

Topics covered in interview:

- 1) Personal Background
- 2) Magyar Nemzet and Comments on the Hungarian Press
- 3) What Young People Read in Hungary
- * 4) The Revolt of the Intellectuals
- 5) Friends - ~~relationships~~^{conditions} in the Medical World
- * 6) Anti-Semitism
- 7) The Communist Functionary
- * 8) The Revolution

I graduated from the Budapest Vörösmarty gymnasium in 1948 and attended Pázmány Péter University for half a year, studying English and German literature. I was expelled because of my bourgeois attitude and for spreading reactionary propaganda. This reactionary propaganda consisted of criticising the new system introduced at the university, ^{which consisted} of bringing informers to the university to spy on the students. A characteristic informer of this sort was a young woman who came from a wealthy Jewish upper middle class family; unfortunately Jewish. I say unfortunately because the fact that such a large percentage of Jews was attracted to Communism increased the degree of anti-Semitism in Hungary. This girl adopted the behaviour and dress of the typical lady Communist although she was pretty. ^{The} fact is that very few pretty girls participated

in the Communist movement. She was a dogmatic, leftist, sectarian Communist. Once, before a Communist demonstration, a boy who lived at the university dormitory complained that he was hungry. This girl who lived with her rich parents on Rózsadomb said to him: "Did you read Makarenko's The Smith of Man (?). Remember, there was a ~~sign~~^{sign} there as a reminder to people, which said "don't whine!". She used to go around with a notebook and pencil checking and interviewing people. She is now in Vienna having escaped from Hungary; it is these, the most radical and leftist Communists who were the most outspoken enemies of the regime later, and during the Revolution.

The religious background was an important factor in influencing people's political attitudes in 1945. The Jewish intelligentsia became Communists because in 1945 it was the Communists who were most *tactically* and aggressively anti-Fascist. In addition, the children of Jewish capitalists were attracted to Communism because they saw in it a way of ending social inequalities and because they saw the selfish and economically harmful nature of their immediate environment. This fact, that so many Communists came from the Jewish bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, had a very grave consequence; i.e. anti-Communists were able to say that all the top-Communists were Jews, and anti-capitalists could say that a great

many of the capitalists were Jews as a dogmatic, leftist, sector attended the university for half a year in 1948/49. There was a world youth congress in Hungary during the summer of 1949. I had always wanted to travel and I got sick excited when I saw all these foreign kids in Budapest. I tried to escape illegally, and was caught and arrested. I was ⁱⁿ imprisoned for four months, and was freed on January 1st, 1950. She used to go around with a notebook and pencil in March 1950 I got a job as ^{cut} reporter at Magyar Nemzet. I had just gotten married and in applying for the job I simply left out the 1949 period from my biography. I did not mention that I had attended the university and was expelled, nor that I tried to defect. My marriage was an important factor because they tended to trust those who married early as more stable and reliable elements, and were therefore willing to overlook one's bourgeois origin. My father was a merchant and my birth certificate states that he was a wholesale merchant which is an even bigger crime. The regime, however, tends to see a revolutionary act in marrying early and moving away from one's parents. Also, at the time that had not yet been developed to the extent that they would have discovered the truth about me.

so The editor-in-chief of Magyar Nemzet was Ernő Mihályfi who was also the head of the Institute of Cultural Relations. He didn't spend a great deal of time on the paper. He was a charming, cultivated, civilized gangster, an evil

stab-in-the-back character. He was a bad journalist but a good editor. The real boss was József Ránki who was known as Roxy in his caricaturist days. He was a talented caricaturist but a stupid, bad journalist. Magyar Nemzet was a bad paper because Mihályfi gave Ránki^a free hand to do as he pleased. We all hated Ránki; he was an old socialist and unfortunately also a Jew.

Later, around 1952, Iván Boldizsár became ~~an~~ ^{the} editor, when he lost his job as under-secretary of foreign affairs. This was at the height of Stalinism and it was understandable that they would have gotten rid of an under-secretary of foreign affairs who was not a Party member. Boldizsár was an excellent journalist and extremely unprincipled. However, Boldizsár was always very generous to the people who worked with him. Mihályfi, that gangster, never stuck his neck out for anybody. Boldizsár helped people find apartments or got them medicine when they needed it, and in general was extremely helpful. He was a good organizer, an excellent editor, and he had original ideas as to how to run a paper. He wrote a great deal: novels, movies, etc. He spent a great deal of money and never had any money left. He is a good example of how the regime controlled its people. Boldizsár had at least 10,000 frts a month, in addition to a free car and other privileges. But it was still not enough for him. He had a big family and a French wife. He also picked up some extra money by writing free-lance

articles in other magazines or for the radio. It was a big fashion for editors to write in each other's magazines and newspapers in order to get the free-lance fees. Boldizsár was an extremely vain man. He was a close friend of Imre Nagy.

In 1950 Magyar Nemzet was still ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ the desert. Elsewhere people were called comrades but here the messengers and so on called one "Mr. Editor". The other papers had all gone Communist. When I first got to Magyar Nemzet it was essentially a bourgeois newspaper with a children's column, a women's column, colourful reporting, make-up, and headlines. All this was bourgeois. Ránki ruined all of this making Magyar Nemzet an unrecognizable paper; he ~~deleted~~ the women's and children's columns, etc. Now when he wrote an article the question was always, "what does it mobilize for?" We had to adopt the party jargon and slogans.

Ránki also left Magyar Nemzet soon after Boldizsár replaced Mihályfi. At the editorial meeting at which Boldizsár took over from Mihályfi, the latter made a little speech and said that in the same way that the miners have a warm lok movement, we here at Magyar Nemzet have a warm colasore movement in the spirit of which he was handing over the job to Boldizsár. Boldizsár, a very witty man, who always managed to find some analogy from Greek or Roman mythology, and never lacked for a witty comment.

said. "I would rather say that we have a very per-
sistent intention in the future I will say that every-
thing the least important article in Magyar Nemzet is
to be written ^{after} carefully, and not just being on
paper."

So the paper improved, and became more colorful.
In Magyar Nemzet we didn't mention one class struggle
because it was a bourgeois newspaper. The idea of the article
thought that the situation would not permit it. The
idea the regime would not allow this. The idea was to
not. He claimed that Magyar Nemzet had a "free-lance"
regime's practice. The paper accepted all the
free-lance articles, written by individuals, but they didn't
try to get ^{praise} ~~praise~~ for himself by moving on the
free-lance budget.

