

Lifting the Velvet Pall – The Vindication of Julius Fucik.

Marx Memorial Lecture, 7-00 pm, Monday 18th November 2002.

On the morning of 15th March 1939, great flurries of snow and sleet swirled about the towers of Prague's Old Town. Along ice bound streets – emptied of trams and people – the lead units of the Wehrmacht swept in triumph towards the city centre and the government buildings, located – high up - in the sprawling castle complex at Hradcany. Awoken by the powerful humming of motors, most citizens wisely chose to remain indoors, still unable to grasp the full enormity of their betrayal at the hands of the Western powers. Along a frontier – already shrunken after the Munich agreement – gangs of Sudetenland Germans were busying themselves, under the direction of SS officers, pulling down border posts which bore the national arms, while Nazi stormtroopers scoured the countryside hunting for Communists, Gypsies, and Jews. And all this time – as the shutters were being pulled down upon the last offices of the free press, as Czechoslovakia disappeared from the map of Europe, and as its people were submerged under the weight of Nazi terror and hatred – their elected leadership did effectively – and precisely - nothing. The army was ordered to remain in its' barracks, the latest tanks and aeroplanes remained idle at their depots, the guns of the Czech fortresses remained silent, and - upon the arrival of their enemy – the soldiers were simply directed to surrender, both themselves and their arms, without even the merest pretence of resistance.

Yet, just six months earlier, the scene had been very different. A crowd of some 15,000 people had thronged the Czech Parliament building, to hear speakers – including Julius Fucik, a young writer and reservist - call for the mass mobilisation of all popular forces against the encroaching menace of Nazism. Fucik's message was singular and uncompromising – there was still time to save the last democracy in central Europe, the frontier could – and should – be protected, and salvation was possible but only through the actions of the people, themselves – whether Czechs, Slovaks, or even the German minority - who could act as fighters for freedom, whether in civilian or military clothes. Not waiting to be arrested by the new regime, Fucik had now – upon the occupation of Czechoslovakia – left his barracks in Prague for the small village of Chotimer (where his parents owned a summer cottage). His immediate response to the dismemberment of his country – and to the destruction of Czech national culture – was both surprising and imaginative and the rationale behind it lies at the very heart of this paper. Throughout the spring and early summer of 1939, he worked on *The Silenced and Forgotten*, a book that sought to champion all of those Czech writers of the nineteenth century who had been deliberately ignored by current literary fashion, or whose voices had been stifled by the incorporation of Czech lands into the Austro-Hungarian empire (It is worth recalling, here, that up until the First World War, only German had been taught in state schools, and that the Czech language had been effectively banned). Confronted by the denial of national identity, the loss of all political freedom, and by the rise of a pernicious sense of cultural nilism, Fucik chose to stress a potent – indigenous - revolutionary tradition that linked the endeavours of the Medieval Hussites and the revolutionaries of 1848, directly with the anti-fascist struggles of his own time. As

artist, polemicist and materialist, it seems that he could simply not bear the thought of the destruction of great art and the erasure of all memory of troublesome, creative and visionary figures from the historical record. Yet – by a curious and disturbing irony – this is precisely what happened to Fucik, himself. Since 1989, it is his legacy that has been subjected to the *tabula rasa*. Pronounced a “non-person”, by those who profited from the “Velvet Revolution”, an ugly gash now adorns the wall of his childhood home - where his bust was torn down on the orders of the city council. The civic squares, metro stations and sports stadiums which recalled his endeavours have been exorcised from the map. His monument is gone from Berlin, his statue vanished from Pilsen, and his empty podium is now the home to an advertising billboard at the entrance to the Prague parklands that once bore his name. An enquiry regarding his work, in a Czech bookshop arouses bewilderment or open suspicion. “That’s a strange request” - the little shopkeeper in the *Mala Strana* practically spat - in response to my own questions about the current availability of author’s books.

