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## THE IMPACT OF THE NEW LEFT ON ESTONIA

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In Eastern Europe, (including the Soviet Union) many young people have been equally repelled by their marxist establishment and by the type of opposition that could be labelled backward-looking and "reactionary." To these people "ultramarxist" emulation of the Western New Left offered a progressive-looking way to oppose the establishment. Insofar as Estonia is highly urbanized, has a high percentage of college students and graduates, and enjoys relatively extensive Western contacts, it could be expected to be more prone than most Soviet republics to rethinking the meaning of marxism in the post-industrial world.<sup>1</sup> With the Soviet official version of marxism obviously worded and interpreted to suit the specifically Russian objectives of the regime, there also is national motivation to go beyond the official creed. This paper will describe what Estonians learned about the New Left unrest in the West, through the official channels, and how they responded.

The ambivalent reaction of the Soviets toward the New Left is exemplified by the contents of two successive pages in the same issue (2 July, 1969) of the main Soviet Estonian daily, *Rabva Hääl*. In one page J. Sitkovski states that "there exists also an 'ultra-leftist' anticommunism" propagated by people like H. Marcuse and his numerous followers among the Western students and intellectuals:

Herbert Marcuse's criticism of capitalism is acid and exposing. But the trouble lies in that he directs his criticism equally against the socialist countries, and, in particular, against the Soviet Union. Arguing in favor of a "single industrial society" theory, Marcuse equates the American and the Soviet regimes. Thus his criticism bears the seal of anticommunism. . . . Discounting the proletariat as a revolutionary force, Marcuse raises into this position *déclassé* elements, unstable and ideologically unhardened youth, bohemian tramps who in his opinion have not yet lost the ability to commit revolutionary acts. To the steady and methodical struggle of the communists to attract wide circles of workers, Marcuse substitutes petty bourgeois forms of struggle such as adventurist revolt, provocations, isolated guerilla uprisings.

Yet in the following page of the same daily these "petty bourgeois" tactics are applauded:

The United States is not able to regulate its internal problems. Everywhere in the country there are great anti-war manifestations and youth demonstrations. . . . The National Guard bayonets are directed against the students at Berkeley.

Sitkovski's article is a typical example of what the Estonian reader learned about the Western student unrest through the central Soviet channels. Occasionally more direct reports became available. Thus the youth monthly *Noorus* featured (in 1970:5) a remarkably cool first-hand report by Jaak Kangilaski about his talks with Western youth during a trip through France and the United States. Kangilaski says that the New Left criticizes the Old Left (including the Western communists) for placing too much emphasis on economic struggle and parliamentary action, and for ignoring the problems of the individual. Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara and Mao Tse Tung are reported as the main heroes of the New Left whose admiration for the revolutionary movement of the Third World Kangilaski deems exaggerated, without specifying whether this applies to Mao alone or also to Che. In May 1968, the French New Left played an "important and, in the opinion of French communists, a basically harmful role," because it led the students to indulge in adventures which the workers could not support, says the young Estonian reporter.

Besides dissociating themselves from the New Left revolt in the West, communists also have felt a need to explain it in Marxist terms. A "petty bourgeois" explanation satisfies some but sounds implausible to others because the New Left is too blatantly anti-bourgeois. The term *déclassé* used by Sitkovski implicitly suggests that the new radicals do not belong to any of the traditional social classes. The solution proposed by the French philosopher Roger Garaudy is that the intellectuals are becoming a revolutionary force separate from the working class, although the two are going to act together as "a new historical bloc", Garaudy's ideas were discussed in the Estonian press at the time he was gradually excluded from the French communist party. In particular, L. Remmelgas in the cultural weekly *Sirp ja Vasar* (20 February, 1970) noted that "even in our midst one can note during the discussion of those problems a dangerous similarity with Garaudy's non-dialectical and non-working-class-oriented thoughts." Coupled with a *pro forma* condemnation of Garaudy, Remmelgas gave quite a fair description of Garaudy's line of reasoning.

