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INTERVIEWS WITH A HUNGARIAN GROUP

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## INTERVIEWS WITH A HUNGARIAN GROUP

This special report is a composite of individual and group interviews in March with a group of Hungarians who were temporarily out of Hungary. Much of this report was done by a member of the Hungarian desk. His excellent findings led to a second series of interviews by him and a member of this section.

Because these interviews indicate a consensus of opinion which emerged in dealing with a group of like individuals, it is being presented in special report form. The material speaks for itself, so interpretive comment is seldom necessary.

These interviews took place in Western Europe with over a dozen Hungarians who were in Hungary shortly before the interviews and expected to return to their homeland. They were travellers who have an interest in the political situation both at home and abroad. They are not intellectuals. These sources felt they could speak freely, partly because there was no political officer officially present and also because they feel confident that they are well regarded for non-political reasons in regime circles. There apparently reigned a strong esprit de corps; no one seemed to fear betrayal by his fellows. Although they are probably communists if only for reasons of expediency, they are not generally biased in favor of the current communist regime.

A certain degree of opportunism prevailed among the group. There is probably more concern with their private affairs than with public problems, even if they are naturally very interested in political and social developments at home. Generally speaking there was not a great deal of native intelligence among the group members.

More details about the sources of this report and the circumstances of their interview are available from this section.

Please note throughout that the opinions expressed herein are those of all or many of those people interviewed. While it is obvious that some are not representative of very many Hungarians, they deserve to be reported nevertheless.



## The Revolution

Sources generally agreed in the view that the revolution went too far both in aims and deeds. According to them, anybody with a little common sense could have foreseen the futility of an attempt to overthrow the communist regime, thereby unavoidably provoking Soviet intervention. Several of the sources condemned the alleged killing of harmless people such as the barber of AVH headquarters and of other "innocent" people just on the mere suspicion of belonging to the AVH. "Why", one of them told us, "I was called up to join the AVH force on October 22nd; fortunately, I was exempted at the last minute, otherwise I, too, might have been killed in those days."

However, without exception, they were enthusiastic about at least one aspect of the revolution: there never before was such unity among Hungarians; a great wave of friendship, mutual understanding and politeness went over the whole population. It was the best feature of the revolution, perhaps never to be experienced again.

Asked whether they thought that the uprising did achieve something, they could think of just one direct consequence of the revolution: the general increase in wages by 20 to 50 per cent. They were vague about future prospects. Only another war might bring liberation to Hungary, they thought; but people do not want another war. On the other hand, curiously enough, they seemed firmly convinced that in case of a second uprising the West and particularly the USA would come to their aid with their armed forces.

## The Regime

Most sources, as was to be expected, were rather noncommittal about their attitude toward the regime. However, some of them were quite outspoken in their different opinions on the KADAR government's measures of retaliation. One of them went as far as to excuse them by insisting that killers deserved to be executed. But another source - apparently the spokesman of a whole group - took the opposite view. He gave us a lengthy description of his own experiences as an eye-witness at a police station and at the prosecutor's office where he went in order to free an arrested relative.

"People were lined up there by the hundreds and mercilessly beaten up without the slightest proof of being guilty of anything", he told us. "There was the case of an elderly, generally respected lawyer who for some unknown reason had been summoned to appear at the police station. Having reported, he was asked about his business to which he only could reply that he didn't know why he had to appear. Thereupon he was told to go to a certain room which he did. As he entered he found four men, who asked him



what he wanted. I want nothing at all, but I have been told to come to this room, he answered. At once the four men started to beat him up mercilessly, and the thrashing went on through the whole night.

(Here a very curious thing happened. A member of the group, sitting next to one interviewer, whispered furiously in his ear: "You see how it is? This man who owes everything to the regime, who owns a luxurious villa complete with everything imaginable from Persian rugs to the latest television set and an expensive car, this man befools his benefactor, the regime. Now do you call that o b j e c t i v i t y , I ask you?" Thus we got another, though somewhat twisted version on the much-discussed topic of "objectivity".) Meanwhile the former source went on to tell us of the brutal beating up by police of small children who were caught removing red stars. Then he mentioned a lesser incident in order to give us a picture of the childrens' general attitude toward the regime. His 8 year-old daughter, one morning, was told by her mother to put on her new, red-colored pullover for the school. The little one first tried to dodge the issue, then finally blankly refused. After some probing she at last gave her reason: "Red is such a Soviet color, I would be ashamed to wear it." She said this in spite of the fact that political issues were never even mentioned at their home.

