

# Correspondence

## THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

SIR,—As one who was not only a witness of, but who also played an active part in, the Hungarian revolution, I would like to reply to some of the statements made by your correspondent, J. Mendelson. As most of the information to which your correspondent refers is inaccurate, his subsequent assessment of the Hungarian revolution is necessarily distorted. Therefore I should like to state the following facts:

The revolution did begin, indeed, with the participation of the whole working class and youth of Hungary with the object of re-establishing freedom for both the individual and the nation; and these objectives have been maintained throughout with the participation of the whole people. Your correspondent refers to book burning. This in fact took place at the very beginning of the revolution, the moral attitude of which at this early stage is not even doubted by your correspondent. The truth is that the book burning was confined to two book shops, one of which was the "Horizon" bookshop, selling Russian language publications, and the other "Szikra," selling Communist Party publications. The symbolic meaning of this demonstration was identical with the pulling down of the Stalin monument: they expressed the determination of the fight against spiritual oppression inside the country, and against military oppression from outside. These two motives continued to be apparent throughout, culminating in the logical demand for national self-determination. To attempt to assess these as symptoms of extreme nationalism seems to me rather strange. It is even more strange if your correspondent wants to reinforce this allegation by citing the demand that Hungarian uranium should be sold to the West and not to the East. The simple truth is that what we asked for was that our uranium should be sold for money.

Contrary to the statement of your correspondent, I would like to stress that nowhere in Hungary did I see the reappearance of uniforms of the pre-1945 Horthy army. What is even more important, however, is the fact that the spirit of the pre-1945 epoch never reappeared.

It is true that the Nagy government had no authority for some days and that Nagy himself was a prisoner in the Parliament building. This, however, was during the first days of the revolution, when he was a captive of the Russians. As soon as the Russians left Budapest, and thus the defence of Parliament could be undertaken by the freedom fighters, the situation changed. A new coalition government was formed under Nagy which, especially in view of the participation of Anna Kéthly and Béla Kovács, enjoyed the confidence of the whole nation. This coalition government expressed the identity of purpose shared by both the people and the political leaders. The freedom fighters were therefore as loyal to the government as the government was loyal to the revolution. Consequently, contrary to your correspondent's statement, the possibility of establishing a military counter-government never arose. On the other hand, the army was indeed represented in the national councils, together with the delegates of the workers, peasants and revolutionary youth.

The declared policy of the government—aiming at free elections and declaration of neutrality—was one to which they proceeded under the so-called "extremist" pressure of the masses. I leave it to the discretion of your readers whether such demands should be considered as of an "extreme right-wing" and "extremist nationalist" character.

I do not want to go into the assessment of Radio Free Europe. It is, however, an entirely false interpretation to maintain that this radio service exercised an influence of any consequence on Hungarian public opinion. Moreover it is not true that they sent a "team of broadcasters" to Hungary. They did, in fact, send their reporters, as it was their job to do so. On the other hand, it is a fact that the streets of Budapest were plastered with posters demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops and stressing at the same time that Hungary did not wish to have any other foreign troops in her territory either.

Your correspondent is right in saying that the revolution became more and more anti-Russian, culminating in the declaration of withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. But Mr. Mendelson should know that this was preceded by the blood-bath of the Russian army, which was carried out right at the beginning against defenceless Hungarian workers and students, under the pretext of the Warsaw Pact.

It was due to the spontaneous character of the revolution that the printing plants produced such a large number of posters. The fact that some of these were worded in a crude and impulsive way only reflects the means of expression peculiar to any working class at its moment of gaining power. I was unable, of course, to see all the posters that appeared, but if it is true that the freedom fighters called on the Russian soldiers in the Russian language not to fight against their Hungarian fellow-workers, since our fight was at the same time conducted on behalf of the peoples of the Soviet Union, then I believe that those who wrote these appeals were no counter-revolutionaries but the first people to assess the Hungarian revolution in its historical context.

L. H.

Hungarian Revolutionary Council of University Students.

SIR,—I was in Hungary from October 28 until November 11 and should like to correct and support Jack Mendelson's letter. Some of his facts are wrong. Nagy was not "virtually a prisoner in the Parliament building" on the day before the Soviet army moved into Budapest again: nor was he besieged "by a huge crowd demanding his head." I can say this with confidence because I spent a good deal of that day—in the Parliament building and out of it—with one of Nagy's closest friends and advisers. The team of broadcasters sent by Radio Free Europe, an odious organisation, to the western town of Győr played no part in events: the Russians sensibly impounded them. "A crowd under the leadership of extreme nationalists" did not storm the Foreign Ministry: on Friday, November 2, a small group of such people taking orders from a man called Jozsef Dudás tried to occupy that building, but were evicted; and Dudás was later arrested by order of the government.

