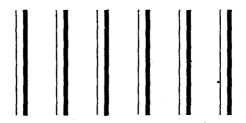


NOTES FROM THE GALLOWS

BY JULIUS FUCHIK



With a Preface by Samuel Sillen and a Note by
Augustina Fuchik

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INTRODUCTION

JULIUS FUCHIK Wrote this book under the shadow of the Nazi hangman's noose. The very form of the manuscript testifies to the invincible courage and resourcefulness of the author. It consists of pencilled slips of paper smuggled one by one, with the aid of a sympathetic Czech guard, from the Gestapo prison at Pankrats, Prague. Fuchik, a man scornful of self-deception, knew he would not live to complete this precarious serial. But he was unyielding in his faith that its "happy ending," as he put it, would soon be written by millions of his own countrymen and by antifascists in other lands.

This confidence in the people and in their future is the root theme of the book. True, we find here, as in so much of the war's prison-literature, an ineffaceable image of fascist cruelty. But this is the picture of one who is not merely a victim of fascism, but also its accuser, judge and moral conqueror. "Oh, what a crop will rise one day from that frightful seeding," he exclaims. And to Fuchik we irresistibly apply the words he chooses to describe a comrade who is "always pointing others into the future, when his own future pointed straight toward death."

Fuchik was killed by the Gestapo, but the future to which he points in this book is a living reality in his native

Czechoslovakia. Indeed, the book itself is the most widely read of all works about the war in that country, and Fuchik is celebrated as one of the great national heroes. The book has also been translated into the tongue of virtually every country that played a part in defeating Hitler, including the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and France. Of the Soviet Union, Fuchik once wrote an admiring book entitled *In the Land Where Tomorrow Is Already Yesterday*. The future of which he writes in the present book has already taken shape in Czechoslovakia and the other new democracies of Europe.

A journalist, literary critic and Communist leader, Julius Fuchik was born on February 23, 1903, in Prague-Smichov. His father was a steel worker as well as an amateur actor and singer. Fuchik's own activity in the working class movement and in the cultural world of Czechoslovakia began when he was in his early teens. As a student at the University of Prague, he studied literature, music and art. Earning his living as a worker, he joined the Communist Party, wrote for socialist reviews, and became a leading figure in the Communist Students Organization. In 1929 he became editor-in-chief of Tvorba (Creation), which under his leadership was an influential cultural and political review. He subsequently became editor of Rude Pravo, organ of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

Following two visits to the Soviet Union, which he reported to his countrymen as correspondent, lecturer, and editor, Fuchik was persecuted and repeatedly imprisoned by Czech reactionaries. At the time of Munich, the Communist press was illegalized, the party driven underground.

With the Nazi occupation, Fuchik went into hiding. He devoted himself to Marxist literary-historical studies and was at the same time instrumental in organizing illegal headquarters for the Party. With his colleagues he published the underground central organ *Rude Pravo* (he was its editor), and other publications including the satirical review *Trnavecek* (The Tiny Whistle).

Of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, today the majority party of that country, Fuchik writes in this book with pride and devotion. This party, under savage persecution, proved to be an indestructible part of the strength of the Czech working class and the entire nation. At a time when imperialist reactionaries in America, like the Munichmen of Czechoslovakia, seek to smash the vanguard party of our own working class, it is particularly instructive to read Fuchik's book. Here we see the Communists in their true light as the most determined defenders of the people's interests. Here we see that genuine friendship with the Soviet Union, the land of socialism, is the prerequisite for the defense of any nation against reaction and fascism. It is as a great Czech patriot, as a staunch son of the Czech working class, that Fuchik speaks with respect and love of the Soviet Union.

He was arrested by the Gestapo, tortured, murdered at the age of 40. But in these pages, so magnificently unlabored, so shrewd in observation, so rich in the love of life, Fuchik has left an enduring work of literature. And an enduring lesson—let us remember his last line: "Be on guard!" "In real life," he wrote, "there are no spectators: you all participate in life." Is not this as true of real litera-

ture as it is of life? This book is a noble participation in the continuing fight—how much closer now to our own homes!—against the monstrous inhumanities of fascism.

SAMUEL SILLEN

A NOTE

IN THE CONCENTRATION camp at Ravensbrück I heard from a fellow-prisoner that my husband, Julius Fuchik, was condemned to death by a Nazi court in Berlin on August 25, 1943.

Questions about his further fate merely echoed back from the high walls around the camp.

After the defeat of Hitler Germany in May, 1945, prisoners were released whom the fascists had not had time to torture quite to death. I was among those saved.

Returning to my liberated homeland, I searched for my husband, just as others by the thousand searched and searched for their husbands, wives, children, fathers and mothers, who had been dragged off by the German invaders to numberless torture hells.

I learned that he had been executed in Berlin on September 8, 1943, the fourteenth day after his sentence.

I also learned that Julius Fuchik had written notes while in Pankrats Prison in Prague. It was a Czech guard, A. Kolinsky, who brought paper and a pencil to his cell and secretly carried away the sheets, one by one. I met that guard and finally collected the notes my husband had written in Pankrats Prison. The numbered sheets came from hiding with various faithful people, and are here presented to the reader—the last chapter of Julius Fuchik's life work.