The voluntary work offerings of factory workers were
extended to the intelligentsia as well. This was done in
a rather foolish way; that is one had to offer to write
two articles instead of one, and so on. This was entirely
senseless because there was room for just ^{as} ~~as~~ many articles
in the paper, and you can't write newspaper articles on a
Stakhanovite basis. The editor's secretary offered, in
her turn, to cut down on the free-lance budget. This ended
when Boldizsar came to the paper; he paid the free-lancers
well and tried to raise the standards of the paper.

When I first got to the paper I always read all the

Western newspapers which the editorial office subscribed to. I read the Neue Zürcher Zeitung and so on. Ránki noticed this and told Endre Sós, the foreign editor, not to give me Western papers. Boldizsár was quite different; he said that a journalist should be well-informed and should read Western papers and listen to the Western radio stations. While he was the editor the various ^{department} ~~congress~~ heads listened to BBC officially in Boldizsár's office. Boldizsár used extremely crude language to abuse the deputy minister; this would have been sacrilege before his time. In general there was a much freer atmosphere at the Magyar Nemzet while he was editor. I remember an editorial conference - I don't know when it was but I know it was before June 1953. We were discussing a book review of a Soviet novel by John Kőröscényi, a historical novelist. The review criticized the novel in a luke-warm fashion. Gárdos, a young journalist who was still a Stalinist at that time called the review counter-revolutionary and said that it was a case for the AVH. Boldizsár then stood up for the review and said that there was no point in getting the AVH involved in a problem of literary criticism. At this time this appeared to be a very courageous stand on Boldizsár's part.

When I started at Magyar Nemzet I worked under a journalist called József Szabó. Ránki called me in and told me to give him written reports on the instructions I

received from Szabó, etc. I was very naive. I told Szabó about this which turn^{ed} out to be a mistake because when Szabó was fired from Magyar Nemzet he went to Mihályfi and told him that Ránki had put me on his, Szabó's, neck as an informer. Mihályfi, of course, repeated this to Ránki who was furious and called me in his office. I claimed that I hadn't repeated Ránki's instructions to Szabó. It was very foolish of me to have told Szabó. I could have given Ránki reports about Szabó containing detrimental information which was already known to everybody and therefore I wouldn't really have been an informer. However, this didn't occur me at the time and therefore I simply didn't report about Szabó, and Ránki never insisted that I do so.

Originally Magyar Nemzet had a ~~column~~^{little} column entitled "What is Wrong?" This was edited by the József Szabó I mentioned before. Szabó was a primitive, inveterate, reactionary who liked to gossip a lot. Mihályfi wanted to end this column because in the People's Democracy there could be nothing wrong. Ránki discontinued the column and changed the entire paper so that it appeared that there was nothing wrong in Hungary. Under Boldizsár this column was brought back under a different title. The merit for this was not entirely his since there was a certain relaxation in the political atmosphere before 1953. The column used to receive some letters which we

didn't publish, for instance, letters from simple workers complaining about their wages, etc. We only published phoney troubles. We wrote about the shortage of vegetables in Kút, and so on. József Szabó was fired from Magyar Hírszem because of a ~~miss~~^{mis}print he was responsible for. Szabó was the make-up editor at the time and he allowed the following mistake to slip through:

"The people of Budapest reject the instructions of comrade Rákosi" instead of "accept" the instructions of comrade Rákosi, (megfogadja - megtagadja). Szabó was fired and the type-setter responsible was interned for an indefinite period. The great classical misprint appeared in Népszava at the time of Stalin's death: "The entire Hungarian working people greeted the death of comrade Stalin with tremendous orders" instead of "with tremendous consternation". (megrendelés - megrendülés). The paper was confiscated and Béla Bodó, the editor responsible, was arrested and tried, although he was a loyal CP member. He was treated well in prison and called "Comrade Bodó". The judge or the state attorney said: "Although there is no such paragraph in the Statutes we cannot leave such a deed unpunished ---" and he was sent to prison for 10 months. He left prison during the Imre Nagy regime and remained a convinced Communist. Bodó said, after he left prison "the only thing that hurt ^{was} me that they took away my Party Membership Book." I can't decide whether he was sincere or hypocritical when he said

this. To-day he is a journalist without any political ties.

The Communists feared misprints like fire although any journalist knows that they are unavoidable. Perhaps they were afraid of misprints because they are afraid of everything that is true. The editors were scared of the Ministers and the others in the Ministry who were their superiors. There was a complex system of checks and controls before the paper appeared on the street. The proof-sheets were proof-read, then read by the page responsible, the make-up editor and so on. It took up a great deal of time and energy. In addition to the many people who proof-read and checked the paper at Magyar Nemzet, the Ministry of People's Culture also had a department whose job it was to find any mistakes not found by the editor of the paper. It was Márk Klinkó who was in charge of Magyar Nemzet at the information department of the Ministry. Once he found a misprint which wrote 'Saglin' instead of 'Stalin'. He informed Endre Sós, who was the night editor - a bad journalist, a cultural historian, and a coward. Sós stopped the machines and looked for Mihályfi at the reception of the Soviet Embassy which the editor-in-chief was attending. He did not find Mihályfi and Sós very ^{wisely} ~~wisely~~ made the decision not to allow the paper to be distributed with this misprint because in this

case the worst that could happen to him was that he would have to pay for the number of issues which had to be thrown away, whereas otherwise he might be arrested and imprisoned. OK. Such nonsense!

The newspapers were often forced to create sinecures for loyal Party members. In 1950, Magyar Nemzet had ^{Endre} ~~Endre~~ László, a very stupid and limited person as foreign editor. At that time György Parragi was editing Magyar Vasárnap, a gossip sort of paper - this was when Magyar Nemzet was being changed from a bourgeois to a regime type newspaper. They created a job for Endre László, a CP member on ^{the staff of} Magyar Vasárnap; he had to check the proofs from a political point of view. He was paid well and thus received a nice sum as ~~addition~~ an extra source of income.

