

PERSONAL HISTORY.

Respondent took his matura in 1926 and entered the Benedictine Order as a novice, remaining a Benedictine monk till 1931. During this time, he took a degree in theology and one in Latin and Hungarian literature at the Budapest University. He left the order in 1931, and between that date and 1938, he led a precarious existence maintaining himself by private tuition. In 1938, he joined the staff of the catholic periodical Korunk Szava, the organ of the progressive catholic lay intelligentsia. His opinion of the character of the then editor-in-chief, Jenő Katona, who later played a fairly prominent role in the left wing of the Smallholders Party, is that not only is he weak and spineless, but that he is also positively malignant. In 1939, respondent was employed by the daily Magyar Nemzet, acting mainly as its labor correspondent. He stayed on the editorial staff of Magyar Nemzet until the very last, i.e. March 1944. In 1942, he became a member of the Social Democratic Party, but was kicked out at the time of the Communist-Social Democrat merger in 1948.

In 1945, he became chief leader-writer (the Hungarian term is "chief contributor") of Nepszava, the official organ of the Social Democratic Party. He held this position until March 1948. From 1947 to May 1948, he was also executive president of the Journalists Federation.

From May 1948, i.e. from the time his catholic-social democratic past became a heavy liability, he was unemployed. He made attempts to find a job as a factory worker, but no union would enroll him, so that he was reduced to finding a job as a day-laborer, working as such till the end of 1950. By providing false data and concealing his past, he finally succeeded in getting employment as an unskilled process worker in a textile factory, and remained there till the end of 1954. In 1955, he was invited for reader by the Magvető Publishing House, the publishing firm of the Writers Union under the direction of Géza Kepes. He was dismissed 9 months later because he passed for publication an anthology of new writings by young Hungarian novelists, which was praised by Radio Free Europe and condemned by László Bokai in Szabad Nep. He was again unemployed till August '56, living by odd translations and similar literary jobs. From August till the 23rd of October 1956, he was sub-editor of the evening daily Esti Budapest, and during the Revolution, he became chief leader-writer of the revived Nepszava.

MANEUVERS IN THE BUDAPEST PARTY COMMITTEE.

Esti Budapest was the official organ of the Budapest Party Committee. It stood considerably more to the left than Szabad Nep itself. On one occasion at a Politbureau meeting, Istvan Kovacs, the secretary of the Budapest Party Committee, in an oblique attack on the "weak" elements of the central leadership, asserted that Esti Budapest is a better servant of the policy of the Party than is Szabad Nep, the organ of the Central Committee. Significantly, however, the then editor-in-chief, Istvan Szirmai was himself moving towards the "weak" elements in the leadership, and as will be apparent below, he had plans to switch Esti Budapest over to the slightly more liberal faction in spite of his own editorial staff.

So far to the left and so Macchiavellian was Esti Budapest, that during the 1956 American election campaign, its staff were praying with all their might for an Eisenhower victory and considered a Stevenson victory a great blow to the "international" working class.

Sometime during the summer of 1956, Geza Losonczy and Zoltan Horvath put forward a short list of strongly worded demands at the Press Department of Party Headquarters in Akademia Street. Among these was a demand that I be allowed to emerge from the limbo and given a voice in the Hungarian press.

(They included this among their demands both for political reasons and for personal friendship. Their attempt at my "rehabilitation" was really a trial balloon, - they did not commit themselves too deeply by putting forward an individual name, - putting forward a corresponding policy instead would have been more risky for them, - and they hoped to test the present state of the Party line by the reaction to this quite personal suggestion. This was a very safe means of testing how flexible the Party line had become by then.) The Press Department gave no definite undertaking, but soon afterwards, I was summoned to Akademia Street. Laszlo Keri, the presschief, was on holiday, and the deputy press chief (whose name I forgot) received me. He vetted me very severely for one hour. I concealed nothing of either my life history or my sympathies, - it would have been no use to do so, and they much preferred frank detestation and ^{angry} confessions of/impotence to insincerety behind which they tended to suspect plotting. He then offered me the Esti Budapest job, stating that a competent technician, but clearly only a technician, was needed there. At this stage, Bela Szabo, the press chief of the Budapest Party Committee, entered the room and there was further amicable discussion. Two days later, Szirmai called me to a private meeting with Bela Szabo. They explained that my task at Esti Budapest will be to help them overcome left sectarianism, and to improve the technical level of the paper.

The second part of the task was an ingenious means of achieving the first, as it was plain from their hints that I was expected to "kill" Stalinist copy on technical grounds, which of course was a much more practicable and smoother method than doing it on political grounds.