So, we can ask ourselves - who was Julius Fucik? – and - Why all the fuss about a man who enjoyed only a modest, and geographically limited, fame in his own lifetime – and, it would appear a lasting hatred and oblivion in our own. Despite the attempts of his early biographers to furnish him with a solid proletarian background – Fucik was the son of an engineer, who worked at the *Skoda* plants in Prague and Pilsen, and enjoyed (as far as we can tell) a comfortable upbringing – filled with amateur theatricals and musicals. At the age of 12, he was cramming his school exercise books with reviews and news items – already writing in the style of a mature journalist and imagining himself to be the editor of the score of broadsheets that he produced (in pen, ink and crayon) for the amusement of his sisters. Yet a defining influence upon him was to be the First World War, which tore apart the patch-worked fragments of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Life changed dramatically for this intelligent and inquisitive child, who experienced food shortages at first hand, heard talk of revolution from the women who queued for bread outside the *Skoda* plant, and witnessed the lightning strikes which convulsed the shop floor - together with the equally sudden reprisals taken by the authorities against the union leadership that had organised them. In particular, the shooting of five children, on 21 June 1918, who had been caught – by soldiers - stealing loaves from the back of a lorry in Pilsen, deeply effected him. He would later write that: “I grew up in a period of war ... I could not fail to see that there was something wrong with a world in which people who were filled with longing for life nevertheless fought each other against their will. I began, as they say, to criticise it. Books and the theatre formed a large part of my world. I explored them and found that there are some books that speak, and some that are entirely dumb. I decided that [henceforth] I had to declare that no books should be either lying or dumb. I looked upon this as my task in the struggle for a better world [and] In this way I began writing about books and the theatre”¹.

It is no surprise, therefore, to discover that Fucik joined the joyful crowds who spilled onto the streets to hear the proclamation of the Czechoslovakian Republic, on 28

¹ G. Fucikova, *Julius Fucik*, (Prague, 1955), pp.12-13.

S. Jolly, “Julius Fucik. Biographical Note” in J. Fucik, *Report from the Gallows*, (London, 1957) p.130.

October 1918, or that as soon as he turned 16 – in the spring of the following year – he formally renounced his membership of the Roman Catholic Church. He was active in the left wing of the Czech Social Democratic Party and, when that party split, in 1921, it seemed a natural progression for him to join the new Communist Party, as a foundation member. At the same time, he was involved with the inception of the Devestil group (the word is the name of a flower but also puns on the Czech for “nine times more powerful” evoking the power of the muses and the 9 original members), the longest lived of the inter-war literary avant-gardes – that was founded in a Prague café in October 1920. Indeed, it is hard – if not impossible - to make Fucik – a Bohemian by inclination, as well as by birth - into a cold and unprepossessing ideologue. His friend and mentor, F.X. Salda was the foremost of Czech literary critics, and Fucik – himself - was not only one of the few Czech’s to be fully aware of Kafka’s work, but was also one of the earliest and most effective popularisers of Jaroslav Hasek’s biting satirical novel *The Good Soldier Svejk*.

Yet it was not to books that Fucik primarily devoted himself. From 1929-1938, he was the co-editor of the Communist Party’s daily newspaper *Rude Pravo* (Red Law), and of the cultural journal *Tvorba* (or Creativity). [You can see reproductions of these publications on either side of the stage]. He made his living as a newspaper writer – “living the day” as he put it – and the vast majority of his *Collected Works* are drawn from the pages of his topical articles. As a result, some of his output may now appear dated or obscure. He never had the time, leisure or the liberty to complete his great novel *The Generation before Peter*, or to synthesise his cultural critiques into one single and authoritative work of literary theory. Thus, it was as reporter and polemicist that he toured Northern Bohemia during the miners’ strikes of 1929 and 1932, producing a stream of illegal strike papers in Czech and German, which effortlessly combined clear and factual reportage with a level of personal engagement and a razor sharp analysis. There is a similar, breathless quality to *The Land where Tomorrow is already Yesterday* (published in 1931), an account of Fucik’s illegal journey across Germany to the USSR, Soviet Central Asia and the Chinese border. The reader is bombarded with a riot of statistical information, graphs, rhetorical questions, interviews and observations, drawn from the author’s 4 month round trip, undertaken in 1930.