Sources were unanimous in their opinion that KÁDÁR was a pathetic victim in the hands of the Russians rather than a despicable scoundrel. He is not so much hated as rather pitied by the population, they told us. Of course, there are those who give him the full blame. We were told of an inscription, often to be seen on lavatory walls, which runs like this: "Long live Vladimir Farkas, for he tortured KÁDÁR!" But, on the whole, people look upon KÁDÁR as a helpless Soviet puppet.

Those in power today do not count. It is of little import just "what could be done" by Kadar, who has already suffered in Rakosi's prisons. It matters little whether the individual is called Kadar or by some other name, - there must be someone to implement Soviet policy in Hungary. Ferenc Mannich is definitely despised. They laugh about György Marosan, though realizing that he is an important figure. He is the only person who walks through the city at night, unaccompanied, ostentatiously showing that he fears nothing. This is impressive both to the Soviets as to the other, more fretful members of the regime.

The police force stands above everything. Yet it can only arrest, attack, and execute. Trials must be carried out with a certain realization of legislation and order. The judges are behaving in a dignified manner. They are the most popular category, immediately following the writers. This, however, does not keep the police force - a significant part of which is comprised of former AVH members - from arresting individuals and behaving brutally. The "bell shock" still continues in Hungary. The difference is merely that



Rakosi and his gang would come at dawn, whereas the present police force arrives after 11:00 p.m., taking away its victims after the curfew has begun. Gunfire is continually heard, throughout the night, in Budapest. At first, the police force had only sent out two-man patrols at night, consisting of one AVH man and one policeman. It was noted that, frequently, only the policeman returned, explaining that his AVH colleague had been shot to death. It turned out that, in many instances, the policeman had shot down the AVH man. Today, the patrols consist of four men.

Despite all terror, the general mood in Budapest is still hopeful. All one must do is wait for the end - that is their opinion.

#### Workers' Guards

Should the regime wish to make a mass movement of the workers' guards, then it is acting against its own interests, since part of the weapons distributed would undoubtedly be used against the regime. If they plan the organization of an elite guard, then the workers' guards will surely side with the police force in aiding Kadar and his group.

#### Things Worth Keeping

All which is good and has been proved useful under the communist regime should be maintained and even encouraged. State ownership of large industrial works and enterprises, for example, is definitely right and useful; but such shortcomings of the prevailing system as an extremely overgrown bureaucracy, or the appointment of important officials and management on the basis of political considerations, should be eliminated. Stressing the development of heavy industry in a country of definitely agricultural character was an unpardonable sin, as well as the source of all the damage which has been done to the country's economic life. Light industry, the production of consumer goods should be encouraged. There are some enterprises which could be better managed by voluntary associations and become profitable. Thus, for instance, truckage, (now in the hands of the State Transportation Enterprise) which has a staff of roughly 3000 employees. Its predecessor, the former "MATEOSZ" association accomplished incomparably better results with a staff of about 300.

Independent artisans and small private shops are definitely needed. The present regulation under which artisans and shopkeepers are allowed to employ, besides their own family members, two assistants is good and adequate. Such a team can easily earn 4-5000 forints a month and provide a decent living for an average family, including the two employees.

The system of state-owned general stores failed completely; they were unable to satisfy the needs of the public. What the consumer needs



are private general stores where he can buy all he wants without having to rely on the haphazard supplies the state-owned stores are able to provide off and on.

Another mistake of the regime was to lure away agricultural laborers to the cities. Now, when they are badly needed all over the country they are, of course, unwilling to return, accustomed as they have grown to town life. This deplorable state of affairs may yet cause serious difficulties.

As far as the agricultural system is concerned, a system of voluntary farmers' co-operatives seems best. Kolkhozes are not as bad as they generally are considered to be, either. Some of them are very efficient and profitable. I myself once visited a kolkhoz and all I can say is that the members prospered and made a good living out of the common income, besides having their own small private household farming plots. But the system of tractor stations is definitely wrong; tractors should be owned by the co-operatives themselves.