The interesting thing about the peace loan was not that people had to give up a sum which was approximately equal to 10 percent of their yearly income but to what extent people prostituted themselves at the peace loan meetings. This is true more of the intelligentsia than the workers. They ^{former} told humiliating and ridiculous tales about the reasons why they contributed. József Hunyadi who was the mining editor, an untalented journalist, said at every peace meeting that he had a cousin in the army for whom he was buying guns with the money he was con-

tributing. Next year he talked about the same person and said that this time he was contributing more in order to buy his cousin in the army a machine-gun. The year after he bought him a tank, and so on. It was absurd.

Iván Boldizsár was the only one who dared to complain about the various phoney ways of getting money from people. He refused to pay his trade union membership fees saying that the trade union was a useless organization which did nothing and did not represent the interests of the workers.

There was a very interesting mood at the offices of ~~Magyar Nemzet~~ Magyar Nemzet in June and July 1953, when Imre Nagy came to power. On the day of Imre Nagy's speech I was in the office at noon; we all knew about Nagy's speech a half day in advance from the MTI dispatches. Ferenc Pál, a staff member of Magyar Nemzet, a bourgeois journalist, and an unprincipled ^{character} who was probably an AVH informer, had just come from the Parliament Building where he heard Imre Nagy's speech. (I think Pál was an AVH informer because there had to be at least one and it was said that it was he.) He was not a Party member or a Communist. Neither, as a matter of fact, were Mihályfi or Boldizsár. Anyway, Pál had been in the Parliament Building which was in itself a sign of the new times because a journalist didn't go to Parliament before. When he returned he said: "I'll be damned, there has been a

180 degree turn in politics." He told us in detail what Imre Nagy had said that morning in Parliament. It caused a tremendous sensation. People felt a variety of things about Imre Nagy. My own opinion was that this was ~~significant~~ ^{on the level,} and meant a great deal. Some people said that it was a tactical ~~move~~ ^{move,} but I didn't think so because after all they admitted having made a great many mistakes which they had never done before. They had never before admitted that their planning was wrong. This was a far-reaching policy change. A week later ~~we~~ received a cold shower when we listened to Rákosi's speech over the radio at the office. The kulak remains a kulak and so on, said Rákosi. Some of the more unprincipled characters in the office said: "Well, this way it's o.k.". At the time I couldn't see what it all meant but today knowing about the struggles within the Kremlin leadership I understand it more. I suspect that Imre Nagy was Khrushchev's man and that Khrushchev put Imre Nagy in power in order to have him act out the 20th Party Congress in advance, in Hungary. The Rákosi come-back was discouraging and depressing and yet the atmosphere was more relaxed and there was a great deal of criticism directed at the ministries and planning, etc.

There was an interesting editorial conference at Magyar Nemzet after the announcement of the New Course. There was one important thing which Boldizsár said and

which made me very mad. Boldizsár stated that he had talked to a "very leading comrade," meaning Rákosi, who reproached him, stating that the press was partly responsible for the troubles into which the country had gotten because it did not call the attention of the leaders to the faults that were being committed. At this same conference at which the new relaxed atmosphere was already evident, I asked a question about the new government program. (Later on it was called the policy of the New Course, and then the June road.) Anyway, when Boldizsár was discussing the work of the press, at this meeting he said that the press had lied, considered the public children, and as a result we lost the trust of the people -- --. I then asked whether we would be allowed to write in the future about a law suit between a poor peasant and kulak, and its outcome. He said that it's quite possible that in the future we would be able to write about this, too. Here are the ^{seeds} ~~seeds~~ of the Hungarian Revolution.

Boldizsár became enthusiastic about the Imre Nagy program, talked about the mistakes of the past stating that we had been too harsh to the workers and punished the little people too hard, etc.

I don't know much about Rákosi's role vis-a-vis the press. Boldizsár and the editor in chief had special telephone lines, so-called K-lines which connected them directly to the various heads of the Party. Boldizsár's

secretary told me that when Rákosi phoned or when the K-line rang Boldizsár ran to it in great excitement although he was pretty casual otherwise. I think it was also Boldizsár who said that Rákosi had stopped him in the halls of the Parliament and said to him: "Now journalism will be really interesting!" I think Rákosi must be ~~smile~~ ^{smile} today; he behaved *insanely* because of his craze for power.

I received a salary of 600 frts. when I started as a CUB reporter at Magyar Nemzet. Later on it was raised to 1,100 and at the end it was 1,290 frts. approximately.

In August 1953 my wife from whom I had been divorced meanwhile revenged herself upon me by reporting the fact that I had defected in 1949, and had not included it in my biography. This was during a period of reaction. Boldizsár called an editorial meeting and said that there were two cases to discuss, one was more serious than the other. He said: "It has been discovered that ^{X.Y.} ~~from~~ ₁ whom we accepted at Magyar Nemzet in spite of his origin is a base, unprincipled ^{person,} ₁ who has behaved like a rat and has abused our trust". He then fired me and told me to leave the office at that very moment. He never took into consideration the fact that I was 19 years old when I defected. After the 20th Party Congress this episode had become rather painful for Boldizsár. When I met him I looked at him with a slightly sarcastic smile and he

looked embarrassed. On the 23rd of October I met him on the ~~Nemzet~~^{Margaret} Bridge and he apologized, giving me his hand, and saying: "Let us make up, too, now". Before this Boldizsár had published an article in Irodalmi Ujság in which he described this episode of having called a member of the Magyar Nemzet staff a rat and having fired him; he said in the article that he often had nightmares about this episode. This gave me ~~satisfaction~~. After Magyar Nemzet I was unable to get a job; I was a marked man having been fired in such a fashion. I had a friend who had a photo lab and I worked with him and was able to earn about 1,100 frts. a month. Working at such a small private enterprise made me feel independent.

About half a year after I was fired from Magyar Nemzet there was a strong purge at the newspaper supposedly in order to "rationalize". This must have been at the end of 1953 or the spring of 1954. They fired a great many people who were bourgeois in their opinions and background. For instance, Pál Magyar, Dr. Károly Matolcsay, ~~Mária Duttka~~, Béla Matvay Betegh, Sándor Asztalos. This purge was carried out by Boldizsár and then a week later Boldizsár himself was fired and ~~Parragi~~^{Parragi} became the editor-in-chief. Soon after, Magyar Nemzet hired a number of very stupid people which proves that the purpose for the purge was not to rationalize. ~~Parragi~~^{Parragi} was an alcoholic although he was occasionally sober. He was a great enemy of

Boldizsár. A sloppy writer but cultivated, with an excellent publicistic routine, who spoke a number of Western languages. Unfortunately he drank too much and went to the dogs. Privately he was a good colleague and a good boss. For a while he was the responsible editor he was placed in the job to offer him a sinecure of 5,000 frts. per month. He was not an operative member of the Magyar Nemzet staff since he never moved out of his office; but he worked hard and read all the Western papers.

