

I was born in Budapest in 1934, the son of a chemist, and artisan. My family is Jewish. We lived fairly well when I was a child, <sup>and</sup> I attended 8 years of general school in Hungary, two years of secondary school in Austria, one in Italy, and one in Israel. Both of my parents died in 1944, one in Bergen-Belsen, and the other as a forced labourer (munkaszolgálat). My father was a Social-Democrat. My one and a half year old brother and I hid from the Nazis, the Arrow Crossists, in 1944, in order to avoid being shot on the banks of the Danube <sup>with the</sup> ~~some~~ other Jews. In 1945 and 1946 I got to Austria and Italy through the JOINT, <sup>though</sup> I returned to Hungary several times for personal reasons, impelled by adolescent <sup>glands.</sup> ~~organs.~~ From 1948 to 1951 I was in Israel where I worked as a road-builder in the Sinai desert, as a welder, iron-turner, land-worker, and journalist. I returned to Hungary in 1951. I don't quite know why I returned, perhaps because I wanted to study. I liked it in Israel but I didn't have enough money to attend the university. For a while I was a reporter on a Communist Hungarian-language newspaper in Israel, not because I was a Communist, but <sup>because</sup> ~~I was angry~~ <sup>at my failure to</sup> receive a scholarship to the university.

After my return to Hungary in 1951 I worked on the construction of Sztalinváros because I was told that I had

to prove my loyalty to the People's Democracy. I was here for a year and received a Red Star for my excellent work; I pinned this to my behind to show how much I thought of it. Then I went to Csepel and built socialism there, too, as an iron-turner in the Rákosi Mátyás Works. It was there that I realized how much the workers hated the regime. I defended it to the workers, thinking that the things they criticized were only small mistakes, and that it was essentially a healthy regime. The workers hated the regime to such an extent that by 1953 they were ready to destroy it and everything that went with it. The intellectual basis of Communism was missing among the workers.

I was never a member of the Communist Party but I sympathized with Communism until 1951 or perhaps even later. The basic premise which determined my political attitude was my hatred of Fascism. What I saw when I visited Hungary in 1945 and 1946 was the ~~strong~~<sup>glowing</sup> spirit of a pioneer movement. I also realized that people in Austria, in the West, didn't live as well as at home. I opposed everything I saw in the West. I didn't start reading Marxist literature until a little later. I read the Communist Manifesto in 1948.

My first disillusionment came in the winter of 1951 when Rákosi said in a speech that "we are eating the hen which lays the golden eggs". Rákosi proved that we would

have to live even worse, in order to live better in the future. Prices would have to be raised 80 percent and wages 20 percent. In Sztalinváros I saw millions of forints wasted and useless nobodies clutter up the place. There was a fant<sup>f</sup>astic amount of bureaucracy; there were Party workers, people responsible for the labour competition, etc. There were five bureaucrats for every hundred workers. The workers hated the Party functionaries. They said "we are the proletariat, They are the toilers (dolgozók)." It was then that I became disillusioned and realized that everything wasn't perfect after all. I thought, however, that the faults were the mistakes of the functionaries and that the high Party leaders didn't know about this. I felt somebody should tell Rákosi about this, so something could be done about it. I somehow had a vision of the good king and the evil advisers.

While I was in Csepel I had many acquaintances among the workers, but no close friend. I was not a worker, was not of working class origin, and this made all the difference. I never had a real friendship with a non-intellectual. I probably can't.

The Party and other leaders in the factory used me to write texts for the loudspeaker system and articles for the factory newspaper. Complaint letters were my specialty; the Party secretaries were therefore quite afraid of me.

This was the Imre Nagy regime, the period of criticizing the mistakes; this was the time when people like Méray and Karinthy were doing the same sort of thing in the newspapers. Novobáczky was the editor of the Csepel factory newspaper. I was always afraid that we were being too bold or outspoken in our criticism but Novobáczky said go ahead, write it. In September, 1956, we told each other that we didn't quite trust each other in those days. He felt that I didn't dare to go far enough. This is the sort of exposé we specialized in: There was a countess working in the factory who was the mistress of one of the Communist managers. The two of them thought up all sorts of tricks to rob the workers. In our exposé we said that a sectarian Stalinist and a countess were robbing the workers. They reported me for slander, and tried to have me fired but without success.

Fogaskerék was a very popular factory newspaper because it told the truth in recent years. From about 1954 on approximately 50 or 60 percent of the articles were slaps at the regime. Although I stopped working in the factory in 1952 I spent about 2 days a week working on the newspaper without pay, even after this. I stopped in the spring of 1956 when Novobáczky left Csepel to work for Magyar Nemzet. I continued my work for the factory newspaper because I had been receiving a scholarship of 250 to 800 frts a month from 1953 on. This scholarship



was given to talented young writers by the literary fund (irodalmi alap). One of the conditions of the fellowship was that I had to do a certain amount of work; hence Csepel. At the university which I was attending as of 1954 they approved of my work on this newspaper because they felt that I was strengthening my contact with the working class. This was so of course, but also it was not so.

