

October 19, 1950

Policy Planning Staff View of Exile National Councils

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Summary:

State Department Policy Planning official Robert Joyce laments to Frank Wisner disarray among the national councils and suggests redoubled efforts to unify them. Check copy and redactions.

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Mr. Wisner

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October 19, 1950

Memorandum to: Mr. Frank G. Wisner

Subject: National Committee for Free Europe

Baron Georges Besseney, Chief of the Foreign Affairs Section of the Hungarian National Council, was in the early thirties Chief of the Political Section of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was Hungarian Minister to Yugoslavia from 1937 until 1941, Hungarian Minister at Vichy in 1941 and 1942 and Hungarian Minister to Switzerland from 1943 until the end of the war. He is an accomplished professional diplomat and a serious and thoughtful person. I have known him very well indeed since 1938. Besseney came from New York to Washington at the end of last week to ask my advice on his continued participation in the Hungarian National Council.

It is my understanding that the Hungarian National Council under the leadership of Bela Varga and former Prime Minister Nagy has been the best disciplined and most unified of the various national councils and committees of Eastern European countries which are recognized by the National Committee for Free Europe in New York. Besseney told me, however, that the Hungarian National Council had started to disintegrate and that the various members of the group were engaged in partisan intrigues and disagreements to the extent that there was a good chance of the Council falling apart. Besseney stated that the Washington representative of the Hungarian National Council, former Hungarian Minister to the United States Szegedy-Maszak, had resigned in disgust and was now endeavoring to obtain employment with the Voice of America. Szegedy-Maszak, in other words, said that he could do nothing useful as a member of the Hungarian National Council which was so hopelessly split on political issues that it probably could have no further utility. Szegedy-Maszak was also a career Hungarian official and a very serious man.

Dept. of State, ISS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.

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Baron Bessenysy sat... and was tempted to give the whole thing up and withdraw from Hungarian affairs. He stated that he had been encouraged by American officials over the past three years to maintain his status as an active member of the Hungarian emigration but that now he was considering giving up this status, applying for American citizenship and withdrawing completely from Hungarian affairs. He asked me what my advice would be to him and through him to the Hungarian National Council. In our conversation I made the following points:

1. The National Committee for Free Europe in New York had absorbed the time and energies of many distinguished and busy Americans who were interested in the problems of Eastern Europe and in maintaining hope for the eventual liberation of the Soviet satellite countries. It had been announced by the Voice of America in the summer of 1949 that the various national committees and councils had been organized. General Lucius Clay, under the auspices of the NCFE, had launched the "freedom campaign". Radio Free Europe had been on the air for some months and arrangements were being made for Radio Free Europe to obtain more effective and powerful broadcasting facilities which would permit the various national councils and committees to speak to their respective peoples behind the Iron Curtain. In addition the NCFE had inaugurated a national fund raising campaign to support the activities of the various national committees. In short, a very great deal of good will, time, energies and money had been committed to the effort to maintain the morale of the captured peoples of Eastern Europe and to permit political exiles from that part of the world to engage in activities to prepare the ground for the liberation of their respective countries. The objectives of the NCFE had received the blessing of the Secretary of State and the Freedom Campaign had been endorsed by the President of the United States.

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2. If the various national committees and councils, due to petty intrigues, partisan differences and selfish jockeyings for precedence and influence on the part of their component members should result in the dissolution of these groups I could foresee serious repercussions and consequences.

3. The distinguished and busy Americans who were devoting a great deal of time to the attainment of the objectives of the NCFE would naturally be disgusted and would certainly lose interest.

4. The various political exiles from Eastern Europe presently active as members of the several national councils and committees would certainly lose stature in this country with the result that there would be very little disposition to provide them with further assistance which was making it possible for them to live and work in the United States. When such great issues were at stake in Eastern Europe it would certainly appear unseemly and petty, to say the least, for the various exiled political leaders to be engaging in futile and silly quarreling amongst themselves.

5. The communists were alleging that the governments of the various Eastern European countries, prior to the communist take-over, were composed of selfish and petty politicians who were engaged in struggling for personal advancement against the best interests of their respective countries, etc. The various communist regimes were claiming that only they could unify not only the countries but the entire region of Eastern Europe. A break-up of the various national councils and committees would certainly give a great deal of credence to the communist theses. It is certain that the communists would make the most of any disintegration among the refugee groups based on petty partisan and selfish interests.

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6. It appeared to me to be incredible that the various individuals in the refugee groups should be quarreling over issues such as the boundary between Croatia and Serbia, Slovak separatism, the percentage of the votes obtained by the Hungarian Small Holders Party in 1945, whether or not G. M. Dimitrov was the authentic leader of the Bulgarian peasant party, etc., etc., rather than agreeing as patriotic citizens of their respective countries on fundamental issues such as self-determination, the re-establishment of basic human freedoms and democratic processes in their respective countries.

Baron Bessenyey agreed entirely and remarked that the basic difficulty was perhaps that the component members of the various national councils and committees were mainly politicians who thought in terms of their own political hopes and partisan issues rather than national issues. He stated that he was exhausted, disgusted and infinitely bored by the long and fruitless quarrels which had developed within the Hungarian National Council. He left me with the impression, however, that he would not formally withdraw from the Hungarian National Council at this time.

I think the time has come to reconsider and re-examine this whole complicated and troublesome issue of political exiles from Eastern Europe. Many of the individual members of the various committees have stated emphatically that only bold measures by appropriate American officials can make the various exiled groups come to their senses. It has been the Department's policy not to interfere in the internal affairs of these national groups but to leave it to the individual members to thrash out their difficulties and come up with some sort of unity. They have apparently failed to accomplish this and we are now faced with, it seems to me, several alternatives:

1. We might let things proceed as at present without intervention which would probably result in the progressive disintegration and ultimate dissolution of the various national committees.

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2. We could advise the NCFE in New York to make a concerted effort to unify the various groups [redacted]

[redacted] Perhaps the NCFE, assisted by the Department, might draw up short programs which all members of the various groups could agree upon. These programs could be standardized and include basic issues which none of the members could fail to concur in such as opposition to Stalinism and imperialism, opposition to dictatorship and police state controls and in favor of the free institutions, the self-determination of the various peoples, etc. The various partisan groups within the committees and councils might also be persuaded to agree to postpone all disputes relating to the internal political and partisan issues within their respective countries. It is just possible that the various committees could coalesce on the basis of such broad programs and objectives.

3. [redacted]

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Robert P. Joyce

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