I never had any Communist sympathies - I seemed to be in the opposition all the time. Politically I have bourgeois democratic views and I think that Hungary is ripe for bourgeois reform and that there is no future for the large estates in Hungary. I don't like those who say that the Horthy era was the good old times; it was only relatively good. You only have to read Illyés: Puszták Népe (the People of the Puszta) to see how good the Horthy era was. I read it in 1946 or even later. This was not a book which was talked about a great deal by the Communist regime although Illyés had a great deal of prestige. He and Kodály had a position similar to that of Pavlov in the Soviet Union - they didn't oppose the regime openly, but only in a camouflaged form. The general opinion among my friends was that they were talented people who hated the regime but in order to succeed had to make slight concessions occasionally without, however, serving the regime.

Boldizsár said about an Illyés play which was being played at one of the theaters, that there was a small thorn hidden in it.

Young people began reading modern literature and especially modern Western literature only in the last few years when it turned out that this was a very good thing. There were voices of criticism at this time from Communist writers like Déri complaining that young people didn't know the modern English and French writers. That was true; young people read chiefly the Hungarian classics which were republished in the last few years, such as Mikszáth, Karinthy, and Móricz. Karinthy was especially popular among bourgeois youth and it was particularly the Jewish intelligentsia which considered him its favourite. His humour is characteristically Jewish. His books, Circus, and (Igy írtok Ti) You Write This Way were republished in cheap editions and disappeared from the book-shops as soon as they came out. In general most young people didn't read these Soviet writers if they didn't have to. I read Ehrenburg's The Ninth Wave and didn't think it too interesting. Ehrenburg's The Thaw was printed in 10,000 copies but was never bought on the market for political reasons. Then Irodalmi Újság had a good article about it and as a result a second volume was printed. But this was more socialist-realist and said more or less "yes, it's true it was this

way, but - - -". Now after the Revolution they are selling both volumes together. We, my friends and I, read Soviet literature because we had a scholarly hatred of the regime and read these things out of interest and masochistically. Azhayev's Far From Moscow was notorious because even the smallest village had a copy of it. It became a concept. People suffered of Azhayev poisoning. I am sorry to say that I didn't read Spanov's Arsonists, an anti-American book. A friend of mine who worked at the New Hungarian Publishers said that the AVH took a large number of copies for itself because it saw in it a very strong educational ~~impact~~^{impact,} There was a considerable interest in this book.

As for the poets, there ~~was~~^{was} a small number of people ~~who were~~^{who were} interested in Illyés but he has no wide circle of followers among the young people. The Ady craze has abated somewhat; the regime didn't take a stand against him and published his works. Until the 1950ies Attila József was the favourite of the regime's official cultural policy. Actually he was the favourite until the year of the turning-point, that is until it was the Communist opposition which was represented by his poetry. I like him in spite of the fact that he was a Communist because to me he represented a stand against oppression. There is for instance his poem ~~the~~ Air which is an indignant

protest against spying on people. My friends and I felt that if he were alive today he would not be a Communist. My friends liked Lajos Nagy who was probably a Communist but a mild type and a good writer. Some *romantics* read Dessö Szabó; he was popular chiefly among young Christian middle class intellectuals who didn't mind that he was an anti-Semite. The big American bestsellers were very popular among semi-educated people. These books circulated until they were in rags. I mean things like *Gone With The Wind*, books by Cronin, and such. Slowly they died out, however, because they were not being re-published. In me the cultural oppression brought out a certain nihilism; I didn't go to the theater and was simply not interested in what was going on in the cultural field. I didn't even read letters which people received from abroad because it was very depressing reading for me. The result was complete isolation. I read relatively little as far as books were concerned. Of the Hungarian writers I read the classics, *Móricz*, *Mikszáth*, *Jókai*, and some of the Western classics like *Engo*, which appeared in the "Cheap Library" series.

It was a characteristic symptom that young people didn't go to see Soviet movies, not even accidentally. At the Biological Institute where I had a number of friends they organized a collective visit to a Soviet movie as a joke and out of curiosity. The movie house was empty and we burst into loud laughter at the most serious scenes.

It was worth it, an interesting experience; the movie was full of typically naive stupidity. The faces of people, the things which they considered achievements and progress, were all very amusing and revealing. We considered it a wonderful joke and talked about it for months. These same young men, however, knew and respected the classical Soviet movies, Eisenstein's Potemkin, Pudovkin's movies and so on. My friends and I liked French movies and Italian movie fairy-tales. We liked De Sica and were unhappy to hear that he was a leftist politically. However, these movies were only played after the 20th Party Congress. We respected Chaplin's art and were outraged that his movies were not shown. Later on they even showed old Hungarian movies.

In the last few years I read all the daily papers as well as Társadalmi Szemle, Színház és Film^müvészet, and occasionally the French Communist papers Humanité and Lettres Françaises. These Western Communist papers although they were Communist still represented the Western spirit to us. I knew of some one who went up to a news-vender, opened a copy of Lettres Françaises, ~~breathed~~ ^{breathed} in the smell of news print and said: "There is Paris air in this". I also read the Austrian Volkstimme. These Western Communist papers were freer than the Communist papers at home. I also read Irodalmi Ujság, Hetfői Hírlap, Béke és Szabadság, and Művelt Nép, as well as Nők

Lapja.

Some of the articles which affected me in the last few years: I remember an article by Méray or Tardos in Nők Lapja which was entitled "Alone in Budapest." The author interviewed working girls in a factory and described their small wages, the degradation into which they were forced, the fact that they could only afford to rent themselves a bed, and not a room, and the fact that society neglected them completely. In the next issue the DISZ secretary of the factory attacked this article. Then ~~Szilágyi~~^{Kuczka} and Tardos, or was it Méray, went to the factory and confronted the secretary telling him to ask the girls whether the article was true or not. The secretary said: "Comrades, you know how it is." This was related by ~~Szilágyi~~^{Kuczka} at the Petöfi circle's press debate.

