

## [Youth Congresses]

In September 1956 three Lithuanian youth, inmates of the slave labor camp No. 10 at Dubrava, Mordovia, were caught after an unsuccessful escape attempt and tortured to death as a warning to the others:

1. Algirdas Petruševičius, civil engineer;
2. Aga Lorentas, student;
3. Juozas Jurkša, student.

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*Dear friends, youths and girls!*

*. . . All young people are interested in the success of the Sixth World Youth and Student Festival, which promises to be magnificent. Let our joint and fruitful efforts be crowned with the result that one fine day in August 1957 we will be able to say: We have done a good job for the happiness and rapprochement of the youth, for friendship and peace.*

*So, until we meet in Moscow!  
Moscow, August 16th, 1956*

(Excerpt from the address of the International Preparatory Committee of the Sixth World Youth and Student Festival).

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This summer is ripe with youth congresses. Among others, on June 29-30 the Lithuanian youth in North America will gather in Chicago for lectures, discussions and a folk dance festival. Young Catholics assembled in Pax Romana will convene in San Salvador on August 1-6. University of Michigan at Ann Arbor will be host to the 10th Congress of the U. S. National Student Association. And, to outdazzle them all, 30,000 young people from all over the world are expected to flock to the Sixth World Youth Festival in Moscow (July 28—August 11) where they will mingle with countless Soviet youth.

These congresses differ in size, clamor and the degree of spontaneity. One thing though is common for all of them—an undercurrent of solemnity. The state of the world weighs heavily over them: the danger of an atomic holocaust which would not allow these young people to reach old age; the even greater danger of fear and impotence which would condemn this summer's delegates to a long winter of 1984. Ideological questions will play an important role in these gatherings and the young people will wrestle intensely with the angels and devils of Weltanschauung. The congresses will be a serious matter, song and dance notwithstanding.

This applies particularly to the Lithuanian Youth Congress in Chicago. It will be rather small numerically and not much noticed outside the local circles. Yet in the total perspective it will carry enough weight to strike at the very core of the mammoth rally in Moscow.

For what are these young people who will gather in Chicago? They are members of a nation which has been under Soviet communism for the last thirteen years. Many of them recollect the particular care for the young ones that the Soviet communists have shown during the mass deportations from Lithuania in cattle trains. Some are in the West because their parents wanted them to remain alive. Others — because they refused to believe in Utopia or in the necessity of mass-murder to create it.

They are going to Chicago on their own free will to discuss problems that vitally interest them and to sound their views: Conservative and Liberal, Catholic and Socialist. This they are able to do because they live outside the boundaries of the

"terrible simplifier". Freedom for them is not a worn-out abstraction, as many in the West call it, but a tangible reality. The memory is still fresh in many of their minds when they had to carry or to watch others carrying placards with the likeness of the dictator and slogans praising him. They remember so-called discussions in Communist schools which were but repetitions of these slogans.

The Chicago delegates are deeply aware that their brethren in Lithuania are officially allowed to express themselves only in those same slogans. They also know that whenever the young people there were able to raise their voice — as in the six-year long guerilla warfare or the demonstrations of last November — they asked for one thing: a free, independent and democratic Lithuania. This lends stature and importance to the Chicago meeting because it will voice the basic demands of an entire silenced nation whose youth is again in the vanguard.

All creeds and political structures, being subject to the decay of senility, place great hopes in youth. The young men in San Salvador will, no doubt, confer about how to restore to Catholicism some of the fervor and luminosity that distinguished its first decades. The students in Ann Arbor, while discussing complacency and facelessness which threaten democracy, will inevitably turn to the days when it was youthfully fresh. These talks will not be solely academic. Both Christianity and democracy, based on certain basic human longings and rooted in the realities of human existence, have in themselves the potential for constant renewal.

It is an interesting coincidence that the Youth Festival in Moscow is taking place at a time when the youngest of these philosophies—Soviet communism — begins to flee an ominous hardening of arteries. The present Soviet leaders are in quest for its rejuvenation. Where and how? Of course, they have tried to identify their political philosophy with all that was youthful in revolutionary movements and all that was great in human thought. But the mystique of the Soviet Union as a revolutionary workers' mother country has been finally destroyed on the barricades in Budapest. And Shakespeare with Hugo, progressive as they are, still remain basically bourgeois and always apt to contaminate the milk on which the "new man" must be fed. Total Stalinism? Its pure perversion had neither youth nor age.

So the Soviet leaders try to return to what they think are the virginal sources of the revolution. Lenin has been made an idol. Bodies of Communist writers and thinkers, once killed for deviations, are dragged out and propped, with the hope that their dead mouths will again yield what was once fire— what was once youth. But this search is hopeless. A dogma which was based not on the living but on the abstract man cannot be rejuvenated.

What about the Soviet youth? What about those who saw their first light under the sky of Utopia? Free of the dust of the past, they were supposed to make the next giant step in the simplistic Marxian game of history. Now a part of them are bored with Soviet reality and a candid minority is even questioning the Soviet dogma. A youth which has failed to fulfill the hopes of its all-knowing mentors cannot serve as a source of rejuvenation. The Soviet leaders are confronted with the inexorable — the wonderful — fact that a total control of youth is impossible. They are up against the sobering reality that in every young man world history begins from anew.

This is not to make a fetish out of youth. Young people have been too often seduced; they marched and chanted in black, brown and red shirts. The need for a collective orgasm under an approving and benevolent glance of a powerful father image will persist. Demagogues will always be attracted by youth's vision and its readiness to give all. They will often succeed in exploiting the readiness of the young ones to commit themselves, to make allegiance to a great cause, an all embracing ideal. The consolation is that whenever they had succeeded in the past it always happened with a vengeance.

The young guests in Moscow will be offered a mythic ideal of peace and brotherhood under the patronage of a young and progressive political system chosen by history to unite the world. In the heart of the Potemkin village that is Soviet Union another Potemkin town, depicting houses and streets of all nations, is being erected. The lampposts and house fronts of Moscow are receiving a fresh coat of paint. Yet all the paint in the Soviet Union will not be able to conceal the pallor of a dying philosophy. Behind the facade of the festival there sit old fat men, fearful of each other, on guard against their own people and at war against the world.

Youth is fearless skepticism and boundless faith; a hunger that is joyful and tears that are proud. It is multiformity and diversity. It is—at its innermost—the particular, the Individual, the unique.

To-day, as always, all these things depend on freedom. To-day, communism is none of these things anymore.