To the Soviet establishment, the most worrisome question implicit in Garaudy's thesis is: are the intellectuals becoming a distinct social class? The idea suggests itself spontaneously to anybody who tries to extrapolate from the Communist Manifesto in the light of present technological developments. According to the Manifesto, the age of great discoveries expanded

### The Impact of the New Left on Estonia

the role of the bourgeoisie which assumed "a most revolutionary part". Then the industrial revolution called into existence the modern working class which became the sole "really revolutionary class" by the time the Manifesto was written. But now the existence of a new technological revolution is recognized both by the West (who call it the "second industrial" or "technetronic" revolution)<sup>2</sup> and by the Soviets (who call it the "scientific-technological revolution"). If this is so, then one may wonder whether a new revolutionary class should not arise, according to the very pattern presented in the Communist Manifesto. The New Leftist unrest of the intellectuals may then be interpreted as the first show of strength by this new class.

Up to now this unorthodox idea has been expressed in Estonia only in a negative form, by stating that the intellectuals are *not* a separate class. But the very insistence on denying a proposition that nobody has explicitly advanced is akin to indirect affirmation. In an article by N. Moltšanov in *Sirp ja Vasar* (6 and 13 March, 1970) the denial is repeated periodically in a way reminiscent of Marc Anthony's "But they are honorable men" in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Moltšanov's argument is the following. As the scientific-technological revolution proceeds, the number of educated people (intelligentsia) increases, and it becomes hard to simply assign them to the existing classes. So a common and specific denominator for this "group" is needed.

However, in contrast to the bourgeoisie or the working class the intelligentsia is of course not a class but a social grouping which in principle can be formed out of people who belong to different classes but who are brought together by their level of education and who may thus acquire specific psychological characteristics.

In the earlier times the intellectuals came mainly from middle class homes and remained middle class. But now the expanded intelligentsia has become another target for exploitation, and feels alienated. Yet their New Left anti-capitalist actions are self-contradictory and show immaturity.

This proves once more that the intelligentsia has its own psychology but that it never has had and never can have its own class ideology.

What they have is a bewildering mix of bourgeois and worker tenets which expresses a vigorous protest but lacks any positive program. Because the ideas of justice, truth and humanism are a working class monopoly, says Moltšanov, the exploited intelligentsia has no other choice but to join forces with the workers. They will be the workers' most important ally, but still a subordinate ally, because on their own

The intelligentsia has not seized and cannot seize power since it is not a separate class.

Moltšanov's argument that the educated people are a distinct "social grouping" is presented powerfully and convincingly, while the contention that they should not be called a "class" boils down to a transparently circular reasoning.

The discussion this far has concerned the reaction of the Soviet Estonian press to the New Left phenomenon in the West. But the phenomenon also spread to Eastern Europe. As in the West, youth protest in Eastern Europe has expressed itself in two different ways. One way is to become apolitical, "opt out" of the society and retire into hippiedom. The other way is to become a radical "marxist revivalist", reject a policy of material incentive for workers, demand "absolute democracy", and admire Mao and Che Guevara. While they prefer to call themselves ultra-leftists, the outlook of the latter group is manifestly similar to the New Left in the West (see e.g. *Economist*, 14 March, 1970).

There are contacts between East European ultra-leftists and Western New Leftists. The Husak regime has asserted that a Czech student opposition group was inspired by West German New Leftist Rudi Dutschke (*Economist*, 24 January, 1970). But the prize goes to the British Communist J. Aldridge who explained the whole Czech Spring 1968 in terms of a Western-inspired uprising of intellectuals against the working class. Estonia's *Rabva Hääl* chose to reproduce this thesis (30 June, 1970).

According to Aldridge, British political leaders incited the Czech intellectuals to carry out "a revolution against the true revolution". It was "a perspectiveless revolution of individuals, an anarchist revolution of the educated." Aldridge says it is wrong to think that the whole Czech people consisted of "dissatisfied intellectuals only", but he implies that all or most intellectuals were dissatisfied indeed to the point of revolting:

The problem of 1968 is not only Czechoslovakia's problem but concerns us English also. When analyzing the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia one cannot help but ask oneself: What is the role of the educated in society? Do they have the right to determine the fate of the other people? Can they present their demands in a form that ignores the nature of the socialist-capitalist antagonism?

These questions are also puzzling the Estonian philosopher Gustav Naan, but he sees them more in terms of a tension between intellectuals and bureaucrats. Previously known in the Soviet Union as a rather daring philosopher of science, Naan has since 1965 increasingly pondered the role of the scientists and of intellectuals in general.