Generally speaking, the working man's standard of living is about the same as it was in pre-war times.

#### Imre Nagy

According to the sources, Imre Nagy enjoyed great popularity and most people trusted him. He was considered to be an honest man of great integrity.

#### Cardinal Mindszenty

The Cardinal was the nation's adored martyr - until his release. Then, in the opinion of the sources, he committed grave mistakes by demanding the Church estates to be given back, and later by seeking shelter at the U.S. Legation. As a consequence, he lost his former great prestige and will never be able to regain it. (Here the interviewer pointed out that, as a matter of fact, the Cardinal never made a demand for the Church estates. "Maybe", he was told, "but how could you maintain Church institutions without Church estates? So, even if indirectly, the demand was made.")

In their view, the revolution is delimited by two decisive moments in its career: . One such moment is Gerő's speech of October 23rd, the moment the revolution was actually started. The second moment is the speech by Cardinal Mindszenty, held on November 3rd, which gave the Communists a chance to discover so-called anti-democratic, etc. aspects within the revolution itself. - Further, in their opinion, the main trouble was the fact that, on November 4th, Mindszenty sought refuge with the American Legation, and that he has remained there to date. A cardinal, who had no fear of Rakosi's prisons, should not "seek refuge", should not hide. Kadar & Co. would not kill Mindszenty, but obviously merely put him under



house arrest. This, Mindszenty should take upon himself. - There were rumors concerning certain episcopal letters, sent from the US Legation. This would seem unfortunate. During the fighting, he should preferably have turned to the Italian or the Austrian Legations, although even in that case, he should long since have left.

#### Escaped Members of the Writers' Union

None of the sources had anything to say in favor of those members of the Writers' Union who escaped to the West; they were unanimously condemned as spineless turncoats who kept changing their attitudes according to the prevailing general mood, finally leaving their fellow writers in the lurch. They warned against letting them speak through Western radio stations.

Tamás Aczél, Enczy, Méray, etc. - all these had been well-known writers at home. They had advocated the Rakosi era. The question remains as to whether or not they are sincere today? Should RFE be convinced of their sincerity, it should definitely broadcast their voices. Naturally, in a more quiet form, in better taste than done by the VOA. But only if and when RFE is convinced that they have truly regretted their actions of the past, that they feel that what they did in the past years was wrong, unconstructive, detrimental ...

If, in Hungary, the term Freedom, or Revolution, or Democracy, is mentioned - this is inevitably linked with the writers; with those writers who are still at home. Whatever the writers may, one day, approve of or support, the nation will follow and support without second thought. The writers know this. This is why they prefer to remain silent, to move into the background without even granting the smallest concessions to the regime. Their responsibility is tremendous.

#### The Revolution and Hungarian Youth

The revolution was initiated by disillusioned Communists within the party, then turned into a mass movement with the aid of the writers, and realized by the masses. At the time of its defeat, it was the working class which resisted the longest. The writers became passively resistant. Yet it is, today, the youth which continues actively to resist. - Many of those arrested are between 12 and 16 years of age.

According to one source, should Hungary today be liberated, the first thing to do would be to furnish a sanatorium, where children between 12 and 14, beaten into invalids, could be patched up.





There are arsenals in the schools. There are guns and ammunition everywhere, under the teachers' desks, under the flooring, in laboratories, in the high schools. In apprentice shops, lessons are in many instances taught in the presence of armed force. In the HQ's of the Bureau of Manpower Reserve, a teacher, who spoke in a Stalinist style against the revolution and the fallen freedom fighters, was promptly shot to death in class. Youth cannot be checked. Only if and when it is given something, if and when its demands are granted. Obviously, it remains to be seen whether or not this self-same youth will be in a position responsibly to represent a free regime.

#### RFE's Role During and After the Revolution

Sources were unanimous in their opinion that RFE "pushed much too hard" during the revolution. At the beginning, RFE demanded the return of Imre Nagy; but when Nagy actually returned, RFE attacked him. This was a serious mistake.

