

This piece is, I suppose, initially about the difference between real repression and what Marcuse once called Repressive Tolerance, but it is ultimately about emancipatory practices and the problems of doing anything anywhere through the media which might be seen, let alone to be creatively liberating. border/lines has spent many pages discussing the freedom of the airwaves but rather less on the freedom or unfreedom of the press. I do not want to do that here in quite those terms, but rather to ask on what grounds and to what purpose is an alternative, emancipatory press possible.

Journals discussed:

Hirmondo, *Bésczelö* and *Máshonnan Bésczelö* all published illegally in Budapest, but available in North America from M.F.S.B.K., P.O. Box 140872, Chicago, IL 60614-0872, U.S.A.

Eastern European Reporter P.O. Box 222, London WC2H 9RP, England. Quarterly at U.S. \$32.00 per annum.

Index on Censorship, 36c Highbury Place, London N5 1QP, England. 10 issues a year for U.S. \$20.00.

This Magazine, 70 The Esplanade, 3rd floor, Toronto M5E 1R2. Six issues for \$12.50.

Books referred to:

John Downing, *Radical Media: The Political Experience of Alternative Communication*. London: South End Press, 1984.

Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press*. New York: Pantheon, 1985.

Charles Landry, David Morley, Russell Southwood, Patrick Wright, *What a Way to Run a Railroad*. London: Comedia, 1985.

At the outset the question has to be narrowed down further. I am not asking what kind of newspapers should be available for mass consumption, nor what is avant-garde (cultural trendiness that sees itself one step ahead of the *Globe and Mail*, or *Time*) but what intellectual, creative, practical basis is there to writing and publishing which consciously sees its task as being the basis for radical alternatives to the legitimising wholeness of the Other discourse. In other words a press for the intelligentsia, in the fullest Eastern European terms, all those whose Higher Education has led them to expect (and sometimes receive) certain occupations in the society.

I start with Central Europe because in a sense the problem is most dramatically there, though I will talk mainly about Hungary because I am more familiar with its specifics. First, all Central European countries are dominated by intellectuals who operate a not-so-sophisticated political and cultural bureaucracy. They run the publishing houses, radio and TV stations, the film studios, the education ministries, planning offices, museums, parks and recreation, the newspapers, and so on. They are, in general, a well-read, well-educated, and multi-lingual group of people. They can also draw on specialists who belong to the Academies of Sciences and to the Universities. They publish many journals, attend conferences (inside and outside their countries) and have all the educational advantages that bureaucracies have in the Western world. Some have more flexible terms of reference (Hungary would rank high here) and some inflexible (Czechoslovakia is the most rigid). Because the countries are rather small, many of them also personally know the opposition intellectuals, mainly because of common university experiences, and some of them read what the dissidents write out of genuine interest.

What the government intellectuals do, however, apart from their everyday policy and administrative activities, is to collectively define what can and cannot be written about them or anyone else they chose to define, sometimes, but not necessarily, aided by a government censor. Thus it is taboo to write anything critical about any other Eastern European country, or to be over-critical of government policies. In Czechoslovakia the penalty for infringement is either to be banned from writing for life, to be imprisoned, to lose a job, or to be deported to a remote area. In Hungary the punishment is loss of job or, more frequently, a high fine. Of course, censorship does not apply only to the more overtly political writing, but also to the more literary. Thus creative writing is made political. No writer in Central Europe can begin to write without being conscious in some way of the political consequences of his actions. Thus if a writer has been defined as a political outcast, he or she must maintain the momentum, they must continue to write and, if possible, publish more of the same or else remain silent. Similarly, a writer who is accorded recognition by the state publishing houses may receive a wide licence to write and publish which will be continued until such a time as he or she chooses to break with the guideline, or whenever the guidelines change. Both situations are political, though being in the opposition does not really allow for a-political writing, while much of that published by the state is necessarily a-political.

In Czechoslovakia and Poland the situation is much more clear-cut than in Hungary. The fact that there are a large number of people who have been defined as being members of the opposition means that there is a wider range of kinds of writers in the *samizdat* press, a wider range of political positions, and also (particularly in Poland) a wider range of discussion alternative forms of media. In Hungary, the number of writers who have been declared oppositional is relatively small: I was given a figure of around 20 (the Czech figure is over 300). But this figure is misleading, because there are a large number of writers who write in official journals or in foreign publications yet who hold official teaching and research posts, but whose ideas are substantially the same as those who publish only in *samizdat*. The crucial issue therefore rests on what *samizdat* says and what its political presence means. Because the Hungarian situation is rather more subtle than the others, I think it has a more direct relevance to our practices here.