The editor of the newspaper was a Party member. I was free to write more or less what I wanted to because I was not a Party member. Of course, we could never say that the wages of the workers were too low; the most we could do was expose the Party functionaries as crooks, as inhuman slave drivers, etc. The paper was popular because the workers knew each other within the 12 factory units and therefore the articles had a personal significance for them. They used to point with finger at the Party secretary who was the subject of one of our exposés. The mistakes and troubles brought up in one of the factory newspapers hurt more than the exposés of the big papers.

I earned about 400 or 500 frts. a month in Csepel. I never managed to have an income much higher than that. When one can't fill one's stomach it is very difficult to concern <sup>oneself</sup> ~~oneself~~ with spiritual or intellectual problems. From 1951 to 1956 I lived in such a fashion that I never had any more money than would suffice to feed me

for one week. The future was always uncertain. It was very humiliating that society didn't guarantee my right to live and exist. Under such conditions material ~~problems~~<sup>blems</sup> are one's chief concern, the rest is unimportant.

From 1952 to 1953 I attended the Academy of Motion Picture Arts where I was studying to be a movie director. At the academy the actors were quite talented. Some of the students were a bunch of boys playing at being young titans. These were talented but had a rather exalted view of their own importance. The rest were good kaders. It was difficult to do any decent work here. The choreographers had 5 hours of Marxism a week and other compulsory subjects which they didn't need; they never had enough time to practise their ballet. The dramaturgs on the other hand had to learn ballet. There was a very confused unsystematic method at the academy; the talented students were expelled, the others were kept. There was an overproduction of graduates so that often a young director had to wait ten to fifteen years to get a movie to direct. So they became discouraged and apathetic. Gyula Háry was the head of my department. He knew a great deal but was very dogmatic, and would judge movie scenes by asking: "Is it according to the Aristotelian principles?" Once at the academy I was reciting a part of Attila József's poem "Air!", the part that goes "they can record what I telephoned, and when and why, to whom". One of the stupid

Party functionaries said in great indignation: "Who is the Fascist scoundrel who wrote this poem?" In 1953 I was expelled from the academy. It was <sup>at</sup> the time of the doctors' trial and Háy had to produce an enemy. Since I was a Jew and had been in Israel, I was the perfect victim. He not only expelled me but reported me to the AVH. Háy was a dogmatic, limited Stalinist and he was convinced that this was in the interest of the Party, etc. The AVH bothered me for three weeks but they didn't even intern me, as they threatened, because Imre Nagy came to power just then. They didn't even slap me or beat me up, to my great surprise.

In 1954 I enrolled at the philosophy faculty of Budapest University. I studied journalism and oriental linguistics, the first because it was a good phoney subject, and the second because I thought I could make a living with it. The head of the journalism school was a Communist idiot whose education consisted of 8 years of elementary school. The students, however, were of very high calibre; of 25 students in the journalism school 18 are now in the West. László Bóka, the dean of the philosophy faculty, said that the curriculum was stupid. 38 of 40 hours of our time each week was taken up by compulsory lectures. Of these 6 hours were Marxism-Leninism, 3 hours were national defence training. I wouldn't have minded studying Marxism if we had really

gone to the original and discussed the philosophy, etc. on a recent scholarly level. Instead we had to study a Party history mishmash and at the seminar we had to spit back what we learned word for word.

In addition to national defence training we had to spend three months of the summer in the army receiving additional training. The officers were stupid Horthyists, and all the students hated and feared these summer months. These reactionary officers have had a hysteria about the intelligentsia since 1953, and their attitude was "we'll show these intellectuals - - -". I used to receive letters from my friends addressed to me "to Verwichtungslager, Kecskemét". At first nobody noticed this, but when they found out I almost got in serious trouble because of it. The food was bad and we only got four or five hours of sleep a night. We had a horror of these training periods, because we felt that their purpose was to break the backs of the students. That's why one of our first demands was the abolition of military training at the universities. In the barracks there was a Soviet advisor who said that a good soldier is one who has sweat pouring out of the stems of his boots. At night we were knocked up and marched into the lake.

The curriculum at the university was *absurd*. As a journalism student I had to learn Ugro-Finnish linguistics, economic history of the Middle Ages, and I



had to know what type of nets the fisher-men of Buda used in 1526. One of my exam questions was about viticulture under the Turks. The printed notes and outlines we received were also stupid. For instance, we were told that the Kalevala was the epic of the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Republic. This was in Tibor Granicsay's notes.

The professors could be classified into three groups. 1) First-rate, cultivated scholars like László Bóka. He had been a small-holder in the past, and now was a Communist university dean. He never had anybody kicked out. But he was a cynical and spineless person. Tibor Erdei-Grúz is another professor of this type. 2) The stupid kaders who were at this point young instructors or assistants, and who said "we will replace the old <sup>guard</sup> ~~people~~". The older professors were afraid of this type. 3) The minority which dared to oppose the regime either passively or by criticizing. Among these were Milán Füst, Dénes Szabó, György Lukács, and among the young ones Mészáros. This last April when university instruction began again <sup>Füst</sup> ~~he~~ appeared in a black suit with a black arm band as the symbol of mourning and ordered the students to stand in silent demonstration. This stratification into three groups existed at all universities.

Each university had a personnel department which handled the amount of salary professors were to receive, decided which students were to be admitted or given fellow-

ships. The personnel department was full of stupid Party functionaries, who tried to run the university.