SZIRMAI.

Szirmai, the then editor of Esti Budapest, is now the press chief of the Kadar gov't. He is a highly intelligent and very cautious man. He is anything but petty. An incident will illustrate this. Shortly before the Revolution, it occurred to him that there is no reason why I should not get financial compensation as other imprisoned and neglected politicians and journalists have been getting at the close of the Rakosi era. Sandor Szalai and Zoltan Horvath have both got 180,000 ft. He picked up the phone and called some powerful Party man in the National Bank, asking him if there was money in what I understood to be some special fund, and telling him that I am to get 50,000 ft. compensation. It did not matter to him that I had been a monk and was a non-materialist philosopher. He was quietly in favor of the Imre Nagy line. Of course, he could not move fast towards it, and nor did he want to. Two of his deputy editors, Frigyes Vadasz and Sandor Karcagi were both Rakosites. So was the rest of the staff. Frigyes Vadasz was a secret AVO man, and his wife was Gerö's secretary. Szirmai stood pretty much alone, although the Press Department of the Budapest Party Committee appeared quietly to support him. He used to be a Zionist but switched to Communism during the anti-Semitic times, and became the press chief of the illegal Communist Party in Transylvania.

At the end of the war, he moved to Szeged, and soon afterwards to Party Headquarters in Budapest, where he became a Central Committee member and secretary of the organization department. After the fall of Rajk, he was demoted to director general of the Hungarian Radio, and the next demotion landed him in prison. He was released in 1954 and was given the Esti Budapest job.

On the 19th of October 1956, he left for Moscow to attend some jubilee of the Moscow evening paper, and he tore back in haste when the Revolution looked like being safely and successfully launched. On his arrival at the end of October, he is supposed to have called me several times with the intention of publishing a new evening paper under our joint editorship. Fortunately for him, he could not locate me, and so his record remained more or less unblemished. In December 1956, I met him 2 or 3 times casually, and he offered me a job either as assistant-editor of the relatively non-Party paper Esti Hirlap, or of Magyar Nemzet, which was to have appeared on January first. Whilst he was at Esti Budapest, he gave me instructions almost daily to kill this or that article on technical grounds, saying that the author is an "AVO bastard".

At a meeting of the Polit Bureau just after Gerö's arrival back from Belgrade, Istvan Kovacs delivered a referendum contending that the country is drifting towards bourgeois democracy and that leadership is slipping out of the hands of the Party. As he was the secretary of the Budapest Party Committee, and as Esti Budapest was the organ of that committee, he was invited to elaborate on this referendum at the next meeting of the Party cell at Esti Budapest. The whole staff except myself were members, and apparently they hoped to strengthen their own orthodox line versus the revisionism with which they felt Szirmai was flirting. Kovacs duly repeated his thesis at the cell meeting, and Szirmai came out strongly in his support. Afterwards, I reminded him that Kovacs is obviously on his way out and warned him that he allowed himself to be maneuvered into an untenable position. He agreed, and at the next editorial conference he again leant over backwards to dissociate himself from the over-statements and exaggerations of Istvan Kovacs.

Although he has been made press chief of the Kadar gov't, he tries to be as inactive as possible, but he is going along with the Kadar line just the same. My first meeting with him in December '56, after he repudiated, by his cooperation with the Kadar gov't, he has stood for before and during the Revolution, was pathetic.

He tried to behave as if nothing had happened, as if there had been no contradiction between his attitude before and after November 4th. Only in one sentence did he refer to the unmentionable: He asked me whether I agree that ever greater sections of the population realize the correctness of the Kadar policy. I am under the impression that he thought there was a microphone in his room.

MAROSAN

Marosan comes from a wild and unruly declassé family of Rumanian stock. His grand-father was middle-class, but his father sank into the proletariat. Although shrewd, he gets carried away by his own terrific drive and emotionalism. When he was elected secretary of the Bakers' Union in 1940, he sent an invitation to Magyar Nemzet for his inaugural speech. I was sent to attend it. His speech was even more muddled and incomprehensible, with unfinished sentences and missing verbs, than his more recent and better known speeches tend to be, but he visibly fired his audience. We became friends, and between '41 and '45 he very often dined at my place. His reputation began rapidly to rise after he was brought into the secretariat of the Social Democratic Party in Conti Street. This wild man who always acted as if he had an open knife in his pocket, formed, with Janos Bartok, a few workers and intellectuals including myself, the Jozsef Attila Society, designed to become a focus of leftist art and letters, and became its driving force. This ambition earned him much respect, and for a while he became the darling of the intellectuals.

