

I am 28 years old. I was born in Szatmár County in the Eastern-most part of Hungary. My family lived in Debrecen. We belonged to the so-called middle class. This fact became very uncomfortable as soon as the Communists got into power. In 1948, I left Debrecen and went to Budapest. I did this partly because I expected a greater choice of jobs available in Budapest and partly, because I thought that in the great city it would be easier to get lost in the masses than in a small town, where my origin was known to everybody. From 1952 to 1956 I was in the prisons of Pestvidék and Vác. In July 1956, my sentence was interrupted and I was set free.

Prison Economy.

Few people in the West would realize that in a People's Democratic State, the prisoner has to pay to his jailers for his room and board and even for the custody given to him. All these items will be deducted from his salary and if his salary should not be enough to take care of all the expenses, then he would to pay back the amount, left on his debit-sheet after his release from prison. This happens very often, since there is not always enough work inside the prison, so that to get a job there is rather a privilege than a right or a must. For those people, however, who die in prison or are executed, their family will receive the bill of medical treatment and even a bill for the executioner, which they have to pay under severe penalty.

Everybody's pay was shown on his records. The wages of the

prisoners were calculated on the usual norm basis. It could happen that, if somebody was unable to fulfill his norm, he would earn during a month minus 400 forints after everything was deducted from his salary. In such cases, the Department of Public Works KÖMI (this is the abbreviation for: Közérdekű Munkaintézet, however, a joke was circulating that the letters stood for "Körülbelül mindenki ide Kerül", which means in English "about everybody will end up here), which assigned the work to be done by each prison, would complain to the prison management and the unproductive worker would be punished by several days of dark-cell.

The usual deductions from the salary were the following:

31% for custody, living quarters and light.

3% childlessness-taxes.

1% old age insurance.

Up to the third norm category, 10 forints were deducted daily for food. Above that category, 15 forints daily. This was done also Sundays, when we did not work. (The Chapel of the prison was transformed for workshop and no religious services were ever held.)

During the time, when somebody was out of work, 8 forints were charged daily for all the expenses of room and board, custody, etc.

In my own case, I was in the prison hospital at Vác for 11 months because of tuberculosis, but there was time before my illness

and also after it, when I did not have any work. In lucky days, when I had work, I was working either as electrician or with a team on the conveyance of materials within the workshop. We had a mica factory in Vác (csillámüzem) where, if we received enough material, then we could work even 12 hours a day, but since in the People's Democratic Economy, supplies did not arrive always in time, often we were out of job.

Altogether I spent 418 days without work in the jail. As I told you before, each day was charged with 8 forints on my debit account.

At the time of the interruption of my prison sentence, I was given 580 forints as the salary due to me. At the same time, however, my indebtedness to the prison was 3304 forints. I had to sign a paper according to which I would repay this debt in 100 forints monthly instalments.

The reason, why they have handed out the 580 forints to me instead of deducting it right away from my debts, can be easily explained, viz. those prisoners who are released without a penny, have to be given their railroad ticket. Now, in my case, the distance to my home would have amounted to quite a considerable amount, so in order that they should not buy my railroad ticket, they gave me my last month's salary.

I do not want to tell you about the horrors of prison life, about the atrocities and tortures committed by the hangmen of the regime, I want only to mention that few people know that each

week twice there have taken place secret executions in the Pestvidéki Prison. The victims were marched completely naked to the courtyard and had to see the hanging of their fellow prisoners before them. But just to break down somebody mentally, they often ordered out a prisoner to the gallows and in some case repeatedly they have done this, who was not to be executed, but he learned about his good luck only in the last minute when he had seen already a half a dozen men hanged before him and has lived through all the anxiety of knowing that he would be the next.

And these beastly jailers of the regime had the good humour to deduct from our miserable pay for childlessness-tax. Just imagine, young men in the prime of their youth convicted for 15 or 25 years, or even lifelong for prison, whose only desire would have been to get married and found a family and warm home, and these people now had to pay to the State, because they remained childless!

