

BEFORE CO-EXISTENCE BROKE OUT

By Emanuel Litvinoff

CO-EXISTENCE seems to have arrived. The talks at Camp David set a new and hopeful tone. There are more trade and cultural exchanges, Soviet sputniks encircle the moon amid sporting applause, and there is even talk of dismantling the nuclear rockets. It is all very reassuring.

Unfortunately, we cannot altogether exorcise the skeletons who dance at the feast, and here are two more of them. Paul Ignotus is a well-known Hungarian writer whose name is familiar to readers of this newspaper and the "New Statesman." A liberal Socialist, after the war he chose to collaborate with the new Hungary, served as its Press Attaché in London, and returned to Budapest in May, 1949. Inevitably, he was arrested, tortured, and imprisoned, convicted as a tool of those notorious British intelligence agents Morgan Phillips, Richard Crossman, Kingsley Martin, Denis Healey, and Konni Zilliacus. The blood-chilling account of his seven years in various Hungarian prisons, his "rehabilitation," and his escape into Austria after the arrest of Imre Nagy is contained in **Political Prisoner** (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 16s).

The book is an individual variation of a common twentieth-century theme, the triumph of European barbarism. In recent years we have been forced to the reluctant conclusion that the only difference between Nazi and Communist tyranny is in the label. The sadists wear different uniforms but they belong to the same breed. In Hungary, where former Fascist bullies performed precisely the same func-

tions in the guise of Communist bullies, this was literally true. The principal value of Mr Ignotus's book is in its account of how a courageous and resourceful man can endure hunger, torture, and degradation and yet remain indomitably human, able to laugh, retain hope, and resist embitterment. Physically broken and suffering near-starvation, the writer fell in love with a woman prisoner he had never seen and with whom he conducted a spirited courtship by messages tapped out on the wall of his cell. It is a great love-story, ranking with the "Diary of Anne Frank" as a moving affirmation of life in a society which seeks to destroy all that is free, spontaneous, and joyous in the human spirit.

Unto Parvilahti is a Finn who spent ten years of captivity in Russia and Siberia after Finland signed an armistice with the Soviet Union in September, 1944. **Beria's Gardens** (Hutchinson, 21s) shows him to be a far less sympathetic personality than Ignotus. A volunteer with the German forces in the Caucasus, and subsequently a liaison officer in Berlin, without a hint of irony he refers to the Germans as the police force of Europe and seems to have lingering regrets over the Nazi defeat. "Germany had given in, the military might of America and England had saved the Soviet Union from certain defeat. The spreading of communism all over Europe was now within the bounds of possibility; it might well destroy all the ancient culture of Europe. There

is no knowing what would have happened to the world if Germany's chauvinistic forces had been allowed to determine the fate of the European countries, but we realised that communism would destroy everything that the nations held dear." This obtuseness can be forgiven in one of the twenty million slaves for whom Stalin's empire was an overpowering tyranny and whose blood and tears were the cement with which its industrial economy was built. It is often forgotten that these unfortunates were an international fellowship, a labour force composed of people shanghaied from all over the world. Mr Parvilahti met Englishmen, Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Bulgarians, Chinese, Koreans and, of course, people of every Soviet nationality. They formed alliances among themselves that cut across the normal barriers of politics and race: old Bolsheviks with their class enemies, Jews with ex-Nazis, and all the "politicals" against the thieves, murderers, and common criminals who were the more privileged element of the Soviet Union's prison population.

"Beria's Gardens" is an enthralling study of life in Russian penal institutions and of the people entrapped in a form of slavery that, for most, could only be terminated by death. But it is not less valuable for its prismatic view of Soviet society in general. Mr Parvilahti has a tendency, common in those who share his situation, to generalise from his own experiences. According to this account, Moscow is a Lubianka without bars and behind the façades of all Soviet cities are misrule, hunger, and persecution. This does not accord with the widespread technical achievements of the Soviet middle class and the vast increase of bourgeois comforts in recent years. But the waste, the muddle, the ramshackle bureaucratic inefficiency certainly exist, and Mr Parvilahti turns up surprising examples from first-hand experience. He is now back in Finland, a free man, and throughout the Communist world there is a new slogan: Socialist Legality. We do not know yet what the words mean in practice, but we do know that the Communist prisons are still crowded with innocent men and women and staffed with licensed sadists. One wonders what co-existence will mean to them.