

Personal

31 July 1969

Mrs. Elly Kamath
c/o Programme Co-ordination
WHO Geneva

Dear Elly,

To whom, if not to you, can I write my impressions of the Boston WHA? Mike isaabout the only other one but he may have left on home leave. For that matter, you may not be in Geneva either, it just occurs to me...but I will write this anyhow, before my recollections lose ascerbity.

Those of us who were co-opted from LUN to work in Boston were instructed, not given a choice or even an appeal against the assignment, however great the practical or family difficulties involved. For my LUN colleague Vera Kalm, there was the genuine hardship of leaving her year-old infant as well as an older boy of about seven who felt very threatened by his mother's absence and manifested emotional disturbance. The cruelty and absurdity of shipping her to Boston became apparent when it turned out that the Geneva staff member (a girl named Monique) who usually assists Mme. Bernard in the reports office for the P&B committee had, in fact, been brought to Boston, to be the secretary instead of the assistant reports officer so that Vera, a novice, could serve in that capacity. And this is only one example of the bureaucratic fetishism and absurdity that appeared to govern much of the planning for Boston.

I was an assistant reports officer too, in the AFL committee. Do not be misled by the joint postcard sent to you during the heady first days: the co-signatory and I LOATHED each other. Mlle. L. is not quite as mad as a hatter, but she is a bit mad and there is method to it. Apparently the WHA is her one big moment of the year, to consort with the great and near-great, to enjoy authority over others, and to prove her besotted and overweening loyalty to The Organization through cheerful martyrdom. The trick she uses is to create enormous confusion and mystery about what she is doing, which is really very simple and has mostly been done well in advance, tobbe embellished during the WHA by a document number or placing a name into space left blank.

It was her idea to keep me in maximum confusion and ignorance, too, as a guarantee of docility and to get me to do work between 6 and 10 pm that I could easily finish by 5:45. She also had the queer idea that she could infuse me with such unquestioning reverence that I would accept instructions, for example, that I must go to the cocktail party given by the blank delegations. Well, we had a test of strength, and I did not go to the blank party and I did finish my work before 6 pm, despite her tiresome and incessant interruptions and other shtik. In her own part of the work, she was the proverbial s---t hitting the electric fan: trying to be faster in the deed than in the thought, she inevitably made errors and lost papers, spreading terror and blame among the local (Boston) recruits who did not even know what a DG was, much less what this mixmaster of a woman was doing or expected them to do. I hate to think how many sets of hundreds of xerox runs of a resolution or amendment had to be scrapped because of compulsive haste; and it will be a long time before I forget the lop-sided running (visible evidence of total commitment to the service of AFL) or the dip to one knee behind BN on the dais (ditto) or the sanctimonious ladylike response to any and all provocation, behind which facade the knives were always sharpened for the next backstab. She has the High Priest and Præstess of AFL completely fooled--but no one else, alas.

A typical day at Boston began with the 8:30 DG's briefing meeting; AFL committee, 9 to 11; plenary, 11:15 to 12:30; General Committee at 12:30; and, after lunch, one or even two more AFL committee meetings, maybe another plenary and/or general committee, with maybe a night meeting of the P&B committee for dessert. I was so dizzied by the running from one meeting to another (in widely separated locations) that on one occasion I arrived in a meeting room and exclaimed in all sincerity "where am I?" In place of the familiar interpretation equipment, we had little "walkie-hearries" worn around the neck, connected to a a piece that went over the head and plunked receivers over the ears. There was a virtue

in this gadget, as I said to someone at the last general committee meeting, in that it helped keep the head in one piece. There was a certain amount of farce in each type of meeting but for me the most pretentious and ridiculous was the 8:30 DG's briefing. The "cabinet" and lesser mortals began to gather at 8:20 or so, bustling and self-important, speaking (if at all) only to the cabots and the lodges while the cabbages conversed with each other in the cheap seats (chairs lining the walls, no ash trays, facing the fine backs of the P5's and above). At 8:30 sharp, the buzz of voices fell abruptly into reverent silence as the DG, followed by the Great Stone Face, arrived and took his seat, flanked by a frozen Valot (Valet? or is it Count Dracula?) and the elegant "Fedel," to discourse (usually) on the "budge" and this or that "committ." I was impressed by the hierarchical, almost military, atmosphere in which the DG, with adamant and phoney folksiness, dispensed his thoughts and worries of the day, reviewed (for those who had witnessed or participated in them) the events of the previous day, throwing in a few wisecracks (whose spontaneity I rather doubt) received with inordinate laughter.

