

I am 34 years old. I went to the faculty of law and political sciences of the University of Budapest. I had my bar examination in 1947. From that year up to 1950 I was practicing as an independent lawyer.

I was a member of the Peasant Party. In the Peasant Union I was the personnel referee. When everybody around me in the Union was arrested I tried to escape through Czechoslovakia to Austria. There, however, I was arrested by the Russians and brought back to Hungary. I was in the Szombathely prison for six months. Thereupon I was expelled from the Bar of Court (ügyvédi kamara) as unreliable.

The irony of the matter was that with my relatively light sentence of six months the AVH apparently considered my case as closed. In fact for my role in the Peasant Union I should have received at least five or six years in jail just as my colleagues did. In addition six months after my expulsion from the Bar of Court I, the unreliable person, was employed by the most secret war material factory. Up to the time of the Revolution I had access to the military investment figures which were guarded in the ^{vaults} ~~walls~~ as top secret material.

During the period between the two world wars the young intellectuals have turned away from the cosmopolitan outlook of their predecessors, for example, Ady and went directly to the fountains of the popular traditions of the Hungarian people for inspiration. The entire new

Hungarian art and literature was nourished by this popular culture. The Hungarian peasantry was the source for music, art, and literature and the Hungarian villages were the places where the artists and writers went out to discover and rediscover the treasures of Hungarian national traditions.

In this direction a great step was done with the organization of the university students' labour service. One could object that this was a rightist coloured paramilitary service but if one would leave out the political overtones then one would have to recognize that the students, especially those who never left before the city, have learned immensely much by going out in the summer to the villages and usually to the poorest regions and working there together with the poorest peasants and nameless labourers the hardest jobs and thus discovering the bitter misery and realities of the Hungarian social and economic system. At the same time they would learn about the inexhaustible treasure of Hungarian folklore and peasant culture.

Another such movement was the so-called village exploring. The village explorers were young writers who went to the country and learned about the conditions on the countryside and then wrote their experiences down in moving and often dramatically exciting books.

Also, such movements could be associated

with the Boy Scouts organization. In the thirties the leaders of the Boy Scouts especially the chief of the Hungarian Boy Scouts organization, count Pál Teleki, have stressed very much the social mission of the organization. Boy Scout groups were sent out to the poorest regions and also to the slums of the city and, for example, at Christmas time the boys who mostly belonged to middle class families, visited the poorest families and gave them presents and helped them in their housework with true brotherly love.

In this connection the wonderful work done by the Catholic and other Christian social organizations should be mentioned, too.

The most outstanding writers and spiritual leaders of this popular social movement were László Németh, Sándor Karácsonyi, and István Sinka. Their idealism and good will cannot be denied, neither their merits in awakening the social conscience of the nation, especially of the youth, and showing them a new direction toward a new socially minded and better society. Such work as, for example "Viharsarok" by Géza Féja have shaken the consciences of the youth with an elementary force. The better part of the Hungarian youth and university students could not live quietly anymore and squander its money in night locals and other places of entertainment carelessly when they knew that millions of their compatriots are living in

misery and they knew that the most valuable part of Hungarian culture, the native culture and not the cosmopolitan culture of Budapest, is perishing in the misery of these people.

The greatest omission of these so laudable movements was, however, that ^{they} ~~it~~ almost completely neglected the city workers, the great masses living in slums and may be in a greater misery even than the people on the countryside. The popular movement was almost entirely concentrated on the Hungarian peasantry and ignored the city proletariat.

The popular movement originally was not at all an extreme left movement. In fact, it was ~~a~~ rather rightist than left. This statement should be taken, however, with a certain caution because the most outstanding leaders of the movement were not so much interested neither in rightist nor leftist politics and could be rather called middle way people in the political field who would have stood rather for a pure and uncorrupted democratic Hungary. Political crystallization was not even very much noticeable at the beginning of the '30-ies; it was rather incidental ~~to the movement~~ that the movement by disclosing the faults of the society in these days and of the political and economic set-up which was largely responsible for the misery of the people, it implied a condemnation of the Horthy system and fought against the remnants of feudalism, for a land reform and better social justice.

Toward the end of the thirties the unity of the popular movement was broken up. Péter Veres and the circle around him influenced part of the youth in the far left. Another part was turning ^{to} the right, Fascism and Nazism. But the majority still tried to find a third way, a middle way, avoiding the extremes of far right and far left.

Among the university students up to 1944 the greatest association was the Turul. This was strongly rightist and very nationalistic. Besides this there had been smaller associations of a rather feudal character and also the Catholic student organization Emericana. At the same time the middle way, the so-called third line, the popular movement was almost entirely missing. Finally, on the initiative of László Vataj, a so-called student unity movement was started in Szeged which then was established and organized also in Budapest.

