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THE ORDEAL OF THE EUROPEAN INTELLECTUALS

BY KLAUS MANN

"It's wonderful, you know, to march with the future, to be on the side of progress!"

The Czech professor seemed cheerful and self-assured. A Marxist philosopher and publicist of great reputation, he played an important role in the cultural life of his Communist-controlled country. Habitues of international academic conferences and literary debates knew him as a forceful, effective speaker versed in all the finesses of dialectical argumentation and Party-Line oratory. Clearly, he enjoyed hearing his own voice and, in default of a larger audience, was only too pleased to lecture a foreign visitor on such subjects as the greatness of "Popular Democracy" and the foulness of the capitalistic system.

"Capitalism in its present monopolistic form," he said, "is not only adverse to the material interests of the working masses, but it also corrupts and paralyzes all intellectual activities. Look at your poets and thinkers, your literary and artistic leaders in the western world! How muddle-headed and downhearted they are! How sterile and embittered! Under capitalism, the mentality of modern man seems to be dominated by a profound and painful sense of fear, of uncertainty, of helplessness. The virulent crises to which Free Enterprise will inevitably lead in certain predictable intervals, are of course not limited to the economic sphere but must also affect the ideologic superstructure. The more sensitive and responsible an individual mind, the more acute and anguishing his awareness of the general predicament! That's why the intellectuals, representing the very conscience of their respective nations, are particularly susceptible to the great malady of our epoch -- that ominous disturbance and disease which Sigmund Freud has called das Unbehagen in der Kultur: the

subconscious ^{sense} feeling of tension and danger inherent in your capitalistic pseudo-civilization. Only Socialism promises and guarantees a cultural renaissance..."

Marxist professors always remind me of those angels who, according to so reliable an observer as William Blake, "have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning."

"The true civilization of Socialism and Popular Democracy," he said, raising his voice and a didactic forefinger, "no longer knows the unwhole=some cycle of boom and depression, -- this mad turmoil of economic anarchy which, on the spiritual level, is accompanied by ^{an} hectic oscillating between extreme euphoria and an equally excessive pessimism, between aggressive arrogance of the Nazi-Fascist brand and that mystic escapism now fashionable among western writers. Any nation following the glorious example of the Soviet Union will succeed, not only in stabilizing and expanding its economy, but also in giving a new faith and purpose to its intellectuals, new inspiration to its creative minds..."

Thus he went on for quite some time, with unabating gusto and eloquence. There would be universal disorder and the constant threat of general disaster, he maintained, unless and until the means of production were socialized on a world-wide scale. It was therefore the sacred duty of all mature, responsible men and women in the western world -- especially of all intellectuals! -- to fight the obsolete system of Free Enterprise and advocate Communism. He quoted Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Glibly and skillfully, he manipulated the whole stock of scientific terms and lofty ideals dear to the Marxist heart, mixing dry statistics and fustian clichés, abuses and prophecies, logic and emotion. He spoke of collective farms, of the heroic Red Army, of racial prejudices in the United States, of Wall Street, warmongers, decadence, and imperialism.

Some of arguments sounded convincing, while others struck me as a little arbitrary. He quoted Maxim Gorki, the Bible, Togliatti, Shakespeare, and Anna Pauker. Even though opposed to free enterprise, he came out with an ardent defense of Freedom -- the "real" freedom which he described as one of the most characteristic attributes and most precious gifts of Soviet-sponsored democracy. Had not Friedrich Engels pointed out, in his famous pamphlet, Anti-Duehring, that only within the framework of a communistically organized society Man would finally cease to be just another animal and become human at last? -- "The establishment of Socialism," the professor said, "marks the end of chaos and terror, the beginning of Order and Liberty."

As the words "freedom" and "liberty" recurred in his speech with irritating persistence, I ventured to ask him point-blank whether intellectuals and artists in Czechoslovakia, or in any other "Iron Curtain" country, were actually free to think and work as they pleased. -- "Why, of course," he asserted -- suddenly somewhat nervous. "Naturally they are free, in a sense." Whereupon I was tactless and cruel enough to mention the names of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, and Miakovsky. Hadn't those world-famous composers been officially humiliated and reprimanded for their "modernist", "western" style, their "decadent formalism", their inadequate understanding of "Soviet humanity and heroism"? According to a recent report issued by the Composers' Union in Moscow, the four repentant sinners were now trying "to take to the road of realism" -- which they had better find without any further delay, lest they end their careers in the Siberian salt mines.