Upon returning to Czechoslovakia, Fucik was drafted for the first of his two periods of military service. However, on both occasions, he was continually shuttled from garrison to garrison in an attempt to lessen his influence upon his fellow soldiers. Worse still, upon the completion of his service – in September 1933 – Julius was arrested at the gate of the barracks and sentenced to several months imprisonment for incitement and for giving lectures to the troops on the subject of the Soviet Union. From then on, continual police surveillance and frequent arrests became the uncomfortable facts of life, for both Fucik and his young wife (Augustina). Consequently, the Party chose to sponsor his second visit to Kirghistan and – between 1934 and 1935 – he acted as the Moscow correspondent for *Rude Pravo*, filing a series of gripping and historically important reports that were to be published posthumously – in book form - in 1949.

Thus, by the time of the Munich betrayal and the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia he had established himself as a well-known journalist and writer, with good contacts among the intelligentsia and considerable experience of industrial struggles, arrest and covert work. Moreover, he was very well travelled. The combination of his ability to move about the countryside unnoticed and his willingness to write, to agitate and to organise, regardless of the personal consequences, marked him out as a figure of some importance within the nascent resistance movement. Having narrowly escaped arrest at Chotimer, he was back in Prague by the summer of 1940. His own words best sum up the tenor of the times - "sometimes, when a policeman's footsteps stop under the window or when in the silence there is a sudden knocking, the heart halts in the throat in brief fright. It is a moment as short as sudden death and, as at the moment of death – how often have I read and heard about it – a bit of your life runs through your mind. Not all of it, just rushing random fragments, sometimes absurd, mostly unimportant. But you see yourself in them: look, that's what I was like" ².

In February 1941, almost the entire Central Committee of the underground resistance was arrested, as the result of an unprecedented series of Gestapo raids. However, by April, a second underground committee had been formed – with Fucik (who by now had adopted dual disguises as either the venerable Professor Horak – complete with wild beard and limping gait – or Mr. Mares, the textile expert, who could be seen in the cafes of Prague idly playing at dice with the travelling salesmen) – acting as the head of press and publicity. "From the depth of the underground", wrote Fucik, the seeds of resistance were germinating a profoundly Socialist harvest. The underground newspaper, *Rude Pravo* appeared regularly and – under Julius's direction – its editorial quality improved both steadily and significantly. In early 1942 the paper hinted that the Party had sponsored new clandestine organisations among intellectuals, youths and factory workers. These were days characterised by brief meetings in the street, by the need for continual changes of address, and by the hurried distribution of small mimeo-typed leaflets, rolled out from illegal print shops at the shortest possible notice. Pamphlets and leaflets flooded the work place, and Fucik – by then the editor of no less than 9 separate publications – noted that: "We entered the New Year with our organisation firmly built up, still not yet embracing everything, still far from achieving the same broad extent as in February 1941, but nonetheless capable of carrying out the tasks of the Party in decisive battles" ³. The pro-western underground were also quick to note the rise in activity, and in May 1942 concluded in a communiqué sent to London that: "The intense, almost public activities of the Communist Party might in the course of time convince the masses that it is the only capable force which is afraid neither of sacrifice nor of work. It makes an impression on the people and gains their sympathies" ⁴.

However, the appointment of Reinhard Heydrich as Reichs Protector of Bohemia and Moravia had already ushered in a new campaign, which was to be unrivalled in its use of brutality and terror. Heydrich had been recommended by Himmler to Hitler, in

² Z. Horeni (ed), *Julius Fucik. Reporter of Revolution*, (Prague, 1983), Vol.I p.104.

³ *Report*, p.139.