There are two established journals, *Hirmondo* (Messenger) and *Bésczelö* (a title with a double meaning - "speaker" and "visiting a person in prison") which mainly covers politics, sociology, cultural comment, and literature. The material in these journals is exclusively about Hungary or by Hungarians. A new journal, *Máshonnan Bésczelö* (*Bésczelö* from elsewhere) produces world literature, which focuses largely on translations of fiction, essays, journalism, and the social sciences from Eastern and Central Europe. Each issue is thematic (nationalism, Poland, the Soviet Union, the economies of the different Soviet-style societies, etc.). All of these are published by the independant publishing houses AB. *Hirmondo* is monthly, *Bésczelö* quarterly and *Máshonnan Bésczelö* "occasionally." Their function is very specific: to make available critical writing to Hungarians which is not provided by the government presses. This is also the policy of book publishing by the three publishers AB, ABC and Free Time. Around 2000 copies of the journals and books are published, though the readership is estimated to be five times that figure. Like the published work in Czechoslovakia, the political positions of the writers is eclectic, ranging from Socialist, through Green, to Bourgeois-Anarchist. The common feature of all the writers is the obvious desire to live in a society where they can write and say what they like, but also that intellectual debate is the core of a vibrant culture. They also have a "fringe" group of publications: *Snob International*, which sees itself as an elitist avant-garde art magazine, *Artful Letters*, which is the work, almost unaided, of a single painter, and *M.O.* (Hungarian October) which focuses exclusively on the smashed revolution of October, 1956. There is also an irregular critical Art magazine called *Arteria*.

The opposition in Hungary is not strong, it is not united except around publishing and it is certainly not Marxist (in my visits to Hungary I have not met a single opposition-member who would call himself a Marxist). As Gabor Demsky, AB's publisher, said in an interview, "We have to acknowledge that there is generally a national consensus about the present regime. Our duty is to tell the truth about our history, about the real situation here... We have to write and publish the truth about current political taboos, about 1956, and also about the historical experiences of other nations in Eastern Europe...." The task of the *samizdat* is therefore almost entirely educational, with

a general belief that ultimately there will be an effect on people's minds and therefore on social action. This educational sense is backed by "flying universities" which move from house to house. And all of this in context where most people inside and outside see the Hungarian economic reforms as being the most innovative and "liberal" in Eastern Europe.

But the *samizdat* is not only writing for the countries of central Europe. One Hungarian publisher boasted how important Radio Free Europe was to the success of *samizdat*. And it is also known that that the CIA as a matter of routine provides regular service to the US government of translations of all *samizdat* publications (as presumably does the KGB to the Soviet bureaucrats, though in neither case is this material made available to the public). *Samizdat* material is made available in English by various interest groups. Merlin Press periodically issues a *Samizdat Register* edited by Roy Medvedev on Soviet writing, and the University of Michigan issues the very large annual *Cross-Currents* on Central European (but mainly Czech) writing. From London comes the new journal, *East European Reporter*, which "supports research and creative work by Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians and Poles with the general aim of promoting a wide range of cultural and educational activities in these countries and elsewhere." Journals like *Index on Censorship* have been providing a service like this for the whole world for some time, and in some respects should be put in the same context as the *New Internationalist* which was discussed in *borderlines* 3. The voices of *samizdat* therefore are heard and used everywhere. The real question is how these national and international relations interact.

It is clear that what the CIA appropriates *samizdat* for is quite different from what the *East European Reporter* does. *The Reporter* is written

almost entirely by Central Europeans, CIA policy is not. *Index on Censorship* tries to give a voice to the voiceless wherever they are; no government anywhere is dedicated to such a policy. *Samizdat* is dedicated to emancipatory practices; foreign government appropriation of it is dedicated to closure. Curiously also, *samizdat* represents for Westerners precisely those values which seem to be in danger of being lost in the West because of the West's own journalistic and educational policies, which is presumably why Central Europeans are eagerly snapped up in academia, the media and the arts. *Samizdat* itself, however, is concerned precisely with the opposite: an internal critique of a social system.

