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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

COMMUNIST SPONSORED WORLD YOUTH FESTIVAL IN VIENNA

Note by the German Delegation

The national youth and students' organizations of the West which in 1946 and 1947 were prepared to co-operate without any suspicion with the representatives of the East under such slogans as "peace-loving", "democratic" and "anti-fascist" soon recognised that their own organizations were intended to be nothing but a front for the World Youth Federation and the International Association of Students, while the conception and the organization of international co-operation were increasingly controlled by the full-time functionaries of the East. Owing to the fact that the West began to recognise the true nature of these festivals as instruments of Communist propaganda, the Communist organizers deemed it advisable to carry out the festivals during the following ten years mainly as an internal affair of the Soviet Bloc.

2. The political re-orientation of many countries towards neutralism, and the Soviet Union's successful penetration of the so-called bloc-free zone between East and West, gave the Soviet Bloc a chance to use, for once, the political instrument represented by the Festival outside the Soviet Bloc. Thus, Vienna, the capital of a neutral country, was chosen. The organizers realised, of course, that the Festival - known to be a Communist-sponsored show - would not regain any ground either in Austria or among the youth of the West. The political intentions connected with the choice of Vienna were, as a matter of fact, directed in the first place towards the populous nations of the Afro-Asian region and those of Latin America, in which the Soviet Bloc's official foreign policy is today mainly interested.

The Festival

3. According to the original plans this first Festival outside the borders of the Soviet Bloc was to be attended by 30,000 participants and to be a grandiose manifestation for "peace and friendship among all peoples". In the course of the

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preparations it became evident, however, that hardly 18,000 youngsters (and that included persons up to the age of 45) could be rallied. But even these expectations were found to be too optimistic, so that at the very last moment the Soviet Bloc delegations had to be increased considerably - the Soviet Delegation which originally was to be composed of 800 participants was reinforced by 3,000 "tourists", Czechoslovakia sent an additional 700 and Poland another 1,200 visitors. Thus, the number of participants from the European countries of the Soviet Bloc amounted to roughly 6,500 persons, i.e. about half of the total number of participants - estimated at 13,000 persons - from the whole world. According to statements made by the organizers prior to the Festival, 120 countries were expected to be represented, while in actual fact only 18 delegations could claim to be the official representatives of their national youth organizations; 12 of these came from Soviet Bloc countries.

4. The so-called "Delegation from the Federal Republic of Germany" had roughly 1,100 members. It consisted chiefly of former members of the outlawed "Free German Youth", mainly from the Ruhr. In addition to these clearly Communist cadres, a group of conscientious objectors and a smaller group of young intellectuals sympathising with the Hamburg student periodical "konkret" could be identified. As the only youth or students' organization from the Federal Republic the LSD (Liberal Students' Association of Germany) had sent an official delegation to Vienna.

5. The official delegation of 500 members from the Soviet-occupied zone was composed exclusively of members of the "Free German Youth".

6. The participants from the countries of the free West consisted of young communists, fellow-travellers and young people who liked to travel but were not interested in politics.

7. The delegations from the underdeveloped countries, which had been expected with particular interest, were not homogeneous and did not act homogeneously. The outlook of their members ranged from convinced and well-trained Communists to young people who wanted to learn something about Europe and European civilisation, to adventurers who exploited the Vienna Festival as an opportunity for cheap entertainment and food. Many of the students from the underdeveloped countries did not travel from their home countries but came from universities in Soviet Bloc countries and from France and Great Britain. Students with scholarships of the Halle, Prague, Moscow and Budapest universities represented the well-trained cadres and managed to take over the leadership of the various groups of their compatriots.

8. The programme of the Festival offered a great variety of different manifestations; each day an average of 80 different programme items offered something from early in the morning until late at night, and in various parts of the town, to the delegates

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from all countries. This enormous effort was, of course, deliberate; had there been gaps in the programme the delegates would have been forced to seek entertainment or do sightseeing on their own. As it was, the uninterrupted official programme kept them busy, and it was quite clear that private sightseeing and discussions were considered undesirable by the managers of the Festival.

9. The Communist organizers' concern that the delegates might come into contact with outside influences was also very clearly underlined by the fact that the different East Bloc delegations were hermetically sealed off from the outside. The delegates from East Asia as well as those from Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria stayed in camps and were taken to and from the various manifestations in closed transports. Only the Poles and the Yugoslavs seemed to be less subjugated to the rigid mechanism of the programme; also the Czechs and Russians seemed relatively free in their movements but then they showed themselves to be one hundred percent Communists.