Rudy, you will not be surprised to hear, almost invariably arrived 5 minutes after the DG had started the proceedings, usually through a door that creaked and groaned as if there was not a drop of machine oil to be found in Greater Boston and called mortification upon the tardy. What astonished me was the irrelevance and fatuity of these meetings, conducted in an aura of such pompous solemnity, so that one morning as we were dismissed I heard myself singing, without volition, "ring around the rosy...pocket full of posies..." --luckily, heard only by LUN fellow-inmates, who understood.

My cat was with me in my hotel room, which accounts for the remnants of sanity and composure salvaged from the Boston WHA. My assignment consisted of writing a summary for the Journal of what had transpired each day at the AFL committee; it might almost have been performed by the local girl hired to operate the xerox machine. I kept a 1969 calendar on the wall, crossing off each day like a jailbird. The AFL committee, in a burst of frantic activity, held 3 meetings and finished its entire agenda on the second Monday of the WHA. At the general committee that evening, I was disintegrating with fatigue after the unremitting pressure and rush but comforted by the (naive) belief that matters would assume some semblance of normality and civilized pace the next day. Imagine my emotion when the DG proceeded to tell us personally, on his way out of the general committee meeting, that P&B was being divided into two sub-committees and that the AFL reports officers would take on one of them from 9 a.m. Tuesday! I stared at him with utter disbelief and something akin to murderous hatred. The next morning I was instructed to submit my Journal summaries to the DG Himself personally, an honour of which I somehow remained insensible. It was, I admit, an opportunity to radiate unspoken indignation and to amuse myself by practicing exaggerated formality, both toward this "egalitarian" slave-driver and the ice-queen who effaces herself in his shadow, following close behind from here to there to beyond (what happens when nature calls? or is nature itself afraid to call on those so austere?).

Although I have known Y. for almost 20 years, she did not deign to speak to me until the last day of the WHA, and even then hardly completed the first sentence before duty made it possible to scoot away. But she was not unique in that respect. One ADG who is always extremely cordial when he comes to LUN, or when he writes me personally for urgent little favours, after which he is very cordial in expressing gratitude, in Boston literally looked through me as if I did not exist. I do await his next SOS for a book or the like! Even more disconcerting, an ex-ADG now retired but also enlisted for Boston, who had for years and years and years been a particular friend of mine, whom I respected and liked most warmly--he, too, responded to my happy and enthusiastic greeting with icy reserve. Even Rudy, my albatross of 17 years, when in the company of the Mightly looked right through me so that I had to pinch myself to be certain I was still corporeal. As my temper is not sluggish, I then started to look through these assorted dignitaries and high-class clerks as if they did not exist, an attitude which I maintained even after conciliatory noises were heard. Others, whom I had not seen for ten or twenty years and scarcely knew even

then, and a few who were friends long ago, had escaped the pervasive snobbery, suspicion and plain fear that seems to characterize the HQs staff. Howard-Jones, Assimoucoupoulos, Pat Palmer, for example, were warm and human, and seemed actually to be glad to see me as well as able to see me, as contrasted to some of the High Priests who pulled their robes around themselves so tightly lest they brush against some plebian by inadvertence.

Siegel, too, was the same man in Boston as in New York. So far as I could see, he was the ONLY one among the upper-uppers who was interested in and willing to talk to the kids--messengers, guards, typists, and other humble labourers--like a fellow human-being. He was the only one for whom they, for their part, had a good word.

All this is fluff. What really did disquiet and dismay me was the degree to which the WHA is rigged and the delegations manipulated and frustrated at every turn, so that they hardly need to be present at all except for window-dressing. Most of them are fully aware of this and even if they are helpless for the moment, they will not remain impotent forever. And they will make WHO pay for their present ignominy.

It is, of course, impossible to write about the WHA without mentioning that great enduring and inspiring man Karl Evang. He is a tenacious and brilliant fighter for his convictions, a towering mind and spirit moored among midgets. How could he, as he merited, become the DC? He could never be the slick politician, he would not last out a first term. And, speaking of slick politicians, the newest Kennedy scandal broke during the WHA and almost crowded the moon-walk out of the news. A sordid and ugly business which even the highest-priced legal and public relations talent, used lavishly, could not conceal. First the Ks throw their weight behind the effort to brand an innocent man for what happened in Dallas; now they are trying with even greater diligence to whitewash into innocence a man who is guilty as sin but one of their own. And the moronic American public seems to be buying this, too.

It is good to be home from the Boston WHA. Please write when you can, preferably to my home address. Much love to you, and to Mike and his family if they are not yet flown the coop.

Affectionately,