

The Parallel Forum

Federation holds parallel nongovernmental meetings coinciding with the governmental meetings under the Helsinki Accord. The Federation was present at Madrid for the Review Conference. It was present at Ottawa for the Human Rights Experts' Meetings. At Ottawa the Canadian Helsinki Watch Group was founded and a report on Canadian compliance with the Helsinki Accord was presented.

Budapest cultural forum

As well, the Federation was present at Budapest last fall. The Budapest Cultural Forum was one of the meetings on specialized topics within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process provided for in the Madrid Concluding Document. It lasted for six weeks from October 15, 1985. It was attended by official government representatives from all thirty-five signatory states, as well as personalities in the field of culture. The first week consisted of opening statements. There followed a series of overlapping meetings in plastic and applied arts, performing arts, literature and mutual cultural knowledge. The final week was devoted to an attempt to draw up conclusions.

Each state chose its own participants to the forum. The Canadian official delegation included Robert Fulford, the Editor of *Saturday Night*, Antonine Maillet, the author, and six other cultural figures. Notably absent from the Canadian delegation were cultural figures who have been leaders in the human rights field, such as Margaret Atwood or Margie Gillis.

The International Helsinki Federation organized its own nongovernmental forum. The official forum was scheduled to last six weeks. The IHF forum was to last only three days, coinciding with the first three days of the official forum. The official forum was to cover all the arts. The IHF forum covered one art only — writing. The official forum had no topical focus. The IHF forum was to focus on one theme only — writers and their integrity.

Parallel forum

The IHF invited twelve authors from Western and Eastern Europe to discuss such topics as writing in exile, the freedom to be different, writing under censorship, self-censorship, the right to history. The speakers included Susan Sontag from the US, who had been invited to be part of the official US delegation to the governmental forum, but declined the invitation in order to take part in the Helsinki Watch parallel forum. There was Amos Oz from Israel, Per Wastberg from Sweden, Danilo Kis from Yugoslavia, George Konrad from Hungary and seven others. The Eastern European authors who spoke, apart from the Hungarians, were, like Danilo Kis, all now living in Western Europe. No Eastern European government allowed its residents to travel to Budapest to participate in the Helsinki Watch parallel nongovernmental forum.

The Hungarians who participated in the Helsinki Watch Forum in Budapest were local Hungarians. Several of those who took part, as speakers or simply as guests, were people who had been victimized by the Hungarian government for their past writing. They had been imprisoned, systematically denied employment, censored. Although the IHF met in Budapest, the Hungarians were

not meant to act as hosts. They were intended simply to be invited guests. The Federation did not wish to place an undue onus on the resident Hungarians, and, by so doing, jeopardize their situation in their home country.

Prohibition by Hungary

A few hours before it was to begin on October 11, 1985, the Hungarian government forbade the holding of the Federation symposium in Budapest. Despite the prohibition, the nongovernmental symposium took place with apparent Hungarian government tolerance. The meeting rooms that the Helsinki Federation had ordered were cancelled, on government direction. Instead, the symposium was held in Budapest in private apartments of Hungarian friends of the Federation. No one, including the invited Hungarian writers, was prohibited from attending. No one was evicted from the country.

Why did Hungary go through this charade of prohibiting a meeting in public premises and then allowing it to continue in private premises? Why did it wait till the last minute to do anything at all? What was the value of incurring worldwide negative publicity or the appearance of repression, and yet not imposing repression? And what should be the appropriate Canadian response to these events?

Hungarian justification

One thing is certain: the stated Hungarian reasons for its actions were not its real reasons. Hungary issued a declaration, justifying its actions, that cannot bear close scrutiny. The Hungarians said those who came to the symposium came as tourists, and must respect the rules concerning tourists. In fact, as the Helsinki Federation pointed out in a release in response to the Hungarian statement, the proposal to hold a symposium did not violate any laws or regulations that the government ordinarily applies either to Hungarians or to visitors to Hungary. Moreover, Hungary is obliged to apply its own laws in such a way as to comply with its undertakings under the Helsinki Final Act.

The Hungarian government statement went on to state that the planners of the alternative forum did not indicate in advance that they wanted to organize the meeting. They had presented the Hungarian authorities with a fait accompli. In fact, the Hungarian authorities knew about the meeting well in advance. I was part of the Federation delegation that met with Andor Egyed, Chief of the Canadian Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary. He was the official who ordered the hotel service cancelled.

The Federation had not asked for permission from Hungary before planning its meeting. That was consistent with what it had done for other Helsinki meetings. The Federation held parallel sessions at the time of the Madrid Review Conference in 1980-83, and at the Ottawa Human Rights Experts' Meeting in the spring of last year. The permission of the Spanish and Canadian governments was neither sought nor considered necessary.

The Hungarian government stated that while it had undertaken to host the intergovernmental cultural forum, it had not undertaken to allow meetings initiated by private organizations. However, the US government noted that the question of private meetings was raised with Hungary