

Peter Coleman

ARTHUR KOESTLER AND THE CONGRESS FOR CULTURAL FREEDOM*

In June 1950, as the Cold War in Europe and Asia deepened, a hundred European and American intellectuals and writers met in Berlin to consider ways of resisting the Kremlin's sustained assault on liberal democratic values. They created something they called the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

The underlying idea was to take the fight to the communists - through a world-wide network of magazines, national committees, cultural programs. It became the West's principal attempt to win over the world's intellectuals to the liberal democratic cause.

The men and women at the congress knew what they were talking about. Many of them were ex-communists of the god-that-failed generation. Many had endured Hitler's or Stalin's prison camps. Others were refugees. Some were Resistance fighters. Most were social democrats. None was conservative.

On the final day of the congress, in the afternoon of Thursday June 28, an exhausted but exhilarated Arthur Koestler spoke for all of them when he called to a crowd of 15,000 in a public park in the British sector of Berlin: *Freunde, die Freiheit hat die Offensive ergriffen!*

There were many leading intellectuals at the congress but Koestler was the animating spirit. He spoke at the opening ceremony on Monday June 25 in the Titania Palace, after the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra had played the darkly heroic *Egmont* overture and Mayor Ernst Reuter had called on the audience of four thousand to stand in silence for those who had died in the struggle for freedom or were still in concentration camps.

Addressing his "friends, fellow-sufferers, fellow-fighters", Koestler outlined his method of action: "Since the earliest days, the teachers of mankind have recommended two diametrically opposed methods of action. The first demands that we should refuse to see the world divided into black and white, heroes and villains, friends and foes; that we should distinguish nuances, and strive for synthesis or at least compromise; it tells us that in nearly all seemingly inescapable dilemmas there exists a third alternative which patient search may discover. In short, we should refuse the choice between Scylla and Charybdis and rather navigate like Odysseus of the nimble wits. We may call this the "neither-nor" attitude.

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The second, opposite advice was summed up two thousand years ago in one single phrase: "Let your communication be, Yea, yea, Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these, comes from evil." This we may call the "either-or" attitude.

Obviously humanity could not have survived without taking both methods into account. By neglecting the first advice, men would long ago have torn each other to pieces. By neglecting the second, man would have forsaken his dignity and moral backbone, and lost his capacity to distinguish between good and evil.

It is equally obvious that each of the two tenets has a different field of application. To enumerate these would be a tedious and pedantic undertaking, and frequently there is conflict between both methods within the same field. Our concern here is with action in the political field. And there it seems that the first method is valid for long-term planning with a certain elbow-rooming space-and time, and that the second is valid in immediate and vital emergencies when, in Beethoven's words, "Fate knocks at the gate of existence".

In such an emergency, the threatened individual or group or civilisation can only survive if it acts with the unhesitating assurance of an organic reflex. The nerves of all living organisms function according to the so-called all-or-nothing law; they either react to a stimulus for all they are worth or do not react at all. And it is not by chance that the calculating machines called electronic brains are constructed according to the same "either-or" principle. They perform immensely complex functions, but each time a decision is required of them, they act according to the Gospel of Matthew.

In vital emergencies like the present, when man stands at a crossroads which only leaves the choice of this way or that, the difference between the very clever and the simple in mind narrows almost to vanishing point or even turns to the latter's advantage. It is amazing to observe how in a crisis the most sophisticated often act like imbeciles. Imbued with the mental habits of the "neither-nor" attitude, of looking for synthesis or compromise - a profoundly human attitude of essential value in its proper field - they are incapable of admitting, even to themselves, that there are situations in which an unambiguous decision is vital for spiritual and physical survival. Faced with destiny's challenge, they act like clever imbeciles and preach neutrality towards the bubonic plague. Mostly they are victims of a professional disease: the intellectual's estrangement from reality. And having lost touch with reality they have acquired that devilish art: they can prove everything that they believe, and believe everything that they can prove. Their logic reminds one of the German student's old nonsense song:

The elephant has his tail in front and his / trunk is at his rear; But when he turns / around his trunk is in front and his tail is I at his rear.

Don't misunderstand me: I know that many of those who are not here with us today cherish freedom too, and are rather frightened of the fate which might befall

them if everybody imitated their attitude of contemplative detachment. It is only that they haven't yet learnt that there is a time to speak in relative clauses and a time to speak in terms of Yea and Nay. For destiny's challenge to man is always couched in simple and direct language, without relative clauses - and requires an answer in equally simple terms."*

Koestler's paper was greeted with applause, but opposition to his pugnacity and style were developing. As his good friend the American philosopher Sidney Hook remarked, Koestler could not recite the multiplication tables without infuriating somebody.

Tensions sharpened quickly on the second day, at the session on "Science and totalitarianism". The first paper, by the English philosopher A.J.Ayer, strayed far from the fears and hopes of Koestler and his supporters. (Ayer wrote later, no doubt whimsically, that he had only gone to Berlin for the free trip.) His "contemplative" - or, as he put it, "namby-pamby" - paper on J. S. Mill's conception of liberty aroused little interest in this assembly; the session chairman, the Greek politician Panayotis Kanellopoulos, was unsympathetic; and Ayer heard someone say: *In unserer Zeit hilft nicht John Stuart Mill* (in our time John Stuart Mill is no help). Ayer and his Oxford colleague, Hugh Trevor-Roper, were already in the anti-Koestler camp.