The intellectuals were cynical about all the abuses. They didn't grind their teeth about the fact that the Russians were exploiting Hungary and about the uranium situation. Instead they would say to each other: "Well, old boy, these Russians are really something! Haha - - -".

Another thing I remember is an article by Méray entitled "Why Maria Pauli?", which appeared in Szabad Nép. (Incidentally, I hated Méray.) The article was about an older unmarried woman working in an office as a clerk; religious, efficient, who was fired without any reason.

Méray went into this case and found out why she was fired. This was a well-written artistic literary report about a real case. His conclusion was that firing this woman was against the Leninist ideals. She was taken back to the office and I heard that Méray received about 200 letters from all sorts of people, even nuns, blessing him for the article. This was something that people talked about.

Very significant were Pál Pándi's Soviet Travel Notes in Szabad Nép. Pándi was, I believe, the son of József Waldapfel and he was cultural editor of Szabad Nép in 1956. Pándi's were the most outspoken comments on the Soviet Union since the regime was in power. I found it as interesting as if it were a similar article in the New York Times. It discussed housing conditions, living standards, etc. My friends and I were all enthusiastic about it and ~~was~~ discussed ^{it} in the following terms: "Did you hear? Isn't it phantastic?" etc. The masses didn't read the Soviet Travel Notes; the title itself was enough to scare them away. But it had a great effect on those who did read them.

People in general were quite indifferent to this revolt of the intellectuals which had taken place. Those who ~~thought~~ ^{thought} anything were only a narrow intellectual stratum, journalist, etc. Some people said that this was the cultural effect of the 20th Party Congress. Others said

that this was only a tactical move, it represented the NEP era in culture. Yet others said that Khrushchev had discovered that it was impossible to rule any longer with the Stalinist methods and that a more humane platform must be adopted. People never even understood how the papers were organized; they would ask: "Who censored the newspapers?" I used to tell my friends that nobody censored them. As they pointed out in Petöfi circle there was a self-censorship. Now it appeared that the political structure of the press was divided into opposing groups like the Soviet leadership. I do not think that the opposition Communist journalists and intellectuals in general were organized in any fashion. Their opposition was due to the fact that 1) in the relaxed atmosphere of the Imre Nagy era at first, and then the post-20th Party Congress era, criticism and opposition were in harmony with *partinost*. And 2) some respected and important journalists like Pál Pándi could write about the Soviet Union in this fashion of conviction and not get in trouble. Before Imre Nagy and especially before the 20th Party Congress people didn't dare to talk freely except before friends, not even before colleagues. But after the Congress one could voice one's opinions fairly freely and if attacked one could always mention Khrushchev and the 20th Party Congress saying: "I am a loyal supporter of the regime, but I don't approve of the Party's policies

with regard to - - -".

The fanatic idealistic Communists had a great role in this revolt of the intellectuals. I think up to the 20th Party Congress about 5 percent of the Communist were of this type and after the Revolution 0 percent. There were great debates and battles within the Party, ^{expounded} ~~expounded~~ at various Party membership meetings. The Party organization of the newspaper publishing concern which published all the non-Party papers such as Magyar Nemzet, Béke és Szabadság, Művelt Nép, and Nők Lapja was only one of the Party groups in which the battle between the Imre Nagy clique and the Stalinists went on. The Imre Nagy group was represented by Losonczy, Vásárhelyi, and Nagy's brother-in-law Ferenc Jánosi. The Party membership meetings here went on ^{until} late at night. Some of the things which the Imre Nagy group maintained were: ^{The} Press lies, people don't read the newspapers, we must tell the truth even if it is unpleasant, etc. Most of the sincere Communists became disillusioned at one stage or another at the variety of injustices ^{dished} out by the regime. Some became disillusioned at the time of the Rajk trial, some later. It was only the rotten, warm-eaten careerists who continued, who are still journalists today. These are the third-raters. The first- and second-raters either left Hungary or else they were arrested after the Revolution.

Gimes was a dangerous Communist - one of the newspaper men on Szabad Nép. On October 23rd, at the demonstration, Gimes was present with a number of other journalists. Around 9 p.m. there was a huge crowd before Parliament and some people were screaming: "Turn off the light in the Red Star!" Gimes and György Fazekas, another anti-Rákosi Party member called them idiots and said: "This isn't what this is all about now." Why were they protesting against turning off the light in the Red Star on October 23rd? Were they Titoists or did they think it would be apolitical to demand more?

There was another man, Litván who was one of the most hated Communists at the university just as the MEFESZ organization was hated in 1949 because it was so extremely leftist. Litván was one of the MEFESZ representatives in 1949. He attended the philosophy faculty, he carried a revolver, and he was disgusting. He was, however, among the first to attack Rákosi at a public meeting. In spite of his past he performed such a service to the Revolution that he paid for all his sins. This proves that the most leftist and radical Communists were those who after they became disillusioned turned into the most ^{insane opponents of} rabid or the regime.

I knew another Communist of this type. He was of bourgeois intellectual background - a Jew. The majority of this type was Jewish. His father was a dishonest

businessman and his brothers said Rákosi should drop dead, Stalin should choke to death. He was a journalist, the sort of person who believed everything the newspapers wrote about the British colonies, about Speidel having been a Nazi, etc. He would say: "It's true because Szabad Nép says so." After the 20th Party Congress he spoke differently. He didn't leave the country - he was disillusioned in Kádár and the Russians and didn't join the Communist Party after the Revolution. As a result he was fired from his job at Budapest Radio. He was always decent and unselfish. I knew very few Communists of his type. He was not very cultivated. He was a real friend of mine and we often got together with a number of other anti-Communist friends and we used to have very sharp debates. We trusted him; this was a rare thing.

I have another friend in the Biological Institute who was a Party member ^{and} ~~who~~ became disillusioned very early. However, one cannot leave the Communist Party voluntarily, ^{being} the best way to lose one's Party membership book. To be an expelled Party member is worth than not having been a Party member at all. In 1956 at a Party membership meeting he said that a ^{fantastic} ~~strange~~ situation existed in Hungary; he asked why it was possible for the President of the Hungarian Republic to disappear without telling the country where he was going while in the West, if Duclos's brief case disappeared there was a scandal, etc. At this point this was

not a very militant act but step by step the country went forward into a fullfledged intellectual revolt, into a revolution.