The students were actually to a great extent of peasant and working class origin. Through their natural logic, and from home, they ~~was~~ brought with them a rejection of the regime. They came to the university with disillusionment and pain. By the third year of their university career they reached the stage where they realized that the troubles were not accidental but stemmed logically from the nature of the regime. On the philosophy faculty they tried to turn these students of working class and peasant origin against petty-bourgeois anarchists like me. This didn't work out; in debates, etc. the former declared their solidarity with the latter group. Thus the Party organization didn't succeed in developing conflict between us. It was interesting what happened in the Revolution. The majority of the intelligentsia worked very hard drafting leaflets and so on, but it did not participate in the fighting. Those who fought on the streets were young men of working class and peasant origin, uncultivated, rude, and sometimes anti-Semitic. I thought that I should join those who were willing to die for the Revolution and so I did participate in the active fighting for four days.

Many of the students of peasant origin kept their ties with the peasantry; for some reason they were more calm than we, and did not see the situation of the country

as hopeless. There was Imre Takács, <sup>a young Populist</sup> a poet, who entered the university at the age of 24. He was an intelligent, cultivated, wooden-faced, rough peasant. His writings (Ser. "Hajdúszögi Naturalizmus") had a bitter naturalism, to some extent like the village-explorers before him. He did not criticize the peasant like Imre Sarkadi nor was he ungainly and phoney about the peasant like Kuczka. István Szabó was another one of these young men; he wrote very well about the peasant, about the real peasant. Yet another was László Tóth, a young writer who declared two years ago at a meeting at the Budapest Party Committee that if the regime continued in this fashion the people would come at it with hoes.

There were two types of informers at the university.

- 1) Students who came from the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia; these were careerists who tried to be more Communist than the Communists. These were more harmful than the most stupid, <sup>fanatic</sup> ~~stupid~~ Communists.
- 2) The technicum (szakértéségi) graduates, who had an important role in the Party organization.

The informers were either stupid and fanatical, or else prostitutes like the two Waldapfel brothers. Some of the assistant professors who were stupid and fanatical Communists became disillusioned and did not inform on anyone since 1953. Three years later these were the crowd which led Petöfi Circle.

In the fall of 1956 I wrote an article in University Youth (Egyetem) Ifjúság, <sup>attacking</sup> ~~the~~ the Party leadership in education. I said that the Party should be true to the real principles of Marxism, and should train cultivated people. In September 1956 the same publication published an answer to my article written by Györe who called me a reactionary provocateur and demanded that I be expelled from the university. I was called to Party headquarters in Academy Street and <sup>threatened</sup> ~~confronted~~ with expulsion of the Party. I told them that I was not a Party member. This seemed to surprise them and they asked: "But you are a Communist?" So I said no and that was the end of it. One could get away with a lot of things in those last days before the Revolution. In September three quarters of the students signed a statement asking that the head of the school of journalism be dismissed. I attended the university for 2 1/2 years and finished four semesters. This would be my third year.

My friends consisted of several students at the university and young writers. Most of my young writer friends were either students at the university or students attending the dramaturgy department of the Academy of Theatrical Arts. (Színházművészeti Főiskola).

What did the young people read? The popularity of Dostoyevski and Móricz decreased somewhat because they were both propagandized too much. Young people read 1) the works



the <sup>"Nyugat"</sup> ~~#~~ generation, 2) the intellectual wing of the populist writers such as Németh, etc., also Weöres, 3) Thomas Mann was somewhat suspicious because the regime wrote stupid things about him, but in spite of this he was popular partly because of Lukács's Mann studies. Also they published a great deal of Thomas Mann so he was available. <sup>Was it because</sup> ~~the~~ people like his decadence? 4) (Chekhov, 5) Sholokhov; he was the only Soviet writer we liked especially Quiet <sup>Flows</sup> ~~the~~ The <sup>Don</sup> ~~Don~~. 6) Two books by Ehrenburg written in emigration, one of them entitled Alleys of Moscow. 7) Russian poems - good translations of third-rate nonsense like Weöres's Shevchenko translations. Shevchenko is just like Mihály Tompa. 8) Translations of three classical Chinese writers. People didn't read these as much as they should have because they suspected that these works had something to do with the Chinese Communist regime. 9) Villon was popular in Lipótváros, chiefly because of Faludy's translation which could be called variations on a theme of Villon. Villon's Great Testament translated by István Vas was really popular. But Villon in general was liked chiefly by the snobbish, pseudo-intellectual types; real intellectuals were not crazy about him. 10) <sup>Dezso</sup> ~~the~~ Szabó was popular because he was forbidden. I think Az Elsodort Falu (The Village Which Has Been Swept Away) is a bad novel, but young intellectuals felt the style still had life in it although

it was distant from their own thinking. People read Az Egész Látóhatár chiefly out of oppositionism.

Young dilettant writers followed two roads, either they imitated the chatter of Márai or else they wrote in short, ~~simple~~<sup>simple</sup> sentences like Móricz. They were just a bunch of little Móriczes. (Interviewer's note: Little Móricz is a Hungarian joke character.) In Szabó they saw a ~~synthesis~~<sup>synthesis</sup> and goggled their eyes saying boy, this is something really new!