In this charged atmosphere, Hugh Trevor-Roper decided not to deliver his paper on "Truth, Liberalism, and Authority" (in which he described "totalitarian" trends in the Christian churches) Instead he took up Ayer's ideal of tolerance and his critique of Koestler's "dogmatism." Koestler replied that he was not asking the Congress to say *yes* to any program, but only for an alliance with ordinary people, millions of whom have fled to the West and have said *no* to totalitarianism: "If intellectuals cannot say *no* to concentration camps and totalitarianism, then I no longer understand the language."

The same uneasy mixture of academic discussion and drama, of reflection and calls to action, characterized most of the debates. At the hot afternoon session, on "Freedom and the Artist," chaired by Silone, it was the famous German novelist and refugee from the U.S.S.R., Theodor Plievier, who, by arriving with his bodyguard, stole the show - he and the American screen actor Robert Montgomery, who said "There is no neutral corner in Freedom's room." There was little response to Herbert Read's gloomy paper on the death of Western capitalist culture ("We are staggering," he said "into a new stage of darkness, utility and ugliness").

A tanulmányban szereplo Koestler idezetek magyarul olvashato helye: Arthur Koestler: A cselekvés ket útja, In: uo: *Egy mítosz anatómiája* (Makovecz Benjamin ford.), Budapest, Osiris, 1999. 209-213. o. [szerk.]

A beszéd nemetül hangzott el a Congress for Cultural Freedom nyitó ülésén, 1950. június 25-én.

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An excited Nicolas Nabokov was the next to be applauded when he shouted: Out of this Congress we must build an organization for war. We must have a standing committee. We must see to it that it calls on all figures, all fighting organizations and all methods of fighting, with a view to action. If we do not, we will sooner or later all be hanged. The hour has long struck 12.

The session ended with Melvin Lasky reading a draft message to intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain, pledging "our moral and material support to all those who assert their right to freedom against oppression."

The next day was dominated by the international news that the United Nations had committed troops to the defence of South Korea. Fate, in Beethoven's words quoted by Koestler, had knocked on the gate of existence and been answered. In this context Koestler delivered his main paper to the congress. It anticipated later debates on "the end of ideology" and was a passionate Leftist critique of the Left:

"The thesis which I wish to put before you is that the antinomies 'Socialism and Capitalism', 'Left and Right', are rapidly becoming meaningless, and that so long as Europe remains bogged down in these false alternatives which obstruct clear thinking, it cannot hope to find a constructive solution for its problems.

The term "Political Left" originated, as you know, with the distribution of factions in the French National Assembly after the Revolution in 1789. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it spread over the Continent and was applied to that section of a country's legislature which sat to the left of the President's chair and was traditionally associated with liberal and democratic opinions. Gradually, the word came to mean the radical or purist or extremist wing of any ideological school or movement, whether liberal and democratic or not. Later on it was used in an even more vague and metaphorical way, and the more it was drained of meaning, the stronger became its emotional appeal. At the beginning of the last war there existed about half a dozen political parties in France, all of them conservative to reactionary in their programme, all of them seated in the right wing of the Chamber, and all of them carrying the word "Left" in their names.

I mention this development as a semantic curiosity and because of its relevance to the present situation. For to this day European Liberals and Social-Democrats refer to themselves as "the moderate Left" which, if words are to be taken seriously, must mean that they differ only in degree but not in kind from their neighbours of "the extreme Left". And "the extreme Left" is still regarded as synonymous with the Communist Party, in spite of the fact that virtually every tenet in the Communist credo is diametrically opposed to the principles originally associated, with the Left. In short, the term "Left" has become a verbal fetish whose cult sidetracks attention from the real issues. It is at the same time a dangerous anachronism, for it implies the existence of a continuous spectrum

between liberal progressives and the worshippers of tyranny and terror, and such is the magic power of words over the mind that European Socialists who think of themselves as "men of the Left" were unconsciously led from a fallacious verbal identification to a real feeling of solidarity with the Communists. They may feel critical or even hostile towards their "extreme" neighbours of the Communist Party; they retain nevertheless an ambivalent neighbourly feeling for them, a conviction of "having the same historical roots", of being, after all, "on the same side of the barricades".

A good many American liberals fell into the same emotional trap during the thirties and even later. The victim of the witch-hunt supplied the whip which scourged him and became an accomplice in his own perdition. However, the relative safety and prosperity of that continent made the confused American liberal gradually accessible to reality and enabled him to get out of the trap, while a major portion of the French and Italian Left, and a smaller portion of the British, exposed to the neurosis-forming climate of Europe, have remained in it.

In the past it was always "the Left" who protested loudest against tyranny, injustice, and infringements of human rights. The failure of European "Leftists" and American liberals to lead the fight against the worst regime of terror and despotism in human history created a strategic vacuum on the ideological battlefield. This vacuum was filled by the Christian Democrats in Italy, the Gaullists in France, by Senator McCarthy and his associates in the U.S.A. McCarthyism represents the wages of the American liberal's sins. If today everywhere in the world the parties who claim to represent the "moderate Left" are beaten or in retreat, it is because they were found wanting in the most crucial issue of our time.

