

SECTION I:

It was my good fortune to attend two Petúfi Club meetings. The heated debates of the writers giving their freest views and the absolute truth was amazing to me. Rakosi and his gang were called like this openly and I was amazed at the complete frankness with which Soviet exploitation, rapes, and abuse were aired. That's where the revolt broke out, not on Oct 23rd. I wanted to complain of the abuses of the regime at Party meetings during the previous two years. But I was warned to keep my peace to protect my family. Generally speaking, it is not exaggeration, that the regime started the revolt. The poverty and the terror were universal. Once the revolt gained momentum, beside the people also officials joined it, else they were suppressed. This the Soviets had never expected. They were simply not ready for it. The fabulous swiftness of the ^{new} regime was proved because by Nov 3rd complete order was restored, and actually noone was hurt after the previous Thursday. So the phony Russian excuse, to help restore order with their invasion of Hungary, was absolutely pointless. I myself helped dismantling barricades on the third. The Revolution was over and it was victorious. Actually, to look back at it, the security of the State was undermined by the official immorality. After all, the State was kept going financially by periodic plundering raids into the various segments of the economy.

The State's example of robbery did not leave any moral standards and it was a bad example for individuals. Theft and dishonesty were common. This State plunder started with the nationalization. "First the banks, then the houses, then stores, then homes, and finally private goods. Then the farms and the kulaks. And finally the workers. The plunder of the workers took a new twist. This was accomplished thru the Stachanowites. The Stachanowites are simply a fiction destroying the workers' morale. It was the basis of the workers' exploitation. A Stachanowite would have a string of helpers getting everything ready for him. He would then come and start the operation, while others finished the job.

SECTION II:

The novel foolishness of the regime resulted from a dozen contradictions, which could never be explained away. First, take the strike, recognized as the workers' best weapon it was prohibited. Second, the steady claims in the improvement of the standard of living, which in reality meant a steady decline ever since the war. Three, this was a State in which the workers ruled, and the peasants, yet these were the very people most suppressed and exploited. Fourth, the regime was to fight servitude and subservience. Instead, it introduced slavery thru the complete control of work and of opportunities. Fifth, they spoke of steadily increasing production, but these were based on false statistics.

Supposedly they even had realistic statistics, but these were kept under seven locks as the biggest of secrets. Sixth, there was a harping on freedom, all was freedom, all the organizations and newspapers supported freedom, but where could one find it? It was a life of dreams and fairy tales. Seventh, steadily improving industrial production meant in practice steadily reduced quality of the products, besides shortages. Eight, the USSR was the greatest helper and friend. But we paid our war debts twenty or thirty times over. We were subject to bloodiest exploitation. Ninth, the USSR was also to be our example in everything, yet she is backward in everything. Tenth, the regime fully abused Marxist theories and lost the moral grounds on which it claims to stand. Eleventh, they placed the highest value on man in theory, but actually he was the least important. But aside from these general observations, I can think of half a dozen stories out of my own life, revealing the moral weaknesses of the regime.

I have written a major study on water movement in the soil. This would have made me an aspirant with a considerable increase in my income. It was extremely well received by everyone until it got in the hands of a professor Potapov. This visiting Russian professor acted as the supervisor of our university on behalf of Moscow. Within 24 hours he rejected my manuscript, claiming it was completely useless. Since there were only three copies made, one of which I had, one of which was in the hand of our rector, and the third one was in the library,

A copy never checked out by anyone, it was quite obvious that he never even looked at it. There was a slight academic furor, which as it turned out, hurt Potapov's reputation more than it hurt mine. As it turned out he enjoyed living in Hungary at the top of the heap, but when his term was to be renewed, the Hungarian Academy refused this. He was unhappy going back to the USSR. However, my work, while recognized in the field, was never distributed or printed because a visiting Russian professor disliked it. Much closer at home, as a matter of fact in the apartment-house where we lived, lived the secretary and mistress of Mihaly Farkas. This woman was a most revolting person, someone who had denounced I think at least 60 people to the AVO, that is to her boss. She had the full use of Mr. Farkas' automobile. During the Revolution the mob suspected her past and cornered her. She was badly beaten, and to be honest we could only say that she was responsible for her own life and her own misdeeds. Thirdly, the story of my Party membership is also a revealing experience. Like in many other professions, the Communists tried, particularly in the universities, to have professors they considered reliable. They did this in several ways; the simplest being that they raised the status of an institution or academy to that of a university and thus the academic teachers became university professors and the professors were being crowded out of the field. One had to protect oneself and one had to learn to hit back.