The populist writers were popular with the intelligentsia which came from the villages and also <sup>with</sup> some young people of intelligentsia origin. The most popular were Kodolányi, Sinka, Németh, Kovacs's *Néma Forradalom* (The Silent Revolution) which was available. Some of the forbidden books were available in Budapest libraries. In Széchenyi library there were very strict controls but the Parliament library open from 1953 on was much freer and at Ervin Szabó library one could get almost all the banned books. Németh's *A Minőség Forradalma* (The Revolt of Quality) was popular and young people registered it as something interesting but they did not consider it a model according to which the country's social or political policies should be changed. There was no such model. The most that people hoped was to get rid of Rákosi; they went no further.

Some of the popular poets were Ferenc Juhász, László

Nagy, István Lakatos, etc., Attila József, of course. Benjámín became popular after his last volume of poems, but people didn't think much of Zelk.

Háy was disliked before 1954 but he became popular because of the articles he wrote after 1954. He was respected for his play God, Emperor, Peasant. Tardos was popular as a pamphleteer. Some of the popular periodicals and newspapers were Magyar Nemzet in the last few months because Novobáczky became its editor, Irodalmi Ujság, and Hétfői Hírlap. (Apropos Hétfői Hírlap whatever people say about Boldizsár he behaved very decently towards me.) Illyés was very popular especially his poems in (Uj Hang), The New Voice, and his Bartók poem in Színház és Mozi (Theater and Movie). Uj Hang was a very courageous periodical under the influence of the Petöfi Circle leaders, Béla Abóthy, Gábor Pap, and Balázs Nagy. In the last five or six months they considered it their own magazine. The satires of Képes were popular. People hated Aragon and Elouard. (These are my own favourite writers: Károly Pap, Andor Endre Gelléri, Zoltán Thury, Babits, Attila József, <sup>Weöres</sup> ~~Wéres~~, Ferenc Juhász, and Miklos Radnóthy. It is strange that Radnóthy was popular not only in Lipótváros but he was very much admired by peasant boys, too, at the university. It is difficult to realize how these boys came to appreciate what Radnóthy stood for: The loyalty of the Jewish intelligentsia to the Magyar

people.

A copy of Orwell's 1984 was circulated in Hungary but I didn't read it. It did read Koestler's Darkness at Noon in 1955, and liked it. I felt it was an excellent report by a political pamphleteer.

I didn't feel the impact of the Imre Nagy era, of the New Course, until the summer of 1954. Then I felt that it was possible to write more freely. After I was dismissed from the academy the AVH <sup>pestered</sup> ~~harassed~~ me for some time in 1953 but then they left me alone. I felt the freer atmosphere only in 1954, not in the first months <sup>the</sup> of Imre Nagy government. We knew that Imre Nagy wanted the good of the country but when he first came to power we said: "O.K., do your best but we are not particularly interested". Young people became more interested in politics, became more politically active, only after Imre Nagy fell from power. Then they realized the difference between the two regimes. In spring 1956 when the Petöfi Circle started its debates we were speechless at the daring speech of Kardos although our demands were far more radical than theirs. We were all in summer <sup>army</sup> ~~in~~ training when Rákosi fell. I heard about it before most of the others, because the political officer told a few of us among the leaders, to listen to an important speech. That's how we heard Rákosi's speech. That same day they took a picture of our group and in order to make us smile



on the picture one of the officers said: "Tell a joke". So I said: "Matyi resigned", at which everybody burst out laughing but of course they didn't believe it because they thought I was just joking. Then we had a meeting and I had to make a little speech. I said: "Comrade Rákosi had a great many responsibilities and troubles on his shoulders. Comrade Rákosi stood before a great trial having to decide about the rehabilitation of comrades Rajk, etc. Comrade Rákosi needs peace, comrade Dimitrov and Bierut found peace, and I hope comrade Rákosi will also find <sup>eternal</sup> ~~peace~~ peace." The officer didn't quite know what I was getting at. We also sang "the traitor is dead and now the country will live because Matthias is no longer king" from the opera "László Hunyadi".

New Course or no New Course until spring 1956 I had to live in the pantry of my own house, the house I inherited from my parents, because I was forced to share my house with a Communist manager who needed all the rooms for himself. I only managed to get my house back in 1956.

The program of Imre Nagy, introduced in 1953 did not have such a great influence on the writers, and the writers' revolt. The important push came in March 1955 with the Central Committee Revolution against Imre Nagy. Another influence was the freeing of political prisoners in 1954.

Faludy, Pálóczy-Horváth, Ignórus, and others left prison and that is when the Communist writers first

heard about the horrors of the AVH. This fact, and the fact that <sup>the freed prisoners</sup> ~~were~~ were not rehabilitated influenced the writers. The important Déry short stories and Benjamin poems appeared in the summer of 1955. When Stalin died Benjamin mourned him. Then he shut himself up for a year and a half and the following summer published his self-lam<sup>e</sup>berating poems.

To show what great importance Rákosi attributed to a correct <sup>cultural</sup> ~~economic~~ policy, one only has to cite the story of Ernő Urbán's satirical play which was considered too critical of the regime by Rákosi, and so he helped Urbán and Tamás Major to rewrite it at the beginning of 1955. It is amazing to think that the dictator had the time and the interest to do this.