Europe has developed a political climate in which words are no longer taken seriously. The ideological chaos created a semantic inflation and a semantic black market where words are traded at a meaning-value entirely different from their official quotation: where war is prepared by peace petitions, police states are labelled popular democracies, and "Leftism" means benevolent neutrality towards despotism.

At first sight the alternative "Capitalism or Socialism" appears much more concrete and meaningful than "Right or Left". But on closer inspection it will be found that the term "Socialism" has suffered a semantic decay similar to that of the "Left". German National Socialism, Russian Soviet Socialism, French Socialism which is Marxist with a pinch of salt, British Socialism which is Christian, non-Marxist, Fabianist, and heaven knows what, all derive their emotional dynamism from the fetish-power of the same word, attached to quite different meanings.

However, let us leave semantics aside, though it is an essential branch of political hygiene. If we are not Tao pedantic, we may hope to agree at least on some

rough-and-ready definition of what Socialism really means and on some common denominator For the aspirations of the various existing Socialist parties.

Let us turn first to the field of *international* politics. One of the basic elements of Socialist thought, from Spartacus' slave revolt to Thomas More's Utopia, from the primitive Christian communities to Marx, is the brotherhood of man. In the past, Socialists have always fought against parochialism, chauvinism, aggressive nationalism and have preached internationalism, cosmopolitanism, the abolition of ideological and political barriers among nations. But do they still?

In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics the word "cosmopolitan" has become a term of abuse, and chauvinism has reached a hitherto unprecedented peak. At the same time at the recent Paris Congress of the French Communist Party a banner was stretched across the hall which read: "The true internationalist is he who is prepared unreservedly, unhesitatingly, and unconditionally to defend the U.S.S.R." So much for the Russian version of Socialist internationalism.

In the Western world the only great power with a Socialist Government is Great Britain. The Labour Party won the elections a few weeks after the end of the war in the still strongest country of Europe, and just at the decisive moment when it no longer needed a Socialist training to understand that Europe must unite or perish. Never before in history was Socialism offered such a chance. Yet from the moment it came to power, the Labour Government has deliberately obstructed every effort towards European unity. The non-Socialist Governments of France, Germany and Italy have proved themselves more internationally minded than the Socialist Government in England.

Of course Britain has a particularly difficult position between the Continent and the Commonwealth; and there are always plausible arguments for avoiding decisions which would require a certain amount of historical imagination. But the essential point is that the victory of British Socialism has not abolished British insularity; it has, on the contrary, strengthened and deepened it. It was Churchill the Conservative, not Attlee the Socialist, who started the United Europe movement which led to the Council of Strasbourg and when the movement got under way the Labour Party's attitude to it remained consistently hostile. The reason for this was explained in a statement by the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party issued in June, 1950. "No Socialist government in Europe", the decisive phrase in the statement runs, "could submit to the authority of a [supranational] body whose policies were decided by an anti-Socialist majority."

What this amounts to is simply a mild British version of the Russian "Socialism in One Country" policy. The Russian veto in the United Nations finds its equivalent in the British veto against the political and economic unity of Europe.

It need not be emphasised that there is a world of difference between the British and the Soviet regimes. My comparison refers merely to one specific

aspect: the collapse of the cosmopolitan élan in the Socialist movement. This process started almost a generation ago, in 1914, and has now reached a stage where we can see the paradoxical phenomenon of capitalist America being prepared to make sacrifices in national sovereignty which Socialist Russia refuses, and of British, French, and German Conservatives pursuing a more internationally-minded policy than their Socialist opposite numbers. In other words, *Socialism has lost its claim to represent the international trend of humanity*. As far as the integration of our world is concerned, the Socialist-Capitalist alternative has become void of meaning, is it meaningful when applied to *domestic* policy?

As regards political and intellectual freedom, there is no relevant difference between Socialist Britain and the capitalist United States. And in the domain of unfreedom there is little to choose between Socialist Russia and Fascist Spain. Again the real division cuts across the abstract frontiers between Socialism and Capitalism. Only one field remains where the alternative is apparently still relevant: the economic field.

Theoretically there is an unbridgeable gulf between nationalism of the means of production on the one hand, and private ownership, profits, and exploitation on the other. But in fact recent developments have abolished the static trench-warfare between the classes and have transformed it into a fluid war of movement. As the question is too complex to be treated here in any systematic manner, I must confine myself to a few remarks in shorthand, as it were.

First, even Marx and Engels knew that nationalisation itself is not a panacea. It is useful to recall Frederick Engels' remark that if nationalisation were identical with Socialism, then the first Socialist institution must have been the regimental tailor. In fact, the Soviet workers do not own their nationalised factories any more than a sailor of the Royal Navy owns the battleship in which he serves. The people's control over the battleships, railways, factories, coal mines, which they theoretically own, depends entirely on the political structure of the state. In Russia, where the Trades Unions have ceased to be an instrument of the working class and have become an instrument for the coercion of the working class, the theoretical owners of the factories and of the land have less influence over management, and work under worse conditions, than their comrades in any Western country. On the other hand, trust managers, factory directors, and "proletarian millionaires" (an official Russian term) form a privileged class, just as much as and more so, than in Capitalist countries. To be sure, their income is called salary and not profit, but again this distinction is merely abstract. Nor is, on the other hand, the factory owner in Capitalist countries any longer able to draw unlimited profits from his enterprise or do with his workers what he likes. I refer you to James Burnham's analysis in *The Managerial Revolution* of the relevant changes in the meaning of the term "ownership" in recent times.