There were tremendous conflicts in the Writers' Association between the president, Sándor Gergely and some of the rebel-Communist writers like Zelk and Káy. At a Party membership meeting Gergely called Zelk a Trotskyite or a deviationist. Zelk's answer was: "Murderer of Attila József, shut up!" Until 1956 I, and everyone else, hated these people, people like Zelk, etc. When they started to fight the regime in Irodalmi Ujság they became respected. Irodalmi Ujság reached a narrow intellectual stratum because its circulation was kept down.

I remember an excellent novel by Lehel Szeberényi: Szalmácska. It was published in 1956 by Magvető, the publishing house of the writers' association. It was a militant sort of book, a wonderful satire on Hungarian conditions describing the poverty of the miners, the stupidity of a village Party secretary, and so on. It didn't cause much of a stir, hardly anyone talked about it. The tragedy was that people didn't realize in spite of Irodalmi Ujság and Petőfi Circle that there was a Revolution, an intellectual Revolution. There was a great indifference toward this; it was not as though Puskás had broken his leg. That was something everyone would have talked about. The intelligentsia, especially the older

people, were apathetic and didn't realize that this was a revolutionary manifestation. People were convinced that whatever appeared in print was the official opinion of the regime. They couldn't believe that a man like Gyula Háy, a Moscovite and Kossuth prize winner would ever sincerely attack the regime - they thought it was a fraud. People's souls were dead; they didn't believe anything. They believed only sensational rumors. ^(I can cite an example) of this, which explains everything. On the evening of October 23rd I was at the National Theater, on the corner of Rákóczy Út, which is one of the most busy and crowded corners in the city. I was there, after the shooting had already started at the Radio and elsewhere, and saw people strolling calmly, shopping in Közért, lovers arm in arm. One could hear gun-fire from Szabad Nép headquarters but nobody paid any attention. Psychologically people simply couldn't understand that anything could possibly happen.

All my friends, who were mostly doctors, were very much effected by the Petöfi Circle debates. They used to come and say: "Boy, what you can hear there! You should hear the way they criticize the regime!" One of the meetings I went to was about the planned economy; their chief speaker was Markos who worked in the planning bureau. By then there were big crowds at each Petöfi Circle meeting. The truth is a great temptation. Young engineers, technicians, and so on spoke up very freely; the atmosphere was

shockingly free. It was intoxicating. The Lukács debate was more emotional and there were stronger attacks on the regime. There was something dreamlike about it all - I felt a certain duality. One could feel the existence of a new power in the country; the intelligentsia spoke more and more freely because it was less open to threats from the secret police. Some members of the intelligentsia took a bourgeois-capitalistic line but many were content to follow the Gomulka line or Tito line; they had learned the Communist tactics well. The non-Party intelligentsia allied itself with the enlightened Party intelligentsia and with the Titoists among the Party leaders. One could also feel a counter-force, the Rákosi line, a dragging back of the country and the Party.

One of the sensational events was Imre Nagy's birthday party in the summer of 1956 to which Rákosi and his clique were not invited, but everyone else, who was anyone at all, was present.

I think this intellectual revolt was spontaneous. The writers felt an inner need to tell the truth. They were disillusioned, they saw the misery of the people and so they did what they had to. It was like an avalanche which swept everything with it.

Hétféli Hírlap was published in September and October 1956. This was the era which led directly to the Revolution but at the time most people and I myself thought that

a change similar to Poland would take place in Hungary, too. There was a significant qualitative difference in these last months before the Revolution, which consisted of the fact that people read the newspapers with great interest even such papers as Szabad Nép, as well as Művelt Nép, Béke és Szabadság and especially Irodalmi Ujság. People were hungry for the truth and now they finally received it. I talked with a French journalist who was in Hungary at the time, and had been to some of the meetings of Petöfi Circle. He told me that in his opinion there was freedom of opinion in Hungary at this time. Nationalist, Titoist Communists, tried to bring about a Gomulka type of transformation in Hungary. Szabad Nép agreed and wrote that it was not a crime to make mistakes but insisted that these mistakes now be corrected. Hetfői Hírlap represented this new mood; I am convinced that it was inspired by Imre Nagy and his circle. It was edited by Iván Boldizsár, a friend of Nagy's, and on Nagy's birthday they published an article about him which practically established a new personal cult around him. On Sunday evening, the 14th of October, there was a tremendous demonstration at the National Theater. The latest issue of Hetfői Hírlap had just been put on sale and the news vendors were surrounded by crowds of people trying to get copies. In a few moments many thousands of people collected on Rákoczy Ut and the boulevard. The crowd wasn't even

trying to get a paper any longer but was simply giving vent to its suppressed emotions. Finally the police came and strangely enough I saw a couple of policemen selling newspapers from their *squad* cars. By 11 o'clock in the evening there were enough papers for all. This was a spontaneous demonstration, a fore-taste of what was to come. It was a little similar to the demonstration at the time of the 1954 soccer match which was lost due to Sebes's mistake. For three or four days huge ^Ccrowds demonstrated in the same spot, shouting *insulting* comments ^{about} ~~at~~ Sebes who was a high Communist functionary. The police were helpless against the crowd; this could have turned into a Revolution. Then eventually it was stopped by the police.

I had many physician friends most of whom worked at various research institutions at the university. During the Revolution, when the ~~material~~ ^{Kádár} material was looked over at the university, it was revealed that six people were paid informers of the AVH at the medical school.

One of my physician friends was Professor Péter Bálint who was a Party member although not a convinced Communist. He was a spineless creature. One of the greatest complaints of physicians was that they were not allowed to travel abroad and were not allowed to keep in touch with the latest advances in Western medicine. Bálint was sent to Belgium on some official mission and when he

returned it was a little like the return of Columbus from America. He told us what he saw and we sat ^{and} marvelled. He was an anti-Communist among his friends. We were all very much hurt by the complete isolation which the regime forced upon us.

The head of the personnel department at the medical school was a man named Tabó, a rough and uncultivated person who could hardly write. He saw an envelope with a foreign stamp on the desk of one of the assistant professors and called him to account for it; he disapproved of the fact that this man had received a letter from abroad although the envelope contained merely a report about a scientific congress. He once discussed his personnel questionnaire with Bálint and quite arrogantly asked him: "what is your profession, what languages do you speak, etc." Bálint felt with great misgiving and some indignation that it was held against him that he spoke several Western languages.

