

"FRONT" ORGANIZATIONS IN FEVER

The various international "front" organizations controlled by Communists have been badly shaken by Russia's onslaught on Hungary. Their Soviet masters have tried to get the "fronts" to concentrate exclusively on Egypt, but have failed. The whole elaborate structure patiently built up in Stalin's time now seems endangered. If it gives way, a huge gap will be torn in Moscow's propaganda network.

The principle on which the "fronts" were constructed was that (a) ultimate control must always remain safely in Communist hands, but (b) gullible non-Communists must be drawn in in sufficient numbers to mask the organizations' real nature. These principles apply to the World Federations of Democratic Youth, Trade Unions, Scientific Workers' and Teachers' Unions (WFDY, WFTU, WFSW and FISE), to corresponding bodies for students (IUS), lawyers (IADL), journalists (IOJ), broadcasters (OIR), and women (WIDF), and to the World Peace Council. Some were built up from scratch, others by winning control of international bodies which were not originally Communist instruments, but the end-product was the same. Each organization could be relied on to give Moscow's current line the blessing of an apparently world-wide, multi-party body. Each also served to enable Communists to avoid ostracism and to work toward national "popular fronts" in countries where conditions were favorable.

Even before Hungary, the "fronts" were in some trouble. Khrushchev's February revelations about Soviet terror had much the same effect on them as on national Communist parties. There were discords at meetings of the World Peace Council in April and of the lawyers' association in May. The Communist press was so embarrassed that it played these meetings down instead of up. At the end of August, the IUS (students) congress in Prague became almost uncontrollable; ironically, one reason was the Communist-led executive's attempt to conciliate West European feeling, which angered nationalist Asian and African delegates.

These storms might easily have been weathered, given time. But the Hungarian rising gave no time. When it broke out, all those "fronts" that could turn a blind eye did so, retreating into an unaccustomed silence while they waited to be given a new "line". The WFTU, however,

dared not remain completely silent in face of an outbreak in which trade unionists played a leading part. On October 28th, four days after Soviet tanks first fired on demonstrating Hungarian workers, the WFTU secretary-general, Louis Saillant, sent from Prague a message deploring "the fascist putsch of which you are the victims" and assuring the Hungarian workers that "you can always count on our understanding and steadfast support." He also sent the Security Council a message assuring it that the Hungarian workers "will themselves be able to frustrate the plans of reaction," and implicitly supporting the Nagy government. These statements looked silly only a few days later, when the Red Army had ousted Nagy. The WFTU bureau then ~~for~~gathered in Prague and tried to concentrate on Egypt.

Two of the other "fronts," however, could not dodge the issue so easily. They were:

1. The World Federation of Democratic Youth, which had the bad luck to be based in Budapest, and
2. The World Peace Council, whose controllers realized that to do nothing at all about Hungary would be suicidal for a body nominally concerned with peace.

FURIOUS POLES

A. -- The WFDY, additionally, embarrassed by the fact that November 10th was its "World Youth Day," did its best to lie low and say nothing, but did not succeed. An open split in its own executive was revealed. A draft resolution urging member organizations to bring aid to Hungary, and supporting "Hungarian youth in its struggle," was pressed by British and Polish members. Every other member of the executive opposed it. The Poles were furious. A Warsaw broadcast commented:

"What did the WFDY, whose headquarters are in Budapest, do in those tragic days? The federation played no part whatever. It turned its back on youth. . . . This shows how remote from life and corroded by past mistakes are the federation and its leadership."

On December 6th, several weeks later, the WFDY secretariat--not the executive--at last managed to get out a wooly statement. It admitted that "among youth and its organizations there are different appraisals" of

the Hungarian "tragedy," and piously hoped that Russia and Hungary would be able to agree about the withdrawal of the Red Army, "with due regard to the interests of Hungary's independence and world peace."

B. -- The WPC won a breathing-space by convening a session of its bureau in Stockholm and then switching to a later date and a meeting in Helsinki because Sweden refused visas to some delegates (which the WPC had probably known would happen). When the bureau did meet, on November 18th, its chairman, Professor Joliot-Curie, was absent (he was said to be ill). It decided to meet in camera. On November 23rd it produced a statement admitting that "opposing views have made it impossible to formulate an agreed verdict" on the "painful events in Hungary." It managed to agree that these events were caused by the cold war, the "policy of military blocks," and the "mistakes of previous governments." Like the WFDY, it expressed hopes for a Red Army withdrawal by agreement (in contrast to its simultaneous demand that British and French forces in Egypt "must be withdrawn at once and unconditionally").

CHINESE VERSUS ITALIANS

An acute internal crisis underlay these carefully measured words. Behind closed doors, the WPC bureau--which is a small, hand-picked group--had been locked in what one delegate called "stormy debates lasting 24 hours." The split took this shape:

1. The Nenni Socialists from Italy refused to accept even the final watered-down statement. Signor Lombardi, their leading delegate, spoke frankly about the rift at Helsinki when he returned to Italy.
2. Even the Italian Communists joined their Nenni Socialist colleagues in demanding, unsuccessfully, that the Red Army's intervention must be condemned.
3. The Chinese, and some of the French delegates, took the most rigid line of all in support of the Red Army. They insisted that its two onslaughts were purely "the internal affair of Hungary." They even outdid
4. The Russians, who at least used more conciliatory language, while refusing to yield on the main issues.

5. The Poles took the line that the obvious division of opposition made it useless to engage in "theoretical controversies." Their leader, Mr. Iwaszkiewicz, said on returning to Warsaw that the Polish delegation tried to get agreement on something "which would help the Hungarians as much as possible." They secured the inclusion of a phrase about the WPC's desire for "the full exercise of Hungarian sovereignty," and rebuked the Chinese and others for calling Nagy's supporters "fascists."
6. A lone Hungarian delegate, Pastor Janos, took the same line as the Poles.

Hungary has brought to a head a growing malaise in the "world peace" movement that Stalin founded. At the previous WPC bureau session, held in Paris this summer, some delegates had already proposed that the various national "peace committees" should be "made independent of the WPC" (in theory, of course, they have always been wholly independent; the new move confirms the falsity of the theory). Now the pressure for independence is even stronger, in Poland as well as in Italy and other western countries. Iwaszkiewicz, broadcasting from Warsaw after his return from Helsinki, spoke of the national committees "seeking their own roads, with a view to rapprochement with potential allies of the peace movement."

The dilemma now for Moscow (and Peking) is that the national branches of the "peace" movement and the other "fronts" must either (a) be allowed to deviate to the extent of actually criticising Communist policies, or (b) lose all their value because they are universally regarded as mere ventriloquist's dolls. Almost certainly the "fronts" will be told to bend rather than break. But they may yet have to bend so far that they will break after all.