

PARIS PEACE CONGRESS

Report by Mr. Kenneth Ingram, who attended as "observer" for the East-West Commission of the National Peace Council.

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The Peace Congress which was held in the Salle Pleyel, Paris, (April 20-25) was an impressive occasion, mainly an account of its widely international character. More than seventy countries were represented. The seating accommodation was about 2,000, so that many of the organisations had to share one ticket of admission among five or six members. The Italian delegation was the largest and numbered 750. The British delegation was about 200. Blocks of seats were allotted to the various nationalities and earphones were fitted in every seat, so that members, as at UNO assemblies, could listen to each speech interpreted in their own language while it was being delivered.

The Congress was unmistakably Communist in composition. When the fall of Nanking was announced by the President the members rose and cheered for several minutes. There were, however, other elements included. Bishop Nikolai, Metropolitan of Krutitsky, sent by the Patriarch of Moscow and officially representing the Russian Orthodox Church, was a venerable and conspicuous figure at all the sessions, and received a tremendous ovation when he addressed the Congress. His message was summed up in the words, "The Orthodox Church considers that its contribution is to oppose warmongers. It blesses all who work for humanity and peace and for the co-operation of all peoples. It believes that justice and truth will conquer."

The Liberal standpoint was voiced by Mr. Harvey Moore, representing the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, and by John Rogge, the American ex-Attorney General. Harvey Moore's speech was badly received, mainly because it was delivered in a very unfortunate manner. John Rogge's address, on the other hand, was heard with sympathy, though some of his sentiments - such as the warning that American Liberals felt grave misgivings as to the method of elections in Cominform countries - were clearly not in line with the sympathies of the audience.

The chief speaker from the British delegation was Mr. Zilliacus. His address was interesting though it was far too long (he spoke for an hour and a half). He urged that it was immensely important that the Labour Party should win the next election, on the ground that, whatever the Labour official foreign policy, the forces in the Labour Party opposed to war with USSR were so strong as to make such a war impossible.

As a whole the Communist speeches were studiously moderate. This was particularly true of the Soviet speakers. Ilya Ehrenburg paid a marked tribute to the British nation. "We remember London and Coventry," he said, "we respect the American people. You cannot and must not give way to fear. We do not want to settle our quarrels by arms." An impressive contribution was made by Alexis Mercessiev, a Russian pilot who was shot down during the war and lost both his legs, but who continued to fight. "The youth of the Soviet Union", he declared, "have asked me to tell you that they do not want war. We hoped that at the end of the war there would be friendship among the Allies and security for the peoples of the world. Every man and woman must ask themselves, 'What am I doing for peace?' We must find the ways and means of preserving peace."

Perhaps the most striking moment in the Congress was the

reception given to the Abbé Boulier, a Paris Catholic priest, when he read out a statement which had been drawn up by a group of Christians among the delegations and addressed to Christians throughout the world. I was present at the private meeting when this memorandum was prepared. It was a meeting composed of the Abbé, a Catholic Czech priest, two Hungarian (Protestant) bishops, three Swede Friends, the Dean of Canterbury and other English clergy. When this statement was read by the Abbé the whole assembly rose to its feet and applauded for several minutes. It was the most moving incident in the whole of the Congress.

My general conclusion is that the Congress was a genuine manifestation of a desire for peace on the part of the Communist elements in the world. It was coloured with a strong bias, which resulted in an over-simplification of the peace issue, owing to the belief that the blame for the present situation rests solely with the Western Powers. But it was not as A. J. Cummings suggests in the News Chronicle (April 26) a "bogus call". I gather that at the final (Monday) sessions the denunciations of Western tactics were much more extreme.

How far this Congress will achieve any positive result is less certain. It was a defect that no attempt was made to relate the various sessions to specific problems, with the result that most speakers were reiterating the same general sentiments. There were few, if any, constructive proposals at the sessions where I was present as to future policy. But as an expression of the passionate desire among peoples of the world for peace there can be no question, and the Congress was an impressive demonstration of this fact.

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