AUGUSTINA FUCHIK

PREFACE

SITTING AT "ATTENTION," your body rigidly erect, your hands gripping your knees, eyes riveted on the yellowing wall of a room in the former Petchek bank building—this is certainly not a position conducive to meditation. But who can force your thoughts to sit at attention?

We shall never know who or when, but someone once called this hall in Petchek building "the Cinema." The Germans called it "domestic imprisonment," but "Cinema" was a stroke of genius. The spacious hall contained six long rows of benches, occupied by the rigid bodies of those under investigation. The bare wall before their staring eyes became a screen on which they projected more scenes than have ever been filmed, as they waited to be called to another hearing, to torture, to death. The film of one's whole life or of some minor moment of life, a film of one's mother, wife or children, of one's broken home or ruined life. Films of courageous comrades-or of betrayal. The film of the man to whom I gave that anti-Nazi leaflet, of blood which is flowing again, of a firm grip of the hand which held me loyal. Films full of horror or of brave decision, of hate or love, fear and hope. Our backs turned to life, each of us died here daily before his own eyes. But not all were reborn.

I have seen the film of my life a hundred times, thousands

of details. Now I shall attempt to set it down. If the hangman's noose strangles before I finish, millions remain to write its "happy ending."

J. F.

Written in the -Gestapo prison at Pankrats, Prague in the spring, 1943

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TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

In five Minutes the clock will strike ten. A beautiful, warm spring evening, April 24, 1942.

I am hurrying as fast as I can while pretending to be an elderly man with a limp—hurrying to reach the Jelineks' before the building is closed at curfew, at ten. There my "adjutant" Mirek is waiting. I know that he has nothing important to tell me this time, nor I to tell him. But to miss an appointed meeting might cause panic, and I should hate to cause extra worry for those two fine souls, my hosts.

They greet me with a cup of tea. Mirek is there—and the Fried couple, also. That is an unnecessary risk. "I like to see you, comrades, but not together this way. So many in one room at once is the best way to jail, to death. You will either have to stick to the rules of conspiracy, or quit working with us, for you are endangering yourselves and others. Do you understand?"

"We understand."

"And what have you brought me?"

"Copy for the May first number of Red Rights."

"Excellent. And you, Mirko?"

"There's nothing new. The work is going well . . ."

"That's all. See you after the first of May. I'll send a message. So long."

"Another cup of tea, chief."

"No, no, Mrs. Jelinek. There are too many of us here."

"At least one cup, please."

Steam rises from the fresh-poured tea.

Someone rings at the door.

At this time of night? Who can it be?

The visitors are impatient. They bang on the door.

"Open up! The police!"

Quick through the window. Escape. I have a pistol; I'll hold them back. Too late. Gestapo men under the windows, aiming pistols into the room. Detectives have forced the door, rush into the room through the kitchen. One, two, three-nine of them. They do not see me because I am behind the door through which they came. I could easily shoot them in the back. But their nine pistols point at the two women and three unarmed men. If I fire, my five friends will fall before I do. If I shoot myself, there will be shooting anyway, and those five will die. If I don't shoot, they will sit in jail six months or a year, and the revolution will set them free, alive. Only Mirek and I will not come out alive; they will torture us. They won't get anything out of me, but out of Mirek? A man who fought in Spain, a man who lived through two years of concentration camp in France, who came from France back to Prague illegally in the midst of war-no, he will never tell. I have two seconds to decide. Or is it three seconds?

If I shoot, I don't save anyone, except myself from torture—but I sacrifice the lives of five comrades. Is that true? Yes. So it is decided. I step out of the corner.

"Ah, one more!"

The first blow in my face. Hard enough to knock a man out.

"Hands up."

Another punch, and another.

This is just as I imagined it would be.

The orderly apartment is now a pile of furniture and broken things.

More blows and kicks.

"March."

They drag me into an automobile. Pistols always pointing at me. They start on me in the car.

"Who are you?"

"Professor Horak."

"You lie."

I shrug my shoulders.

"Sit still or we shoot!"

"Well, shoot."

Instead, they punch me.

We pass a streetcar. It looks to me as though it were draped with white. A wedding car—at night? I must be feverish.

The Petchek building, Gestapo headquarters. I never thought I should enter here alive. They make me run up to the fourth floor. Aha, the famous II-A section, anti-Communist investigation. I seem to be almost curious.

A tall thin commissar in charge of the arrest unit puts a revolver in his pocket and takes me into his office. He lights my cigarette.

"Who are you?"

"Professor Horak."

"You lie."

The watch on his wrist shows eleven o'clock.

"Search him."

They strip me and search.

"He has an identity card."

"The name?"

"Professor Horak."

"Check up on that."

They telephone.

"Of course, he is not registered. The card is forged."

"Who gave it to you?"

"Police headquarters."

Then the first blow with a stick. The second, third . . . shall I count them? No, my boy, there is nowhere to report such statistics.

"Your name? Speak. Your address? Speak. With whom did you have contact? Speak. Their addresses? Talk! Talk! Talk, or we'll beat you."

How many blows can a man stand?

The radio squeaks midnight. The cafes must be closing, the last guests going home. Lovers stand before house doors unable to take leave of each other. The tall thin commissar comes into the room with a cheerful smile.

"Everything in order, Mr. Editor?"

Who told them that? The Jelineks? The Frieds? Why, they don't even know my name.

"You see, we know everything. Talk! Be reasonable."

In their special dictionary to be reasonable means to betray.

I won't be reasonable.