RFE also broadcast repeated appeals for the release of Cardinal Mindszenty; "and then see, what happened when he was freed!" RFE came forward with ever increasing revolutionary demands though it must have known that a people of 10 million had not even the slightest hope of defeating the powerful Soviet Union.

#### Suggestions on Future Programming

People are again beginning to listen to Western radio. Quite naturally, the wish for information overcame disillusionment.

The reliability of RFE has increased. RFE broadcasts are no longer being checked against BBC, as formerly, when the listeners believed only what was also repeated by BBC. They feel that RFE says less, but, in their opinion, if less is said, less errors can arise. A reserved tone to deal with political events is considered correct. At the same time, the audience feels that, in connection with individual political speeches, with court sentences, executions, decrees, the most emphatic tone of voice should be used. This does not mean stressing empty phrases, but that an objective commentator should express his opinion decisively. If attacking, RFE should attack on grounds of data, not by cynical remarks or jests, nor in the exaggerated voice of the reader. Several items were quoted which were considered very good. These included scripts emphatically attacking the police force, sentences, executions, the clear-cut script on school children as well as the objective warning in connection with March 15th events.

Political topics should continue to be handled with restraint. Any rash action should be discouraged. Regime measures and institutions should



be commented on in an objective way; this means that the real achievements of the communist regime should not be attacked just because they are communist achievements. Such things as the nationalization of large industrial works, free education, and voluntary farmers' co-operatives are basically good, but they must be freed from the burden of bureaucracy, of political bias, and the members of farmers' co-operatives should be allowed to possess small private household farming plots. There is ample room for constructive criticism in this field. Also there are some new laws and decrees, as for instance the new "Labor Statutes". ("A Munka Törvénykönyve") which, on the whole, are not bad, but have shortcomings which might be criticized in a constructive way.

Hungarian listeners are mostly interested in colorful features, popular-scientific lectures, in the latest technical developments, in short, as they called it - in "non-political news". These things, though the public longs for them, are almost entirely neglected by regime media.

Sources displayed a keen interest in musical programs. According to them, there is not much need for serious, "classical" music, for in this field RFE could hardly compete with the regime radio; what listeners want to hear is jazz, dance music, and above all - the latest hits and song-hits, such as those of Doris Day, Caterina Valente, and Rosemary Clooney. It is almost impossible to get such records in Hungary, and people are crazy about them.

The revolution has not failed. It has merely been silenced. Therefore, we have no cause for mourning. Life continues. Individuals still wish to enjoy themselves. Let us not mourn and inter the Hungarian nation. Therefore, RFE may well give lively jazz music, preferably in the evening hours.

Owing to the fact that sources spend much time travelling abroad they seldom have a chance to listen to Western stations. Therefore, though they seemed to know a great deal about RFE, they were vague about specific RFE programs and personalities. As a matter of fact, they couldn't recall any of them.

#### The RFE Message Service

As to the messages, these are considered adequate. In their opinion, however, although such message service is necessary, they have technical objections. RFE gives out-dated messages. They know of a case, where the message was broadcast at a time when the person in question had already returned to Hungary. It would be wise to retain this program, naturally to a smaller extent, and limited to a certain hour of the day, to broad-



cast only messages from recent escapees. People cannot spend the entire day close to the radio, only to receive news of the successful arrival abroad of their relatives.

They did not consider the message service of an enticing nature. Whoever has left the country, did so of his own free will, quite regardless of whether or not we suggested it. He who returns will return regardless of any outside advice, whether or not controlled by official organ. Those who leave will leave even if RFE advises against it. Therefore, an article in this connection would serve only to prove to the regime that RFE is not concerned with any commerce in human beings.

The general opinion at home on escapees - although naturally, one cannot generalize - is a poor one. The majority are considered to be seeking adventure, to be irresponsible. With certain exceptions, of course, of persons who thus have been able to save their lives. Those who had been the initiators and executors of the revolution are mostly still at home. And their intention is to remain at home. Their opinion is that the revolution was carried out not for them to live well, but because it had been a historical necessity within the life of the nation. Thus, they feel they must also accept defeat.

#### RFE's Continued Existence

Sources heard rumors according to which RFE would eventually be given up for one reason or another. They protested vehemently against any such development. "RFE is more than ever needed", they insisted; "throw the culprits out if necessary, but carry on by all means!"