I started writing when I was 14 years old, and have written for a variety of newspapers. My first short story was published in Irodalmi Ujság in 1953, although I had published sketches and shorter pieces before. A book of my short stories was scheduled to appear this year. I was connected to the writers' association through membership in one of its sections, the "Work Community of Young Writers" (Fiatal Írók Munka Közössége (FIM)). FIM was established in 1950 at the worst possible time, during the Korean war, when the regime's propaganda was at its crudest talking about "chained rats", etc. Every silly dilettant was a member but also a great many

good writers such as Eörsy and László Nagy. We had quite outspoken debates. Perhaps it was because we had a closer, more direct tie with the people that we were always a step ahead of the adult writers politically until May 1956 after which they didn't dare to call FIM together anymore. By then Benjámín and company were in the *thick* of the writers' revolt in the writers' association. They tried to ~~disarm us~~ <sup>disarm us</sup>; for instance, Hegedüs called in the young writers and told them how difficult it was to be a Prime Minister.

There was a state theme plan and the *quadrumvirate* at Party headquarters decided what subjects the writers should write about. Then Farkas went to the writers' association and said: "Here are the themes; the Party expects you to write - - -". Then some smaller-scale idiot like Aczél came and told us: "No one has written a short story about organizing the labour competition in a factory. Why doesn't someone write it?" So I said: "Why doesn't comrade Aczél write it?" This was in 1953 or 1954. In 1954 Aczél and Méray were still loyal representatives of the Party and the Party organization in the writers' association. It was only in the fall of 1955 that Aczél joined the writers' revolt. We had aesthetic debates, for instance about the correct way of depicting the worker. I pointed out that one could not write about a typical peasant but only about people. One

can describe people ~~who were~~ <sup>who were</sup> also, incidentally workers or peasants. It is silly to ask us to describe people in the midst of work because the important events in a man's life do not take place while he is working. Young writers should write, instead of going to the factory to find out about the workers. Aczél said that he couldn't agree with me, that he was surprised at my tone, and that I needed ideological training. This took place in the winter of 1953. There was a great deal of extravagant behaviour and a spirit of "pour épater le bourgeois" in FIM. We had another debate at the time when Lukácsi attacked Rákosi in the Petöfi Circle and Sarkadi defended Rákosi. We attacked Sarkadi for this, and demanded that he be reprimanded. FIM had a DISZ organization which was supposed to guide us ideologically. Its secretary was László Pap - a fool. We stayed a debate in which we attacked the orthodoxy of their Marxism; it was a Lukács type of debate. We defeated them on their own ground. They were pitiful fools.

We played all sorts of crazy pranks. It was Béla Abodi's idea to go en masse, with a big crowd of young writers, to one of the statues in Budapest and have a mock holy Mass with singing, etc. When a policeman came out to find out what we were doing he said we were the members of a sect ~~who~~, practicing <sup>the</sup> personal <sup>ity</sup> cult. He said we were the members of the "dégévészeti csögevészet"



(double talk) sect. There was a messages and musical request program over the Budapest Radio; we sent a message in the name of Bug, the slang name for executioner, to little Matyi in Rákos. The title of the song we requested was "you will be mine in spite of everything" ("Lesz Maga juszt is az enyém"). This message was broadcast but there was quite a scandal at the Radio when they found out the double meaning. We also had all sorts of telephone jokes. We used to call ~~the wives of~~ <sup>the wives of</sup> people we knew at a time when we knew that their husbands were not at home, and told them that their husband was drunk in such and such a place, and would they please come and get him. It never failed, they always fell for this. We would go to the place where we asked the wives to go, and watched them looking in vain for their drunken husbands. A girl called Kuc<sup>sz</sup>ka's wife when she knew Kuc<sup>sz</sup>ka wasn't home and pretended that she was his girl-friend. Kuc<sup>sz</sup>ka was furious when he found out.

It was very difficult for a young writer to get anything published in Hungary because there was a shortage of periodicals. New Voice (Uj Hang) was to be the DISZ periodical for young writers but they were pushed out of it by the older, more established writers. Uj Hang became a New Course periodical in which people like Illyés and Déry published their newest works. ~~the~~ <sup>Essayists</sup>, short story writers and critics had the greatest difficulty and

it was easiest for poets to be published. My own writings, short stories, and others were published in Irodalmi Ujság, *Uj Hang*, Magyar Nemzet, Szabad Ifjúság, ~~and~~ and the periodical of the Hungarian army, *as well as over the radio.*

Even the young writers themselves didn't know who stood where, who was what, because they were unable to publish. There was one writer, Margit Szécsy, who had written some very bad dogmatic untalented stuff before, and then in the last year or so a volume of her works appeared, and they were excellent. She had undergone a complete metamorphosis. Some of us did get together, of course; my own closer friends among the young writers were Tardos, Gömböry, etc.

In the writers' association the participants of the writers' revolt were Party members and the revolt itself took place at Party membership meetings, and not on the outside. The non-Party writers like Németh and Illyés were not interested in it.

Péter Veres is a political prostitute and a very bad writer. He is a wild peasant who got into the garden of literature with the help of the Party and trampled it. As a non-Party folk kader he stuck his nose into everything. He is a stupid and limited character.

