DISCUSSION:

FESTIVAL DEFENDED

AS ONE who participated in the preparatory work to organise an Australian delegation to the 9th World Festival of Youth and Students held in Sofia, July-August 1968, I draw conclusions which differ from those expressed in ALR 1/69 by Susan Burgoyne.

The Festival for Solidarity, Peace and Friendship was, I believe, a historic occasion which brought together some fifteen thousand young people from over 120 countries. Those who participated in the Festival had a common aim to condemn world imperialism, whose aim is to exploit and suppress the peoples of the world. This alone makes the personal efforts of those who sponsored and supported the Festival, well worthwhile.

Sofia became the world centre of progressive young people where they joined together internationally to advance their rights, to propose, to express and to initiate future struggles to determine that the world in which we live should be a world of peace and free from exploitation.

The positive contribution of the Festival is best expressed by the solidarity meeting with the people of Vietnam. Here material, financial and medical aid was extended, overwhelming solidarity was expressed for the continuance of the struggles for the people of Vietnam. The Festival therefore made a positive contribution to the final victory over imperialism in Vietnam. Such a victory over imperialism would be a tremendous assistance to the peoples' struggles for independence in various countries.

This alone would vindicate the necessity of celebrating the Festival.

Miss Burgoyne raises specific criticisms of the narrowness in the work of the International Preparatory Committee. Such criticisms were not raised with the National Festival Committee for guidance or assistance in her work as the Committee's representative at IPC. I believe Miss Burgoyne's conclusions mainly derive from her own personal opinions relating to Czechoslovakia.

There are of course certain aspects of work by the IPC which I also criticise but I have personally raised my criticism direct with the IPC. This, in my view, is the only principled procedure to follow. I have never had occasion to criticise the aims of IPC, which I fully support.

The IPC took the tremendous responsibility of guaranteeing the organisation, finances and political preparations of the Festival. If the main support and participation came from the youth organisations of socialist countries and the World Federation of Democratic Youth then it is obvious that their views would emerge at any conference or forum held during the Festival. The policies and aims of the Festival must have the agreement of those who do the basic work. National Festival Committees represented at the IPC agreed with the preparations. It seems that Miss Burgoyne is really raising the issue that some aims and themes of the WFDY and of youth organisations are in contradiction with the theme of the Festival for solidarity, peace and friendship.

This is obviously not so, for no other
organisations contribute more to positive activity for solidarity, peace and friendship than do the WFDY and the youth of socialist countries.

Miss Burgoyne expresses the opinion that international gatherings like the Festival are not as important today as in years gone by I believe that this is also a wrong estimation irrespective of conflicting ideas, opinions and views and all the complexities and contradictions that exist amongst the various youth movements today.

One must take a positive, objective view that problems are not insurmountable and can be resolved. As the tactics and strategies of imperialism sharpen and are increased it becomes more urgent for the youth movements to resolve their differences through unity in action around common aims of solidarity, peace and friendship.

This can be best achieved by international gatherings. Whether the form of these gatherings is Festivals or Forums does not really matter, what is important is that struggles be coordinated, assisted and supported by all progressives. If one did not reach this conclusion then why should we worry at all?

What is important is that there be no over-emphasis on any one section of struggle. The recent French student revolt must be a glaring lesson to all on this. In my view the overthrow of the establishment cannot be consolidated without the support of the masses and correct political preparations by a communist or marxist party. To over-emphasise the importance of any one group is a political error. We should look upon international gatherings of co-operation as the property of all exploited forces, first of all the working class, and all extend our efforts for the international spirit of solidarity, peace and friendship with this in mind. For this after all is the way to the emancipation of Man.

The work of the Australian Festival Committee and the participation of an Australian delegation, was, I believe, a positive contribution to world peace and friendship. The aims of the Festival will always receive my support and assistance.

TOM SUPPLE.

(Mr. Supple is a Vice President of the Sydney Branch of the Waterside Workers’ Federation and the Secretary of the National Festival Committee which prepared Australian participation in the 9th Festival.)

ANOTHER OPINION

IT MAY BE OF INTEREST to those who read Susan Burgoyne’s article on the World Youth Festival (ALR No. 1, 1969) to consider some of the conclusions reached on the same topic by the London Bulletin No. 6 of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. This article speaks of the Festival pointing up “profound differences in the political orientation of young people in the socialist and capitalist countries” and draws from this the conclusion that “movements which have grown up fighting against authoritarianism and harassment in their own countries are naturally not going to welcome the same phenomena in a socialist country.” (Restrictions on delegation activity, limitations in the Festival program.)

The writer found that many young people from Eastern European socialist countries showed an “abysmal ignorance” of post-war Czechoslovakian history and thus were unable to really consider the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia,

Apart from Vietnam, the author notes that the one political issue that basically concerns East Europeans is the German question. He suggests that this concern actually distorts understanding of world politics. Claiming that Bonn is not an objective inde-
pendent force and that concentration on it, as if it were, leads to a neglect of the leading role of US imperialism, he makes the point that much more consideration needs to be given to the nature of the cold war "as a Western conception devised to put the socialist countries as much on the defensive as possible. . . American-offered competition on material terms (at a time when she was in a position of immense material superiority). This competition was accepted as an equal struggle, which it was not. Indeed the acceptance of an unequal struggle as an equal one only compounded the inequality. This distortion was especially deleterious in the case of the two Germanies."