Thus I was forced to join the Social Democratic Party in 1948. Of course, when this party and the Communists were fused in 1949, I had the right not to join it and loose my job. But I had a family to support and I need academic work and I must teach. I was taken over into the Communist Party. I was a t times mistreated, for they su pressed my theories and innovations, altho I got along very well with ever-one. I got along particularly well with youth and actually my students asked me to join the CP, for they wanted me to stay. This is something I can rationalize, but I couldn't quite get over it still. As fourth I should like to mention the story of Kovacic. He was a "Kossuth Prize" winning botanist, ho for several years was in charge of domesticating and growing a plant that had rubbery liquid in its root. A kind of dandelion. This was to be a new domestic rubber-source. The plant was imported from Russia already by the Germans during the War. Then after the War the Hungarians tried to get it domesticated in Hungary. After several years of experimenting Professor Kovacic categorically refused to have anything to do with it. He explained lengthily that the domestication would be impossible, because cross fertilization with certain domestic weeds would take place inevitably, reducing the rubber content below any reasonable minimum. This excellent scholar with a fine reputation was then thrown overboard and fired from his job. He was accused of sabotage, spent some time in jail. He is still not permitted to teach.

I think he works as an agronomist on some kolkhoz. Independently of his fate, a few years later the authorities admitted the failure of this enterprise on climatic and botanical grounds, but they still failed to rehabilitate Professor Kovacic.

Five, a different type of story was related by a friend of ours who worked as an agronomist on a State farm. While supervising once the loading of grain, he hung up his beautiful leather coat inside a railroad car. Called away to the phone, by the time he got back an hour later, the train was gone. He frantically tried to track it down, the direction was to be Szeged. He got as far as Szolnok, but there the train disappeared. It never arrived in Szeged. After a lot of misadventure he discovered that a train arrived with grain as a gift of the Great Soviet Union to Szeged. After some looking he realized that this was the same train. With the help of friends he could open the car and get his leather coat back, a gift of the Soviet people!

SECTION III:

For us the Revolution was a personal thing and I would like to tell you about it thru the eyes of our family. I was the first faculty member to volunteer for the youth brigade forming at the University. My kids went around the town, hanging revolutionary posters, and my wife was the first woman in Budapest to cut out the Soviet emblem from the Hungarian Red-White-Green. X

X This is an interesting episode. Our apartment faced the square where General Bem's statue is set up and suddenly, when my wife heard the mass of people outside, she realized there is a great demonstration on. As her first thought she put out the red-white-green flag in the window. Her second thought was when she saw the demonstration, that the Soviet emblem doesn't belong to this occasion. She ran for the letter-opening scissors, bent out the window and cut out the flag. A tremendous cheer followed her action. At the university we argued long whether the exit of the Soviet troops should be in the initial 14 points demanded. Also, there¹was much debate on whether border revision should be brought up in the beginning. But it was decided that it would be best left for later. On the 23rd, after such arguments, most students and many faculty left DISZ. Surprisingly the Koreans studying in Budapest were all well-meaning neutrals. Some even fought with the revolt, in spite of the fact that they enjoyed excellent living conditions. We were happily surprised by them. We were also most pleased that the so-called One-Year Maturists who finished secondary school in one year short-courses were also opposed to the regime and they saw their positions clearly. The nation was wholly united. Regardless of what position of preference people enjoyed, most everyone was against the regime. Today the Hungarian people are immune to Communism. There was little difference in Hungarian affairs since Nazi days, except that instead of Germanism now there was Slavism.

and the country's foreign policy was most similar. Domestically it was different perhaps, generally speaking, that anti-Semitism didn't play a role. The aftermath of the revolt is a different chapter. Hungary's youth was disgusted. Since then some turned to the extreme left, some to the extreme right. Personally I fully realize the helplessness of the situation. My reasons for leaving.