⁴ V. Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule*, (New York & London, 1971), p.205.

chilling terms as one “who knows neither charity nor mercy. Even murdering children will be a pleasant duty to him”, and his bloody – if thankfully brief – record as the military ruler of the Czech lands was to entirely vindicate this clinical and utterly immoral assessment of his pathological delight in torture and mass murder. His arrival in Prague was heralded by the declaration of a state of martial law, which saw hundreds of resistance fighters executed and thousands deported to the concentration camps. As the net closed in around Fucik, he continued to organise resistance operations from a borrowed city centre flat. May Day celebrations offered the Party the chance to publicise the successes of the Red Army and to show that – despite grievous losses – the struggle against fascism was far from hopeless. Thus a new mimeo-typed leaflet [there is a copy to the side of the stage] proclaiming that help was at hand, and that the Swastika would ultimately be encircled and crushed from all sides, was produced. On the night of 24th April 1942, Julius hurried to a routine meeting with members of a resistance cell, in the Pankrac district of the city, to discuss the preparations to mark the first of May. Pankrac, we are told, was then an area “well-nigh at the edge of the world”, separated from the city centre by a deep ravine, and where even the trams – by the time they reached there – seemed to be out of breath. Yet it was here, among the crowded tenements, that Fucik and his companions were seized by the Gestapo, in the culmination of what the SS officers had euphemistically called “the big hunt” for the members of the underground committee. Throughout the early hours of the morning, the infamous II-A1, anti-communist department (situated on the 4th floor of the Petschek Palace), was filled with suspects. Tortured and badly beaten, with blood flowing from every pore, Fucik yielded nothing and was left for dead.

Yet, the end did not come – and the prison doctor was forced to tear up the death certificate that he had carefully prepared for his patient in advance, and was forced to disappear back down the prison corridor muttering darkly that Fucik was possessed with “The constitution of a horse!”⁵. Not that this counted for anything. Julius had been caught in arms, positively identified, and marked out for a show trial and execution. From the moment of his arrest he had been under absolutely no illusions that his death was not a matter of “if” but of “when”. However, even though the Gestapo had sacked his library and burned his writings, one last twist of fate enabled Fucik to begin to wage a silent war against his oppressors “secretly ... in prison, in conditions more difficult than those prevailing on the battle-field in the midst of grenade and bomb explosions”⁶. During the weeks following his arrest, contacts were made with two of the most unlikely of helpers: - the prison guards – Adolf Kolinsky, an SS man, registered as a German citizen, but who had Czech family - and Jaroslav Hora, a police constable whose father had been a member of the Communist Party. Initially suspicious of these problematic, and deeply troubled, individuals, Fucik gradually came to realise that they were acting of their own volition, that their offers of writing materials were not made in order to ensnare him and that they were prepared to risk their own lives to smuggle his writings out of the jail.

⁵ *Report*, p.37.

⁶ Fucikova (1977), p.28.

Pencils and lengths of lavatory paper were smuggled into Fucik's cell and a system gradually evolved, whereby Kolinsky (and later Hora) would wait outside, while he wrote. If Julius needed anything – or if his small, snubbed, pencil needed to be sharpened – then he would knock upon the door. He returned the completed sheets to the warders at the end of each session, and they then hid them – normally in piping or the water cisterns – before retrieving them at the end of their shifts and carrying them out of the prison, under cover of their own private bags. From the very first, Fucik's prison diary was a work conceived and composed as a literary work and one which was *intended* to be published at a later date. It was carefully (not to say painstakingly) ordered – each page was numbered, and it was even given a specific title page – proclaiming it to be a “Report from the Gallows. Written in the Gestapo prison at Pankrac, in spring 1943”. Sometimes Fucik wrote up to seven pages at one go, sometimes only two or three. Work was conducted at an incredible speed, and it is therefore all the more striking that the manuscript is rarely marked by crossings out or substantial re-workings. It is clear that the author spent the long hours of enforced idleness in his cell planning out each passage in advance. There is a definite structure to the book, imposed from the outset – an overriding sense of optimism and even an ebullient sense of good humour (as Fucik cannot help himself laughing at a bullying SS drill instructor who, in his bluster and authoritarian arrogance, seemed to have fallen straight out of the pages of *Good Soldier Svejk*). This confidence in the future – in the defeat of fascism (a murderous circus, that cannot last) – is implicit in every page as Fucik began to set down a partial history not only of his own struggles, but also of the development of the entire Czech resistance movement. At the same time, he also attempted to continue the survey of Czech literature that he had begun after the Nazi invasion of his homeland. However, relying only upon his own memory and without a single book to hand, this proved to be an exceedingly difficult task and one which he was never able to complete. His text breaks off suddenly and only a handful of manuscript pages have survived for us, which were obviously intended to be the framework for a much larger study that he had always considered to be his life's work. As it is, this accolade must go to the *Report* itself, as one of the most evocative, powerful and accurate studies of the inhumanity of fascism that has ever been produced.

