

Interviewer's notes:

This is a B type interview with a peasant boy from Western Hungary about the social changes that occurred in the peasant community.

I come from Szentéverfa in county Vas. This is a village of about 1500 inhabitants. In this village there was no large estate but almost every family owned some land. The largest land a family owned was not more than 20 yokes. My father owned 14 yokes and although there were 6 of us brothers at home we could make a living. In old times father was a well-to-do man in the village and he was elected judge of the village. Later on, we were pressured by the taxes so much that all the 6 of us had to leave home and work in order to make money for the taxes. We worked in Budapest and at many other parts of the country mainly in road construction work, and we had to send home all our earnings. The whole money was spent on taxes and living. On the other hand it is true that father could keep his holdings and he still owns the 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ yokes. The Communist policy raised the levy so high that after a harvest nothing was left, not even the necessary food. We had to work at the time of the harvest for other people in order to earn the wheat for the family. We had to give in 2 or 3 *hogs a year*

and sometimes we had to buy it in order to give it to the state, buying it for 22 and 24 forints per kg. On the other hand when we gave it in, we got only 5 forints for a kg. During the last 5 years I was at home only in work time from spring to fall and even then I had to work for other people. From fall to spring I had to go away in order to earn money. I was working mainly in Szekesfehervar and later in Sarszentmihaly. At one time there was a great pressure in Peterfa in order to establish a co-operative. However, they did not succeed in this plan. There was one co-operative of type 1 which lasted for one year, it was established in 1952 and in the next year, when Nagy Imre came, everybody left the co-operative. It was a co-operative only in name, in nothing else. There was for example no ^{commandation} ~~convulsion~~. Since that time nobody tried to establish a co-operative and everybody was able to retain his land. We were fortunate enough to have a good local council chairman who explained to the Communists that in old times many people had emigrated from the village to America. They had become rich and consequently everybody had relatives in America. He explained to the Communists that if the pressure would be kept on, people would go over the border and would go out to America. This is how everybody was able to keep his land. In every family there was some

^{Woman, children,}
 free labour, . . . If there were no children they
 received ^{help} from America. In such a way every family
 could pay the taxes and levies and keep his land. Any-
 thing the peasant produced was immediately taken away
 by the state and even more^e than he produced. We had to
 stand in queues for bread. Many people bought their bread
 in Szombathely and Ják since they had no wheat ~~left~~
 their own^{left}. Szombathely was 25 miles away. We had to
 ride bicycle to get there and stand in queue before a
 bakery shop. Then finally when we got in, the baker
 told us that he does not give bread to a village
 people, because they had it anyhow. So we were fortunate
 if after a bicycle ride of 50 km we could return with
 a loaf of 2 kg. Clothing items and similar things came
 from America as gifts. There were few families which
 would not have relatives in America and the relatives
 supported the whole village. The money we earned was
 given back right away to the state as taxes or we had
 to buy our food for money. There is no factory in
 Péterfa. Consequently the men had to leave their families
 in order to make money. In many cases they were unable
 to find work nearby and it happened often that a married
 man could come home only once in a month in order to
 see his family. The Communists ~~had~~ gave food ration only
 to those people who were in the village. For example
 my sister worked in Szombathely and was living at home,

so we did not get any ration for her because the Communists said that she got her food in Szombathely but she didn't get it there. They always gave less ration than the number of people who were at home. This abuse made with the ration was only a form of pressure upon the small holders that they should join the co-operatives. It is impossible that there shouldn't be enough wheat in Hungary. In Péterfa most families owned something around 10 yokes. There were 2 families owning 16 yokes each which were the largest owners of the village. The Communists accused the 2 tavern owners and the parish priest that they were kulaks. The parish priest was bothered very much by the Communists but again after all nothing serious happened to him. He is still there in the village. One of the tavern owners was pressured and bothered so much that finally he lost everything and became a very poor man. The other tavern owner was deported to the Hortobagy. Although his children were permitted to stay in the village, his land was taken away and a co-operative of the neighbour village took it over. 2 years ago the family was permitted to return to Szombathely but not to Péterfa. The members of the family worked there up to the Revolution and then they came over to Austria. The parish priest had to sell his cows and horses in order to pay his taxes. Later on his land was taken away. He stayed there in the village

