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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

COMMUNIST CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS IN ITALY

Note by the Italian Delegation

The Italian Delegation wishes to bring the attention of the Committee on Information and Cultural Relations to the following particulars on Communist cultural associations in Italy. These associations were set up for the purpose of arranging and expanding cultural contacts between Italy and Soviet countries.

2. Organized on the lines of the "Italy-USSR" Association, which was started in 1944, they are managed by committees consisting of Communist members of Parliament or of members of Parliament belonging to kindred parties. There are also some intellectuals, including specialists in the language of the country concerned, as well as a few journalists and persons exercising liberal professions. There are also a number of so-called "independents" anxious to get into the limelight, besides a handful of people whose good faith has been abused.

3. Both the leaders and ordinary members of these associations belong to the Communist Party or sympathise with its aims and, in any event, can be labelled "progressives".

4. The official aim of these associations is to make better known in Italy the literary, artistic and scientific activities of the country incorporated in their title, and conversely, to publicise in that country similar information about Italy. In reality, however, these associations are only concerned with giving information on the political system and the domestic and foreign policies of each of the Soviet Bloc countries. A subsidiary aim is to give these countries a false and distorted idea of life in Italy particularly in the cultural field, by giving undue prominence to the achievements of artists, scientists, writers and film directors with "progressive" leanings.

5. These associations use a variety of means to gain their ends, including the publication of reviews and pamphlets which sing the praises of the so-called "Socialist Democracies", the organizing of exhibitions and of film shows with a running commentary, and the careful selection of lecturers or scientists to be sent either as individuals or as members of special delegations, on visits to Soviet Bloc countries. These associations meet all travel and living expenses incurred by these visits.

6. It should, however, be noted that the various cultural occasions sponsored by these associations have roused very little interest among the general public or even avowed Communists.

7. The recent cultural offensive against the West launched by the satellite countries as part of the "warming up" policy applied in connection with the "de-Stalinisation" process, does not appear to have found an effective instrument in these associations precisely because their political sympathies are too openly displayed.

8. The following are the main activities of these associations:

- (a) The "Italy-USSR" Association devotes itself largely to the sale in Italy of various reviews: "Realtà Sovietica", "Rassegna Sovietica" and "Bibliografia Medica" (Soviet Reality, Soviet Review and Medical Bibliography), and of various propaganda booklets and pamphlets.

9. During the current year, this Association held two public meetings at which Italo-Soviet cultural relations and their better promotion were discussed. These meetings only attracted about a hundred Communist Party members or sympathisers, and even in the extreme Left Wing press, they were only reported very briefly.

10. The "Italy-USSR" Association, during 1956, also organized various delegations of intellectuals (artists, teachers, scientists, etc.) invited to the USSR by the Soviet Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.

11. Quite recently, the same Association arranged a small exhibition of Italian drawings in Moscow, where the work of progressive artists was shown.

- (b) The "Italy-Romania" Association publishes a monthly review under that title as well as certain periodicals in French, sponsored by the Rumanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. This Association also helped to organize an "Italian Book Exhibition" in Bucharest under the auspices of this Institute.

12. In September, the Association, still with the co-operation of the Institute, organized an exhibition of "Rumanian Arts and Crafts" in Rome. It included Rumanian national costumes, carpets and woodwork, fancy leather and specimens of typical Rumanian interiors. However, this exhibition was very poorly attended, even on the first day, and was adversely criticised, even by Left Wing groups. This is on a par with Ilya Ehrenbourg's recent criticism of the present position of the arts in the USSR.

- (c) The "Italy-Hungary" Association, after a period of activity displayed mainly in the propaganda field using as its theme Hungarian success in the realm of sport, has given no sign of life for some time.

- (d) The same applies to the "Italy-Czechoslovakia" and "Italy-Bulgaria" Associations.
- (e) There is little activity on the part of the "Italy-Albania" Association. As regards cultural relations with Italy, Albanian propaganda cannot compete with the counter-propaganda disseminated by the many Albanian refugees and refugee organizations in Italy.
- (f) Finally, an Association only set up quite recently under the title: "Centre for the Development of Economic and Cultural Relations with China" (Centro per lo sviluppo delle relazioni economiche e culturali con la Cina) publishes a periodical in Rome, most of which are articles reproduced from Chinese Communist reviews.

13. However, the Centre's main activity has so far consisted in preparing the visits of the various scientific and cultural delegations sent to Italy by the Peking Government during the year. The Centre has some say in the composition of these delegations which include a number of "non-progressives" attracted by the prospect of such a rare chance to travel. The Centre is responsible for organizing the reception of the Chinese delegations on their arrival in Italy.

14. It co-operates with the Chinese Cultural Institute set up in Milan in 1955, mainly for the purpose of publishing popular editions of Italian translations of the best-known Chinese classics.

15. There is no doubt that these associations must be closely watched lest their cultural activities, which are notoriously tendentious, should develop along purely political lines.

16. So far, as already pointed out in this note, the cultural activities of these associations have been very restricted and, viewed strictly as propaganda, have either had little influence or, in some cases, have achieved the reverse of the effect intended.

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