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Generally speaking, nationalisation without an appropriate change in political structure leads not to State Socialism but to State Capitalism. The difference between the two cannot be defined in economic terms; it is a matter of democratic controls, of political freedom, and cultural climate. A nationalised economy in itself may serve as a basis for a totalitarian autocracy of the Russian type or even for a Fascist regime.

Equally problematic is the question just how much nationalisation makes a country socialist or capitalist? British Socialism nationalised the railways, but France and Germany had state-owned railways long before. The total nationalisation of all means of production and distribution has been recognised as unworkable even in Russia. The alternative is no longer nationalisation or private economy in the abstract; the real problem is to find the proper balance of state ownership, control, planning, and free enterprise. And the search for this delicate balance is again not an abstract but an empirical pursuit. Apparently each nation has to work out its own formula, for there are many imponderabilia which enter into the equation.

As an example of the complex reality masked by the "Capitalism versus Socialism" slogan, one may quote food-rationing. Food-rationing - which means state control of distribution - worked very satisfactorily in puritan England under Conservative and Socialist governments alike. But it broke down completely in Italy and France, both countries with a highly individualistic and resourceful Latin population. Obviously, far-reaching inferences must be drawn from this fact concerning the balance of state control and free enterprise appropriate to each of these countries. In short, even in the purely economic sphere we are not dealing with a clear-cut alternative between Capitalism and Socialism, but with a kind of continuous rainbow spectrum whose shape and colour are largely determined by psychological and other factors not contained in Socialist theory.

What I have said should not be misinterpreted as an apology for Capitalism or as an attack on Socialism. My point is that this alternative is rapidly becoming as antiquated and meaningless as the dispute between Jansenists and Jesuits or the Wars of the Roses. Nor did I mean to say that it always was meaningless. I said it is becoming meaningless, because it operates with rigid nineteenth-century conceptions, and does not take into account new realities which have emerged since and new conflicts which cut across conventional boundaries.

It is not a novelty in history that a real dilemma which once seemed all-important is gradually drained of its meaning and becomes a pseudo-dilemma as new historical realities emerge. People lost interest in waging wars of religion when national consciousness began to dawn on them. The conflict between Republicans and Monarchists went out of fashion when economic problems became all-important. The examples could be multiplied. Every period seems to

have its specific conflict which polarises the world and serves as an ideological compass in the chaos - until history passes over it with a shrug and afterwards people wonder what they were so excited about.

It is a further fact that some of these great ideological conflicts are never decided; they end in a stalemate. In successive centuries it looked as if the whole world would either become Islamic or Christian, either Catholic or Protestant, either Republican or Monarchist, either Capitalist or Socialist. But instead of a decision there came deadlock and a process which might call *the withering away of the dilemma*. The withering, or draining of meaning, always seems to be the result of some mutation in human consciousness accompanied by a shift of emphasis to an entirely different set of values - from religious consciousness to national consciousness to economic consciousness and so on.

This "and so on" poses a problem which we are unable to answer with certainty. We cannot foretell the nature of the next mutation in the consciousness of the masses, nor the values which will emerge on the next higher level. But we may assume on the strength of past analogies that the battle-cries of economic man will appear to his successor just as sterile and pointless as the Wars of the Roses appear to us.

Two short remarks in conclusion. First, it is necessary to qualify the statement that the apparently decisive conflicts of a given period tend to end in a stalemate and wither away. This did indeed happen in the past, but only in cases where the forces in the conflict were fairly balanced. Europe remained Christian because the Arabs never got to Paris and the Turks were beaten back at the ramparts of Vienna. There are other less-edifying examples of history solving its dilemmas. The conclusion is obvious.

In the second place, though we cannot foresee the values and spiritual climate of post-economic man, certain conjectures are permissible. While the majority of Europeans are still hypnotised by the anachronistic battle-cries of Left and Right, Capitalism and Socialism, history has moved on to a new alternative, a new conflict which cuts across the old lines of division. The real content of this conflict can be summed up in one phrase: total tyranny against relative freedom. Sometimes I have a feeling in my bones that the terrible pressure which this conflict exerts on all humanity might perhaps represent a challenge, a biological stimulus as it were, which will release the new mutation of human consciousness; and that its content might be a new spiritual awareness, born of anguish and suffering, of the full meaning of freedom. And I don't mean by that, freedom from want, freedom from fear and the rest. Since the dawn of civilisation people have fought under the slogan of freedom; but it was always freedom from some particularly irksome oppression, freedom in a restricted, negative sense. I mean freedom in a much deeper and fuller sense than any we can conceive today, or see

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realised anywhere in organic nature. If that is the case, then we are indeed living in an interesting time, and the answer which we shall give to destiny's challenge is not without import for the future of our species.¹

The Left did not easily accept Koestler's censure. The Norwegian Haakon Lie insisted that it was the British Left - the Labour Party - that had succeeded in destroying British communism. Altiro Spinelli declared that ex-Communists of the Koestler variety had retained a "Communist intolerance" that would "reduce us all to rubble."