10. At a number of Festival events the Communist organization remained almost invisible; sport contests, exhibitions and some artistic events of high quality did not fail to impress the delegates as well as the Viennese who like a good show. However, it became comparatively quickly known in Festival circles that the non-political entertainment was only meant to camouflage a highly political purpose. The unequivocally political tendency of the Festival became particularly apparent in the course of the less numerous but more revealing special events, such as the meeting of the various vocational groups, and during the students' seminars and meetings of the various faculties. At the latter, in particular, the motivating ideas of the Soviet Bloc were openly discussed, as can be seen from some of the subjects on the agenda:

"The rôle of the student and his organizations in Society"

"Nature and man in the light of contemporary scientific, technical and philosophical findings"

"The problems raised by the democratisation and reform of the universities"

"Economic, political and cultural problems of the colonial and underdeveloped countries and the rôle of the student in their solution".

11. The discussions of these and similar subjects sometimes became dramatic. They also revealed the true intentions of the sponsors. As soon as arguments or counter-arguments did not coincide with the political line of the sponsors the discussions were terminated and labelled as "attempts at cleavage" or "imperialist polemics".

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12. Various youth organizations of the free world had taken the initiative to counteract Communist propaganda at the Festival by informing and enlightening the delegates. The main initiators of this enterprise, which was also known as "counteraction", were the members of the working committee "Young Life", set up for this purpose by Austrian and foreign organizations. The most important element of this action consisted in "information standards" showing a great choice of Western books, pamphlets, newspapers etc. in various languages and an information service qualified to answer queries of all kinds. The basic task of this counteraction was, however, to counteract the one-sided effect of the Eastern propaganda Festival on neutral ground in the more restricted human field, and to break the Communist propaganda monopoly by offering the possibility of human contacts and discussions between East and West. A remarkable number of delegates to the Festival - in particular from the so-called neutral countries - understood and appreciated the work of these "contact centres".

Balance-Sheet

13. As a credit item the Communists can book the fact of having managed to organize a big meeting with a number of valuable attractions, and of having succeeded in running it without major disturbances. The greatest success in their eyes will probably be the fact that they have made a decisive step - both from the psychological and propaganda point of view - from the Eastern ghetto into the world this side of the iron curtain, so that their Festival in the eyes of the uninitiated, the opportunists, the anti-Western neutralists, and the Communist fellow-travellers, carried no longer the stigma of a purely Communist demonstration. This gain is likely to make them put up with the many disappointments and failures entailed by this Festival on non-Communist territory. This "world-wide and non-political" youth meeting, and those who had come to take part in it, could certainly not claim to be representative of the nations in question. Prominent personalities, in particular from the non-committed world, left no doubt about their reserved attitude vis-à-vis the Festival, for example Prime Minister Nehru and Prime Minister Nkrumah. President Nasser prohibited the participation of delegates from the UAR, and the Sudan, too, decided to stay away.

14. The sponsors must even have entertained some doubt concerning the political reliability of those who participated from the West. Heretical views were wide-spread, and the subject "freedom of the Press" had led to open conflicts within the United States, Italian, Indian and Brazilian delegations. Another shortcoming was that the Festival lacked something which the sponsors themselves could not furnish: a voluntary or spontaneous contribution by the host country or other countries. Austrian public opinion reacted instead with disciplined reserve, and the Austrian Press kept silent. This lack of reaction in the host country must have left its mark especially on the delegates

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from the neutralist countries, and a great number of intellectuals from these countries made no attempt to conceal their disappointment with the predominantly political nature of the Festival.

15. Even though the Communists failed to turn this Festival into a triumph of propaganda for their political doctrine, and although the impact of this monster propaganda effort on all delegates - in particular on those from the colonial, semi-colonial and underdeveloped countries - can be considered negligible, the West has no reason to be smug. The fact that this Communist propaganda manifestation was, for the first time, held on neutral ground and could not be prevented by the West was of sufficient value for the East to accept its numerous negative points, the effects of which are, moreover, bound to be limited in time and space since Eastern propaganda will either not mention them at all or subject them to the camouflage treatment of its experts. Cleverly arranged photos, paid "positive declarations", and other tricks, offer sufficient means of turning the Vienna Festival into an impressive propaganda demonstration of great suitability for political mass propaganda among the ignorant and those who waver - especially in the under-developed countries.

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