Németh didn't publish any new works although Révai begged him to do so. Németh had no direct contact with the present young generation. He kept quiet until the

Revolution. Németh has a confused deep Magyar concept whose cultural basis is not really <sup>of a</sup> folk ~~nature~~ <sup>nature</sup>. Young people ignored the confusion of his ideas and were attracted by the fact that he emphasized both the Magyar and the Western nature of the Hungarian character and the Hungarian destiny. This was a healthy thing. His Galilei stirred up a much greater storm than his ideological works. People identified Németh with his Galilei and considered it his own apologia. They didn't, however, think that his political and social ideas were ~~desirable~~ <sup>desirable</sup> or possible of realization.

The most influential ideas were those hailed by the makers of the French Revolution. Rousseau's theory of natural rights meant more to Hungarian youth than the populist <sup>or</sup> folk ideology. Politically, culturally, aesthetically, and in literature these ideas were the most important. The periodicals *Nyngat* and *Válasz* were very important in ~~culturing~~ <sup>familiarizing</sup> young people with these ideals. It's not that they offered a political or social solution ~~to~~ <sup>for</sup> Hungary; the 1948 to 1956 period in Hungary brought about such a radical transformation that the pre-1948 writings seemed utopian or conservative in comparison. No writer in Hungary had a concrete plan and youth was generally opposed to all former forms of political or social organization. Révai was admired by the old Nékosz crowd and his old ideological works were popular among the Communist in-

telligentsia but he lost all his popularity during the Déry debates when he demanded administrative action against Déry.

In general the political concepts of writers didn't interest the people only the extent to which they could denounce the regime. Strangely enough writers didn't even have political conceptions, not even the Communist writers. Kardos said: "First we will have to get Imre Nagy into power; this is just a joke now but when he is in power we will have to go to work." It was the tragedy of the Revolution that nobody had any concrete social or political plan. People debated what was to be done with collective farms or the nationalized industries but no one systematized this into a concrete plan. The Hungarian Revolution was a negation of what had been but it offered no solution, and no plan by which to replace the old system. The workers' councils were the only interesting and new institution which came out of the Revolution.

That the *valve* was opened was due to the 20th Party Congress which allowed the existing energies to be used against the regime. But aside from this the Revolution was not caused by international events, outside political factors, although they contributed to its outbreak. The fact is that by the time the Revolution broke out the country was in such a state that no outside event could have changed the course of affairs. It was Gerö and



Rákosi who made the Revolution. If Hungary had not been the country with the greatest degree of terror, if the Rajk trial had not taken place in Hungary but somewhere else, if Rákosi had not been strongest and wisest of the satellite leaders, then there would have been no Revolution in Hungary.

The Hungarian army was unable to resist because Bata and the other top army generals were not good enough Communists to be against the people and were too cowardly to be for the people. What happened was that the higher officers were passive or went home during the Revolution and by the 4th of November there was no significant resistance against the Russian attack. If the army could have been organized into a fighting tool during the first week of the Revolution, then the Russians would have found the Hungarian army units resisting them and the United Nations would have regarded the case of Hungary in an entirely different light. This was not possible because of the personality of Imre Nagy, because only his last government was reliable and above suspicion, and because any satellite army is organized in such a fashion that it is incapable of fighting anyone. I talked to an army officer during the Revolution and asked him on whose side he was and in answer he pointed to his stomach. The soldiers of a satellite army are badly trained and are incapable of independent thought. During the Revolution the

soldiers asked for a commander to help them fire an armored <sup>n</sup>canon.

Another reason why the Revolution took place in Hungary and not anywhere else was that only Hungary produced an Imre Nagy. Up and down, liberalize and deliberalize - for years he kept society in constant excitement. For years he held people's attention focussed on the country's most vital problems of existence. It was not just economic conditions which led to the Revolution; in Rumania people had a lower standard of living and in Czechoslovakia a higher, thus the causes were not merely economic. Fejtó is stupid when he claims that the uranium question was the major cause of the Revolution.

The Revolution could have been prevented at various times: 1) Imre Nagy could have stopped the Revolution on the 23rd of October if he had made an energetic speech which would have sent the people home. That he didn't was due to the fact that Imre Nagy is a quiet, meditative person and Rákosi is a shrewd and stupid Gauleiter. To Nagy, Rákosi was not only a Gauleiter but also a member of <sup>the</sup> family. 2) During the Revolution the Central Committee of the Communist Party met and strengthened Gerö in his position as Party secretary. If they had <sup>k</sup>icked out the Stalinists at that time and put in Kádár on the 26th, people would have been satisfied with a better Communist regime, with a Gomulka type government. They would not have in-

sisted on free elections. 3) If Imre Nagy's coalition government had made its concessions earlier, just a few days earlier, then a Dudás would have been robbed of his *raison d'être*.

On the 20th of October I was elected secretary of the four-member MEFESZ leadership, the other members of which were Pál Wald who is now in Paris, Imre Máté in Munich, and György Gömöri in Oxford. I opposed the demonstration of the 23rd because I thought that Pirocs would shoot at the demonstrators after allowing the demonstration to take place. The deans Zoltán Tóth and Tibor Kardoss were scared. (See my article in the March 15, 1957 issue of *Magyar Szó*). At the demonstration the four of us were in the first row, then came the professors and the rest of the faculty, and then the rest of the university. We sent a message to Gerö when the demonstration was banned asking him to allow it to go on. He was reluctant and said that he would shoot at the demonstrators if we went on with it. Our answer was that in that case we would break everything on the way, so Gerö said that under these circumstances he was forced to allow the demonstration.