This in turn provoked another ex-Communist, Franz Borkenau, in an overwrought speech, to call out that he was proud to be a convert from Communism. Then he asked: Is not everyone thrilled that President Truman has ordered arms for South Korea? When the Berliners loudly applauded him, David Rousset complained that "this is no way to debate a question," and Trevor-Roper, in a subsequent damaging report on the Congress declared that "this fanatical speech [Borkenau's] was less frightening than the hysterical German applause which greeted it." (To which Lasky, thinking of Berlin's anti-Nazi, anti-Stalinist social democrats, that at least one reader of Trevor-Roper's *The Last Days of Hitler*, has been forced to doubt whether Trevor-Roper really knew what the last days of Hitler were like, "or the first days, or any day."))

But there was more major debate - over the wording of the Freedom Manifesto which Koestler drafted and was determined that the congress adopt. It had fourteen numbered paragraphs rejecting neutralism, calling for peace through the establishing of democratic institutions, and expressing solidarity with the victims of totalitarian states. Trevor-Roper and Ayer raised what Ayer himself later called "mischievous objections" in an attempt at "under mining" the Congress. In particular Trevor-Roper objected to one draft paragraph declaring that totalitarians "who deny spiritual freedom to others do not enjoy the right to citizenship in the free republic of the spirit." It was a clumsily expressed renunciation of neutralism, but Trevor-Roper claimed that it amounted to calling for a ban on the Communist Party. When Silone, Lie, and Frode Jacobson, as well as Ayer, supported Trevor-Roper, Koestler withdrew the paragraph to preserve unanimity. Koestler read the Manifesto to the fifteen thousand people who attended the closing ceremony on Thursday afternoon and shouted the echoing words; "Friends, Freedom has seized the offensive!" The Berlin Congress had been a triumph for Koestler - but at a price.¹

1. We hold it to be self-evident that intellectual freedom is one of the inalienable rights of man.

¹ The italicised words in paragraphs 10, 13, and 14 are the amendments added on the motion of Hugh Trevor-Roper and A. J. Ayer. This document was adopted.)

2. Such freedom is defined first and foremost by his right to hold and express his own opinions, and particularly opinions which differ from those of his rulers. Deprived of the right to say "no," man becomes a slave.

3. Freedom and peace are inseparable. In any country, under any regime, the overwhelming majority of ordinary people fear and oppose war. The danger of war becomes acute when governments, by suppressing democratic representative institutions, deny to the majority the means of imposing its will to peace.

Peace can be maintained only if each government submits to the control and inspection of its acts by the people whom it governs, and agrees to submit all questions immediately involving the risk of war to a representative international authority, by whose decisions it will abide.

4. We hold that the main reason for the present insecurity of the world is the policy of governments which, while paying lip-service to peace, refuse to accept this double control. Historical experience proves that wars can be prepared and waged under any slogan, including that of peace. Campaigns for peace which are not backed by acts that will guarantee its maintenance are like counterfeit currency circulated for dishonest purposes. Intellectual sanity and physical security can only return to the world if such practices are abandoned.

5. Freedom is based on the toleration of divergent opinions. The principle of toleration does not logically permit the practice of intolerance.

6. No political philosophy or economic theory can claim the sole right to represent freedom in the abstract.. We hold that the value of such theories is to be judged by the range of concrete freedom which they accord the individual in practice.

We likewise hold that no race, nation, class or religion can claim the sole right to represent the idea of freedom, nor the right to deny freedom to other groups or creeds in the name of any ultimate ideal or lofty aim whatsoever. We hold that the historical contribution of any society is to be judged by the extent and quality of the freedom which its members actually enjoy.

7. In times of emergency, restrictions on the freedom of the individual are imposed in the real or assumed interest of the community. We hold it to be essential that such restrictions be confined to a minimum of clearly specified actions; that they be understood to be temporary and limited expedients in the nature of a sacrifice; and that the measures restricting freedom be themselves subject to free criticism and democratic control. Only thus can we have a reasonable assurance that emergency measures restricting individual freedom will not degenerate into a permanent tyranny.

8. In totalitarian states restrictions on freedom are no longer intended and publicly understood as sacrifices imposed on the people, but are, on the contrary, represented as triumphs of progress and achievements of a superior civilisation.

We hold that both the theory and practice of these regimes run counter to the basic rights of the individual and the fundamental aspirations of mankind as a whole.

9. We hold the danger represented, by these regimes to be all the greater since their means of enforcement far surpasses that of all previous tyrannies in the history of mankind. The citizen of the totalitarian state is expected and forced not only to abstain from crime but to conform in all his thoughts and actions to a prescribed pattern. Citizens are persecuted and condemned on such unspecified and all-embracing charges as "enemies of the people" or "socially unreliable elements."

10. We hold that there can be no stable world so long as man-kind, with regard to freedom, remains divided into "haves" and "have-nots." The defence of existing freedoms, the reconquest of lost freedoms, *and the creation of new freedoms* are parts of the same struggle.

11. We hold that the theory and practice of the totalitarian state are the greatest challenge which man has been called on to meet in the course of civilised history.

12. We hold that indifference or neutrality in the face of such a challenge amounts to a betrayal of mankind and to the abdication of the free mind. Our answers to this challenge may decide the fate of man for generations.