without any land, he gets a salary as a religious teacher from the state and he is living on that salary now. The other sour point of the Communist system was the taxation. Taxation was not ~~tax~~ based on the land or on the income although such a system would have been just. Many people from Peterfa went away to work and a lot of money came into the village in such a way. Therefore the Communists levied ³ huge taxes, 10 000 and 40 000 forints without any reason. Such a levy happened almost every year. So the average ~~man~~ smallholder had to pay his taxes out of the land, had to give in his levy and had to pay the tax in money which was allotted to him as extraordinary tax. As far as I know, the local council got an order from the people above, how much money they must collect in taxes. This amount was then distributed according to yokes and this was the way how the small holders had to pay it. However, this distribution was not always just. The people who owned more than 10 yokes had always to pay more. The office of the local council was managed by the old notary but actually the chairman of the council was the most powerful person in the village. We had for example a chairman of the local council who had no more than 3 years of grade school. All he knew was to scribble down his name on those papers which were put before him by the notary.

In the last 2 years we had a rather good chairman, a young boy of 25 years with a good learning and with a knowledge of how to run a village. He often tried to do a good job. The chairman of the local council was elected but not in a democratic way. In every case 2 candidates were put up but those candidates were on the party line and the tax payers could vote only among the 2. I don't know who selected these candidates but somebody who knew the people of the Party. The Party had a great power in the village but hardly any members. Out of the 1600 people of Peteria there were no more than 12 party members, and even out of those 12 people 10 were strangers who came to Peteria through marriage. Out of the real people of Peteria there were only 2 who joined the Party. The party secretary was a Rumanian fellow, a former road maintenance man who joined the Party as the first one in the village right after the war. At that time he could hardly talk Hungarian. There were some new landholders in the village, the former workmen of the estate of the count who now got 4 or 5 yokes. Even these new landholders were destitute because it was impossible to make a living out of 5 yokes. They, too, had to leave the village and find work elsewhere. ^{Their} ~~Their~~ life had been much better in

those times when they had been working for the count. It is true that the system pressured them less with taxes, but this was the only favour given to them by the system. Not even these new landholders joined the co-operative as long as it existed. There were 2 stores in the village, the co-operative store and a branch of the same one. There were no privately owned stores. The old private stores were closed down. One of the taverns was transformed onto a movie. One of the tavern owners was told that he could keep his tavern provided he will join the co-operative with his land. He did not do so, consequently his tavern was closed down by the authorities. In the co-operative store ^{one} could see every kind of commodities except those which were wanted by the people. There were ^{times} ~~times~~ when it was impossible to get there bread or lard. In the last time, just when I left the village there was no salt to be bought there. Next to the co-operative store there was an old Jewish store which now became the tavern owned by another state co-operative. This was the only tavern of the village and it sold one liter ^{of wine, beer} ~~beer~~ for 30 forints which was a very expensive price. Only one or two people went there since the other people got their wine ^{at} ~~in~~ the different houses. In the houses you could buy better wine and much cheaper. People went into the tavern only in order to get beer. Since beer was something