In 1945, he was undecided as to whether he wants to enter Hungarian or Rumanian political life. Nor could he easily make up his mind between the Communist and the Social Democratic parties.

What mattered to him was to be in the fighting elite of the working class, and not whether this elite carried a Social Democratic or a Communist banner. However, he was not a secret Communist Party member, although his deputy, Istvan Szurdy, was one. Other prominent secret Communists in the Social Democratic Party, or - as they were called - double card carriers, were Jozsef Harustyak, Sandor Ronai, and Lili Schiller, the secretary of Szakasits and the sister of Marton Horvath (whose original name is Marton Schiller). We did not know of their double membership at the time, but much later Geza Losonczy and his entourage spilled the beans.

I have not met him since 1945. Therefore my explanation of his treachery is based on conjecture. The whole left wing of the Social Democratic Party was Jewish, (1. Pal Justus; 2. Imre Vajda; 3. Sandor Szalai; 4. Zoltan Horvath; 5. Pal Schiffer; 6. Ferenc Revesz), they were far too intelligent for Marosan, and his anti-Semitism plus his inferiority complex drove him on to outdo them. They liked him well enough, regarding him as a sort of lovable enfant terrible, and he wanted to beat them to it and to go over to the Communist side quicker and in a more radical way than they.

Besides, he had few scruples, he told me of having, at one time before his entry into politics, been an Eintänzer, and he did not seem to be ashamed of the fact.

After his release from prison (which earned him 200,000 ft. compensation) Rakosi and Hegedüs promptly invited him for a talk and sent a huge car to fetch him. His wife implored him not to go and not to enter politics again, but he could not extricate himself, - how can you if Rakosi calls for you right after you come out, - the temptation to be in the midst of everything was too strong for him. Rakosi, of course, needed him as a shop-window Aryan and a "fighting proletarian" with the knife between his teeth.

However, his importance in the present Kadar gov't is more than just a fiery, loud-mouthed figure-head. There is not, in that gov't, a figure powerful enough to overawe him, he will bang the table and shout until he gets his way.

THE KADAR GOVERNMENT -- PORTRAITS.Geza Revesz.

I do not know him personally, but his doctor is a friend of mine. Through him, I could form a picture of his character. He is a coolly cynical man in the grand manner. A cosmopolitan NKWD product, well informed and of wide outlook, he knows James Joyce and Anatole France as well as the official Bible, and does not attach much importance to either. With Kadar and Marosán, he is probably the most important member of the present hierarchy. His Soviet status, as well as his own character, make him superior and independent. He used to refer even to Rakosi and Gerö by their surnames, omitting the word "comrade", - a serious breach of Communist etiquette which lesser leaders could not afford. For instance, Andics was heard to address her own husband as "comrade Berei".

Antal Apro.

I believe there is a tendency to underestimate him. He is not without a certain shrewdness in handling people and gaining popularity and confidence. Once a work mate of mine in the textile factory where I worked, who was born in the same village as Apro, had a grievance and went to Akademia Street to see him. He was admitted instantly, Apro made it his business to settle the matter, and this created quite an impression in the factory.

Apro is the type who really believes that the proletariat is best served by a faithful and consistent attachment to the Soviet Union, he really thinks that capitalists are evil, and he feels that compared to the great goal of proletarian victory, Soviet political oppression of Hungary is a matter of very secondary importance.

Karoly Kiss.

There is some similarity between Apro and Kiss, both are old-fashioned and inflexible, but Kiss is a more naive and honest little man. In type, he is the exact opposite of Geza Revesz, - if the members of the hierarchy had to be ordered along a spectrum, Revesz and Kiss would represent the two extreme ends. Whenever the Party wanted to talk something over with Kethly, they would send Kiss.

Ferenc Munnich.

In spite of everything, Munnich has a streak of humanitarianism in him. He rather dislikes the more cruel manifestations of terror, but instead of standing up against what he dislikes, he prefers to shut his eyes and not to notice them. He drinks very heavily and this enables him to maintain a sort of could-not-care-less attitude. The belief that he and Revesz are the real managers of the Kadar firm is probably ill founded.

He is not a man who will enforce his will. I used to drink with him on occasions, and found him¹ fairly jolly fellow, but a foxy and dishonest one. I have it from first hand that in December '56, at the height of the campaign to mop up revolutionary organizations and to re-build State security organs, he sat in his office in comparative idleness, his telephone did not ring for the whole hour while his visitor (my informant) was with him, and when he made a remark to that effect, he just shrugged his shoulders and said "They are doing it all".