13. *The defence of intellectual liberty today imposes a positive obligation: to offer new and constructive answers to the problems of our time.*

14. We address this manifesto to all men who are determined to regain those liberties which they have lost and to preserve *and extend* those which they enjoy.

If Berlin was a triumph for Arthur Koestler, it was also the climax of his swan song. He had been brilliant in Berlin, but for the next few months the Congress for Cultural Freedom remained a faltering and uncertain organization, its future in doubt. When the stumbling ended, about November and December 1950, and funds had been secured, staff appointed, and goals clarified, Koestler and his closest associates were no longer the dominant influences. "*Ne koestlerisonspas,*" the French Leftist Catholic *Esprit* had warned, and the Congress took careful note. To "Koestlerize" meant to attack contemptuously the fellow-travellers, whom Koestler indeed regarded as - literally - neurotics or, as he described them twice in one speech at Berlin, "imbeciles."

The alternative strategy adopted by the Congress for Cultural Freedom was to build a kind of "united front" with the democratic elements of the European Left and gradually win it over to the Atlanticist cause. It is impossible to separate this *coup* - at once ideological and pragmatic - from the decision of the U.S. Central

A Hungarian translation of this *Manifesto* appeared in a Hungarian language Koestler Festschrift edited by Bela Hidegkuti (*Koestler Emlekkönyv*, Bethlen Gabor Kiado, 1992) [Editor's note]

Intelligence Agency to assume responsibility for the continuing funding of the Congress. But before coming to that, and its consequences, it is necessary to note what happened within the Congress in the second half of 1950.

An informal steering committee met at Koestler's home at Fontaine-le-Port outside Paris in July: August 1950. It made important decisions.

It opened a temporary Paris office in the Hotel Baltimore. It planned a French national committee, *Les Amis de la Liberte*, to hold meetings in Paris and the provinces. It had Articles of Association drafted and the "Berlin Manifesto" translated into French. It agreed that a special committee to deal with Soviet affairs would have to be formed and a French magazine launched when an editor could be found. Koestler began writing a pamphlet.

There was still disagreement and uncertainty about the precise role of the Congress they were forming. Koestler now believed that, in the light of the Korean War, it should be less a cultural organization and more a political movement, a "Deminform" to counter the Cominform. He wanted to set up a labour *Front de la Liberte* among the trade unions - a proposal with which Silone agreed - to supplement *Les Amis de la Liberte*. Koestler also proposed "mass rallies" on the crises in Korea, Persia, and Yugoslavia.

Meanwhile the Leftist and neutralist press of France, Italy and Britain continued to attack the Berlin Congress... and Koestler. The most damaging attack was H.R. Trevor-Roper's in the *Manchester Guardian*. The Congress had not been a cultural or intellectual meeting, he wrote. It had been organized by American ex-Communists, "rootless" Europeans and "hysterical" German nationalists or even Nazis. G.A. Borgese made a similar attack in *Corriere della Sera*.

Koestler answered these critics in a series of interviews but lasting damage was done. At this stage strains on Koestler (which included threats to his life and Communist surveillance of his home) led what he called "a kind of nervous crack-up." He decided to resign from the Congress. But before doing so, he finished the Congress's first pamphlet, *Que veulent Les Amis de la Liberte?* It developed the ideas of the Berlin Manifesto, settled a score with Trevor-Roper and Ayer, and defined the mission of the Congress. It deserves to be quoted *in extenso*:

FIRST AND FOREMOST, we want our civilization to survive. Two conditions are essential for its survival: freedom and peace,

We have put freedom first because peace is a function of freedom. A nation enslaved can at any time be whipped by its leaders into war hysteria and aggression. By isolating countries behind an Iron Curtain or a Chinese Wall, totalitarian governments can preach pacifism to foreign peoples, and world conquest to their own.

Nations wax the more aggressive and bellicose, the more they are deprived of freedom. The threat to peace came successively from countries in various degrees

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of enslavement: militarist Prussia, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Japan, Soviet Russia. Each of these countries made, during the present century, successive bids for world conquest in the name of some ideology or secular religion. Each promised some form of Thousand-Year Reich or social paradise as a distant aim. Each time, the professed aim served as a cloak for wars of conquest. Each time, millions of well-meaning people were led to their destruction in the name of a phantom.

Communism in its present form has become a phantom ideology. It has as little to do with Socialism as the medieval Inquisition and the reign of the Borgias with the teachings of Christ. Our civilization can be saved if only the hypnotic power of this phantom is broken. This is not a task which any political party or group can achieve alone. It is an operation Mental Hygiene which can be accomplished only by a joint effort of the educated classes - of the men in public life, in the arts and letters, in the universities and elementary schools, in the laboratories and editorial offices, in the trade unions and professional organizations - who determine the intellectual climate of the nation.

The task which the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Friends of Liberty have set for themselves is to change the present confused and poisoned intellectual climate. If we fail, we shall become guilty of a new *trahison des clerics*, and the responsibility before history will be ours.

Since the Berlin Congress launched its Manifesto, its Secretariat has received a flood of letters asking us to clarify our attitude to a number of questions. The following are our answers to some of the questions which seem to us most typical.

QUESTION: How can we pretend to defend freedom while the Western world is rife with social injustice, political corruption, racial discrimination?

ANSWER: We do not pretend that our democracies are anywhere approaching an ideal state. We are defending our relative freedoms against the total unfreedom of dictatorial regimes.