II. Catholic Youth Movement in Illegality.

It is well-known that Catholic Youth Organizations had been dissolved already during the summer of 1946. However, some groups have continued to function secretly even after the final prohibition of the Actio Catholica in the summer of 1948. Especially active have been certain groups of the former KIOE (Katolikus Ifjúsunkások Országos Egyesülete) (in English: National Organization of the Catholic Young Workers).

When I arrived in Budapest in 1948, I tried to join one such group. However, it was not easy to be accepted, namely the members there have been already together for years and now, in the illegality, they became even more exclusive and trusted only each other. I knew actually only of two such groups in Budapest, but I know that there have been more. Great care was taken that the members of different groups should not know each other because of the dangers in illegality.

I soon realized that I have to start anew. Actually I discovered that even if I could, I would not want to join those two groups, because, besides of their exclusivity, I found that they did not have enough impetus in their work, they rather lived and worked for themselves.

One of these groups was under the leadership of a Salesian Brother. In his group, some of the boys had been working already outside, that is, they have collected around themselves some people in their working place in the spirit of secular apostolate, but the

framework of this group which consisted of about ten boys, was also a strictly closed unit where it was impossible to break in. In my opinion, ten men had been too great a crowd for the discussion of a serious topic, therefore, I proposed the splitting of the group into two. This was, however, rejected by the group unanimously. Seeing this, I did not go anymore to their meetings. I saw them only once or twice and later I kept up the contact only with the Salesian Brother. However, during the later development, some of the boys from these groups have come to our activists meeting and helped in the organization of my new group.

This new group consisted mostly of boys who came to Budapest from Debrecen, just as I did. There were usually six of us. We kept regular meetings. The fundamental idea of our organization was about the followings:- to form a close circle of spiritual children around a good priest. In our meetings we separated according to our vocation and jobs, not because of class spirit, but because of the differences of problems to be faced in different ~~occasions~~ vocations.

The programme of our meetings was about the same everywhere. The members of the group first learned to know each other. They told each other their backgrounds, family circumstances, jobs etc. as far as it seemed necessary in order to know each other thoroughly.

After this, there was reading^{of} the Bible, followed by meditation

and then discussion.

This was followed by short lectures and discussions in religious sciences, as for instance dogmatics, morales, apologetics and sociology.

After this, we discussed our actual problems. For example, my position in my workshop is such and such. The Party Secretary has warned me that they were watching me going to the church all the time. What would be the most appropriate answer and behavior in such a case? In this connection, the apostolate was a very serious concern of ours. For example, one would bring up that in his workshop there is a young worker of such and such character, who seemed to him worthwhile to be brought into our company. His interests are such and such, what would be the way to win his confidence? In such a case, we often decided that the person would be invited by one of us to a movie, where our colleague^u would introduce him to the others. Since our whole working system was founded on neighborly love, we tried to bring the men together with a colleague of ours who seemed to be the most appropriate friend for him and all of us tried to treat him with as much love and consideration as we could bring up. Thus we tried to dispel the awful atmosphere of distrust which involved all of us, so that this new friend of ours should feel himself right away in our company as if in a family circle.

After the actual problems were taken care of, we had lectures and discussions about topics of general education and knowledge. On

this field we concentrated very much on books, which had not only general, literary and scientific value, but were also famous from the point of view of religion and which were not easily available in the Soviet controlled countries. If we could get hold of such a work, at least one of us would read it and prepare a report on it which would be followed then by a general discussion. This method of work was applied also to the articles of *Vigilia*, the best Catholic Periodical in Hungary, which was not available to everybody, on the one hand because it was permitted to appear only in very limited numbers and, on the other hand, its price was 5 forints, which was too much for most of our boys' pocket.

Finally, we closed our meeting with prayer or with a recital of the official evening prayer of the Catholic Church, the *Completorium*.

Through the same method of recruiting, which I have just described above, I received my three boys. No-one of them worked at the same factory with me, which meant that every Sunday I had to go to a Parish far away from my home in order that I could meet them at 10 p.m. and go together to Mass. We met once during the week, where we had the same programme as I described above, only on a lower level, because these boys had less education and because I had to start with them the fundamentals of their religion from the beginning. The same was true for the general education, which I had to implant to their intellect also by a slow and difficult work. However, I liked my job immensely and regard that period

even to-day as one of the best times of my life.

