

The Parallel Forum

opening statement at the official cultural forum was scheduled for before the Hungarian decision was reached. The forum continued for six weeks from its opening on October 15. Canada made a public concluding statement. As well, it could have made any public statements it wished at any time outside of the forum.

NGOs and Helsinki

It was a mistake for Canada to have remained silent. It is important to appreciate the value of nongovernmental organizations in the Helsinki process. The Helsinki process is one of peace through confidence-building measures, human contacts and human rights. Only nongovernmental organizations can generate the human contacts to make the process work. Governmental delegations from the East are people under pressure from their governments, rather than people who put pressure on their governments. They are chosen for their ideological conformity to the regimes in place. Contacts through official meetings are, for East Europeans, intergovernmental contacts and nothing more. The Helsinki Final Act and the Madrid Review Conference Concluding Document specifically acknowledged the importance of NGOs to the Helsinki process. The Final Act committed governments to implement its provisions so that "organizations and their representatives can, in the field of their activity, develop contacts and meetings amongst themselves and exchange information." The Madrid Concluding Document committed governments to take steps "to ensure satisfactory conditions for activities within the framework of mutual cooperation on their territory in which citizens can take part."

It would be wrong for Canada to show undue sympathy for the Hungarian plight. Reality dictates that Hungary must succumb to Soviet pressure. However, as Istvan Gaurka, a Hungarian writer who participated in the parallel forum, said, "to live with reality means to accept the unacceptable." Canada, obviously, does not have the means to persuade the Hungarians that the Soviets do. Yet, in consort with the other Western nations, it can have and has had an influence. Eastern European respect for cultural freedom will not happen by itself. Western pressure is needed as a countervailing force against Soviet threats.

Even though the alternative forum sponsored by the Helsinki Federation is now over, a Canadian statement would still serve a purpose. It would be a support to those Hungarians who participated in the private forum. It would be an assertion of the importance to Canada of private groups in the Helsinki process. It would be a commitment not to allow similar events to occur in future Eastern Euro-

pean Helsinki meetings. If we lose this opportunity, we have lost sight of our commitment to the Helsinki process itself.

Official contacts not enough

For the International Helsinki Federation, the Hungarian government cancellation of the meeting rooms was a mixed curse. If forced the Federation into quarters that were inadequate. Even a large apartment cannot accommodate comfortably a meeting of over 100 people. It generated an atmosphere of intimidation that could not help but have an effect, particularly on the Hungarian guests who attended the meeting. It was a continuing signal from Eastern Europe that respect for human rights has still a long way to go.

On the other hand, the Federation itself received a good deal of publicity from the prohibition. The previous Federation meeting in Ottawa that coincided with the CSCE Human Rights Experts Meeting, passed almost unnoticed. The prohibition in Budapest meant the Federation had an opportunity to make more widely known its own goals, and the purpose of its own meeting. While a violation of human rights may be news, and respect for human rights may not be news, the Federation prefers the anonymity that came from the tolerance in Ottawa to the publicity that arose from the intolerance in Budapest. The Federation exists to generate respect for human rights, not to generate publicity for itself. Its goal is a situation where respect for human rights is complete and its own existence superfluous.

The official intergovernmental forum ended in a way that emphasized the importance of the nongovernmental Helsinki Watch forum. The official forum ended without a concluding agreement. The US complained that the Soviets had blocked the open discussion among artists at the forum. Most of the meetings were bound by rules of procedure that limited the discussion to a statement by each participant. Delegates could not be interrupted or questioned about their remarks. There was no time limit for statements.

Given those restrictive conditions, it meant that the true cultural forum was the Helsinki Watch forum. It was that forum where there was a true exchange between East and West unhampered by governmental restriction about what could be said. The Helsinki Watch groups have become more than just compliance assessment or "watch" groups. They have given the intended Helsinki process of human contacts a reality that governments cannot or will not give it.