This is not an abstract distinction. Its validity is demonstrated by the mass exodus of persecuted people from the satellite countries to the West. Europe has become a one-way street which points like an arrow from total slavery to relative freedom. The wretched masses who have left their homes, their goods and chattels, with no better immediate prospects than physical safety in a DP camp, have a bitter knowledge of the reality of our time - a knowledge which a considerable proportion of our intelligentsia lacks. Those writers who prove in clever articles that there is nothing to choose between the two "blocs" are herewith invited to spend a few days at the "school of reality" of these displaced persons camps.

QUESTION: I agree with your aims. But doesn't your militant, anti-totalitarian attitude contribute to making the cold war more acute, and drive us nearer to the hot war?

ANSWER: We are convinced that a militant anti-totalitarian attitude is our last and only chance of preventing war.

Every political and ideological Munich brings war one step nearer.

Every proof that the free world is strong and united makes the danger of war recede one step further.

Every bona fide Communist voter brought back into the democratic camp means the loss of one potential Fifth Columnist to the aggressor.

Every fellow-traveller cured of his morbid obsession means one potential collaborator less.

The above goes for the rank and file. Tolerance of mental aberrations cannot be extended to members of the professional intelligentsia. Farm-hands and factory workers labour under the handicap of a fragmentary education and often it is physically impossible for them to get at the facts. *The professional intelligentsia has no such excuses.* Refusal to acknowledge facts, conscious or unconscious distortion of facts, frivolity and foolishness on the part of those who influence public opinion, are crimes against the spirit even if rarely definable by law.

Before the last war, intellectuals who supported Hitler's policy of concentration camps, or refused to admit that German concentration camps existed, were ostracized by progressive intellectuals. The writers and scientists who today support Russian concentration camps and mass deportations, or refuse to admit the facts concerning them, are still regarded as "progressive," "idealistic," and so on. We are opposed to the persecution of the ignorant and the innocent. We are opposed to the toleration of the totalitarian creed in the professional intelligentsia. *We refuse to grant intellectual respectability to the active or passive accomplices of tyranny, terror and defamation.*

QUESTION: Is it possible for a socialist or a member of the moderate Left to cooperate with right-wing political parties against the extreme Left?

ANSWER: The question contains a semantic fallacy. The *parties directed by the Cominform do not represent the "Left" any more than the "People's Democracies" are governed by the people.* The worship of a Fuehrer, the branding of all opposition as a crime, the abolition of habeas corpus, of freedom of assembly and speech, the rule of police and censorship, are all characteristics not of the extreme Left but *of the extreme Right.*

The fact that misguided portions of the working class, for instance in France and Italy, support the Communist party, does not make it a left-wing party. Millions of Italian and German workers enlisted in the Fascist and Nazi parties in an equally mistaken belief, but that did not make Fascism a left-wing movement.

A nation is doomed to lose its freedom if its population becomes so frightened by the short-term struggle that all the aims of the long-term struggle are sacrificed.

France collapsed under Hitlerite aggression because it failed to make this clear distinction between long-term and short-term aims, because social and party divisions took priority over the tasks imposed by the immediate emergency.

Europe will share the fate of France in 1939 if it is unable to learn the lessons of the past.

QUESTION: What about Spain?

ANSWER: We consider Franco's totalitarian regime to be as abhorrent as any other tyranny - and have said so in a special Resolution on Spain adopted by the Berlin Congress. But it is unlikely that fifteen million Spaniards will start a war of aggression against the world, and only too likely that the Soviet regime and its satellites will continue the war of aggression they started in Korea. Therefore, our emphasis is on the immediate and principal danger from the East, and we refuse to fall into the trap of Cominform propagandists who want to divert our attention and energies from the real threat into a crusade against Francisco Franco.

QUESTION: Your Manifesto protests against totalitarian slavery but is silent on matters like racial discrimination against the Negroes in the United States. Why?

ANSWER: The answer is much the same as on the Spanish question. Communist propaganda deliberately plays up the Negro question to divert attention from the totalitarian threat and to spread confusion in the progressive camp.

The Cominform propagandists and their intellectual dupes pretend that Negroes are tarred and feathered on every street corner in America.² Accordingly, every small racial disturbance in America is played up in big headlines by the so-called progressive press; whereas the deportation of the population of entire Soviet republics - e.g., the Volga-Germans, the Crimean and Chechen Republics - even if officially admitted, are passed over in silence. During the ninety years since the abolition of slavery, the condition of Negroes in the United States has steadily, though admittedly much too slowly, improved. This improvement might be compared to a continuously ascending curve; whereas the curve of progress in Soviet Russia and its satellite countries shows a sudden break and steep fall into the abyss. To accelerate this improvement, and to obtain complete economic and social equality for Negroes, is part of the struggle for long-term aims which must continue. But it is madness to refuse to fight the danger of the total enslavement of Europe because in the Southern states of America Negroes still have to travel in separate railway compartments. Precisely this madness is echoed every day by highbrow French intellectuals and their cliques.

² Incidentally, during the last decade the number of Negroes lynched in the United States has never exceeded two a year. However horrifying even two such crimes are, they only represent a fraction of one per mil of the number of crimes against humanity committed annually by the totalitarian regimes.