One of the complaints of the doctors was that they weren't allowed enough dollars for Western medical literature. There was a tremendous bureaucracy. Often laboratory equipment was ordered by the institute but it didn't arrive although it cost a great deal of money. At other times they received huge quantities of very expensive instruments, such quantities that they would last for 50 years. But very often necessary instruments and materials

were not available. The thing was badly organized.

There is ~~a~~ very strong anti-Semitism in Hungary today. During the Revolution many people were afraid of pogroms; many irresponsible elements received arms during the Revolution. This is so in every revolution including the French. The French revolution was not fought by academicians but the mob. This does not change the fact that it was a noble revolution. In Hungary anti-Semitism is traditional and during the Communist era many elements were added to it which only increased it. First of all it was officially repressed by the regime and therefore it had to go underground, so to speak, and secondly many of the Party leaders were Jews. People were even jealous of the fact that the Jews had relatives abroad who sent them packages. I was afraid that there would be a pogrom if anything happened to overthrow the regime. I thought that the Western world should be told about this possibility and should use its propaganda organizations to warn against such a pogrom. I was very much amazed during the Revolution that nothing happened. There were a great many people in Hungary who knew only that the leaders of the regime were Jews but didn't realize that a great many Jews were also deported. The reason the Revolution was not anti-Semitic was that the anger of the masses turned against the AVH and thus conducted the hatred of the people into other channels. I heard that in ~~USA~~ and in the country-

side they made lists of all the Jews, broke their windows, and so on. But this is just a rumour. I am not sure whether it's true. At any rate I do not believe that the non-anti-Semitic nature of the Revolution was due to the majority of the Hungarian people. I just think it was a lucky accident. Radio Free Europe didn't help in fighting anti-Semitism; on the contrary, it was tinged with anti-Semitism. The way they talked about the mid-Eastern situation and Israel, made the primitive man think that those Jews wouldn't leave the Arabs alone. The BBC was different.

* * * *

During the Communist era a definite Soviet aristocracy, consisting of Party functionaries, developed. There is a very characteristic functionary type who wore a shielded cap, leather coat especially if he was an AVH agent, was quite fat, and tried to talk in a *folksy* style. He had rather characteristic movements and gestures such as pointing with the fingers in a certain way. They used Party jargon, of course, as well as *pithy*, ^{*folksy*} sayings which they copied from Rákosi. They even pronounced the name of the Party in a very characteristic fashion. The intelligentsia also followed this trend. The shielded cap was worn by the most servile Communists, those who felt that this cap showed their distance from the bourgeoisie. It was worn by the Jewish ^{*f*}~~aker~~'s son who also adopted a peasant style of speech. This proved in his eyes, and I

suppose in the eyes of the Party, that he had turned his back on his past. I am not sure about these gestures; perhaps they were imitating Stalin's mannerisms which they saw in some Soviet movie. The functionaries used Pobeda cars; it was always a bad feeling when a Pobeda stopped before the house. The Mrs. Party functionary went to market with the Pobeda or else sent her chauffeur. The proletarian women didn't like this. In our house the concierge's brother made such a Party career. He became a police officer and is now a captain. He leads a bourgeois life and sent his children to the university. His son received a very good scholarship to the Soviet Union and married the daughter of a high Soviet official. It was quite a sensation when he came home to Hungary and brought a frigidaire from the Soviet Union.

The Revolution.

On the 23rd of October I went to the Radio Station where, at 2 p.m. the demonstration was being prepared and people were assembling. All those radio employees who could leave their work were getting ready to participate. Suddenly we heard over a loudspeaker that László Piro, the minister of interior had called off the demonstration. There was a tremendous indignation and people ran upstairs to the telephone in order to protest the ban. I think it was the Radio's Party committee which demanded that the

demonstration be allowed to take place and asked that comrade Kádár come to the Radio. Kádár came and talked to the Radio's Party organization. László Hartai, one of the top people at the Radio, and a spineless Rákosi-ite, was in the yard trying to prevent ^{the crowd} /from participating in the demonstration. He was pale and looked frightened, and he didn't succeed. It was amazing that this could happen in a society where authority is so important. (He was the sort of cautious person who would talk about "comrade Rákosi" even over the phone not daring to leave off the word comrade because he didn't even trust the telephones. He was not the only one afraid of telephones. When I used to talk to Matelcsy at Magyar Nemzet he always put his phone in a drawer because he was afraid there might be a mike hidden in the phone.) I joined the Radio crowd and ~~went~~ ^{marched} with them in the demonstration. It was a happy and liberated crowd. We met in Belváros where all the school and university groups met. A tremendous exaltation swept over the population. There were national flags all over which affected especially the older people. The Kossuth song was sung which reminded one of 1848. The memory of 1848 was very strong. Everyone was in the streets and standing in the doors of shops and houses. I remember one cosmetic salon, the door of which was full of women with facial packs on their faces watching the demonstration. The slogans became gradually more and more radical and by

the time we got to Buda there were already such slogans heard as "down with Gerö" "long live the Poles" "new uniforms for the army" and "open trial for Parkas". There were shouts to the soldiers in the army barracks at the Bem statue asking them to come out and join the demonstration. They hung out a piece of paper with a Kossuth coat of arms painted on it. There was a tremendous ovation. Suddenly the first flag appeared with the Kossuth coat of arms cut out of it. Others followed soon. Secretly I was hoping there would be a tremendous scandal. I even thought that a revolution was a possibility because I saw that the police and the soldiers were on the side of the crowd. The crowd gave policemen tri-colour ribbons to wear. I first felt at this demonstration what March 15, 1848 meant; ^{I felt} ~~was~~ the real meaning of national independence. Others felt the same thing. I thought the Soviet Union wouldn't interfere in this, in fact I thought Soviet interference out of the question because of Tito. Then the crowd went to the Parliament; this is when the Communists should have sent Imre Nagy in time, with a clever speech. I felt that Imre Nagy's speech was too strongly ^a Communist statement which didn't satisfy the people's national feelings. Meanwhile while people were waiting for Imre Nagy before the Parliament trucks came from the Radio Station with young men on them who shouted that the AVO was using tear gas bombs to get rid

