

Editorial

CULTURAL EXCHANGE: A BALANCE SHEET

No other subject in the U. S. A. has been recently the cause of such great expectations, vague rejoicing and exasperating generalizations than that of "cultural exchanges". Some visionaries are already foreseeing a bright future for the world, once a certain number of symphonic orchestras, ballets and delegations of agricultural experts exchange a certain quota of visits. The people of East and West — so it goes — will meet each other as people, will see that the other people are but people and the resulting goodwill will melt the cold war and prevent other wars.

The trouble with this assumption is its basic correctness. Any genuine exchanges are bound to be in the favor of the West, as the Soviet system maintains itself by seclusion, sterilization, distortion and omission. Yet it is equally true that, if the Soviets are permitted to rig and limit the exchanges to suit their purposes and if the West displays here the same inertia and lack of imagination as it frequently does in international affairs, international communism is bound to profit.

The lack of normal contacts between the people of the free world and of the Soviet orbit is not a result of "misunderstandings" or "suspicions," but is an outcome of an arbitrary act by the Soviet government perpetrated with the aim to preserve its power. Neither is the cold war due to the fact that "people don't know each other." It is due, mainly, to the inherent expansiveness of an empire bent on nothing less than world conquest and using its centralized apparatus of propaganda and subversion for that purpose. Arts and artists are, as repeatedly admitted by the Soviets themselves, only tools in services of this apparatus.

The Soviets know very well that in this contest of "cultural exchanges" many odds are against them. Therefore, in planning their moves, they put great store in the hoped for naivete of the populations of the free countries and the quiescence of their governments. Their strategy is crystal-clear: to foster exchanges of collective bodies (easily supervised), thus to create goodwill for the Soviet system and, in turn, to translate that goodwill into political gains. Once — the Soviets hope, in the public opinion of the West the image of Khrushchev will merge with that of Galina Ulanova, the Western people shall become more reluctant to maintain their guard and shall exert a greater pressure on their governments for "disarmament" and "summit talks" on Soviet terms. On the other hand, the Soviets are doing their best to avoid any influx of non-Communist ideas into their empire and to prevent any dialogue between Westerners and Communist-ruled people, except the reliable hard core of the Party bureaucracy. Thus, a Soviet literary NKVD man and informer B. Polevoi recently appeared in the White House with a gift on behalf of "Soviet war veterans," while middle aged party stalwarts were visiting New York under the pretense of representing the Soviet academic youth.

Meeting of ideas and of people — this is the area where the free world must do its best to expand cultural exchanges. Unfortunately, many planners in the West seem to be too absorbed in "tit for tat" exchanges (fifty orchestra members for fifty ballerinas, etc.) to see the heart of the matter. The successes of Philadelphia symphony, Van Cliburn or the U.S. basketballers are excellent news. But where are the efforts to reach the youth of the Communist-ruled countries, where are the publications issued especially for the captive people that would mirror the richness and diversity of thought in the West?

And here, *pro domo sua*, we must come to another huge oversight. In this year 1958, the government that depicts itself as the apostle of co-existence and cultural exchanges, is keeping an entire nation — Lithuania — under lock and key. Not a single non-Communist newspaperman has been admitted into Lithuania since the second Soviet occupation in 1944; tourists from the West, plain and famous, are detoured from this country (only some Asian delegations, unfamiliar with Lithuania's past, are given quick Potemkin tours); no Western orchestras or theatre groups are seen on Lithuanian stages; no non-Communist books and newspapers are available to the public. Lithuanians are not permitted to travel in the West, except in commissar-shepherded groups.

The harshness of these Soviet actions are a reflection of their incessant fear of the Lithuanian resistance spirit and allegiance to freedom and democracy. Yet the infamous thing is not only that the Soviets do it; it is also that free world does not challenge it.

