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News from Abroad

WRITERS AND THE DEFENCE  
OF LIBERTY

A Survey of the Paris Congress

MR. E. M. FORSTER ON "FABIO-FASCISM"  
IN ENGLAND

PARIS, JUNE 26.

The Writers' Congress for the Defence of Culture came to an end last night after a five-day discussion in a hot and crowded hall. At its close a permanent committee was founded whose object it will be to stimulate future contacts between the writers of the various countries, and to defend their interests. The headquarters of this committee will be "provisionally" in Paris.

Although all the writers at the congress were more or less Left wing, there is little justification for the rather unkind remarks heard on many sides to the effect that the main object of the congress was simply to give the Soviet Union a "boost." It is true that its speakers included many friends of the Soviet Union, such as M. André Gide, M. Barbusse, M. Malraux, and several leading German émigrés who contributed, in addition to the Russian delegation, to the praise of Russia as the stronghold of a new culture.

The Russian delegation included several young writers of the proletarian school, and it almost seemed a pity that a writer like Ehrenburg, who is much more at home in the cafes of Montparnasse than in the coilpits of the Donetz Basin, should have been given more prominence at the congress than these attractive and unfamiliar young faces.

### Some Liveliness

The public at the congress was mainly Communist in sympathy, though not entirely so, and the "opposition" managed to create a few unpleasant incidents. Thus the mention of Victor Serge Kabalchich (the Russian writer who translated, while he was still living in France, numerous Soviet books into French and who has since been deported by the Soviet Government to Siberia for alleged Trotskyism) caused considerable embarrassment to the Russian delegation and their friends. There was another uproar in the hall when Professor Salvemini, the well-known Italian émigré, referred to the fact that terrorism was not limited to Italy and Germany and that it was practised in Russia as well. While one part of the audience rose to cheer, other part spat down.

### M. Gide

Among the speakers of the congress was M. André Gide, who, like Anatole France before him, has turned sharply to the Left in his old age.

M. Gide began by saying that he wished to be both profoundly internationalist and profoundly French. It was unfortunate, he said, that the nationalists should treat internationalism as treason towards one's own country and that they should have given the word "patriot" such a narrow and objectionable meaning that one simply could not decently use it now.

He (M. Gide) was favourable to Communism, but held that it must not exclude individualism. He believed that in a Communist society an individual had a better chance of revealing himself than elsewhere. (The treatment of minorities in the Soviet Union showed indeed, he said, that Communism had no intention of standardising human beings.)

M. Gide then spoke of France. He paid a tribute to the "hothouse literature" of the seventeenth century which he said was an essential phase in France's cultural process—but he added that literature in France did not really become full-blooded until it had fallen into the plebeian hands of Rousseau and Diderot. Victor Hugo, who began as a bourgeois poet, was eventually guided by a sound intuition towards the people; hence his greatest work, "Les Misérables."

The object of literature was communion with the reader, but this communion often came many years after the book was written. Stendhal, Balzac, Blake, Nietzsche, Herman Melville wrote for unborn generations. In Moscow to-day too many people were in a hurry, M. Gide said.

"I admit I found it a little alarming at the Writers' Congress in Moscow to hear large numbers of workmen say to the writers, 'Draw us, paint us, speak of us.' It is not the rôle of literature—at least it is not its only rôle—to be a mirror. Soviet Russian literature has produced many remarkable works, but its rôle hitherto has been essentially that of a mirror."

M. Gide argued that in a bourgeois society the writer was essentially in opposition. In Soviet Russia alone he could allow himself to be carried onward on the waves of the Revolution; he could be in direct communion with the people. But Soviet literature, M. Gide said, was still far from having achieved greatness.

It had as yet produced no works embodying the new man for which one was waiting.

"I am, however, confidently waiting for those great works in which the writer goes ahead of reality and opens up new ways for it. In every lasting work of art there is more than a mere reply to the momentary needs of a class or a period. By reprinting Pushkin and producing Shakespeare Soviet Russia reveals more genuinely its love of culture than by publishing an avalanche of books (including some very good ones) which merely glorify its present triumph.

### Mr. Huxley and Propaganda

Somewhat disappointing from the Soviet point of view were the speeches of the two principal British delegates, Mr. Aldous Huxley and Mr. E. M. Forster.

Mr. Huxley said that it was not easy to determine the effectiveness of propaganda. It was not so simple a matter as advertisement, for advertisement dealt with matters of no importance. One did not mind whether one bought Afta soap or B's soap. But propaganda dealt with essentials, and its effectiveness was largely determined both by external and internal factors over which there could be no real control. There were millions of people in England who read Tory papers every day and invariably voted Labour. Nor should one too readily assume the influence of the dear old political book. H. G. Wells's history of mankind had not made the world internationalist. If Marx became so influential, it was only because Lenin had studied him.

Turning to Fascist countries, Mr. Huxley said that in the long run the effectiveness of totalitarian propaganda must be doubted. It was easy to achieve mental homogeneity in a small savage tribe; it was impossible in a nation of fifty or sixty millions. Nor could they be cut off completely from the influence of the outer world. More dangerous in dictatorial States was the negative propaganda, the propaganda of silence. "Silence and suppression," Mr. Huxley said, "are employed by every newspaper in democratic countries. But the subjects suppressed fortunately vary with the policy of the newspaper proprietor. Thanks to this, we can get some sort of notion of what is happening in the world."

"In the totalitarian State the suppression of the outlawed facts and ideas is complete. Silence is probably a more dangerous enemy to culture than the noisiest propaganda in favour of barbarism."

### Mr. Forster on Fabio-Fascism

Mr. Forster began by saying that England's freedom and her freedom of thought were inseparable. It was England's freedom which was the life-blood of her culture. "If one were to suppress the England's liberties—be it the liberties of India and Kenya, or Italy would say 'Never,' the Libers would say 'Not until I consider them worthy.'" "I agree with every word General Smuts said at St. Andrews," Mr. Forster said, "except that he never suggested that the blessings he praised might be applied to the coloured people of South Africa. This omission made his eulogy a mockery."

Mr. Forster went on to say that freedom in England was enjoyed only by the fairly wealthy people, and that the man on the dole regarded liberty as a fad of the upper classes. He cared no more about liberty than about the cultural heritage.

"In spite of these two I believe in liberty," Mr. Forster said, "because the British type of liberty may be still of use to us and to the world. I am not a Fascist, for Fascism does evil that evil may come. In Communism I see hope, though it does many things which I think evil. It is something that in England dictatorship is still supposed to be ungentlemanly (laughter)—and massacres of Jews in bad form, and private armies figures of fun. Our danger from Fascism, unless a war breaks out, is negligible."

"But," Mr. Forster continued, "we are menaced by something more insidious, and that is Fabio-Fascism. It is the dictator spirit working quietly away behind the facade of constitutional forms, passing a little law like the Sedition Act, and whispering and cooing the so-called 'news' every evening over the wireless until opposition is dimmed and dulled. This Fabio-Fascism—a method known to Charles the First—is the traditional method by which liberty has been attacked in England. Fabio-Fascism is our old enemy—"

He shall mark our goings, question whence we came,  
Get his guards about us, as in freedom's name:  
He shall peep and mutter and the night shall bring  
Watchers 'neath our windows lest we mock the King.

Mr. Forster then dealt at some length with the proceedings taken in connection with James Hanley's "Boy," and with other examples of objectionable interference with the freedom of thought. In conclusion he urged others to be sensitive and courageous and to fight about all against a new war which would mark the end of all liberal civilisation.