167 pages of the *Report* were eventually smuggled out of Pankrac prison, between 13th April and 9th June 1943. This was truly a “time stolen [back] from death” - where every second gained marked a small, but significant victory. Indeed, if one looks closely enough at the text of the *Report* it is clear that the book possesses two separate, and climactic endings – the first evidently written when the transference of Fucik to Germany was first mooted, in May 1943, and the second at the beginning of June shortly before his transportation actually took place ⁷. The last 16 of the pages were written on 9th June, the day before he was transferred to the fortress at Bautzen. Separated from Kolinsky and Hora, Fucik no longer had the opportunity to write. However, we can glimpse him again in the handful of beautiful cards and pictures drawn by his cellmate, Zdenek Dvorak (who was later tortured to death in Auschwitz) and in the yellowing pages of the transcript of his show trial, which were unearthed in

⁷ *Report*, pp.77 & 145.

1950. Brought before the court, on 25th August 1943, Fucik was faced by not only the prosecutor - but also by his defending counsel – who both demanded the imposition of the death penalty. Though it was a foregone conclusion, Fucik – to the end – breathed defiance from the dock, the accused turned accuser, proclaiming that though the verdict of the court would now decree his death, his own verdict on Fascism – that true life for the individual would inevitably entail its utter destruction – had been registered long ago and was now coming to pass on battlefields throughout the world. The fear that the end of the Third Reich was at hand certainly served to accelerate the judicial process against him and to greatly increase the number of executions carried out in Berlin's Plotensee prison. As normal methods were abandoned, Julius Fucik was one of 360 prisoners murdered in the course of just one single night of terror (7-8th September 1943). The last record of him speaks of him being bundled from his cell, in the hours before dawn, and gagged by SS officers in an attempt to stop him singing the *Internationale* – as it transpires, the refrain was heard and picked up by his fellow prisoners whose voices accompanied him on his final journey ⁸.

By killing him, the Nazi authorities believed that they were consigning both the author and his work to oblivion. Yet, this was not to be. After the liberation of Prague, in May 1945, the warder Kolinsky sought out Fucik's widow (who had, herself, just returned from a concentration camp) and presented her with the first scraps of his prison writings. Augustina quickly reconstructed the manuscript of the *Report from the Gallows* and, in September 1945, it was published to great acclaim in both Czechoslovakia and in the Soviet sector of Berlin – though in such haste that some passages of the text still lay undiscovered and were only added into subsequent editions. It is not going too far to say that publication was “the most significant event in” post-war Czech prose ⁹. By March 1955, the *Report* had been translated into 68 languages and published in 154 different editions, a figure that was to rise to 88 languages and 265 editions by 1977, and 320 foreign language and 38 Czech editions to date. More than a million copies of the book were printed in the Czech language alone (making the reticence of the Prague bookseller, whom I mentioned at the beginning of the paper all the more surprising!) ¹⁰.

Fucik's rallying call against the resurgence of Fascism and imperialist war – “People, I have loved you. Be on your guard!” – captured the imagination of the developing world. In Korea and in Vietnam, the first editions of the *Report* were printed in instalments by cyclostyle and hastily distributed to forward units in the field, while radicalised soldiers in the British and Indian armies – though completely unable to speak each others language – struck up friendships based on the mutual recognition of the cover of his – by now – famous book ¹¹. A young Fidel Castro recommended it as vital reading matter to his guerrilla army and declared that its author's spirit was “enshrined in every victory

⁸ J. Kubka, M. Gonzales, R. Bachmann & Z. Horeni, *Julius Fucik and the Present*, (Prague, 1973), p.31.

⁹ A. Novak, *Czech Literature*, (Michigan, 1976), p.334.

¹⁰ *Report*, p.147.