If we translated their argument back into the language of the Popular Front of 1936, it would run something like this: "We have no right to fight Hitler's plan of sending six million Jews to the gas chambers as long as a single Jew is excluded from a fashionable hotel in America. Only when the last Jew and Negro has reached a state of absolute equality, and only when all factories in France have been socialized, and all colonial peoples liberated - only then shall have the right to make a Popular Front and to defend what remains of Europe against the Reichswehr and the Gestapo. And if Europe meanwhile goes to the dogs, and a few million Frenchmen are deported to forced labour and concentration camps, that is just too bad; what matters is that our revolutionary conscience should be kept clean."³

QUESTION: What is your attitude to the atom bomb and the Stockholm appeal?

ANSWER: We believe that the appeal of the Stockholm Peace Movement is a direct preparation for war.

The appeal has two points. The first asks for the prohibition of atomic weapons; the second that "the first government that uses atomic weapons should be branded as war criminal."

Hundreds of thousands of well-meaning people signed this appeal without seeing the obvious dupery. According to the text of the appeal, if a country (for example, Russia) invades another country (for example, the United States) which is inferior in infantry and tanks, and the latter uses the atom bomb against the aggressor to stop him from further aggression, this latter country would be branded as a war criminal.

According to the text of the appeal, atom bombs should be prohibited, but non-atomic bombs, tanks, submarines and ground troops should fall under no such restrictions. Now the atomic bomb is only one among other weapons; and whether he dies from Uranium 235 or from TNT, makes no difference to the victim. It does however make a great difference to the Stockholm "pacifists." Russia, whose armament budget and mobilization orders are not subject to the control of the people, has a great superiority in the number of its divisions and armaments over the West. The West is only superior in one branch of armament: atomic weapons. By prohibiting these, while imposing no restrictions on other weapons, the "Partisans of Peace" wish to reduce America to military impotence - as a prelude to reducing Europe to complete slavery.

The atom bomb is a horrible, weapon. So are flame throwers, incendiary bombs and mustard gas. The aim of Communist propaganda is to hypnotize the

³ It may be mentioned that out of the seven American members of the International Committee of the Congress, two are Negroes.

public into focussing all its passion and emotion on one type of weapon, making it forget that others exist. The Stockholm brand of "pacifism" has no objection to dog fighting cat, provided that biting is permitted, clawing forbidden.

Our answer to the Stockholm appeal is short and simple. Firstly, disarmament must extend to all weapons. Secondly, any government which commits an act of aggression by using atomic or any other weapons, is to be regarded as a war criminal.

QUESTION: Communism may be a phantom creed - it nevertheless has a strong emotional dynamism, the power of a secular religion. What creed or "mystique" can you offer which would counteract this force with equal power?

ANSWER: None. Don't let us have any illusions on this point. We must face our predicament with realism and honesty.

Fanatical mass movements are always at a temporary advantage against the defenders of civilization. The invading hordes, whether Tartar, Fascist, Nazi or Communist, have the advantage of a simple monolithic creed over a complex and divided culture. Neither Capitalist America, nor Socialist Britain, nor Christian-Democrat Italy has been capable of producing a faith with the same dynamism as the Communist phantom-creed. Ours is a defensive battle, as most battles which saved the continuity of civilization have been. The difficulty which results from this position is that the freedom which we are defending is taken for granted and not much appreciated by the masses - until they are deprived of it. Habeas corpus, civil rights, freedom of expression - nay, such elementary privileges as freedom to change one's job if one so desires, to read the newspapers which express opposite opinions, and to travel freely in one's own country - all these do not add up to a militant creed. To quote Matteotti, freedom is like the air you breathe; you only become conscious of it when the rope is round your neck.

We have no panacea to offer to the manifold problems which beset the civilization we are defending. We do not wish to embark on a crusade. We have learned the tragic lesson of our times; we are conscious of the fact that most crusades in history have ended in disaster and brought only misery and disillusionment in their wake.

Democracy, by its very nature, can create no conspiratorial instrument comparable to the Cominform, nor produce a counter-phantom to the Communist creed. The weapons in our fight can only be truth, sincerity, courage; an acute sense of reality, and our appreciation of the basic values of our complex civilization.

To the totalitarian threat and its fanatical creed we oppose an absolute and unconditional "NO." But our "YES" to the civilization which we are defending leaves full scope for nuances, divergent opinions, social theories and experiment.

We repeat: our aim is survival; and the conditions of survival are freedom and peace. Both are threatened from without and from within. Defence against foreign and internal aggression is impossible in a poisoned moral atmosphere.

To counteract this poison is the task of the professional and intellectual classes and their responsibility. Only a profound and rapid change of the intellectual climate can deter aggression, and make effective defence possible if aggression occurs. Without the return of moral and intellectual sanity, no economic or military aid can save us. To bring about this return to sanity is the aim of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

We count on your support.

The pamphlet enjoyed great success and was translated into several languages. Koestler himself remained pleased with it and republished in both *The Trail of the Dinosaur* (1955) and *Bricks to Babel* (1981). But the moment of his domination of the Congress had now passed, although his influence as a "founding father" would remain. Not the least of this influence was his persuading his friend Michael Polanyi to join the Congress, to master-mind some of its most important international conferences and to inject his philosophic ideas into the Congress melting-pot.