INFORMATION CHANNELS.

While I was a process worker, for 4 years I never looked at a newspaper. Nevertheless, I was always as well or better informed of the way things were going, including impending policy decisions, as the most acute reader of Szabad Nep editorials. The way this worked may give an insight into what channels of information are functioning in a Communist society. I had a friend, formerly a sub-editor of Szabadsag, who was transferred to the State Film Studio as a writer of propaganda jingles. His boss, a woman, had intimate relations with a Polit Bureau member and always gossiped to my friend everything she heard. He was an irresistible old man, a sort of Damon Runyon of the Ring, who once knew the literary giants of a bygone age, such as Krudy and Szomory, and who would trade stories of that age for the confidences of the mighty of the present. Everybody ate out of his hand. He used frequently to meet Tamas Aczel, and I assume that through him information passed to other writers.

One of the most important junction of news channels in Budapest was the Brazil Espresso, where every has-been used to meet everybody who was anybody. Many of these characters were so lovable that the authorities would have been sorry to do anything to them.

THE DECEMBER 8TH 1956 MEMORANDUM.

(Interviewer's Remark: In respondent's account of this memorandum, all the former coalition parties, including the Social Democrats, are stated to have been signatories, and he attributes a large part of the initiative to the Social Democratic side. Contrast with the UNITED NATIONS Report on the Problem of Hungary.

December 8th, 1956, was the last "situation" of Hungarian political history. This was the date of the memorandum drafted and signed by the Smallholders, Petöfi, Social Democrats and Democratic People's Party, the Greater Budapest Workers Council, the Writers Union, the Revolutionary Council of Intellectuals, and the MEFESZ. The signatories were adamant on contacts with the Kadar clique, but stated their readiness to talk with the Russians themselves, if and when the latter are ready to come to terms with the Hungarian population, on the basis of the following 4 points:

1.) The undersigned approve of the Socialist economic order. (Nationalization of large-scale industry, maintenance of the existing State farms, voluntary agricultural collectives, the smaller details being left in abeyance.) They approve of democracy in politics, agreeing to the limitation of the number of competing parties to five, (i.e. the above 4 plus the Communist Party).

2.) On Russo-Hungarian relations: The signatories recommend the withdrawal of all Russian troops because this renders good relations between Hungary and the Soviet Union impossible and also hinders the realization of Point 1.

3.) The following provisional State order is suggested: A governing council of 5 - 9 members (the first idea in the discussions of the draft was to propose Kethly alone, Feja and with him the whole village-explorer block, thought Kethly had behaved marvellously and is best capable of fulfilling this office.) The members to be nominated by inter-Party agreement. A cabinet composed of ministers of State, who shall be political nominees, and portfolio ministers, who shall be chosen on grounds of competence. A provisional parliament, composed of delegates of Revolutionary Councils. This shall have 3 duties: Securing the prerequisites of peaceful productive work, maintenance of public order, and preparation of elections within a half to two years.

4.) Guarantees offered to the Soviet Union: Hungarian fissile materials to be used only for peaceful purposes under international control, and constitutional prohibition of the stationing of any foreign troops in Hungary.

This Memorandum was drafted at a series of meetings in private apartments. (Interviewer's Remark: Respondent has himself participated in it.) It is really the work of two men: of Istvan Bibó and Andras Revesz. Revesz is the brainist of the Social Democrat leadership. The Smallholders were not directly represented at these meetings, although the approval of Bela Kovacs was obtained through an indirect line. In any case there is no such thing as a Smallholders Party. It is really three parties: (1) The followers of Bela Kovacs, (2) The lawyers and kulaks behind Aladar Pongracz, (3) The Jewish petite bourgeoisie, the declassé "gens d'arms" (ex-officers, etc.) and other Abfall. It is ludicrous to say that these 3 groups are in any way bound together within the Party, or that there is any cohesion between them.

BIBO.

In December Bibo confidently asserted that no matter what they do now, within a year the Russians will want to sit down with "us". His attitude was what I would describe as grim optimism. However, as is wrong, he is far too rationalistic to be a statesman. He is dominated by his own intelligence, and he fails to understand and realize the importance of elemental political forces, which are often irrational. He does not appreciate the role of pride and arrogance in the Russian political character, nor the peasant mentality which produces the determined unwillingness to give up land. A man of reason like Bibo is at a loss to understand why the Russians want to hang on to the land of Hungary almost regardless of cost.