of the crowd before the Radio Station. I got a ride on a motor-cycle and on the way to the Radio we heard shouts "the Stalin statue is down". This had a great psychological effect on everyone. On ^{Calvin} ~~the~~ Place army trucks were burning, in the neighbouring saloon they were selling ^{liquor} ~~liquor~~ and a drunken hooligan was making an irredentist ^{speech} ~~speech~~ from the top of a truck. I thought this was a Poznan type of disturbance. There were many trucks full of soldiers who were fraternizing with the crowds surrounding them. We tried to get near the Radio from the back to see what was going on. But we were warned not to go because of the tear gas bombs. Then I went to see my fiancee and she and my sister went out to see what else was happening. This prevented me from moving freely. We saw a ~~Központ~~ ^{Központ} where some wise people were already starting to buy up the food. We also saw a lot of proletarian hooligan types with target-shooting guns. These were not proud and conscious working class types like the older workers. The young proletarians were morally weak. The Szabad Nép headquarters was besieged by the crowd; the scene was lighted up by burning cars. It was a tragic scene. The crowd didn't know that between the 22nd and the 23rd Imre Nagy's people took over Szabad Nép and that the issue of the 21st was already written by them. Márton Horváth was dismissed and the Gimes group published a free Szabad Nép. The October 23rd issue of Szabad Nép was a revolutionary newspaper. One

kid stood in the door with arms spread ^{out,} and said: "This is your paper now." The new Szabad Nép crowd also printed leaflets on which they tried to tell the people that Szabad Nép was now on the side of the Revolution and against the Rákosi-ites. People didn't believe this - they had been fooled so often, and they burned the leaflets. People came carrying the dead body of a child on a sign-board, draped ~~the~~ ^{with} the Hungarian flag. The child had been killed by the AVH at the Radio. The crowd was shouting: "We'll be revenged." This scene proved the natural dramatic instinct of the crowd which always knows what to do. The body was taken to Szabad Nép headquarters and placed in the main hall.

Around one or two a.m. a great many journalists met under the doorway of the newspaper publishing concern. My parents to whom I talked on the phone told me to come home, otherwise I wouldn't be able to get up tomorrow. Then I told them that there was a Revolution and I couldn't come home. Here I heard a rumour that the Russians were coming with tanks from Székesfehérvár.

In the days of the Revolution I visited the offices of Magyar Nemzet and found out that the ~~guards~~ had been told not to allow Parragi ~~to enter~~ to enter the office. There was a great confusion at Magyar Nemzet, unknown people were running up and down the halls and there were patch attempts on the part of the pre-1948 and post-1948

staffs of Magyar Nemzet. (The pre-1948 staff had been ^{gradually} ~~gradually~~ fired during the Communist era.)

During the Revolution I used to go to the editorial offices of the new newspaper Igazság (The Truth) and I also took some articles to the Radio. At the Radio the majority of the staff were on the side of the Revolution and tried to broadcast in the spirit of the Revolution. The Revolutionary Council held conferences all day. They expelled from the Radio György Kalmár, the stupid and spineless Party secretary who was unfortunately a Jew. Now he is an editor of Népszabadság. He would have joined the Revolution but he was not allowed to do so. One day a great quantity of bread, potatoes, and flour appeared in the hall of the Radio Station; the food was sent to the Revolutionary Kossuth Radio by one of the villages. The Kossuth Radio broadcasts emanated from the Parliament Building; unfortunately I had no journalist's certificate and therefore couldn't enter the Parliament.

Dudás was not taken serious by sensible people. His newspaper showed that he was an uncultivated person and it was not a responsible, serious publication. He was surrounded by a terrorist crowd which wanted to occupy the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Imre Nagy ^{had him} arrested ~~him~~; I believe. Responsible, serious people realized that they had to follow Imre Nagy in spite of the fact that he was a Communist; this was no time to start with a new leader.

Dudás's newspaper Függetlenség (Independence) was one of the most rightist publications of the Revolution but even this was opposed to lynch justice. There were internal struggles at the association of journalists during the Revolution. Old Nazi newspaper men who had just been freed from prison appeared at the association and the others tried to expel them. This was a difficult problem because one of the slogans of the Revolution was "Freedom of speech, opinion, etc." So how could one say to these old rightists "get out!" So they played at being allies. An enormous number of papers was published during the Revolution.

A great many people, including some Jews especially + the more cowardly ones, said that Mindszenty's speech during the Revolution was revisionist. I heard it over the radio and thought it was a decent, calm, moderate speech without any overtones of personal revenge. I don't know, I can't remember what he said about the return of the church land.

I left Hungary in December 1956 because 1) I was afraid I would be arrested, because of my contributions to the Revolutionary Kossuth Radio. Right after the Revolution the people who had worked for Igasság ^{were} ~~was~~ not arrested yet. 2) when the Revolution was victorious I didn't hide the fact that I had had secret connections with the Voice of America and had contributed to its broadcasts in the past. 3) I have always wanted to leave Hungary and go to

the West.

This is how I contributed to the VOA broadcast. It began in the March of 1956. It was a period when journalists, writers, etc. had caught a fever which forced them to tell the truth, to describe what was going on, to reveal the injustices and lies of the regime. I used to listen to the Voice of America and it gave post-office box numbers in Vienna and Munich to which one could write letters. I decided that as long as I wasn't allowed to publish in Hungary I would write to the VOA and see if they would broadcast my letters. I was very careful, I never touched my letter with my bare hands, but wore gloves. Although I wrote on my own typewriter I knew these typewriters could be ^{identified} ~~recognized~~ by their special characteristics and therefore I ^{mailed} ~~was~~ the third or fourth copy whose letters were ^{blurred} ~~blurred~~ and therefore would be more difficult to recognize, and I burned the carbon paper with which I wrote the letter. I didn't lick the envelope knowing that chemical analysis could trace it to me. In fact I didn't paste down the envelope at all thinking that they wouldn't become suspicious if they saw the letter wasn't sealed. I wrote a name, a fictitious name, above the post-office box number so that it would not be so noticeable. I remember I wrote an article about political jokes in Budapest and a political commentary discussing a pamphlet printed by the regime in which

for the first time Rákosi's picture was ~~on~~ the same ^{size} ~~size~~ as Béla Kun's and was in alphabetical order. This was a hint of the campaign against the personality cult which followed the 20th Party Congress. VOA broadcast both these letters. I told nobody about this not even friends or relatives, until the Revolution.

Interviewer's Comment on Respondent:

~~Intelligence~~
A nice mediocrity; a fairly typical, unremarkable, semi-intellectual of Jewish lower middle class background. He is not particularly well-informed.