By the time we got to Bem Place it was full of people - everyone was there. We wanted to get the soldiers in the barracks on Bem Place to act as a cordon but the DISZ secretary had ordered the soldiers to go to the roof and locked the attic door, and the commander was not present.

As a result the soldiers were unable to leave the barracks.

In the evening Imre Nagy called us to him and asked us various questions. Among them he asked what had happened at the Radio Studio. I was there as member of the ME-FESZ leadership. Some of the other people there were Ormay who is now in Oxford, Devecsery, Sinkovitch, possibly Aczél, and a few DISZ functionaries whom I didn't know. There were also some officers from the Stalin Academy which is the officers' school. I told Imre Nagy that he should be named Prime Minister, that he should kick out Gerö and his gang, and ~~then~~ that he should annihilate the AVH. He simply told us that he was unable to do what we asked. Hidas and Mekis who were present stared in consternation at our rather outspoken talk and they took Imre Nagy away to Party headquarters where he stayed for a week. He was very apathetic. The trouble with Imre Nagy was that he took everything he learned about Marxism and the Communist Party seriously.

Then I went to the writers' association. There was a phone call from Szabad Nép headquarters asking us to publish leaflets. All the journalists left Szabad Nép and only Gimes was there. Ormay and I went to the Szabad Nép building and made the decision not to print leaflets. Half the building was ~~broken~~ in ruins.

On the morning of the 24th I participated in the fighting on Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Avenue. We tried to shoot



out two Russians from the Madách House. I felt that *the* whole thing was a sport, a game; however I never fought against the tanks thinking it is a hopeless proposition; one has to run too fast.

On the 25th the Party secretary at the university was sent home. In the morning I participated in the demonstration. I was in the eighth or tenth line. We shouted the slogans: "the radio is lying", "down with Gerö", and "Ruski go home". One of the slogans was "we are not a mob". I liked this, the fact that the people had such pride. It was quite characteristic of the Revolution. Actually this was a mob. From the 26th on ~~there~~<sup>I</sup> was one of the editors of Egyetemi Ifjúság (University Youth) which was published every day. Gömöry was one of the other editors. From the 30th I also worked for the newspaper Igazság where I was Obersovszky's deputy. During the day I worked on Igazság and at night on Egyetemi Ifjúság. Thousands of people would come ~~in~~ to the offices of Igazság every day. They brought their articles, etc. One day I walked into my office at Igazság and found a man sitting on my desk and cleaning a gun. When he saw me he pointed his gun at me. I told him that this was my room, my desk, and that I wanted to write my article. He told me that there was no place here for a collaborationist journalist and led me out into the street at gun-point. I was finally able to explain who I was and

I was allowed to return to my room. I remember one very amusing article. It was about the fact that the Russians looted some of the jewellery shops in Budapest. The headline went "Counter-Revolutionary Looters in Budapest. Thefts by Armed Men". The story went on to tell about the way the Russians were looting Budapest's shops.

On the night of the 23rd I also went to the writers' association. Benjámín, Aczél, Sándor Erdei, Tardos, Sarkadi, and Ernő Urbán were there. Later Tamási, Déry, Jankovich, and a few younger writers also showed up. Erdei was shouting curses at his brother over the phone calling him a crook and asking him to stop the shooting. His brother answered that he couldn't do it. A writers' association delegation, led by Erdei and Benjámín, and including Zelkó, but not Déry, was sent to Party headquarters and returned in despair. Hegedüs had told them that if the fighting had not stopped by the morning he would call in the Russians. In the first few days these were the people who <sup>were</sup> at writers' association headquarters - chiefly the Communist writers. They were constantly negotiating and drafting proclamations and so on. These proclamations, statements, and leaflets supporting Imre Nagy were quite insignificant and unimportant. It was the papers which mattered. All sorts of people were always coming to the writers' association, dilettants with poems, then once some AVO people came to hand over their arms to them and

asking for protection. Later the Revolutionary Council of the intelligentsia was established with a delegate from the writers' association represented in it. Hay talked over the radio, asking the writers to put down their arms, but without success. The active people at the writers' association were Benjámín, Tardos, Aczél, Zoltán Molnar, Sándor Erdei, Déry, and Hay, of the Communists, and Tamási and Jankovich of the non-Communists. László Németh didn't come in, neither did Illyés except to participate in the November 3rd meeting. The writers were a liaison between Imre Nagy, <sup>the</sup> intelligentsia <sup>revolutionary council,</sup> ~~committee~~ and the university revolutionary council. People turned to them with all sorts of things, and <sup>^</sup> bought them food from the villages. The workers' councils often asked the writers' association for advice especially after November 4th. The fighters didn't turn to the writers' association, or to anyone else for advice. Kopácsy, the police chief of Budapest also had a few writers around him; Zoltán Molnar, Gimes, and Aczél. Imre Nagy had a phone connection with the writers' association in the first few days after he left Party headquarters.

I know a good story about József Darvas, about something that happened to him during the Revolution. He was stopped by <sup>insurgents</sup> ~~the police~~ and forced to sign the following admission. "I admit that I am a contemptible <sup>lad,</sup> ~~man~~ and that I was <sup>Hátya's</sup> Rákosi's most humble bootlicker."