While understanding why socialists from Eastern Europe concentrate so much on German revanchism he finds it disheartening that spokesmen of the German Democratic Republic at the Festival claimed 100% success in almost every field. He states: "The German Democratic Republic must be supported as the bastion of socialism in Germany. But because of the history of the cold war and the historical circumstances in which it was created, it is essentially a defensive bastion. It is not, as it stands, a model for socialism in Western Germany."

The problems which arose at the Festival are seen as stemming from three main sources, namely, the young participants from the capitalist countries and the 'third World' were markedly more political in their approach than those from the socialist countries, who, in the mass, were apolitical; the program was often ritualistic rather than political (the Women's Day was more concerned with a flower show, a dress show and a ball to choose Miss Festival than with women's rights and the condition of women in all societies) and from the differing political orientations of participants.

Such questions do not simply concern a World Youth Festival, as Susan Burgoyne pointed out. The way one estimates imperialism, and especially such components of imperialism as West Germany will determine one's attitude, at least in part, to events in Czechoslovakia.

JUNE PETERS

VIEWS RE-ASSERTED

IN *ALR* (No. 1, 1969) there appear two replies to my article (*ALR* No. 6, 1968) wherein I disagreed with Ted Bacon on the question of self-determination. G. Sanderson disagrees with my interpretation of a statement by Lenin placed at the top of my article. I maintain that my interpretation is the valid one and that she is wrong.

However, the main point of her article seems to be embodied in her statements to the effect that "I believe" "a particular viewpoint" has been imposed on Czechoslovakia by the action of the Soviet Union and four other members of the Warsaw Pact countries. Again, though this force was used "even in a good cause such as that of internationalism, national friction is increased and the cause of internationalism put back. I believe this has been the case with the invasion of Czechoslovakia."

What particular viewpoint was imposed on Czechoslovakia? She does not state. This is the crux of the matter. The viewpoint that was imposed was that counter-revolution aided by external forces would not be allowed to break socialist Czechoslovakia away from the socialist community.

Is that a correct viewpoint? It is! The obviously related question is, "was the action of the five Warsaw Pact countries necessary? This is the question that has to be answered and I repeat from my previous article, "The evasion of the case of the Five has
been a marked and disturbing feature of those in Australia who disagree with the action of the Five”.

It is not enough for G.S. to say “I believe” as she does in both cases mentioned above. She needs to bring forward evidence to disprove the case of the Warsaw Five who for months warned of the dangers and this is documented in publication after publication for all to read.

In addition we have to face the fact that today a majority of the Communist Parties of the world agree that the action of the Five was necessary. This is not necessarily of itself proof, but it is surely cause for a searching re-appraisal of our position. G.S. quoted from documents issued after Hungary (1956) and also the statement of the 81 Parties in November 1960.

Here again she misses the point. Nowhere in these documents is it stated or implied that socialist countries united in CMEA and the Warsaw Pact should stand aside and allow an integral part of the socialist community (in this case Czechoslovakia) to be torn away. Which once again brings us back to the central issue.

The weakest point in her argument is surely the following:

“China and Albania have on numerous occasions declared their conviction that the Soviet Government and the CPSU leadership are betraying the socialist revolution and are hand in glove with American imperialism. Surely a grave situation! Could their armed intervention in the Soviet Union then be supported?”

“The thing to be faced here is, “does G.S. believe what the Chinese say about the Soviet Union? Is it true?” I don’t think socialism is in danger in the USSR so it is not a problem for me. Nor do I believe that China is in danger of being torn away to the capitalist camp. It’s up to G.S. to decide on what she believes to be the facts, not on what others tell her.

And this once again brings us back to the real issue. Czechoslovakia was in danger of being torn away to join the capitalist camp and action was therefore necessary. This is the opinion of the majority of the world communist parties.

The second reply to my article is from G. Burns. He says, “The elements of subjectivity, which are prejudice, habitual and wishful thinking are being severely tested.” I must agree that his elements are being severely tested. How is one to assess the following statement of his: “Only the old and the blind can mistake the issue of Czechoslovakia as one against counter-revolution when it is one for democracy.”

Hardly a contribution to the clarification of the issues or an answer to the fact that the majority of Communist Parties think otherwise. Another point. He states — “J.B.H. mentions democracy once, and only casually, accidentally”. Even if his count were correct (which it isn’t), what has this to do with the argument? My case is based on socialist democracy as against capitalist democracy and the number of times the word is used is not the essential point.

He also states — “J.B.H. does concede a fragmentary thought on the problem of self-determination.” Really G.B., this is too much! The Editorial Board placed my article under “The Principle of Self-Determination”. And if I did not deal with democracy or self-determination by all that’s wonderful, what are you replying to me on? Your elements are having a field day, it would seem.

J. B. Henderson