I was deported from Budapest on June 7th 1951. The work of our group, however, continued, but not ^{very} long anymore.

One of our activists had been implanted to us by the AVH. For example, as I later remember ^{ed}, he told me after one of our meetings, that the time would come, ^w then we would have to start sabotage in our working places. My answer was that this was not our method, our organization was purely ecclesiastic and religious. Later, when I was in jail, my investigator asked me about this conversation "with whom did you talk about sabotage?" When I told him about that conversation, he wrote it down in his report and presented the case according to which our organization was directed toward sabotage. A second accusation against me was espionage. "You have been a spy too. Tell me about your connections with Western espionage organizations". I was tortured with this for two days and two nights and I had to write about this topic hundreds of pages. Only, when I was taken again upstairs for questioning, suddenly it came to my mind that once I was speaking ~~know~~ ^{indeed} about connections with Western intelligence services with the same man, namely, when I was deported to the country, once he came down to visit me and told me that in the Army he met somebody who came home from the West and who has some mission assigned to him by some Western Intelligence Agency. He would escort a group of people to the West by armed guard to the border. I was interested in hearing this, because

I had just at that time low spirits, since rumours spread that we, the internees, ^{would} ~~would~~ be deported to the Soviet Union. When I told about this incident to the investigator, ^{he} ~~they~~ took the whole affair as closed and the man was not bothered because of this. He remained further in his job and he lived comparatively well, as I learned after one and a half years from my mother who was allowed to visit me. I had the opportunity later to speak with some of my former colleagues in the prison about this member and only then we discovered that actually he came to our group with phony recommendations and no one of us knew him before.

All these Catholic youth groups, working in illegality, have been under the directorate of a Committee of ten outstanding priests. The chairman of the Committee was rotating from time to time. The whole setup was most likely a continuation in illegality of one part of the work of the former Catholic Action. Whether it was organized according to official church directives or the priests working in it did it out of their own devotion and zeal, I don't know. It would be dangerous and compromising to speak about it even to-day.

The said Committee has published pamphlets of Catholic Weltanschauung. As far as I know, the responsible editor was always the chairman of the Committee. These pamphlets were strictly restricted to Catholic teaching about religion, morales and Weltanschauung. They avoided daily politics and any direct instigation against the regime. We multiplied these pamphlets

on typewriters usually always in 5 exemplars, and thus distributed them. The reason for this was, that multiplication by any other method, as for instance mimeographing of unauthorized material could be punished already, while on his typewriter anybody could write down things and give to his friends without incurring too much danger.

One boy in the group of the Salesian Brother enlisted to the police with the permission of the Brother. Later the AVH was filled up from the police and in this way, the boy was transferred against his will to the AVH and there to the personal bodyguard of Rákosi. Even there, in the lion's den, he continued his apostolic work and soon one or two boys in his unit were reading our pamphlets. One day, one of these boys fell asleep on guard duty, and when he was taken down to prison for this offence, ~~some~~ his pockets were emptied and they found one of our pamphlets with him. During the investigation which followed this incident, the boy confessed the name of the person from whom he received the pamphlet. The AVH set to work then and slowly succeeded in rolling-up the whole organization. The threads were leading to the Salesian Brother who was executed then for the crime of organizing against the State.

This all happened during the summer of 1952. I don't know what has happened with the individual groups since that time, because I was arrested too and thrown into jail. However, during my long stay in prison, I met here and there members of the

different groups of the Illegal Catholic Youth Organization which had been smashed at the same time and from the many mosaics of information gained through the conversations, I came to the conclusion that the AVH have collected a tremendous amount of material about the illegal work of the Catholic Youth Organization already before 1952, and then, in the wake of the above mentioned incident, it has almost completely broken and rolled-up the entire organization which with a thorough job.

In spite of the long years in jail which I had to suffer, because of my work in this illegal organization, I still remember it as the greatest and most beautiful experience in my life. It was most touching, how those simple working boys stuck together, loved each other and were attached to me, their leader. I can't think of any more beautiful work as this secret apostolate was for God and the eternal truth in a society filled with lies and debased by corruption and inhumanity.