~~page.~~
~~gated~~ we could get it only in winter. In the summer when it would have been the best it was impossible to get it. People did not dare to talk about politics in the tavern, because some party members were always present there. Everybody at home was freely talking about politics because everybody was reliable in the village. In old times we had a catholic school in our village. My father was just the judge of the village when the schools were taken over by the state. My father did not want to sign the papers giving the school over to the state and he was threatened with being deported to the Hortobagy. Finally he did not sign the papers but the school was taken over by the state anyhow. Then new teachers came into our village since out of the 2 old teachers one was old and retired and the other one escaped from the country. Many new teachers came since in the new system every subject had to be taught by another teacher, for example, we had a special teacher for Russian language. None of the teachers was a Communist, one of them came with us to Austria. He was supposed to be drafted into military service and he rather selected the escape. The great problem with the new state school was the religious ~~man~~ education. Both parents had to report personally at the school if they wanted to send their children to religious

education. Our village was a good old catholic village and every family sent his children to the religious education. Otherwise the Communists did not do very much to improve the schools. One of them got ~~away~~ a new roof and was whitewashed, but nothing else was done, still the old school buildings are used which are by now pretty old. At the time when my father was the judge there was some talk in the village that a modern school building would be needed, then came nationalisation of the schools and no new buildings were erected. The whole village is catholic. Since the Jewish store keeper was deported in 1944 there are no other persons but catholics living at Péterfa. Religion was taught by the parish priest in the school regularly and every year. Everybody went to church in the same way as it had been done before democracy. People are very religious and there are no differences in this respect among them. Even the Communists went to church. All the weddings were carried out in the church, even the chairman of the local council had his marriage there. There haven't been any great changes in the customs of courtship and marriage. A great part of the young people find their maid within the village. Except for the finances the young couple/s tried to live in the old way. The finances were another sour

problem. For a single man it was easy to find work but a married man had to go to Budapest to find work which was pretty hard on his whole family. Right after the war, 2 new houses were built in Péterfa. They were the last constructions carried out. No new home was built during the democracy. Everybody made enough money to keep his family and his fortune together but it was impossible to erect a ~~house~~^{home} or acquire land. The people, the village stuck together there was no espionage and no reporting to the police. The kids did not become Communist either. ~~They~~^{They} were many so called black ~~slaughtering~~^{slaughtering} of the animals of the village. ~~Since~~ Since there was no butcher shop in the village, it was necessary to ~~slaughter~~^{slaughter} the animals without official permission. ~~In spite of this~~^{However,} nobody was reported to the police because of a black ~~slaughter~~^{slaughter}. The chairman of the local council ~~butchers~~^{bought} at of this meat but nobody was persecuted. The situation was so bad that people ~~wood~~^{stole} out of their own forest. One needed a special permission to cut lumber in one's own wood. ~~Somebody~~^{Somebody} got permission to cut 3 cbm of wood he had to give in 1 cbm for a few hundred forints. Moreover, there was a great red tape connected with lumbering. If somebody needed a permission for cutting lumber, ~~they~~^{they} had to go ~~to~~ to the village hall for the permission, then the permission was forwarded to Szombathely

where the council of the subcounty finally issued the permission. Together with the permission one got the decision how much wood he has to deliver to the state. If somebody owned a ^{trunk}~~trunk~~ and he wanted to get a few shingles out of it, he needed a special permission then he could go to the ^{sawmill}~~shawin~~ mill where the best shingles were taken away ^{from}~~for~~ him. He was left only with the poor ones and he had even to pay for the operation. So most people did not even apply for a permission because everybody had a pity to cut out his wood for a few hundred forints. There was even a black wood cutting, ~~that again~~ Some land holders obtained a permission for cleaning their wood and under the ^{pretext}~~pretext~~ of cleaning they were able to steal a few pieces of lumber too. There were many troubles with the agricultural work too. NO smallholder was permitted to own a threshing machine. A ~~disc~~ or a plough was permitted to be in private property. In some cases a few holders even manage^d to buy a new ~~disc~~ or a plough. The other operations had to be carried out with the aid of a state ~~agricultural~~ agricultural machine station. This machine station was ~~sit~~ situated in the neighbouring village of Gyongyoshermany but in our village it had a branch office with two or three tractors. The tractors could be hired by