I know the story from Darvas himself, and he added that the tragic thing about it was that it was the truth.

I was in Budapest until November 3rd when the university revolutionary council sent me, another member of the council, and a chauffeur to Vienna to supervise the transportation of drugs which were being stolen on the border. We got to Győr on the 4th; by then the city was occupied. When we tried to leave the Russians arrested us and we were jailed for nine days during two of which we received no food. Finally they let us go and we crossed the Austrian border.

I don't <sup>\*</sup>quite <sup>\*</sup>know <sup>\*</sup>how to define my political attitude today. Would I be a Menshevik? I suppose that I am a socialist in the sense that I consider the future of society in terms of a collective solution. There is such a thing as class struggle and exploitation both in the West and in the Soviet Union as well. Basically I am a materialist; I don't believe in the immortality of the soul, I believe in psychology, etc. <sup>Essentially</sup> ~~I believe in the~~ I believe in the existence of the human nervous system. I received a lot from Marxism, although I am not a Marxist or any -ist. I believe that the social analysis of Das Kapital was correct for that period. But that was a long time ago, and it is no more true for our times. The French Revolution brought about a basic and significant transformation in culture and aesthetics and we still live



on its crumbs. The modern man's moral and aesthetic views stem from the French Revolution, while his economic thinking with respect to production, distribution, and the class system stem from Marx. Marxism was the starting point of modern economic and social thinking and all other viewpoints and schools were forced to polarize around Marx. He influenced the entire economic world. Today if one talks about economics one must at least take Marx into consideration.

My objection to the educational system in Hungary was that they didn't teach ~~the~~ Marx, but a commentary on Marx. They were afraid of the reformist Marxists and fed us the *paper* which consisted of Marx, ground up, and reshaped to serve their own aims. I read Marx regularly for a number of years.

I do not believe that Hungary will be liberated within the next 20 years since a free Hungary is impossible unless the Soviet Union is dissolved, and I do not think that this will take place within the next 20 years. I am prepared for a long period of emigration. However, in case of liberation, this is what Hungary wants: The society which would have developed in Hungary if the Revolution had not been put down, would have been a unique thing. There would have been a multi-party system. The many small free peasant holdings would gradually have been transformed into cooperatives in which land and production

are common but ~~are~~ preserve the illusion of private property. Heavy industry would have been nationalized while middle and small size factories would have remained in private hands, because it would not have been worth while to nationalize them. There would have been very strong trade unions and a strong peasant party. The Small Holder Party and the Peasant Party would have to unite because they ~~had~~ <sup>have</sup> no way of existing separately. Mindszenty would be freed but his policy would not come to the fore, and the church would not stick its nose into politics. I believe this so strongly, that the church should not even demand democracy. I agree with László Németh's New Hungary (Uj Magyarország).

I would not have joined any parties after the Revolution although I would have fought on the side of the Christian parties because Christianity is not a political principle. I am certain that I would have gotten into conflict with Károly Rássay and the others who wanted to bring back the 1930ies. However, I am willing to be kicked in the behind for the principles for which I stand.

~~Because~~ I didn't approve of the Social-Democratic Party, ~~because~~ <sup>because</sup> I considered the Social-Democratic leaders corrupt and cowardly who compromised with the Horváth regime. Kéthly, of course, is not corrupt but she is stupid. The Communists were able to mislead the workers, because the workers didn't trust the Social-Democrats. I would like

to see a Social-Democratic Party which truly represented the working class but was anti-Soviet. I mean something a little like the British Labour Party. I would never become the member of a party whose functionaries received larger salaries than any of the workers. Nor should the party interfere with my artistic activities. Such a party is not possible in Hungary because there aren't enough people who want it. All the parties at home, except the Petöfi Party, and even that, took advantage of the Revolution. My potential party had its <sup>seeds</sup> ~~roots~~ in the Petöfi Circle and the people who led it, Tánczos, Zádor, Zoltán Molnár, etc. As for the Petöfi Party I think writers should write and not try to be leaders of a party. Writers are too *erratic* and nervous to be good politicians. The writers should not have a leading role in the public life of a country.

Interviewer's Comments on Respondent:

An intelligent, talented, alert young man; a member of the somewhat over-rated "Oxford Group", the alleged elite corps of Hungarian refugee students. Respondent is a very kind and good-natured chap though he has a very definite chip on the shoulder, <sup>is undoubtedly neurotic,</sup> and is not on the best of terms with his fellow men and society. This is easily understandable when one takes into consideration his background, the fact that he has been homeless since early

childhood, had to hide from Nazi persecution, etc. He appears older than his age, and is very <sup>disorganized,</sup> nervous, and in his manner, and tends to express himself with more than a touch of crudity. He is somewhat arrogant, ~~and~~ and <sup>aggressive</sup> ~~and~~ but this is undoubtedly a form of compensation, and should not be taken too seriously. ~~He is the type who, because of his background as a victim of Nazi persecution, would have been a natural convert to Communism; young people of his social background provided a good percentage of the Communist intelligentsia. But due to a number of factors not the least of which was his individualism and his basic and internal round-peg-ing-square-hole-ism, this did not happen. Another reason, of course, is his sojourn in the West and in Israel between 1945 and 1951.~~