¹¹ *Julius Fucik and the Present*, op.cit. p.13.

of our age”, while the Chilean poet - Pablo Neruda - sincerely believed that: “We live at a time which in literature will be known in the future as ‘the Fucik epoch’, an epoch of simple heroism”. An official portrait by Max Svabinsky [which you can see behind me] was sketched in 1950 from a series of police photographs (taken in September 1933) – and was, in its day, as famous as Korda’s iconic photograph of Che Guevara, holding the power both to inspire or to enrage, depending upon the persuasion of the viewer¹². The image subsequently appeared on postage stamps and on the badge of Czechoslovakian youth organisations, after 1949, and was to provide the focus for Milan Kundera’s scorn in the 1969 novel *The Joke*.

Streets, squares, schools, merchant ships, and even mountains bore Fucik’s name. In 1958, the 4th Congress of the International Association of Journalists, sitting in Bucharest, decided to proclaim the 8th September – the date of his death – as the Day of International Solidarity with Journalists, and from the 1950s through to the late 1970s a constant stream of films, documentaries and theatrical plays served to keep him in the public mind¹³. However, the popularity of his work was severely limited by the onset of the Cold War, and its influence confined – primarily – to the Eastern Block, to China, and to those countries – such as Spain, Portugal and Chile – that were still struggling to overthrow Fascism. In Britain, although it was enthusiastically reviewed by such left-wing luminaries, as Allen Hutt and Harry Pollitt, it was almost completely ignored by the mainstream press. Worse still, the tendency of these reviewers to stress orthodoxy against new literary forms, and to seek to contrast Fucik’s sacrifice with the apparent backsliding of George Orwell and Cyril Connolly proved incredibly counter-productive¹⁴. Fucik the avant-gardist now appeared to be a figure of social, and literary, conservatism. The result was that the book was only taken up by minor publishers and produced in cheap editions which sold poorly and had, eventually, to be pulped.

Far more damaging was the decision of the ill-fated Rudolf Slansky (the then General Secretary of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party), to flick the pen of the censor across Fucik’s last work. His cuts not only removed all mention of the author’s sympathy for the Germans of the Sudetenland, but also created yawning gaps and inconsistencies in the text, which provided ready ammunition for right-wing detractors. How, they asked, was it possible that Fucik had been kept prisoner for so long before his sentencing? Why was he not kept in solitary confinement, and why had he been driven around the darkened streets of Prague by the Gestapo? Surely, they reasoned, the book was a fraud, concocted by the new Socialist government of Czechoslovakia in order to champion its own part in the resistance struggle, and to legitimise the reasons behind its own rapid ascent to power. Fucik had now become a victim of his own success – in the words of a former acquaintance, turned exile and Cold War warrior, he had been transformed into a “communist idol” to be venerated “with true pagan

¹² *Julius Fucik and the Present*, op.cit. p.12.

D. Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia. A Czech History*, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1998), pp.252-253 & 284.

¹³ *Julius Fucik and the Present*, op.cit. p.15.

¹⁴ H. Pollitt, “Testament of a Hero”, *Daily Worker*, (12 April 1951), p.2.

ceremoniousness”¹⁵. As the most visible and popular (indigenous) symbol of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, he was - therefore - the most vital for demolition – though it was the use that his name and work were put to, rather than his actual achievements and writings that drew the majority of opprobrium levelled by the dissenters of the 1960s and ‘70s¹⁶. However, all of this was to change in November 1989 as Vaclav Havel targeted Fucik for particular censure, as a “false hero” whose demagoguery, and melodramatic self-obsession simply had no place in the modern world of “post-communism”. Worse still, it was suggested that Fucik had been both a traitor and a coward who had talked to the Nazis and had actively betrayed his comrades to them. It was confidently predicted that a future commission of enquiry would throw open the state archives and reveal both himself – and his most famous work – to be little more than tarnished and sorry fakes.