The goal of the student unity movement was to work toward a new, more just social balance in the Hungarian society following the middle road shown by the popular writers. This work was to be performed first of all on the cultural field but also in the economic field. With other words, in the cultural field the students were striving to discover and learn more about the indigenous Hungarian culture and to cultivate and develop this culture in the music and the art and literature of the present day.

In the economic field on the other hand the students were striving to learn about the conditions in Hungary first hand, with other words going out and work together with the people and then to disseminate their discoveries as the popular writers did thereby waking up the conscience of the ruling class and of the whole Hungarian society and when the time would arrive, when the students themselves would occupy already positions in the society, they would be prepared to do everything to change this society and the economy of Hungary for the better.

Thus the main stress in the development of the new Hungarian intelligentsia has been the social consciousness and at the same time the love for the pure traditional folklore and popular culture as preserved by the peasantry. It must be emphasized, however, that the popular movement was by far not a chauvinistic movement, just to the contrary: while stirring up enthusiasm in the youth toward the Hungarian popular culture, the writers and artists have taught the Hungarian youth at the same time to appreciate the values and to discover the beauties of the popular culture of the neighbouring peoples. The greatest collectors of Hungarian popular music and songs, the world-famous composers Bartók and Kodály, have not stopped their researches at the ethnical frontiers of the Hungarian people but brought to light also the popular music and songs of the Rumanian, Serbian, Slovak, etc. peoples. The same openmindedness toward other nations

was true also with regard to the popular writers. For example, László Németh was one of the greatest advocates of a Danubian Confederation and has written many articles in the support of the peaceful cooperation of all nations in that area.

The second world war has divided the Hungarian youth sharply. The rightist part went over to the German side. Many have hoped for a Western victory and remained openly or secretly anglophiles. The leftist part, especially students living in the Popular Colleges (Népi Kollégium), under the leadership of László Kardos, formed an underground opposition. Both the leftist and also the purely nationalistic opposition groups during their underground resistance came near to certain groups of the Communist movement. The contacts and cooperation with these Communist groups especially with the so-called Weishaus group, has to a certain degree predestined the after war developments.

One can say that an excellent new ~~intelligentsia~~ intelligentsia was in the process of forming which would have just grown up and matured to be the leading stratum of the nation when the war ended. However, the last year of the war and the first month of the so-called "liberation" have dealt terrific blows on this new intelligentsia. Part of the youth have fallen on the battle-field. A greater part was taken to Russia as prisoners of war and

perished there.

Those who remained home were trying to find their place in two directions, namely in the Small-Holders Party and in the Peasant Party. Besides these there had been smaller fractions among the youth. For example, the former Popular College students, then youth leaning to the Social-Democratic Party, the Communists, and also the Christian-Democrats in Barankovics's party. One could not speak about unity anymore. Daily politics became all important. The former leading writers as László Németh, Sándor Karácsonyi, Sinka, and many others slowly retired in complete passivity. Others have tried to take up always the most opportune positions and swim with the most powerful current.

Many have still hoped in a democratic development. They still believed that as soon as a peace treaty was signed the Soviet troops would withdraw and leave Hungary alone. The radical elimination of the remnants of feudalism by the Communists and the Soviet troops at the early stage of the "liberation", however illegal and brutal and often unjust their method was by executing this land reform and other measures, if undeniably created the best basis for a new start toward a more democratic and better social development in Hungary.

Very soon, however, the young intellectuals had to discover the brutal reality and they have started to

organize themselves for the coming opposition already before the Communists have taken over all power. Thus the so-called Hungarian Unity (Magyar Közösség) was organized within the Small-Holders Party and the Peasant Party as an underground opposition group against the Communists at a time when the government and the majority of the Parliament was still composed from the Small-Holders. Later the Peasant Union (Magyar Paraszt Szövetség) was organized. This latter organization was originally founded for the protection of peasant interests but it soon became the greatest meeting place and camp of the young intellectuals. It maintained also close connections with other progressive groups, for example, with the social political group of the Catholic Action (Actio Catholica Társadalompolitikai Csopertja).

All these organizations and groups have been liquidated in 1948 under the pretext of the discovery of different conspiracies against the state by the police. For example, the above mentioned group of the Catholic Action was destroyed in the connection with the conspiracy trial of the Ministry of Agriculture. All members of the Hungarian Unity and the Hungarian Peasant Union and other similar groups had been arrested. It was enough if the police could prove that somebody maintained correspondence with any person abroad to have him sentenced for prison. This was the time that Recsk, the infamous concentration

camp, was installed and that the deportations had begun.