First I realized that I could not keep on serving the regime regardless of whether they wanted me or not.

And second, my role in the revolt bore me ill. I was a bad Party member and I opposed the Party's regime in the past two years rather openly. I went to Petöfi Club meetings and kept in touch with the others and for many years I did not hide my secret dream - that I would give everything to one who could put us out on a West Berlin street with my family, with the clothes on our back.

Fourth consideration was practical for me. I saw the falsity of the Kadar system. The retracted promises, and I was simply afraid of jail or punishment. Till now I could be of help to the right kind of people. After this it would have been dangerous for me to stay. At the university all those participating in any way in the revolt, were punished. And that I couldn't have returned to the Party, I announced at a public meeting, and asked others to follow suit. A man who did was later fired. Also, as the first volunteer faculty member to join the university's youth brigade, I showed the way from which there was no return.

I couldn't forget about my family, either, and I was afraid that they would be exposed to retributions and that I couldn't assure a future for my children. We waited to the last minute for a change, for a miracle. None came. I never denied my Communist Party membership and I saw its consequences for my life in the West. I offered no excuse.

Finally, perhaps a silly consideration was, that there were obviously many firings to be undertaken at the university and that with my departure one man less might be fired, due to the greater need on the faculty.

SECTION I:

It is a truism well understood by everyone in Hungary, that no one is irreplaceable. I wrote several textbooks, but I could be replaced. My generation had a few advantages over the younger people. We had perhaps a better education because we had to struggle more. For three years I worked at the university without any pay. After that I got minimum pay for the first four years as a university instructor. I actually finished secondary school and my university education thru my own financial efforts. I think we have to struggle more.

There was a change in this. For the younger people it's easier now, ever since the war. But before the war younger people were hardest hit, while now it's the family man who is hardest hit. Today the younger people are not forced to work so hard, to do so many things. For three years I earned my living as a painter, as a sports figure. I was a tennis, bow and arrow, and sharp shooter champion. I was an amateur carpenter who built his own sports equipment for use and for sale. My brother and I became Hungarian bow and arrow champions, designed our own equipment and sold it at a profit. We also built in Budapest a large sports center with 22 tennis courts and 2 skating rinks. I don't think there is need for this type of activity for today's university graduates.

A university like ours was a world apart. Our rector, Imre Mate, was an excellent politician of the older generation, with very good connections. He also was an academician, but lost his title in the revolution. He was always very cautious and this is actually his capital. He was also well-meaning. Besides him we had two more from the older period. One was a very clever ex-jurist, the other one was a shrewd opportunist who finished the university right after the war. He was not very important. Mate showed himself quite a reactionary to his colleagues. He actually joined the Party in 1951, at a time when he did not have to. He did it only for personal gains as he was not an outstanding scholar. In the revolt youth was first suspicious of him, as he opposed severely all manifestations of the young people. But when he saw the success of the revolt, he banked on its strength and made use of it. He got elected as president of the Revolutionary Council. The Revolution however, removed only five men from office. One was the ex-rector and there were several Marxists, Party secretaries, economists, academic personnel, but not one of them was a serious scholar. One man, Kolbai, was an excellent scholar and a real Communist. In fact he was left in his job by the Revolution and he is now the rector. Competence was not in every instance of this high level. Where academy teachers were taken over to become university professors, they lacked the proper background.