the landholders for threshing or for traction. In such a case one had to sign a contract a whole month ahead. Then the state ~~the~~ tractor arrived on the day specified in the contract. If the contract said that they should come on the 15th of the month they arrived whether it was raining or not. This is why the tractors were not much used for ploughing and similar work. The pay for the hire of the tractors was 18 forints for an hour, which was not too expensive, but this cheap rate was valid only for agricultural use. If somebody wanted to use the tractor for traction, he had to pay 30 forints for an hour. This is why the tractors cannot be used for construction work, and home building stopped entirely in the village. There were 2 or 3 tractor operators in our village. One of them was born in our village, the other ones were strangers who came to our village. The tractor operators own no land, but they have a pay from the state station. Originally the tractor operators were paid pretty well. When about 2 or 3 years ago, the authorities ~~dis~~ discovered that the tractor operators ^{are} ~~are~~ stealing, ~~and~~ making black work and are cheating in many other ways, then their pay was reduced. The landholders did not like the whole system of tractor stations. It was not a good system. They worked with the tractors only for those people who did not own a cow for ploughing. The tractors

themselves were not good either. Hungary would need the same kind of small tractors one can see here in Austria. The greatest complaint of all the landholders was against the system of compulsory state levy. The state required a levy on everything a farm could produce disregarding the fact whether ^h the individual farmers produced that thing or not. For example there was a levy of beef. The owner of a large farm was supposed to give in every year one cow. A smaller landholder 80 kg of beef. This system was a very great mess, since nobody could have given ~~in~~ 80 kg of beef. What happened was that several people got together, they bought a cattle together out of their own money then turned the cattle over to the state for a paltry sum. In the case of the pork levy the people went to Szombathely, bought a ^{hog} ~~hog~~ there, drove it back to Péterfa and turned it over to the state. In our village the live stock remained on the same level as it was in ~~in~~ old times. The number of the horses and cows has not ~~in~~ increased. People did not see any incentive for ~~an~~ a good animal husbandry. All I can tell you about the agricultural co-operatives is what I have seen in ~~in~~ our neighbouring village in Gyongyoshermany. There is a ² ~~2~~ kochose there which was established right at the beginning in 1949. However, I have never seen

any agreement among the members of the co-operative. What I have seen all the time was that the members were standing in small groups and quarreling with one another. The chairman of the co-operative couldn't do very much about it. The situation was that one person joined the co-operative with 10 yokes, the other one with 150 yokes and now they have to work in the same way and they get the ~~an~~ same money out of the business. This was a type 3 co-operative. As far as I know the Communists did not know to establish type 1 co-operatives and I don't know anything about type 2. Every member had a so called household farm of 1 000 square elles which he could use according to his will. I don't know what happened to the houses owned by the members who joined the co-operative. I don't know whether those houses could be kept in private property. The chairman of the co-operative was indeed elected by the members. Usually a person was elected who knew about agriculture. In spite of that many problems came up. There was a case when the chairman was a good expert in agriculture, but he did not know anything about the necessary office work. There are chairmen who keep a book keeper. ~~The~~ The chairman usually cannot do anything without the members and as a rule the members talk over the different problems. It depends on the material success of the

co-operative whether the chairman is liked or not by the members. Where the members are destitute, the chairman is never liked, where the members are better off, the chairman is usually liked. The co-operatives made up the worst system ever conceived by human mind. If everybody would be in a kolkhoz, there would be a complete misery in Hungary. The cooperative ~~does~~ does not pay any taxes but the individual landholder must pay taxes, he must pay for all the expenses of the co-operatives. The individual owner must pay 10 times the amount for everything as the co-operative. A landholder must work in his own property, but a member of a co-operative has working hours. His main concern is that the 8 hours should be over. All the members are watching the other ones and are unwilling to ~~work~~ work more than the other persons. There is a competition of loathing among the members of the cooperatives. It happened in the co-operative of Gyongyoshermány that the work stopped because people went away to work for other people and obtain ~~hay~~ for their cow. Nobody joined the co-operative, ~~s~~ out of enthusiasm and everybody would leave it if he could. The members of the co-operative are paid according to labour units. When joining the co-operative it ~~is~~ is determined how many labour units he has in his family and he ~~is~~ gets paid accordingly. They do not get much money in pay because the ~~pay~~