However, when this commission, drawn from a wide spectrum of academic opinion (and including forensic scientists from the police department) finally returned its findings, in 1995, they were very different from those that had been originally intended. When subjected to forensic testing in the laboratories, the manuscript was proved beyond all doubt to be genuine and – further than that – significant new passages from the *Report* had been discovered in the vaults, which had never before been made public. These threw significant light on the fight of the Czech resistance from 1941-43, proved that it was – as Fucik had always suspected – his adjutant, Jaroslav Klecan, who had talked to the Gestapo and revealed (and what a revelation it was!) that Fucik had had – all along – one final trick to play upon his captors. Rather than giving any incriminating evidence to his interrogators – and realising that the whole of the underground organisation was endangered by Klecan’s testimony, he had engaged his foes in a grim dance of death in an attempt to throw them off the scent of those groups that were still operational. “I knew”, he wrote, “that here too there was an opportunity for struggle; by quite different means than from outside, but with the same purpose and the same objective ... Now something more was needed, so that I could say that I had done my duty in every place and in every situation”¹⁷. As he fed his torturers false information, piecemeal, he bought – through the sacrifice of his own life – the shattered infrastructure of the resistance the all-important time it needed, in order to rebuild its strength and gather its forces. Each passing day brought in new recruits, new stockpiles of arms, and witnessed fresh advances by the allies, driving nail upon nail – inexorably – into the coffins of the Third Reich and the Axis powers. Furthermore, on the personal level – we know of at least 5 prominent poets and writers, including a future Nobel Prize Laureate who were saved in this manner, not to mention the young National Theatre actress who stood trial alongside him. In this light, Fucik’s last struggle – fought out in the darkness of a condemned cell – does not detract from his heroism, but instead adds enormously to its potency and lustre.

¹⁵ E. Hostovsky, “The Communist Idol. Julius Fucik and his Generation”, (New York, 1953), p.1.

¹⁶ See for example: J. Skvorecky, “The Legend and My Gun Loader” in P. Steiner, “Making a Czech Hero: Julius Fucik through his Writings”, *Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies*, no.1501 (Sept. 2000), p.2.

¹⁷ *Report*, p.144.

Julius Fucik can be (and in recent years he has been) portrayed as a dated, irrelevant and wholly forlorn figure - “a hero” in the words of Peter Steiner (the great American expert upon his life and work), “but alas, one who was no longer needed”¹⁸. I find this a rather sad – and not to say misplaced judgement. There is no teleology of free-market capitalism – only the base law of the jungle – and fascism and imperialism, far from being conquered in 1945, still stalk the corners of the globe. If Fucik has fallen from fashion, then it is a reflection not necessarily upon him, but upon our own age, where cynicism and historical amnesia appear to be very much the order of the day. However, while writing this paper I was reminded by Stuart Munro [who is videoing tonight’s meeting] of the giant metronome, perched high on the Letna plain above Prague, and whose movements are intended to mirror the workings of the Marxist dialectic. Just as change and conflict are the motors of human affairs, so the tide will turn once again. The victories of the Left in the Czech elections – this very year – have already produced some interesting results. On 30th July 2002, the monument to one of the heroes of the Communist resistance was re-instated by Prague’s - Social Democrat - Deputy Mayor, who (when interviewed) considered that it was “only a matter of time” before all of the memorials to Fucik were restored¹⁹. As long as courage and self-sacrifice are values to be admired – and an end to exploitation and racial hatred hoped and striven for – then it would seem that the memory of Julius Fucik will never be totally erased. Although countless gallons of ink have been spilt in attempting to analyse the reasons that prompted him to write the *Report from the Gallows*, I would suggest that he – himself – provided the most succinct and poignant answer – when he explained that: “That’s why I am writing to you. I am throwing my letter like a message in a bottle into the sea of time; may a lucky tide lay it at your feet and you, wiping away the mould of our emotion, read the long-gone words about the people we are. So that you may understand us, my dear unknown [my dear future]”²⁰. If my talk tonight has done anything – I would hope that it has served to capture something of his conviction, unyielding sense of optimism and sheer tenacity, and that his message – thrown forward into this uncertain age has reached a new audience and found a safe harbour within these halls.

¹⁸ Steiner, op.cit. p.150.

¹⁹ *Postmark Prague*, Vol.12 no. 9, (September 2002), p.6.

²⁰ Horeni (ed), op.cit. p.105.