As to Friday's lynchings in Republic Square, it is worth recalling that the mob was eventually driven off by tanks under the Hungarian flag: a *Paris-Match* photographer, bravely getting pictures, was among those fatally wounded by their fire. On the following morning I happened myself to be talking to General István Kovács (deputy of the newly appointed General Maléter) at the Ministry of Defence, when he was informed by telephone that another crowd was intent on lynching suspected AVH men (political policemen): I heard him give sharp orders for an army unit to intervene and arrest the suspected men.

Two ministers, not four, visited Mindszenty on Thursday, November 1: they were Tildy and Maléter. I talked to both of them, before and after, in the Cardinal's antechamber, where, with one other British journalist (Tony Cavendish of the B.U.P.), I was waiting for an interview with the Cardinal. We had that interview directly after Tildy came out; and were told by the Cardinal—who was much too tired, worried, and bemused for diplomatic fencing—that he was trying to find out what the situation really was, and would declare himself two days later. And his broadcast on the following Saturday night was not, in the event, a weakening of the government's position: he called for national unity and a return to work—precisely what the Nagy government most needed at that time.

Of course there was a danger of things slipping hopelessly to the right. Many disgusting incidents of mob violence, many nasty signs of growing right-wing pressure, much evidence of mischief-making intervention by western cold-war agencies began to occur and appear after five or six days' fighting against the Soviet army. And one's estimate of what would have happened without a second Soviet intervention will obviously depend on what one personally saw and experienced during the days before November 4. My own opinion remains that the Nagy government was gaining in control and

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strength; and that successful negotiation with the Soviet army for withdrawal would have restored Nagy to great national prestige. Others think otherwise. The Chinese, for instance, believe that white terror had won control of Budapest for 48 hours before the second Soviet attack: they, after all, had eight of their Legation staff assaulted (one so badly as to need amputation of a leg), and many of their students insulted.

However that may be, no sensible opinion about Hungary can be based on "the second intervention." The key questions are: What was the true nature of the Rákosi regime? Why did the Russians intervene in the first place? And what do they mean to do now?

Now I am sure—what I did not know before, but ought to have suspected or found out—that the Rákosi regime was a bloodstained tyranny beside which Horthy's pre-war regime pales to a tolerant and liberal democracy. I ought to have suspected or found out because radical friends of mine, in Hungary, have now told me how they suffered under that terror; and I am one of those who owe them such amends as one can make for not having bestirred myself in their behalf. What is clear and certain now is that the Stalin-Beria system was exported and imposed on Hungary, after the end of 1948, "down to the last chip." Thereafter Hungary was a Soviet colony, "Socialist and peace-loving" on its propaganda façade, murderous and bankrupt in reality. The British *Daily Worker*, I notice, is still loyal to the propaganda façade: with a dishonesty as silly as it is cynical, it is still talking about the "mistakes" of the Rákosi regime. But murder is not a mistake. Fake trials are not errors. Criminal perversions of everything that Socialism is thought to mean are not malpractices. This, of course, is the language of the morally bankrupt.

Why did the Soviet leaders commit the brutal folly of sending in their tanks to fight for the Rákosi regime? The answer must be complex. But part of it, surely, is that they both welcome and resist the "de-Stalinising" process: they want it to go on, but only if they can control it. Yet the nature of

the process is that ordinary people should control it. So they slew about in contradictory courses.

What do they mean to do now? That depends very largely on the western powers. There was probably never a time when the British Labour Party had a better opportunity of asserting itself for the good of Europe. It is terribly urgent that responsible voices in Britain be raised in favour of dismantling the cold war alliances and displacing them by all-European security agreements within the United Nations. Instead of standing by in gormless wonder while Poles and Hungarians and others—yes, and Russians, too—strike out on new paths for new freedoms, why can we not play our part, why can we not show that we will honour and assist these attempts, and not try to pervert or exploit them for sordid, reactionary, or so-called "strategic" ends?

BASIL DAVIDSON

London, S.W.13.

## REVISION OF MARXISM

SIR,—The signatories of the letter repudiating the "grave crimes and abuses in the U.S.S.R." affirm that Marxism is not out of date. It would be interesting to know what Marxist interpretation there could be of the events in the U.S.S.R. and the uncritical support which many Marxists gave to the distorted versions of them.

I suggest that we should have to go outside orthodox Marxism to account for these things; to move into the regions of the irrational, the emotional, perhaps the psychopathological, to say why a man like Stalin could gain such power and why intelligent and otherwise critical people in this and other countries with no less facts to go on than other people had, should have allowed themselves to be so completely deceived.

Marxist thinkers have had a psychological blind spot which has, I think, been partly responsible for the extent of their deception. They have refused to accept any development of Marxist theory which has sought to incorporate the work of contemporary psychology in understanding how human beings think and act. They have thought almost exclusively in terms of social categories which has led to a lack of humanity in dealing with people who did not fit neatly into their categories. Perhaps if Marxists begin now to see how vastly more complex human beings are than they have allowed for, some good may emerge from the present disintegration.

