

ELLI PEONIDOU - CYPRUS.

Distinguished writers from all over the world, had such a gathering taken place two and a half thousand years ago, the Cypriot Poet Stassinos would, I am sure, have taken part. Stassinos, who lived in the 7th century B.C., describes the events preceeding the Trojan War in his "Cyprian Epics". In one of the fragments of his poems that have survived to our days says:

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Which means:

"And so many heroes died in Troy. For this was the will of Zeus".

More than 2500 years have gone by since then. Generations upon generations have lived and died. There have been thousands of wars, major or minor ones, on our planet. And poets and writers have lamented the dead. Such a war took place three years ago in my little island, Cyprus, the birthplace of Venus. It was not a major war, and it did not last long either; hardly a month. However, this short period of time was enough for us to lament 6000 dead and missing persons, it was enough to create about 200,000 refugees, which is <sup>one third</sup> ~~half~~ of the population, in a small island of 9,000 square kilometres.

This is not the first time that Cyprus has been subjected to the evils of war. The whole of its dramatic history is a story of war and foreign conquest. Phoenicians, Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Franks, Venetians, Ottomans, British have conquered the beautiful island, plundered its wealth and beauty, leaving part of their culture in the process. This is how our poet Thodhossis Pierides sings the incessant comings and goings of the conquerors to our little island.

"One by one the waves of history have come and gone,  
They have come and gone but we have remained here.  
We, the plebeian masters of this land,  
We, who shall remain; even though they come, even though they go.."

"We, who shall remain, even though they come, even though they go". The poet prophesies and encourages his people, gives them the courage to face up to the future evils in the same spirit as they have faced those of the past. The poet has no arms, no material power. He only has his pen, his knowledge and his intuition. And these are enough. The poetry of Yiannis Ritsos in Greece fed and soothed the tormented

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people of Greece during the long years of the fascist dictatorship. The poetry of Nazim Hikmet in Turkey has been feeding the new generation, which brings a promise of democracy. The poetry of Pablo Nerunda in Chile brings consolation and hope to the chained Chilean people. ~~The~~ The young Vietnamese partisans fought with verses in their pockets. Lorca lived proud and free in the hearts of the Spaniards throughout the long period of Franco's Fascist rule. Pushkin's verses were a substitute to munition in the hands of the World War II defenders of Leningrad. The verses of Brecht acted like dynamite in the souls of the German anti-fascists. The verses of Hristo Botev ignited the flame of revolution in chained Bulgaria.

Art finds the courage to enter where anybody else would have feared to tread. The Greek tragic poet Euripides laments the destruction of the enemies of the Greeks and Aristophanes does nothing but caustically satirize everything that is wrong in the Athenian Society.

Dear members of the conference, I will again return to my small country. We have an old saying in Cyprus: "The tongue always seeks to touch the aching tooth". It is indeed a tormenting pain to feel that this ancient island is in danger of perishing. And the causes are so foreign to us, the Greeks and Turks of Cyprus. It is true <sup>may be</sup> that our two peoples have had different religions, different customs, different languages. These differences were however, respected and honoured by both sides. Greek and Turkish Cypriots, we used to live side by side and take part in the banquets of Greek or Turkish weddings together, and together we celebrated the Turkish Bairam and the Greek Easter. We, the Greek Cypriots, miss the Hodjas painful incantation and the Turkish Cypriots would be a familiar sight at the fairgrounds during Christian festivals. Our enemies came from outside and had for years been working on the imperialist motto of divide and rule. The plan, perfectly organised and executed by the Greek and Turkish Juntas and the very small party of Cypriot reactionaries has had the morbid effects. Although we felt, we could almost see the evil that was going to happen, stood by too small and too weak to fight against it. And now? Now that we see our island divided and our peoples dangerously far from - and tragically so near - each other, feel an urgent need, to approach each other before it becomes too late, before the new generations born now forget their neighbours or see them as enemies. Which is then the most natural means of such an approach? None other but the intellectual approach.

Already the works of the Greek Cypriot authors written after the war show clear signs of this need for an intellectual contact. Our poetry and prose of the last few years do not exhibit any trace of hatred against the Turkish Cypriot. On the contrary, there appears a sense of sympathy, and solitariness for our common bitter fate. The hatred is aimed at the reactionary circles, at NATO and its lackeys, who are the same, whatever language they may speak.

"Osman, my brother, I open my heart to you and stretch my hand out to you", ✕

says the poet Costas Cleanthous. I am sure that the works of the Turkish Cypriots are in the same key. We are doing our best to find and translate these works. We are doing our best to send our works to the other side. And we will surely find a way. Because Art recognises no barriers - natural or artificial. On the contrary, Art makes frontiers and barriers disappear wherever they may be. I would, from this rostrum greet the Turkish writers who are here. Opportunities like these are for us precious for contacting and getting to know each other. For, wherever war shows its ugly face, the presence and contribution of art in dissipating enmities and reuniting peoples becomes even more urgent, because it helps to unveil the dark plotters of conflicts. Wherever there is danger of war poetry is called upon to put up its shining shield which protects and embraces all languages, all religions, all races.

This gathering of writers which has world wide repercussions and meaning, will become a milestone in the history of literature, in the same way that the Helsinki conference has become a milestone in the History of Europe. Here we must stress the importance of the initiative of the National Union of Writers of Bulgaria who have realised this gathering, which is an extension of the Final Act of Helsinki. This hospitable, green country of Bulgaria gives us to-day a unique opportunity to demonstrate the power of the written word in action. It offers us the ideal conditions to discuss collectively how this power could be used. For this our sincere thanks. Our languages, our views of the world, our philosophies may be different. Our individual styles are also different. However, the aims and the goals of all the participants are the same. To preserve alive this warm shelter of mankind, our planet. For never before have the dark forces been more able for a total destruction. Never before has total annihilation been such a tangible reality, a Guernica stretching to the four corners of the earth. At the same time, however, never before have the forces of peace and progress been so strong and so capable not only of bringing stable peace to the world but change it too. The writer's antennae are ~~more~~ <sup>that</sup> sensitive ~~and that~~ <sup>and must</sup> can perceive the danger all the ugliness and the beauty of this dear blue planet of ours. Let us exploit to the maximum our capabilities.

more clearly. This is why they are ready to fight with their pens in defence of this small yet vast blue-green globe.