

I was born in Budapest, graduated from gymnasium with good average in 1952. I went to the Matyas gymnasium, I then attended University of Szeged and graduated from there in July 1956. Subsequently I left for the Soviet Union to visit my grandmother in Carpatho Ruthenia.

I spent the summer there and the early fall of 1956. From my grandmother I also went on to Moscow and caught the first rumblings of some developments in Hungary there. The idea of a revolt occurred to me during the summer while in the Soviet Union. The previous spring we wanted to start a literary weekly with the backing and help of K Sandor Nagy, Hungary's other Stalin price winner besides Akzel and with Andras Kovesi. We meant to start either a very right wing magazine (that is right wing at the time) or else just be happy with a single issue calling for a mass meeting of the Party at the Hero's Square. We approached Imre Nagy who was then not even member of the Party but who was the leader of the correctionists but he disapproved and so we had no chance of going ahead.

I have been an enthusiastic Communist ever since 1947 or 1948, ever since I have my own political views. In the old days I was school secretary for the student

league also cultural appointee and I had various other offices. From the fall of 1951 to the summer of 1952 during my last year in secondary school I became the organizing secretary of the Hungarian Writers Association, also in 1951 I had my first poem published.

In the fall of 1952 I moved down to Szeged where I attended the university, for the first 3 years there I wrote non political articles in the newspaper called *Delmagyarország*. I wrote primarily production reports, went around factories, construction sites and then writing up the difficulties and achievements of the workers. A typical report went something like this: we got ^{word} either through party channels or perhaps through a phone call from somebody that a mason brigade is falling behind its schedules and is showing signs of disorganisation, (the one in question was near dissolution.) I was sent out to investigate and write a story on this. In a comparatively small town like Szeged one could keep a tab on practically every enterprise going on. We knew of every factory and we knew some of the good and some of the bad workers. In the brigade in question I discovered that the overwhelming majority of workers were very young. Only recently did they graduate as apprentice masons from the Pecs mason school were they were subjected to

interminable political training but most inadequate practical training in their trade. This then became my article. Besides these work and production reports I also wrote play reviews. Not long after my arrival in Szeged I began to revise my political views. One of the first things that struck me, was the absurd lying about rising standards of living. At the time I was convinced as many others were that due to the ocean war and the generally warlike atmosphere we would have to defend Socialism in the world war that seemed to loom ahead. We were willing to undergo sacrifices for this. We knew that the West wanted to wipe out Socialism but I was most upset why the government and the party refused to admit the inevitable sacrifices we were called to bring in order to permit rearmament. It made no sense to me to pretend that ~~life~~ life is better than a few years ago when in fact the standards fell drastically. I was soon having doubts about the sincerity and the character of the regime. I still defended the regime against any outsiders attack but I was considered to be unruly for criticising the Party from within, among its members. As a writer I wanted more freedom but at the same time I felt that as a progressive I had no alternative besides the ~~agony~~ victory of the

Communist Party. I consider myself fully materialistic and I completely accept dialectic materialism as an accurate historical analysis. Yes I am a Marxist though I know that Marx overlooked many important aspects. I am a good enough Marxist to have approved and I still approve the Communist attacks on the Social Democrats almost everywhere (say in Hungary, France, ~~Germany~~ Germany and even Italy) except that I find Pietro Nenni on the right track. I very much feel that the revolt last October justified my views. I know now that the mass of Hungarians agreed with me, and I am certain that ultimately Hungary will get there.

Actually, much was accomplished in the last 10 years. People achieved a spiritual independence unknown before. There was an increased respect for men instead of the former respect for title and positions. Another achievement was that everyone started thinking and even the peasants read^a the papers regularly. I am disappointed in the cultural activities in the West for I am quite certain that the great mass of people read much more in Hungary and are much better informed about a great many things, they have a greater interest. We shall ~~not~~ not dwell into whether these were direct results of the régime's policies or reactions against the régime's policies but the fact remains.

A more liberal and uninhibited attitude towards sex was another beneficial development of the last decade. I place great importance for the cultural groundwork that has been done among the peasants and workers. Of all things I saw once an old peasant reading Candide in a train.

The other side of the balance sheet of course cannot be skipped. The most important aspect I think was that people generally tended to become cynical. This was largely due to the fact that there were no firm fixed points one could rely on. The very fact that room ~~f~~ was left for disagreements among the Party elite created the Revolution. Further the uselessness of the AVO in the Revolution was due primarily to the fact that they had no ground to stand on.