In 1949/50 the darkest terror set in in Hungary. Anybody who was able to save his skin was trying only to survive these times and keep quiet and as small as possible in order to disappear in the crowd and not to call the attention of the police on himself. Any intellectual work or writing which was still done (except, of course, by the hundred percent Communist writers who wrote for the regime) was done only for the drawer of the desk of the writers. Any kind of meeting or cultural organizing was out of question. Literature from abroad was out of reach. The most one could do was just to find out where the other intellectuals, former friends or colleagues, have lived and worked and just keep in mind that they were there and were alive.

Change in this situation was brought about only by the first premiership of Imre Nagy when the cracks and splits in the Communist system first became apparent and while the Communist began a furious struggle among themselves the rest of the population could take a deep breath. There was no question even then about renewed political activity by the non-Communists but the intellectual elite was able to resume contacts with each other and to build out again the cultural life.

One curious aspect of the life in the catacombs during the last years was that we had been much more in-

tensely interested in all the modern currents of Western culture and have discussed it with a greater alertness and enthusiasm than the Western intellectuals did in their free environment. For example, Orwell's 1984 which was strictly proscribed in the Soviet orbit, ^{was} ~~was~~ discussed in many such meetings quite thoroughly and sharply.

The young writers who were not permitted to publish their writings in the state controlled magazines and newspapers had to earn their living often with very hard manual labour. However, during the evenings in such discussion groups and circles they could participate in lectures and discussions about literature, science, philosophy, etc. held on the highest level. The elder and more experienced writers have given their best in order to direct and educate the young generation. But also famous scientists were invited from all fields to give lectures and participate in the discussions. The greatest care was taken that each ideology and each direction should be represented in such meetings so that in the cultural life of 1955/56 which was going on in these study and discussion circles the atmosphere was highly charged, intensive, and interesting and it was the most fertile to produce the best and most valuable minds and personalities.

It is only natural that politics could not be kept out but this was not directed in dreaming and preparing the Revolution or lists of future governments but to form

a definite image about the Hungary after a liberation. This liberation, however, was not expected from Western armies, not even from a revolution but rather from an internal evolution within the whole Soviet orbit. Everybody, even most of the Communists were convinced already at this time that the system as it was just could not go on any longer and that great changes would follow very soon. To be prepared for these changes and to direct the nation into the right direction without great upheavals and heavy sufferings this was our intention by discussing and trying to develop the image of a future Hungary. In this connection I would like to note that nobody ever wanted to restore the old feudalistic order of prewar Hungary.

Thus a glowing spiritual circle arose from the ashes which was not directed from any headquarters and not organized by any organizer but formed itself entirely spontaneously.

It was no accident when in the first hour of the Revolution marching from the statue of Petöfi toward Bem-Square I saw all those intellectuals whom I have known between 1942 and 1948 and again since 1955 joining our originally small group of about 200 students as if they would have followed a secret command although nobody could be notified neither by mail nor by phone to come. Somehow each of these men of that secretly glowing circle has

~~somehow~~ felt where ^{his} ~~their~~ place was at that hour.

All of us who belonged to this invisible circle had the same endeavour, namely that we wanted to see things in their final consequences and to understand the world in its deepest sense. We felt that in the 20th century because of the mechanization both in the East and in the West people become specialized on a small limited field and loose their vista toward the great concepts and coherency in the world and just the existence of a little nation makes it imperative that its sons should look upon the world and upon history in its greatest unity and that thus they should not be discouraged by the limitations but encouraged by the limitlessness of the universe.

Another thought of us was that since the greatest geniuses always march by a few steps before their age by carefully examining and investigating the leading ideas proposed by the greatest minds living today to learn something about the direction of the future cultural development within the Western world. We were confident that in this way we would be able to recognize the right path which we ought to follow and avoid many pitfalls and dangers for our country.

Our intellectual activity was politically oriented to the extent only that we did not want to take stand in the terrible struggle between Capitalism and Communism but avoiding these alternatives we were trying to find

that synthesis which would unquestionably develop and crystallize itself in the near future out of this fight between the thesis and anti-thesis. We tried to find that practical direction on the field of economics, culture, and sociology in which direction the atomic age of the 20th century would progress. In this way did we want to prepare ourselves and Hungarian society for the right road to follow that when the time would arrive, namely at the moment when the present system would end in a complete bankruptcy about which no one had any doubts, then we would be able to lead our nation smoothly over to the new social and economic order.

Did the AVH know about these activities? They did. Our meetings were not entirely safe operations even at this time. During the Revolution many kader files came into our hands. Among the papers of a friend of mine we found the report sent in to the AVH by his superintendent in which he was denounced because at his apartment each week a meeting was held with about 15 to 20 persons. However, the character of the meeting and the topics and ideological content were not known to the police.