4 Station Avenue,  
Edgbaston.

R. OSBORN

## CYPRUS EMERGENCY

SIR,—On November 26, 1956, a year has been completed since the declaration of the state of emergency in Cyprus.

Your journal, in its issue of December 3, 1955, commenting on the Emergency Measures, said:—

Cypriots can be lawfully arrested without warrant, tried by court martial and executed by firing squad. . . . Sir John Harding, in fact, is now in a position to do anything except restore order or solve the problem of Cyprus.

The experience of one year's emergency measures has proved that you were right about what you said then. Eight Cypriots have been executed since then, hundreds, against whom no charge has been brought, are detained in prisons and concentration camps, but the gap between the people of Cyprus and the British government remains as wide as ever.

The government can partly repair the damage done by postponing executions and relaxing the emergency measures.

K. L. TSIOPRAS

## PRIESTLEY AND LEAVIS

SIR,—What travesty Mr. Priestley was travestying when he honoured me with his attention in your pages I didn't know; it hardly, at the time, seemed to me to matter much. When, however, in your issue of December 1, a month after Mr. Priestley's original performance, you print the letter from Mr. James Reeves I feel compelled to make some comment. Mr. Reeves doesn't convey his intention very precisely or directly (he was no doubt anxious to avoid dogmatism), but in printing his letter you

*The New Statesman and Nation*, December 8, 1956 implicitly offer it as a seriously relevant contribution and, I must suppose, aimed at me. "Some critics," says Mr. Reeves, "are more concerned for their professional standards than for the literature they profess to serve": they practise or preach a "dogmatic exclusiveness"—this appears to be the charge—that discourages people who haven't read anything as good as "even Mr. Priestley" from making contacts with literature they would otherwise have made. I needn't discuss how, exactly, the alleged process of discouragement could work or what conception Mr. Reeves himself can have of the function of criticism (I cannot myself see what is gained by getting one's pupils to read best-sellers). What I have to note is the pretty obvious relation of his "dogmatic exclusiveness" to the figure presented as me by Mr. Priestley.

Let me then say that, in the talk to which Mr. Priestley referred, so far from being engaged in general demolition, I was guided by the explicit aim of insisting on the different kinds of discrimination one has to make in coming to terms with the literature of one's own time. It was essentially of my theme that I should instance (it strikes me as odd that I should have to say this, in view of the printed evidence of my habit as a critic) a number of creative achievements that seem to me to stand as, in their different ways, classical, or memorable, thought not among the greatest, or even major. It is very true that I was concerned to insist on the importance of standards; I gave my grounds for holding that, in the past quarter of a century, much talent had failed to develop because of the absence of standards—because, that is, of the virtual abeyance of the critical function (and, let me say, no serious attempt has ever been made to answer the case that I have presented with a great deal of particularity, again and again). In my account of what a due performance of the function of criticism would have been like—for there you have my theme—the conception of criticism I invoked was the very reverse of a dogmatic one. Mr. R. W. H. Holland who, in another letter, alleges that for some undergraduates I tend to be an "oracle," will perhaps bear witness that the "oracle," where he is listened to, is known for his insistence that criticism, of its essential nature, is collaborative—collaborative and creative, and that a due performance of the function requires a plurality of centres. (Undergraduates making, in discussion, the point that a judgment has the form "This is so, is it not?" and that the critic expects a response of the form "Yes, but—," have been greeted with ironical smiles by colleagues of mine: the "influence" is recognised.)

I do indeed think it urgently necessary for a living contemporary literature that the function of criticism should be restored, and therefore I am depressed (if not, unhappily, surprised) when the *NEW STATESMAN AND NATION* judges such an article as Mr. Priestley's a good thing for a journal that addresses an educated public to print.

Downing College,  
Cambridge.

F. R. LEAVIS

SIR,—I should like to suggest a New Year resolution for the English literary intelligentsia. Namely, to learn how to dispute *directly* about a subject. The chief reason for the closed-in, stale atmosphere that hangs about their controversies is this habit they have of arguing at several removes. Authors are attacked not because of what they have written but because of what people have written about what they have written. Their personal characters are dissected by people who have never met them, and assigned to causes which have never operated. Mr. Priestley attacks Dr. Leavis on the strength of what some fatuous gossip-writer said he had said. Now Mr. Maxwell, who was not moved to intervene in the original dispute, attacks me for not being nasty enough to Mr. Priestley.

One result of this habit of mind is that every literary controversy moves at once into a state of confusion in which nobody can seriously discuss anything. When a similar tangle happens on the football field, the referee blows his whistle and the players all go back to their original positions. But our literary controversialists cannot do this, however hard the whistle is blown, because they did not have clearly

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