opinions but the official Party line"; "he sent a dispatch praising Cardinal MINDSZENTY"; "he had been going wrong for several months"; all these choice fantasies were in the minds and mouths of the Stalinist defenders of Soviet aggression against the evil day when I should return. The answer is that I wanted to do an honest job and was not allowed to.

None of this, of course, affects the fundamental incorrectness and dishonesty of the "Daily Worker's" position in Hungary. Was there a danger of counter-revolution or not? There was, and it is a lie to claim that I "pooh-poohed" it. But the Stalinists put their faith in T-54 tanks and a four-day bombardment of BUDAPEST; they support the export of Socialism in high-explosive form; I preferred and I still prefer to put my faith in the Hungarian people. And even if counter-revolution had succeeded, the second Soviet intervention would still have been unjustified. Was there "white terror?" The "Daily Worker"

can quote DELMER till it is blue in the face, but it cannot alter the facts.

From start to finish the "Daily Worker" - or rather the Stalinists who control it - has lied, lied, lied about Hungary. It printed a gruesome photograph of a lynched man under the headline: "The White Terror in Hungary," implying that he was an ordinary Communist party member, whereas there was in the office another photograph of the same corpse, taken from a different angle, which showed that he was wearing AVH uniform.

The "Daily Worker" cynically declares that for the Soviet Union to have "refused" to intervene would have been "inhuman" and that by denying this I am "quite oblivious to reality." After what I saw of the bravery, the sufferings and the sacrifices of the heroic people in the face of terrible odds, this insult to their gallantry and to their 20,000 dead sickens me. Shame on a newspaper which can spit on a nation's anguish and grief. Shame on party leaders who can justify with smooth clichés and lies the massacre and martyrdom of a proud and indomitable people. These leaders are wholly discredited; they have abandoned Socialist principles; they are destroying the Communist party as a political force. They must be removed quickly, if the Communist party is to hold its head up once more before the British people.

End.