

Hungarian lawmakers in Washington demand freedom for LaRouche

by William Jones

A high-powered delegation, which included two members of the Hungarian Parliament, a leader of the Hungarian Association of Former Political Prisoners, and an Austrian professor of law, representing the former Austrian Minister of Justice, Hans Klecatsky, arrived in Washington on March 24 for a week of meetings on Capitol Hill and at the State Department as a part of their investigation of human rights violations committed against Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche.

In the nation's capital, political operatives have attempted to sweep the LaRouche case under the rug, either because they themselves were implicated in the crime or because they lacked the courage to take on a fight with an administration that's still sitting on 20,000 documents, which would prove that LaRouche was jailed as a result of a U.S. government conspiracy.

The interest of the delegation in the LaRouche case was of a particularly personal character. All of the Hungarian members of the delegation had themselves spent years in prison, jailed for political crimes by the former communist regime in Hungary. One of them, Sandor Cseh, the vice president of the largest political party in Hungary, the Smallholders' Party, had been imprisoned by the Russians and condemned to death, for a crime which, as it was later proven, he did not commit. Janos Denes, who was elected as an independent to the Hungarian Parliament, was jailed for his part in the 1956 Hungarian revolt.

The visit of the delegation to Washington, coming in the wake of an Ibero-American delegation at the end of February on a similar mission, has sparked much nervousness at the U.S. State Department, which has tried to ignore the crescendo of international protest over the LaRouche case. Unable to totally disregard the protests, the State Department's Human Rights Division agreed to meet with the Hungarian delegation. Although the meeting was with the legal counsel of the Human Rights Division, it was orchestrated directly by Secretary of State James Baker III, who, according to high-level sources in the State Department, personally made the decision not to have outgoing chief of the Human Rights Division, Richard Schifter, attend the meeting. Baker also recommended that the Department of Justice not send a representative to the meeting, as they had initially intended.

Although State Department spokesman David Stuart in-

sisted that the LaRouche case was an ordinary "criminal" case, he did admit to the delegation that there had been numerous inquiries made on the LaRouche case from several countries.

Later, in meetings with the congressional office of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), ranking staff members admitted to the delegation that there were "irregularities" in the LaRouche case. One staff member somewhat nervously said that he hoped that the delegation was not comparing the "irregularities" in the LaRouche case to procedures which had been implemented in communist Hungary during the years of Soviet occupation. Dr. Tibor Kovats, the president of the Association of Former Political Prisoners (POFOP), responded by pointing out that even communist regimes called their political prisoners "criminal cases" and that the most noted of Hungarian political prisoners, Cardinal Mindszenty, had been accused and convicted of tax evasion and conspiracy.

The CSCE people were also cognizant of the interventions at previous years' CSCE conferences in Copenhagen and Moscow by the Schiller Institute, of which LaRouche was a founding member.

Lantos, a 'false Magyar'

The delegation also met with several U.S. congressmen, noted for their involvement in human rights issues and for their interest in the affairs in eastern Europe. The biggest shock was perhaps the treatment they received from an ex-countryman, Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.). Lantos, a Hungarian Jew who escaped Hungary during the Nazi occupation thanks to the efforts of the Swede Raoul Wallenberg, has, during his term in the U.S. Congress, been a prime spokesman for the drug-connected Anti-Defamation League, a nominally Jewish organization which has been in the middle of the government conspiracy which imprisoned LaRouche.

Lantos, still with many contacts in Hungary, tries to portray himself as a friend of Hungary. That "friendship" showed itself to be ephemeral when Lantos refused to meet with the delegation of Hungarians, instead sending his wife out to parry their questions about the LaRouche case. (Ironically, Lantos also portrays himself as a fighter for human rights, chairing the ad hoc Congressional Human Rights Caucus.) The great "fighter's" wife made the incredible claim

(which she knew to be absolutely false) that LaRouche was a millionaire. The congressman added insult to injury by not even once coming out of his office, where he was clearly visible, to greet the delegation from his native land. This led one of the delegation to brand Lantos as a "false Magyar" (Hungarian), a characterization which they will carry back with them to Budapest.