### The Impact of the New Left on Estonia

In an essay in the Estonian literary-social monthly *Looming* (November 1969) Naan ostensibly discussed the modern bourgeois society only. In this society he distinguishes the bourgeois and proletarian "classes" which account, respectively, for about 2% and 30% of the total population. The rest of the population do not belong to these "classes", but rather to the bureaucratic and intellectual "strata". Bureaucracy has a conservative and stabilizing role. Intellectuals have an anticipatory and renovating role: they are critical and individualistic. The regulatory role between these two antagonistic (though equally useful) "strata" belongs to the tiny ruling class and to the proletarian "people" (who are only about 30% of the total population). The system usually gets out of equilibrium through a bureaucratic over-tightening of screws, rather than through an excess of intellectual free-wheeling. Yet the creativeness of the intellectuals is becoming increasingly indispensable to the society and to the ruling class. Not only are they the originators of all ideologies (including marxism), but the grey matter of the brain has become the world's most strategic raw material. As a result "the intellectuals are becoming the most exploited social stratum" (presumably depriving the industrial workers of that distinction, although Naan does not spell it out).

Comparing British stability with the czarist Russian failure, Naan implicitly suggests, with copious quoting of Marx and Lenin, that the Soviets are depriving themselves of crucial stabilizing features by over-heavy dependence on bureaucracy, by treating would-be reformers as subversive, and by not tolerating an autonomous press and a loyal opposition party. His peculiar mix of marxist and bourgeois thinking is different from that of the Western New Left ideologues. But his insistence on a new and crucial role for the intellectual "stratum" is unmistakable. And he does not mean that this role is limited to the non-Soviet world.

Naan's views were strongly disputed by M. Makarov (in *Looming*, March 1971) who ostensibly criticized some Western Communist views but actually countered Naan's theses point by point. Makarov charged that "such ideas were a major component of the Czechoslovak counter-revolution during which Zd. Mlynar said the intellectuals would liberate the society from the 'hostile bureaucratic class' . . . represented by the communist party leaders." Naan apparently received a reprimand after he presented his views on the new role of intellectuals even more explicitly at a closed meeting in 1970 or early 1971. But the text of this talk kept circulating in Estonia, and by late 1972 (see *Sirp ja Vasar*, 6 October 1972:15) Naan again discussed publicly the role of the intellectuals.

Has there been any sign of the Estonian intellectuals assuming an active new role (apart from discussing it)? What could be expected in Estonian conditions, would be either apolitical opting-out of the society or Guevara-oriented ultra-leftism.

Opting-out means rejecting the existing social privileges rather than fighting for them. The early peaceful brand of hippie in America managed to shock both the bourgeois who had the economic pie and the worker who was struggling to get it, because the hippie said the pie was not worth having anyway. The Estonian literary establishment faced a limited problem of the same type around 1970. Instead of fighting to get their poetry published, like the young poets of 1960, the new crop was not interested in getting into print past the official gatekeepers—they rather published private “49-copy” albums. (Private publications in Soviet Estonia must be in less than 50 copies.) In an unprecedented review of such unofficial poetry in an official literary magazine, the establishment reaction is described (U. Laht, *Looming*, June 1970):

It is said that the fifth generation is behaving scandalously. They allegedly have no ambition at all, and . . . do not want to get enmeshed with professional writing. So to say non-professional, absolutely free doing their own thing, the most independent form of esthetic self-realization.

The activity of the young poets is associated in the mind of the “public” with long hair, and has been branded by some as “the local variety of the hippie movement,” says Laht, but he does not personally believe that a true hippie movement can take place in Estonia, except as a superficial fad, because “our social structure avoids the nonsense of over-saturated consumership where the oppression by things subjects man, and giving them up may look like one way out.” Poetry samples from the private albums, as quoted by Laht, show surrealism which may offend the petty bourgeois mentality of the Soviet Estonian establishment, but contain hardly anything that could not be published for political reasons if the authors had wanted to use the official publications. Laht considers as mere show-off extreme samples such as Johnny B. Isotamm’s

We do not understand each other, my dear  
we talk different languages, my dear  
You’ve got an artificial brain *made in USSR*.

In order to get into print, Isotamm reluctantly made his peace with the literary establishment in 1971. Hippie attire (including long hair and wearing of crosses) persist in Estonia, but with hardly any protest content left.