This should not mean that everyone rejected Stalinism or the the greatness of Stalin as an organizer .

Even last summer on my way to Moscow in the train people blamed Stalin until an officer travelling with us came to his defence. He made it quite plain that he would never ^{have} become a hero without Stalin and even the ~~ant~~y Communists admit that during the war Stalin saved the country. I am quite certain that in 30 years' time Stalin will have become ^{the} new Napoleon of the new revolution. I feel that the system will be revised

from within by itself and in the same system October 23rd will become a national holiday. In this context I am talking ^{only} in terms of Europe. As ~~Крушчов~~ Khrushchev said China is too big to be evaluated in terms of the Communist future.

The other aspect of the lack of a firm point in our lives resulted in uncertainty about the future. No one could plan ahead, no one saved, the word for the day was to drink and enjoy life and to fulfill the moment's joy. This sort of helpless resignation prevailed in Hungary till 1953/1954. My attitude personally, before the Revolution was something like this: this system is ~~hated~~ hated but it cannot be changed except by war; I do not want war, thus I cannot do anything about it. The attitude has changed after the Revolution to something like this: I hate this system, but no war will come. The West is not much better and a shadow is standing behind us all. As a writer I was desperately searching for every bit of freedom because every ~~my~~ step was limited and prescribed; man was ^{re}stricted and the country was deteriorating. Within the Party there were steady changes going on; the convinced Communists were leaving the fold, many of these had the problem that they felt they could not live through the experience of change; they felt themselves

out of step. Some convinced people, however, never lost faith in the regime not even now. This group must fill three qualifications: ¹⁾ ~~One~~, they are not very intelligent. ²⁾ ~~Two~~, they are not in touch with life, ³⁾ ~~Three~~, that is with day to day living, and ~~three~~ they may be completely intellectualized sensitive Communists. ^{last} The ^{last} may still be convinced if they kept off the streets during the Revolution which many Communists did. There are today in Hungary between 15 and 30 000 fully convinced Communists serving the regime faithfully. The figure I think ^e tends to be the lower one. As far as the top party leadership ~~is~~ goes I am quite certain that Rakosi never knew how much hated he was, he lived so entirely isolated from the country. Of course he promised the sky at the beginning of his ~~is~~ regime but the people got nothing in the end, this perhaps was the major reason for the hatred. To make this ~~more~~ easier understood I should like to state that a county party secretary already lived so far apart from the world that he didn't realize the hatred he was surrounded with either. I expect to write a short story some day just how this bureaucracy would work in ^{and} practice taking the optimum situation personnel as an example. Take some nasty remark by a trusted old reliable worker against the regime due to production inefficiency

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or any such neutral ~~xxxx~~ topic. Now imagine that Rakosi sent word down ~~channels~~ ^{channels} ~~channels~~ that he wants to know the exact feelings of the workers in the factory. Of course ~~a~~ the shop steward who ~~is~~ writes up the report already takes out the profanities ~~x~~ but basically leaves the man's opinions when he submits the report to the ~~planned~~ ^{planned} t secretary. In all good faith the secretary ~~x~~ brushes up the Hungarian wording and at the same time ~~turnes~~ ^{tames} down the comment before submitting it to the district secretary. This is entirely apart ~~far~~ from the fact that neither of the party agents ~~so~~ far wanted to appear in a bad light nor wanted to be exposed to some justified criticism for their management of the plant. The report then goes again pepped up from a district secretary to the county secretary by which time it is quite ~~is~~ innocuous and contains but neutral comments about the management. On its way up to party headquarters ~~the~~ ^{the} report acquires some flattering terms which are further ~~embellished~~ ^{embellished} ~~embellished~~ ~~embellished~~ by the time it reaches Rakosi's secretariat and in the end the great man sees a glowing praise for that particular factory management and operation. As this process developed noone actually ~~yet~~ ^{yet} lied, ~~xxx~~ truth was completely transformed. I think this is most characteristic for both the political ~~conditions~~ ^{conditions} and the economic ~~xxxx~~ of the country. I feel that

guesses

~~XXXXXXXX~~ can be made as to the true nature of things but no exact figures are available on any of this. Ofcourse in practice there are many other considerations: for instance, Budapest is the cultural centre of the country as well as the political centre. All officials, in fact all people with ambitions tried to get away from the countryside and had to fight therefore for the top jobs available in Budapest. There are always many applicants for each good job in Budapest and there are several ways of getting hold of one of these, not the least of these is denunciation or overzealous fulfillment of duty.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Note: Respondent gave the following information on 6 aspects of government policy and popular reaction: Terror, propaganda, the West, the USSR, education, Anti-semitism.