At a meeting at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a senior staffer, not so keen on discussing the LaRouche case, had to give begrudging assent when Dr. Kurt Ebert, the Austrian member of the delegation, a professor of law at the University of Innsbruck, pointed out that the United States has refused to sign almost all the major human rights covenants: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (EMRK), signed on Nov. 4, 1950, by the 15 member states of the Council of Europe. Neither had the United States, Dr. Ebert pointed out, joined the U.N. Human Rights Covenants of Dec. 16, 1966 (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), nor had it ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of Dec. 21, 1965, and the American Convention on Human Rights of Nov. 22, 1969, which has been in effect since July 1978. The staffer also admitted that they were having a problem getting the administration to sign human rights accords.

Other congressmen with a more sincere interest in developments in eastern Europe and in human rights than Lantos, gave a much more hospitable welcome to the European visitors. In a meeting with black activist Faye Williams, a congressional candidate from Louisiana and now chief staffer for Rep. Mervyn Dymally (D-Calif.) and a leading figure in the Center for the Study of Harassment of African-Americans, the delegation expressed deep concern over the harassment and political persecution facing black elected officials in the United States. Sandor Cseh proposed forming an International Alliance of Political Prisoners to expose and combat the persecution of individuals because of their political views.

The delegation also received a warm response from representatives of the Hungarian-American community, many of whom had also been political prisoners in their native land. In several meetings, the group was able to speak about the real situation in Hungary and to express their concerns about the LaRouche case as a dangerous precedent for a country long seen as the beacon of liberty. In one reception to which they were invited by leaders of an Hungarian-American association, they were received as guests of honor and given the opportunity to speak about their human rights mission to the U.S. on behalf of LaRouche. At the behest of Catholic human rights activists, the delegation was also given a place of honor at a memorial Mass for Cardinal Mindszenty at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington on March 29.

Although only a handful of journalists showed up at the press conference of the Hungarian delegation on March 30 at the National Press Club in Washington, it was still apparent that a diplomatic uproar had been caused by the delegation's intervention on behalf of LaRouche. The press conference was delayed because of a longer-than-expected meeting at the State Department, but none of the reporters left the room. In his introductory remarks, Dr. Kovats, while stressing that it was not their intention to interfere with the workings of the U.S. legal system, nevertheless said that as former political prisoners they had become concerned about the violations committed in the legal proceedings against LaRouche, a man whom they had gotten to know through his economic proposals for eastern Europe. "We were also interested in learning how human rights violations were being handled in the United States."

Janos Denes then gave a speech expressing heartfelt concern that the human rights violations in the LaRouche case were setting a dangerous precedent for the United States. "I myself suffered for decades, as did my country during the period of the Soviet occupation," said Denes. "The LaRouche case indicates that the United States might be developing in the same direction as Hungary under the Soviet occupation." Denes stressed that the U.N. Human Rights Convention applies even in the case of one single individual. "We are asking," Denes continued, "that his case be reexamined and that a new trial be held. We are asking that he be freed, and that the case be brought to a different conclusion than that which placed him in prison. Here the press can play an important role. It would be tragic if the United States falters in this case," said Denes. "The Primate of Hungary, Cardinal Mindszenty, suffered in precisely the same way." Denes then proudly pointed to the pins on his jacket, showing that he, too, had been the victim of political imprisonment and persecution, a fact which was recognized belatedly by his own government. Sandor Cseh explained how he had been arrested by the Russians and condemned to death for a crime which he didn't commit, even before his accusers had any proof that he may have committed the crime. "This was obviously not done under the rule 'innocent until proven guilty,'" said Cseh. "The law makes mistakes. And I feel that an investigation will find that mistakes have been made in the case of LaRouche. The man is 70 years old, condemned to prison for perhaps the rest of his life, and being behind bars gives him little possibility to adequately defend himself. He should be freed."

Dr. Kurt Ebert called for the LaRouche case to be brought before an international tribunal. "Individual judges may err," said Ebert, "and therefore there must exist a tribunal before which these errors can be corrected." Ebert emphasized that the developed notion of human rights also involves the right of the single individual to raise his or her voice against the oppression of those rights by that individual's own government.