Besides the opting-out of society, ultra-leftist symptoms also appeared in Estonia. Almost simultaneously, two poems praising Che Guevara appeared in Winter 1969/70, one in Hungary, the other in Estonia. The Hungarian defiantly told his critics that Guevara was the model for “us ultras” (*Economist*, 14 March 1970). The Estonian poem was by Arvi Siig who previously had published a veiled demand for home rule for Estonia.<sup>3</sup>

The Impact of the New Left on Estonia

His poem "Che" (in *Looming*, January 1970) is worth quoting in full:

Che, Che Guevara!  
 The world is black-black.  
 The glory of revolution  
 is only  
 a line out of its miscellania.  
 Jan Hus must have perished in the same way,  
 although in a different way.  
 The black and white list will  
 contain your name, Che Guevara.

There was a promise of dawn.  
 Winds and clouds were restless.  
 In the jungle  
 and at the top of the stone jungle  
 the new day flashed.  
 Over your body they march again,  
 as they marched  
 into a certain small country—  
 the troops of the world gendarme.

Let's get a dictator!  
 On with the puppet show!  
 Democracy?  
 We know that dialectics!  
 There is no justice without power:  
 and power will get you—  
 into the sandpit!  
 Only the buried ones  
 make no mistakes.

Dominican Republic or Babylon?  
 The world—the graves of the worthiest.  
 With a fresh cross on the grave  
 freedom is cursing the lie.  
 At the end of the twentieth century  
 mourning the light  
 as if it were still B.C.  
 I lower my head.

The poem may be taken just for a Soviet diatribe against the United States. Only in this way, of course, could it get published, in spite of its praise of Che whom the Soviet establishment abhors without daring to say it out, except in an indirect way (cf. Kangilask's report discussed earlier). But the marching of foreign armies "into a certain small country"

make one think not only of the American intervention in the Dominican Republic but also of the more recent Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, the country of Jan Hus whom Siig compares with Che. If it were only American interventionism there would be no grounds for the total pessimism expressed in the poem's final lines, since the Soviets would supply a beacon of hope. Siig clearly is assigning the role of the "world's gendarme" jointly to the American *and* Soviet establishments, in a typical New Left manner.

There have been other manifestations of unrest among the Estonian intellectuals which would not qualify as New Left by Western standards, but which may be part of the same phenomenon, modified by the specific conditions prevalent in the Soviet Union. In contrast to the "New Left of the students" it could be called the "New Left of the academicians". Sakharov's memoranda are a prime example of it. Assuming a world-wide unrest of the intellectual class (or "stratum", in Naan's euphemistic terminology), different sections of this class could protest first in different countries. In America students are materially insured via their parents and can afford to revolt, while the academicians have too much to lose. In the Soviet Union, only somebody with a national standing can protest and actually be heard. The main document of the Estonian "New Left of the academicians" (besides Naan's essays) was an anonymous "memo of the Estonian intellectuals" of 1968.<sup>4</sup> More far-reaching than Sakharov's, this memo argues in favor of Western-type political freedom.

Press attacks against the New Leftists continued in Estonia throughout 1971. Their methods were considered fascist (*Rahva Hääl*, 6 May 1971), and they were even accused of murdering communist students in Chile (M. Makarov, in *Looming*, March 1971). By 1972 offers were made to co-opt the rank-and-file of the by-now disintegrating Western student movement, provided that they adopt some "communist-led positive changes" (V. Merkin, *Eesti Kommunist*, July 1972). Ultramarxist voices in Estonia itself faded along with the worldwide ebb of the New Left. From the vantage point of the mid-seventies the New Left may seem to be a past phenomenon, just as worker unrest may have seemed during its post-Luddite ebb. However, it is bound to re-emerge in one form or another, if it is viewed as a symptom of the rise of a new social class—the "thinking class" consisting of massive numbers of college-educated people with limited job opportunities.<sup>5</sup> The social foundation for ultramarxist thought and action continues to exist in Estonia, too.

## The Impact of the New Left on Estonia

## FOOTNOTES

1. For an overview of Soviet Estonia, see the author's "Estonia and Estonians" in Zev Katz, ed., *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*, New York: Free Press, 1975.

2. See e.g., Z. Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era*, New York: Viking, 1970.

3. See R. Taagepera, "Nationalism in the Estonian Communist Party," *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the USSR*, Munich, XVII:1, pp. 3-15 (1970).

4. Reproduced in *Münchener Merkur*, No. 306, 1968; see also *Newsweek*, June 16, 1969.

5. See R. Taagepera, "The Revolt of the Thinking Class," *Queen's Quarterly*, 78:1:19-29 (1971); and "Revolt of the Thinking Class," *The Nation*, May 31, 1971.