money made by the co-operative is spent for taxes, for new stables and so on. The members are paid in kind such as wheat. Consequently if a member needs some money, he goes away for a few days to work for somebody and earn money. Then he is ~~was~~ behind with his work in the co-operative and he tries to make it up with a very poor job. Somebody's ~~plan~~^{light} depends very much on the kind of job he gets in the co-operative. Those people who work with horses or cows are bound to the co-operative and cannot leave it. The stable men of the co-operatives are in a very *bad* plight indeed. The co-operatives did some *construction*, particularly by constructing quite a few stables and had a rather good *live stock*. In *live stock* the co-operatives are much better than the individual small holders. Of course the small holder had to use his animals for work but the cooperative ~~has~~ has the tractors. The individual landholder produces always more, the co-operative uses more fertilizers, but then the tractor comes and makes a very sloppy job. The wheat is always higher on the field of the individual landholder. I do not know any data of the neighbouring village but I do know that it was a small village with a few people and had a huge acreage. There was a lot of land there, the count had a large estate there and ^{there} were peasants with 200 yokes. The situation there was quite different *from*

that in our village and this situation enabled the establishment of a cooperative. I know of the state farms that I have seen around our village. There is a state farm at Jak. It was formed out of the former ~~land~~ *land it is cultivated by his former hired and wage laborers* estate of the count, who had no land of their own. It is led by an agronom and it has many brigade leaders. The employees are no Communists, they just went there to work because everybody has to make a living. It is better to be an employee of a state farm than to be a member of a co-operative because the employees of the state farm get their pay whether the harvest is good or bad. The agronom of the state x farm must be an expert. However, none of the old agricultural experts of the count were retained on the state farm. This state farm has been very poorly managed and I don't know what has been the reason of it. It worked with a great deficit every year so just before the Revolution it was made a so called independent state farm which means that the state will not pay them any more subsidy. If the farm will not operate economically in the future, the employees will get less money. The co-operative in Gyongyoshermany did much better work than the state farm. There are few employees in the state farm. They have to work with machines which results in a much poorer harvest. There are many kinds of work which

simply cannot be done with machines. The state farm had its own machinery including one combine. But whenever it was necessary, they hired machinery from the state machine and tractor station. It was a rule with the state machine station, that first of all, the work of the state farm should be carried out, then the work of the ~~state farm~~ ^{Kolkhoz} should be carried out and finally the individual landholders. ^{should be served.} The employees of the state farm do not live so well as ^{is} old times the workers of the count did. In ~~the~~ old times the worker in a harvest who worked for a part of the harvest could sell a part of his earning and during the other part of the year he could take up other jobs. At present the employees of the state farm have to work all the year round. They get their ~~daily~~ daily bread but nothing else. Some of them live in the old ^{barack} barracks of the count's estates. Some other ones got new homes specially built for them since the state farm was established. Concerning the medical care in our village I can say that there is a district doctor in Ják who visits Péterfa one day every week. The members of the co-operatives and the employees of the state farms are in the ~~the~~ OTI but the individual land holders have to pay any expenses when they get ill. The ~~OTI~~ ^{OTI} is a very good idea. Concerning family life I want to mention that if a father raises

