CZECHOSLOVAKIA

'Without music, Mr Tomin...

Exasperated by the security state's continued harassment of him and of his philosophy classes, Dr Julius Tomin sent an open letter to the Czech Minister of the Interior last weekend, announcing the start of a ten day hunger strike. He headed the letter: 'Must it have been?'

Prague, 10 May

Mr Minister,

On Wednesday 7 May at noon I delivered in person to the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs a letter in which I informed you about my serious worries that servants of your department intend once more to misuse the 19th paragraph of law 40/74 which empowers members of the security forces 'to demand the required explanation from anyone who could contribute to the clarification of matters important to the investigation of a civil offence, or other breach of statutory duty, or help in the search for missing persons or property'. I then let you know of my serious anxiety that members of the security forces would like to misuse the above paragraph in order to impede me and my friends from engaging in our joint study of the elements of philosophical thoughts.

On Wednesday the 7th at seven o'clock in the evening I wanted to give a class on Aristotle's Metaphysics in my flat, to a few of my friends. I told you that, should my anxieties prove justified and the security forces, under command, prevent me by force from lecturing on Aristotle's Metaphysics Book 1, I would in protest begin a 10-day hunger-strike. Mr Minister, let me describe to you the manner of my last interrogation following the invitation 'to give an explanation in accordance with paragraph 19 of law number 40/74; and in the case of nonattendance to face a summons'

As I informed you in my last letter, I was invited to the police station on Fr. Kriska no. 24. l accepted the invitation and came at three in the afternoon; I waited a moment in the entrance hall until the arrival of an elderly gentleman, who informed me that he was not acquainted with the matter, and the in-Vestigating officer was on his way. Then he began to talk about music, assuring me that I would, as a philosopher, greet his comments with interest. He spoke of our national music, and its part in the life of the nation, saying that, so long as our country lives, so too will we play the music of Smetana.

He turned to the subject of baroque music, and of the deep impression which it leaves on the human spirit: 'Without music, Mr Tomin, I could not imagine my life. I do not want to reproach our modern youth; nevertheless, nowadays young people do not understand music as we older people understand it. Bach said that all men should learn to understand music, and it is true that, in my case, I did not grasp the meaning of Smetana's Bartered Bride as I now do. As a boy I could not understand my mother when she asked me to sit in the meadow and listen to the song of a skylark. Music is like love. Sensible women tell us that the best lovers are men between forty and fifty. Take Beethoven, for example.

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How pure and sensitive a soul, and yet how revolutionary was his music! He would have been killed among the first by the Nazis, for they could not understand such music. So gentle a man, and how loved by women! His nephew took advantage of it, indeed appropriating for himself as mistresses the women who loved his uncle. But Beethoven needed to express, in love just as in music, sensitivity before all other things. And so he lived, in the end, with a hunchback.

The elderly gentleman in civilian clothes recounted that he worked as an extra in the Theatre, and that he had managed to talk about art with our greatest artists. He described to me the structure of a violin, and the art involved in making one and mentioned that he had discussed the problem with some of our greatest scientists. Then, changing the subject, he referred to the concerts arranged for the Prague spring festival, and commented on the various performances of Smetana's My Country. 'Mr Tomin, how Smetana must have loved the Czech people; what beautiful relations must he have had with the peasantry!

AT about 5.30, the elderly gentleman with musical interests was replaced by a young man, also in civilian clothes, who announced that I could have been sentenced for damaging the interests of the state abroad, and he began to read extracts from the foreign press which described, for the most part accurately, the harassment by the police of our Wednesday discussions of philosophy.

Shortly after half past six I was transferred to the police station at Bartholomew Street. There members of the Secret Police worked on me. Two of them in particular impressed themselves on my memory. Policeman A they neglected to introduce themselves walked around the interrogation office, and every time he passed me, struck me bluntly on the head, and then pulled my hair, saying, 'Don't go to sleep here, Mr Tomin'. He took a step to the door, a step back, and repeated the performance. I could relax only during the five steps that he sometimes took towards the window and the five steps back to me. For variety, Policeman A merely pulled violently at the hair of my temples, one side when going to the window, and the other side when walking to the door.

Another policeman stayed in the room meanwhile, standing motionless by the window. They did not interrogate me, but conducted a dialogue between themselves. A: 'Could this be a philosopher?' B: 'Fortunately his philosophy can be seen through by a little child.' A: 'He is crazy and belongs in a mental hospital.'

A: 'They say he has a doctorate. I would like to know what he gave for it.' B: 'He is in the business for money, what can you expect? He must have bought the degree as well.' After some time A exclaimed: 'We forbid your lectures! And you will listen to us! And get up! You will want to stand up when I talk to you!'

I recalled, Mr Minister, the second paragraph of law, 40/79, concerning the security forces: 'The security forces help the citizen to exact his rights and to maintain his dignity and personal freedom in accordance with the law and interests of our socialist

I remained sitting. Policeman A and B jumped on me, pulled me to my feet, seized me by the collar of the shirt and pulled me to the wall. Policeman B: 'Lean against the wall! Now take one step forward! I took one step forward. Policeman A: 'Now we see that you can learn obedience! And it didn't require very much.' So I went to sit down. They shouted, and demanded that I stand up; then jumping again on me they twisted my arm behind my back, and finally threw me to the floor. When I tried to lift at least my head Policeman A hit it down. They were breathing heavily, and moving wildly around the room. A kicked my head and, after a moment, they jumped on me once more and, by twisting my arms, raised me almost to my feet before letting me fall again. Then they took my legs and began to lift them, in order to hold me standing on my

AT last, no doubt through fatigue, they called for help and together made me sit down on the chair. Others arrived and were told: 'Imagine! He has been lying on the floor again! What an exhibitionist!' The reply was: 'He should be in a mental hospital. Everyone knows that!' After a while B picked up some of the official record paper: 'We warn you for stopping (sic) your lecturing activities immediately. Otherwise we prevent it by every lawful means. Do you take this warning?'

I dictated and they wrote in the record: I cannot accept this warning since it involves a contradiction. I am certain that there are no lawful means whereby, in our country ... this moment they interrupted me, saying that I had no right to the words 'our country' since my country is England. The official record then remained unfinished and unsigned.

The group of policemen who had worked on me for two hours left, to be replaced once more by the elderly gentleman who had spoken previously to me about 'my country'. He seemed a little tired now, and so he spoke about his father whom he loved very much, and who smoked a hundred cigarettes a day. In the mornings he would cough heavily and he was now very ill; they all, mother and children, had to sit continually in the atmosphere of cigarette smoke. Apparently this habit of his father's had begun in the war, and it was for this reason that the elderly gentleman remained a non-smoker. He spoke of his mother who had prophetic dreams which would be confirmed on the radio in the mornings. He himself was a materialist; nevertheless it seemed to him that they could be transmitted, just as radio or television waves are transmitted, through space; a doctor had explained to him that the brain is more sensitive at night and able to pick up influences which would not affect it by day.

Then Policeman B returned with his company, and I was taken to Konviktska St where I was detained for 48 hours in a cell. The reason for the detention was not given. When I at last got home I learned that during that same evening eleven of my friends were taken from my flat, interrogated and detained for forth-eight hours. Mr Minister, I hereby announce that on Wednesday 7th at 6.30 pm in the afternoon I began a ten-day hunger strike.