"It would seem," I said, "that those musicians had either to give up their artistic tastes and principles, or else risk financial ruin, public disgrace and severe punishment. Now, do you think such brutal regimentation compatible with the ideal of intellectual freedom? Tell me frankly, professor! Tell me off the record! I'm not asking you this question as a

journalist but as a fellow liberal and fellow intellectual."

He didn't like that at all. Not that he was really nonplussed or at a loss for words! An experienced debater always knows how to wriggle out of a ticklish problem. But there was a hurt, rather pathetic expression in his eyes as he plunged into a lengthy discourse about "certain healthy limitations of individual freedom," "constructive criticism" and "revolutionary discipline."

"Under Socialism," he said, fidgeting on his chair, "it is the ^{task} ~~task~~ and function of the artist to inspire the masses -- not just an esoteric clique of snobs and connoisseurs. If the Russian people don't care for atonalism and cacophony -- why, then the Russian composers have to produce more understandable, more appealing stuff! That's simple enough, isn't it?"

And, after a short silence, in a confidentially lowered voice: "Of course, the case of Shostakovich and his friends might have been handled in a more tactful, more diplomatic manner. From our western point of view, it was maybe a bit surprising, indeed, slightly embarrassing to see those talented musicians publicly castigated. But then, our western viewpoint is probably out-of-date -- an anachronism, tainted with bourgeois prejudices and pretensions. The Russians are tougher than we are; not so sentimental, not so touchy and delicate. Which is to say that they are more advanced, more modern and realistic. For these are difficult days, my friend -- especially for intellectuals!

1a Ernst Fischer:

"Der Mensch des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts wurde von Krise zu Krise, von Katastrophe zu Katastrophe geschleudert. Sein tiefstes Lebensgefühl jenseits der Grenzen der Sowjetunion ist Beunruhigung, Unsicherheit, Angst um die eigene Existenz. Freud konstatiert ein wachsendes 'Unbehagen in der Kultur'. Das Modebuch zwischen zwei Weltkriegen hiess 'Untergang des Abendlandes'. Die neue Modephilosophie, der sogenannte Existentialismus, baut einen Schutzwall verzweifelter Konstruktionen und verwegener Absurditäten um die angst-verzehrte Persönlichkeit..."..... "Das Gefühl des Grauens vor einem unpersönlich und anonym gewordenen Dasein, vor der Nivellierung, Standardisierung und Verantwortungslosigkeit des gesellschaftlichen Lebens..... Das Dasein in der kapitalistischen Zivilisation scheint überhaupt nichts mehr als Angst zu sein..."

Aber: "Das Grundgefühl des Renaissance-Menschen war keineswegs Angst, sondern ein ungeheurer Lebensmut, ein grosses, schöpferisches Selbstbewusstsein -- und auch wie Kommunisten, ich leugne es nicht, sind von diesem Grundgefühl durchdrungen."

"In der warenproduzierenden Welt ergibt sich das Gefühl einer grenzenlosen Ohnmacht.... Wir Friedrich Engels in seinem 'Anti-Dühring' feststellte:

'Jede auf Warenproduktion beruhende Gesellschaft hat das Eigentümliche, dass in ihr die Produzenten die Herrschaft über ihre eigenen gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen verloren haben... Es herrscht Anarchie der gesellschaftlichen Produktion... Das Produkt beherrscht den Produzenten.'"

"Es ist das Wesen des Menschen, das nach Freiheit ruft, es ist die Idee des Menschen, frei zu sein."

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Minikomplex

Döblin:

"Man ist tiefer in die Innerlichkeit hineingetrieben, aber die Innerlichkeit hat nun ein deutlicheres Gesicht angenommen.... Eine neue Epoche der Metaphysik und Religion bricht an. Die Welt, vorher positivistisch und wissenschaftlich überklar, taucht wieder in das Geheimnis ein.

Auch die Kunst verändert ihr Gesicht. Sie wird dringender, innerlicher und herzlicher.

Wo das Göttliche sich nähert, mit seinem Ernst, seinen Schauern, seiner Wahrheit und seiner Herrlichkeit, klingen die Lieder der Kunst anders.

Die Harfen werden neu gestimmt."

Die Kinder, die mystische Lieb
Christen...