United in the common struggle against Communism and Soviet aggression, we are sending to you, our compatriots living behind the Iron Curtain, a message of solidarity and faith in our early reunion. We are exiled newspapermen. We have gathered in Berlin, the closest we can come to you, to inform you that we are active in keeping alive the cause of liberty for our countries... In exile we want to serve you. In exile we want to perform a duty toward the free world. That duty is to warn the free peoples of the world that your fate awaits them unless they check aggression at once; that your fate awaits them unless you are liberated; and that the policy of liberation is the only one which can serve a dual purpose. It will reunite you, our compatriots, with the free world and it will save the free world from becoming a victim of the same aggression.

Thus spoke Boleslaw Wierzbianski, Polish journalist exiled in Britain and chairman of the International Federation of Free Journalists (IFFJ) as he stood before a RIAS microphone in the auditorium of Berlin's Technical University April 25 and broadcast to the peoples behind the Iron Curtain. On one side of the stage was a wasted tree, it branches bare except for a few tiny green shoots — symbol of the death of freedom and the life of freedom under Soviet domination.

Broadcast of the message to the peoples ruled by Communism marked the opening of the third annual congress of the IFFJ, whose members have all fled Communist domination. Speaker after speaker stepped before the microphone to tell the shocking story of suppression in his native country, much of it pieced together from reports seeping out through the Iron Curtain.

The Berlin congress had a dual purpose: to inform those living under Soviet domination that the fight for their eventual release from enslavement was continuing vigorously in the free world, and to present the situation of the press and other information media in the Iron Curtain countries to Western public opinion. To the East, the exiled journalists directed word of courage; to the West, they spoke this warning: "No nation can say 'It can't happen to us' if vigilance over human freedom and rights is neglected. With freedom of the press safeguarded, the majority of people will be informed truthfully, will see clearly and will never allow the Communist minority, however ruthless, unscrupulous and determined it may be, to seize power."

More than 100 IFFJ members attended the congress, as did many representatives of the Western press and prominent guests from other fields. Police guarded the university's main hall during the three-day session, but there was no Communist demonstration.

The International Federation of Free Journalists of central and eastern Europe and Balkan and Baltic countries was organized in 1948, and has been waging a "war of words" against Communism ever since. It unites approximately 1,500 self-exiled journalists from the Soviet-occupied countries in national associations. Nationalities represented in the federation are: Albanian, Byelorussian, Bulgarian, Czech, Slovak, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Polish, Rumanian, Unkrainian, Yugoslav, Croat, Serb and Slovene. Headquarters of the federation are in London and its regional unions in the United States, France, Germany, Sweden and Italy.

Journalist members of the IFFJ publish about 150 newspapers and other periodicals for the use of their compatriots. Its principal objects are: to oppose any totalitarian doctrines which misrepresent the principle of freedom of the press; to restore the proper meaning of traditional ideas of freedom and democracy, truth and honesty, in relations between individuals as well as nations; and to defend professional rights of its members and facilitate their contacts and collaboration with Western journalists and the press.

Josef Josten, Czech journalist and author of the book "Oh, My Country", which tells the story of the Communists coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, in summarizing the situation of the press in the Iron Curtain countries, quoted from Pravda, an official Communist party newspaper in Moscow, some months ago an article which called the Soviet press "the freest, the most highly ideological, truthful and principled press in the world". Shortly after the article appeared, he said, Pravda declared that "party organs must rivet the attention of the editorial staffs to party political and ideological questions and make of newspapers truly militant organs for the political education of the masses."

Mr Josten, who escaped from Prague after the Communists coup, pointed out that the technique curtailing the freedom of the press in the Soviet orbit applies not only to the local press, but involves foreign correspondents and agencies for both incoming and outgoing information. "Both native and foreign pressmen not sharing the regime's ideology are persecuted morally, materially, socially and even physically", he said.
In this unhappy land of falsity and contradiction, he went on, "foreign correspondents are isolated from the usual sources of information and even from the people, denied entry visas or their extension, limited in their freedom of movement and forced to use only official handouts and information as the basis of their reports. Even the facts obtained under such conditions are censored and delayed in transmission. Charges of ‘biased reporting’ are a daily occurrence until the ‘offending’ writer is either expelled or, seeing the futility of working under such conditions, asks to be relieved of his assignment. Arrests, blackmail and sentences for spying are the latest nightmares in the lives of these foreign correspondents.”

A DRAMATIC illustration of this isolation of foreign newsmen was the reenactment of the trial of William Oatis, American correspondent, whom the Communist court in Prague sentenced to prison a year ago on alleged espionage charges. With a “cast” of four Czechs, a Rumanian and an American student at Berlin’s Technical University who bore a striking resemblance to Oatis, the farce of the Oatis trial was reconstructed for radio listeners on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Several weeks before the opening of the Berlin sessions, the IFFJ challenged the Communist International Organization of Journalists in Prague to appear at the congress to answer a charge that they who serve the Soviets by running their press are participating in the breakdown of the liberty of millions by contributing to the latters’ indoctrination in hostile ideologies. Declaring that by serving as instruments of “russification” those controlling the Communist press are as much oppressors of their countrymen as the dread secret police, the congress accused them of guilt of “crimes against the soul of our peoples which will not be forgotten.”

“Are any of you here?” thundered Mr. Wierzbianski. “I repeat, are any of you here?”

There was no answer.

THE Free Journalists did not confine themselves to revealing the shackling of the press and other information media in the Iron Curtain countries. They held a symposium on the abolition of human rights as the basis for the Soviet economic system, with particular reference to the recent Moscow Economic Conference proposals concerning world trade; surveyed various aspects of the institution of labor camps; dealt with conditions of the workers; aired the travesties on justice, the “genocide of the human mind” through complete control of all creative abilities in fields of science, art, music and literature and an educational system which cripples the capacity of independent thinking in youthful minds; and the elimination of all religions except that of Communist interpretation.

Western speakers participating in the congress praised the IFFJ for the part it is playing in upholding the moral struggle against the forces of Communist oppression and cited efforts the Western world is making to promote eventual freedom for all peoples. All of them reminded the exiled journalists that the free world is not fooled by Russian tactics.

Calling Radio Free Europe a “spiritual airlift”, Admiral H. B. Miller, president of the National Committee for a Free Europe, declared: “Control of the press has been used for the organization of ignorance and the promotion of uncertainty and indecision through fear, up to now. But now the free world is alerted. The news has leaked out through the Iron Curtain for all to see, and the free press of all countries can now inform the free people about the facts. Here is organized bestiality parading in the disguise of a human social reform — a ‘progressive’ movement.”

SAID Mayor Ernst Reuter of Berlin: “By defending our freedom here in Berlin we at the same time defend your freedom. There is no freedom for an individual nation for the freedom of each nation depends on the freedom of the others. This also goes for the Russian nation. We must realize that freedom is no present from heaven but that we must work for it. Freedom is an explosive power which jumps across borders.”

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