Did the intellectuals change their opinion during the intervening years? It is only natural that everybody has grown older a few years. Many have changed their opinion quite considerably as compared to their thinking in 1948. However, many, maybe the majority, have followed

their ideal on the same path as they did before 1948.

A sharp distinction has to be made between the intellectuals and the masses in their attitude during the Revolution. The reaction from the part of the popular masses was a complete negation of everything in their bitterness toward the oppression and in their enthusiasm in throwing off the yoke. At the same time the intellectuals had been grown up already from naive idealism and were professing practical realism which manifested itself in the fact that they were not at all willing to throw away everything which was brought about during the changes of the last years. They had also a much clearer concept of the terrific might of Soviet Russia than the popular masses. Therefore they thought of Hungary's future in the context of the Eastern block and wanted to maintain friendly ties with the Soviet Union.

What was the role of the Communist intellectuals during this period? Those Communist intellectuals who have been in the underground movement and resistance up to 1945, among them the Weishaus group mentioned above, have been entirely disillusioned from the Rákosi type Communist regime by 1948/49 and most of them were thrown into jail and those who remained free often remained members of the Party formally but in fact have retired from all activities into complete passivity. (Among these latter there have been such who were working for the AVH

but we knew about this and we did not mind since they did more good than harm by protecting us and leading the AVH astray. This again shows you that the social problems in Hungary are unimaginably differentiated. You can't regard everything as either black or white and this seems to be very hard to understand for the Western public.)

The other part of the Communist intellectuals who did not get disillusioned even after 1949 ~~there~~ had been either too stupid to understand anything or had been plain careerists who in order to be able to publish, to receive good salary or even Stalin prize continued to serve the regime with their literary or artistic output.

These people when they began around 1955 to smell the fragrance of the new winds as true careerists did not want to miss any time and so in the Petöfi circle and similar manifestations they rose into the ranks of the forerunners of the Revolution. A great amount of careerism was in their behaviour but it is undeniable that a great deal of sincerity could be found in them, too. For example, I am quite positive that Déry turned against the regime in the beginning only because this was fashionable and because he wanted to change sides in time, but later he stood at the side of the Revolution with all his heart and soul as if he had thrown away the ballast of many years and would stand first time entirely free and happy.

How could I explain the birth of the Petöfi circle? In the years 1955/56 there was the so-called Népfront, Popular-front movement which was organized in order to widen the participation of the population in the life of the country but strictly under the leadership of the Communist Party. The Petöfi circle was formed in this sign of the Népfront to widen the cultural activities which were restricted up to now to the few orthodox Communists. The goal of the Petöfi circle was that in the spirit of the 20th Party Congress of the Soviet Union the fault of the "cult of personality", with other words Stalin's system, should be discovered and debated in order to find the remedies for the many shortcomings of the system admitted by now and regretted even by the Communists themselves. However, all this had to be done on strictly Marxist basis. No place was foreseen and provided within the Petöfi circle for any bourgeois philosophy or direction.

What happened during the Revolution with our invisible cultural circle? As I brought out before we certainly did not want a Revolution. All of us, however, even the extreme left and Communist intellectuals were convinced that changes had to come. Of course, the changes and the future society was imaged differently by different groups and people with different ideologies.

During the Revolution the organization started every-

where on the same lines where they had been cut off in 1948. For the time being nobody thought it expedient that the "invisible circle" should try to take the lead into its hands. Even the danger was still there that things might get out of hands either toward a right or a left extreme again and then our place would have been in the opposition.

Our plan was rather to penetrate into everywhere, into all key positions. We did not want to form a separate Party organization but rather our goal was that our men should get into each party and capture there important positions. We had already formulated the idea of "Épitök Eire" (The Circle of the Builders) which would have been only a debating forum out around which the whole circle of the progressive young intellectuals could have crystallized itself into a spiritual community. (The name was given not only because symbolism but because the organization was attached to the Union of the Building Industries.)

What happened with the members of the "invisible circle"? A part of them emigrated abroad in the wake of the Revolution. The greater part remained at home. About their activities I have no information.

This part of the emigration is the least able to strike roots in foreign lands. The nature of the intellectuals is rather contemplative and therefore they can't

make easily a living in the practical economic life. A writer remains writer only if he can write in his own mother-tongue to his own nation.

Those who remained home, in spite of all oppression they have to suffer, are in my opinion in a more advantageous situation since they can still find and maintain contact with each other and to a certain extent with the public.

Interviewer's Comment on Respondent:

Respondent is disliked at his place of work (RFE) by many of his Hungarian colleagues. He is suspected of having been (and still being) pro-Communist. In the opinion of the interviewer these suspicions are without foundation. Respondent seems to be a straightforward, sincere man, with a pleasant look and fascinating talk.