But these observations bring us to the question of whether the experiences of *samizdat* are of any relevance to publishing in Canada, without the term itself being appropriated loosely for an "alternative" press, as Studs Terkel does in a review of Abe Peck's recent trendy study *Uncovering the Sixties*. *Samizdat* is illegal publishing, and there are no clear senses in which publishing faces that sense of illegality here. Indeed, virtually all non-establishment publishing in Canada which is not clearly pomographic receives some subsidy from the Canada Council, the SSHRC or one of the provincial cultural bodies. But most "alternative" publishing in Canada does not do more than touch the fringe of the culture nor in any way can be considered essential reading for people who see themselves as political intellectuals. This not because Canada is intrinsically more complex than

Hungary, except in a geographical sense, but because the journals are appealing to culturally and politically fragmented audiences. Hungary's political symmetry is one of its attractive features: there is official culture and there is opposition culture. In Canada there is official culture and there is officially sponsored alternative culture, with plenty of government and non-government paper-work going into deciding what should be the proportion of government money paid to the subsidy of either. (Expo, for example, is definitely official culture; the *Canadian Forum*, to take an example at random is perhaps alternative). In Hungary when the government decided to have an International Cultural Forum, the opposition responded with an Unofficial Symposium. In Canada everyone would want to have a little part of the government action.

Thus if *samizdat* were to have any meaning here it would have to satisfy something like the following requirements: it should represent alternative culture, alternative politics, alternative media, an alternative sense of the place of the intellectual in the society, an alternative economy (Hungarian *samizdat* necessarily is part of an economy that exists on the fringes of the state). There is no reason why it should not take money from the state, when it can get it, but it should see itself as establishing a completely autonomous process of production, whether it called itself socialist, cooperative or syndicalist. It should not be dogmatic, otherwise it will not be taken seriously by anybody, but on the other hand it should not see itself as competing with the established media (an alternative *MacLeans* would end up being something like the Paris *L'Express*). Within Canada the only journals that have come close to doing this are *La Vie en Rose* and *Les Temps Fou* in Québec and perhaps *This Magazine* and *The Body Politic* in Toronto. *This Magazine* represents something of the problem that the issue raises, for its content, and perhaps in its objectives it comes closest to looking like a Canadian *samizdat* (the other three discussed above are special cases in that they are specific sexual interventions in cultural publishing). *This Magazine*, emerging out of *This Magazine is About Schools*, wanted to fill the gap in Canadian journalism that I have been discussing: to be a regular (weekly or fortnightly) journal of the left which would do in Canada what, for lack of clear international comparisons, say *The Nation* or *The Guardian* try to do in the USA or

The New Statesman in Britain, though in none of these cases can one say that they represent effective alternatives. *This Magazine* was to be professional, self-sufficient, and linked to movement. It is, in a sense all of this, and clearly provides the best journalistic writing on the left. But its circulation at present is 5500 and it appears six times a year. The problem, and it is a problem with which I want to conclude, is under what circumstances can an alternative press and alternative media flourish?

The problem is that flourishing in the sense I have been writing implies, being an interconnected whole. The alternatives exist in their fragmentation, but they do not have the sense of common purpose and mutually-supportive organization that I have found in Hungary. And it is only with such interconnectedness that we can, in the long run, establish the élan and the mutually-viable economies to be politically and educationally effective. Both *Radical Media* and *What a Way To Run a Railroad* provide suggestive indications of how that might be done. Ultimately for us, that implies a Federation of Alternative publishers in Canada (including magazines, presses, radio, record companies, video) which would push the sterile CPPA to one side and defy the capitalist/bureaucratic stranglehold on our cultural policies. The present situation allows the fragmentation to be masterminded by the grant-giving agencies, and by the hand-to-mouth necessities of being small. An intermedia federation of the left with its own printing-presses, credit union, marketing strategy, educational network, etc., would provide just an organization in which *samizdat* would become a reality. If, for example, *Fuse*, *Body Politic*, *This Magazine*, *Fireweed*, *Pulp Press*, *Parachute*, D.E.C., Bread and Roses Credit Union, the Marxist Institute really organised themselves...*borderlines* would certainly be interested.

But that is a theme for another piece.

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MACLEANS
BESTSELLER