a son he hardly waits until he gets 15 years old and then sends him off to make money. There is a great need for money in every family. The youngsters have a chance to learn but they ^{prefer} ~~select~~ to work rather than to attend school. This is the reason why the youngsters do not learn any trade. In our village it was a rule that the children sent home their earnings and fulfilled their duties towards their family. If anybody was away to work, he came back to the village for the *fiesta*, for the great holidays, or for the important agricultural work in summertime. In such a way most boys had a chance to get acquainted with a girl from the village. If somebody got married on the place of his work, he came home with his wife. If somebody is the only child in his family, he'll always come home to settle down. If there are many children in the family, and the boy is dispensable, he may settle down somewhere else, for example quite a few people moved to Budapest and to some other cities. In our village we had a culture house from old times on, which was used particularly by the youngsters. In old times more plays were ~~per~~ performed there by the amateur drama group. In some other villages the system constructed new cultur^e homes and many other improvements, but nothing happened in our village. In old times we had a movie but this movie was closed down by the Communists. In the cultur^e house we have radio ^{and} ping pong tables.

There are dances there every Sunday and the youngsters prepare their theatrical performances there. The culture house is located next to the school and it is directed by one of the teachers. There is no Communist propaganda going there but it is true that the drama group cannot play those plays they would like. They usually get a list of the permissible plays from Budapest. They can select freely from that list and they try to select a play which has no Communist propaganda in it. Many families have a radio. All of them are fit to receive foreign radio stations since this was the main aim why the sets were acquired. People listen to the voice of America, to the English stations and to Free Europe. Newspapers are not read in the village because people say that all the newspapers lie. My father likes to read and he reads all the books he can get hold of and he is reading up to 2 o'clock in the morning, but he does not read newspapers and he does not listen to the radio. Electricity was introduced in our village way back in 1948. We have not received anything from democracy. Our people do not care about Communism. At the demonstration on May 1st the school kids, the chairman of the local council, some party functionaries and the manager of the store marched up, but not even these people march enthusiastically. None of the peasants participates in the demonstration. The speeches are delivered by the chairman of the local

council or by a teacher. The speeches are usually very short. As far as I know there has been only one case when the whole village participated in the demonstration and that was during the Revolution. At that time even the old women marched with the crowd up to the church. Around the church are the tombs of the Russian soldiers, who died during the last war. On the first day of the Revolution all the people marched up to this Russian burial place but did not do anything to the ^mt_obes. 2 university students, 2 boys from our village delivered 2 short speeches. Then they marched out to the end of the village and returned. That was the great demonstration. It is difficult for me to talk about my own political views since I have many ideas. However, I am not sure whether those ideas are right. I think that the land should be in private property. There should not be any state farms and no co-operatives unless the people freely want to establish them. The old large estates should not be ~~reinstated~~ restored. It is impossible to give land to everybody who is a peasant in Hungary. There should be a selection and only the good peasants should get land who really take ~~the~~ care of it. In such a way everybody would own a farm in the extent of 20 or 30 yokes. There should not be any large estates, for example nothing over 1 000 yokes. I do not know much about nationalization, however, I think that the large

plants should be kept in the hands of the state. It is necessary that trade should be free and should be in private hands. It is much better if every village has its own stores and own taverns owned by private persons. If somebody wants to establish a shop or a plant, he should be permitted to do so and own it in his full rights. My knowledge is even poorer concerning foreign policy. All I know is that the Russians should go out of Hungary and the small countries should be really free and independent. It is possible that the small ~~max~~ countries should live together peacefully, such a peace is particularly possible between Hungary and Austria, but even between Hungary and ^{Czechoslovakia} ~~Poland~~. If the government is really elected by the people, it will strive to maintain ^{peace} ~~peace~~ with the neighbouring countries and with other countries. I think that ~~a~~ neutrality ~~for~~ Hungary would be an excellent thing. The church should get back its schools and institutions, but it should not get back its old large estates. The priests could be paid out of the taxes. I think this is the way how it is done here in Austria. If any changes could be made in Hungary, the most important thing would be that the Russians should evacuate the country and the land should be returned to the peasants. I don't know who are the good politicians in Hungary since I haven't heard any good names in the last few years. Perhaps Nagy Imre could stay on the government

at least for a while. Finally it would be important that people should get freedom and for example the landholders should be free to do what they want to.