Most of them only finished an agricultural academy. Actually we had good replacements from the younger crop of scholars. Those at Science University were better than our graduates, but our youth was well prepared and they became useful people. They were better than many of the older generation, even though life was made a bit too easy for them. Here again, it was the potential planning that went on, for there was usually enough money for the institutions, but never enough for the individuals. To illustrate the contrast between the older and the newer generation, I think it is fair to say that the older generation was not convinced Communists in their thinking, but in their deeds they frequently served the regime more and better than the younger people, who are perhaps more ideally committed to the regime's principles, but had actually compromised themselves for the regime much less. Another awkward position was that Party members were often worried of the consequences of their actions. Yet many non-members were frequently willing to do things more radical for the regime than members would do. Much of the Party's power was built on these. There were not many of these, but they served the Party well from the outside. Within the Party there were convinced three groups. One segment followed the Russian policy line without any principles. Others followed the CP of Hungary. And the third, a small minority, were convinced Communists who accepted everything as the Scripture.

There were no spies or informers on the faculty, but there were several people on the administrative staff, scholastic division and the financial division, who served in that capacity. Actually the university cleansed itself continually, for it was easy for these people to make their mistakes, lacking mental competence. One man from the scholastic division turned out to be an AVO Major during the revolt, and he was perhaps the brightest. Another was an AVO Lieutenant and all were surprised at this, tho he also acted as Party secretary. At times the Party matters were taken very seriously. One of our full professors, who was not much of a scholar but quite a Communist, lost his chair in 1954, but he kept the title. This man once attacked me viciously for defending another man, altho the man needed defending, for being expelled from the Party meant loss of the job. Sometime in 1955 I met this man on a train accidentally. We travelled together and he really let go at the Communists. "How they ruin the country and how I love the Party, what criminals they are." Four days later he was found dead after taking poison. In a free society it's actually very difficult to imagine the Party's overriding power. I know of a man who once had an argument with a Party official. His home was searched twice, and on the second occasion a pistol was found under his couch. He got years of jail for this. When I joined the Party the Communist regime had not yet been tried.

Until 1949 we hoped for some agreement that would work. A year later I would not have joined it. We were very hopeful that a merger with the Social Democrats might lead to a gradual mellowing of the Communist doctrines. We were going to give it a chance. Of course, once we saw the truth it was too late. But nine years of suffering should be an advantage of the West. We tried it out on our own skin. Perhaps we could save the West from this experience. The regime has now been tried with negative results.

During the Revolution we very much hoped that it might spread to the USSR. The Yugoslavs and Rumanians were afraid of Hungarian revision, thus they did not join the revolutionary trend. The only way out of this nationalistic animosity I see, is a confederation with Hungarian speaking population groups under Hungarian administration.

To sum it up, there was much hopelessness of being shut into Hungary. We had not enjoyed Western thought between '49 and '54. After Stalin's death color crept into the intellectual life. While there was some relief after Stalin's death in our intellectual life, we considered Western intellectual life as a fast train speeding by us. The Communists spent much on science, but they constructed blindness. Their work didn't help. Many people in the academic world lived from support-
ing and propagating Soviet theories.

Those who did this, got ahead. Those who were critical of the Soviets, got lost. One simply had to follow the Soviet line in every field. The difficulty in the humanities was perhaps even greater and we had better chances in natural sciences. Yet, there is an illustration to show what the natural scientists were up against. Some people on our faculty developed a new type weeding machine. They were very proud of it and showed it around. Once a Soviet professor had a chance to see it. He was just visiting for a few weeks. He emphatically rejected the whole concept as superfluous. He actually did say the following: "We know longer have weeds in the Soviet Union and in three, four years' time you will not have any in Hungary either, therefore the machinery is superfluous."

INTERVIEWER'S OPINING: Professor [REDACTED] is a very able, very talented scholar. Without any knowledge in the field I would think he probably has an independent and imaginative mind. He very much gives the impression of the students' teacher. His joining the CP left its mark on him, for he strongly feels that he betrayed his principles. The family as a whole seems to be the prototype of the old middleclass family, who compromised itself with the regime while fully condemning every aspect of it. It represents perhaps the more tragic part of the Hungarian middle classes' development since the War.

Please note: These interviews should be read in connection with Interviews NO. 411, the professor's wife, and NO. 415, his daughter.