

CONFERENCE ON "CHRISTIAN AND MARXIST VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS: AN AMERICAN-HUNGARIAN-YUGOSLAV DIALOGUE."

by Leslie A. Muray

Dr. Leslie Muray (Episcopalian) is a native of Hungary. He received his doctorate from the Claremont School of Theology in California. He teaches in the Humanities Department at Lansing Community College, Lansing, Michigan. He is an Episcopal priest. A previous report on the same conference by Leonard Swidler and the text of the Joint Statement were published in the previous issue of OPREE (Vol. IX, No. 6).

A conference on "Christian and Marxist Views on Human Rights: An American-Hungarian-Yugoslav Dialogue" sponsored by New ERA was held September 29-October 5, 1989 at the Mayflower Stouffer Hotel, Washington, D.C.

The Eastern European participants from Hungary were: Tamás Földesi, Dean, Law School, Lorand Eötvös University, Budapest; János Kelemen, Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Budapest; Mária Ludassy, Research Fellow, Institute of Philosophy, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest; Károly Proehle, Emeritus Professor of Theology, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Budapest; András Sajo, Professor of Law, Institute for Political and Legal Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest; László Solyom, Professor of Law, Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest; Gyöngyi Szabo-Földesi, Vice Rector, University of Physical Education, Budapest; and Pál Bruno Tarnay, Professor of Fundamental Theology, Catholic Theological Faculty, "Pazmány Péter," Budapest.

The participants from Yugoslavia were Zagorka Golubovic, Professor, Institute of Social Sciences, University of Belgrade; Trivo Indjic, Head of Research and Planning Department, Center for Cultural Development Studies, Belgrade; Marko Orsolc, Professor of Philosophy and Sociology of Religion, Faculty of Theology, Sarajevo; Vladan Perisic, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Theological Faculty, Belgrade; Vesna Pesic, School for Social Workers, Belgrade; and Vesna Pusic, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb.

In addition, Krystyna Gorniak from Poland and currently working on a second doctorate at Temple University; and Fenggang Yang, Lecturer, the People's University of China, China, Visiting Scholar, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., were also participants. Eleven North Americans participated in the conference.

At the beginning of the conference, Tamas Földesi mentioned that the title of the conference was something of a misnomer: although profoundly conversant with the multiplicity of Marxist traditions, none of the Hungarian participants was a Marxist per se. Being independent thinkers, he also stated that in no way were they a national delegation. The Yugoslavians agreed with much of this assessment, with the exception of Zagorka Golubovic, a critical, humanistic Marxist in the tradition of the Praxis group which she so ably represented.

There was considerable discussion about the death of Marxism. Paul Mojzes of Rosemont College, U.S.A., raised an important distinction: before conducting a premature autopsy on Marxism, we need to recognize that while what we are witnessing is the well-deserved demise of Marxism-Leninism, there are other traditions in the multiplicity of Marxist traditions that are very much alive and have much to contribute to contemporary thought.

Able presiding over the sessions was the conference organizer, Leonard Swidler, of Temple University. The format followed was a ten-minute summary of previously distributed papers, followed by the reactions of two respondents, a brief response by the presenter, and general discussion. The papers, whose quality was excellent, covered a wide range of aspects of human rights: a historical analysis of the effects of Louis Blanc's socialism, the distinction between citizen and human rights, various philosophical and theological justification of rights, an Orthodox theological reflection on human rights, a conceptual framework for religious liberty, human rights and sexuality, Marxist and Christian views of economic rights, right to the protection of the human body, basic rights, civil society and the state, constitutional privacy in contemporary Hungary, and human rights in a process-relational perspective. The discussions were quite animated, with agreement and disagreement crossing national, religious, and ideological boundaries.

Reflecting their respective contexts, the Eastern Europeans tended to stress political rights while the North Americans emphasized economic rights. It is unfortunate that those North Americans of a neoconservative bent

were not present for the whole conference.

Monday and Tuesday afternoons, small groups, "consultations," were sent to the Hungarian and Yugoslav embassies to ask about the human rights situations in those countries. Others went to hearing of the House Subcommittee on Human Rights, and to such Washington-based think tanks as the American Enterprise Institute and the Ethics and Public Policy Center to find out about their work in the human rights area. The consultations reported back to the larger group.

A subcommittee worked on drafting a joint statement. After much debate and discussion, the participants adopted the joint statement attached to this report.

Given the incredibly rapid changes in Eastern Europe, it was exciting for the North Americans to hear accounts not only from eyewitnesses but participants in those events. A number of the Hungarians are actively involved in the reform movement, the shaping of the new constitution, and new political parties. Several of them had appointments with officials of the State Department as well as other governmental and private agencies during the conference. They represented a wide variety of political views within a democratic spectrum. A number of the Yugoslavians are also involved in democratic movements, "clubs," in their country, and the three courageous women are among the founders and leaders of the women's movement in Yugoslavia.

In the evenings, some of Washington's fine eating establishments provided the setting for dinner. Although time was limited, many of the participants took time to go sightseeing. Tamas Földesi jogged by the White House every morning. As far as we know, President Bush did not join him.