Terror. I ~~xxx~~ should like to distinguish ~~thax~~ between the negative and positive aspects of terror. A negative aspect would be, actually, the number of people eliminated; the positive aspect would concern the degree of fear spread ~~and~~ among the population. The negative of course is easily understood in terms of people destroyed or made harmless, the positive is a different matter. For example a policy may be decided on to intimidate the Maszeks; a political chief gives a speech that the Maszeks are exploiting the people and doing too well;

his followers would overinterpret this meaning that the Maszeks must be put into their places. The word spreads around in party circles and the AVO man gets the clue. The first Maszek who makes an inadequate tax return out or cheats on his turnover feels the full weight of the AVO. The AVO overdoes itself and the politicians. This however, is always explained easily with the fact that there always is an enemy if a little too much pressure is used. The mechanism of this system is rotter and the regime never hesitated to destroy the Workers Councils, with the AVO. These would have been the very agencies permitting a contact with the people and permitting criticism of the government so badly needed, since the regime was so distant from the people.

Propaganda.

The organisation of the propaganda machinery was quite subtle. To begin with every journalist or analyst read every letter of Szabad Nép every morning; there the daily changes in the government line were laid down. After his daily communion with the latest line the journalist was on his own except that he had some assurance that a lector would go over his story x before publication and send it back for corrections if it was not acceptable.

The utilization of the propaganda machinery in case of a major change in government policy would take place in one of two ways. The switch would be preceded by the meeting of the Party Central Committee. This would be followed by a meeting of all county secretaries who would be called to Budapest. These men would then be told about the impending change and told when they were to tell the County Executive Committees about the changes. The editors of the papers would by then be informed for they would be members of the County Executive Committee. At this time, on the given word the articles would appear in the papers announcing and explaining the policy switch.

An alternative method for a changed line would have to be used if only insufficient time is to be available. This is the case in almost every instance of a personnel change. Personnel changes, must come suddenly by necessity since the personnel in question is frequently taken by surprise. In such instances the change has to be explained afterwards.

A 3rd type of change would be the routine campaign; whenever the norms would be revised, new peace loans announced or some other campaign would be under way. Such a campaign meant daily articles related to the topic under review.

But this sort of thing was not bluntly forced on the local editors: ~~only~~ at times a gentle reminder would appear in Szabad Nép on the basis of ^a articles. In order to call attention to the rearming of West German aggressive army the Szabad Nép writer would simply remark that this issue should not be left out of sight. On succeeding days and subsequent weeks articles would appear on the topic in the local press. As to the effectiveness of the various types of propaganda the least effective was a positive type propaganda namely the one trying to glorify the great Soviet Union or Socialism or the great accomplishments of the Hungarian economy. A touch more effective perhaps were the negative aspects of propaganda abusing the West for here of course people ^{lacked} liked the chance to compare reality with fiction. The fate of ~~Rajk~~ Rajk for instance ^{formed} was not challenged by the public as a distortion of facts but simply as an old abuse of the regime.

The Soviet Union.

Throughout the past decade Rakosi's position of full independence was the decisive factor in Hungarian developments. I am certain that he was entirely on his own and had almost complete freedom of action. In terms of economics however, the Soviets exploited the Hungarian market by various means.

The most elementary and most serious of these was the artificial forint - rubel exchange rate; thus imports were extremely expensive and exports were very cheap. On top of this the Russians frequently refused to accept Hungarian exports as first class merchandise and paid in the end only second class merchandise and ^{and} prices, from their decision there was no appeal. Concerning the shipments of goods from Hungary it was quite obvious that the government could not reveal the secret commercial treaties with Russia without revealing the complete Soviet exploitation of the trade relationship. In cultural matters the over-praise of Russian culture and things Russian has completely ruined the reputation of Russia and even the high cultural achievements of the Russians were rejected.

The West.

Relations with the West must be understood in terms of the war panic starting in 1950. At the time all the abuses committed by the regime were excused by me and by others. We felt we must keep the line against the West, we knew a war was on and we believed that the West was our enemy. We were afraid of bombings and there was a panic on.

Education.

Today the view is wide spread in the West ^{that} the Communist educated children rejected the regime. This is a dangerous half truth; in fact this is wrong. To the contrary, the very ideas of the regime were accepted. Only the youth learned to see the difference between the ~~xx~~ reality and these ideas. The entire attack against the regime took place within the regime. ~~The~~ The many demands posed by the demonstrators were all within Socialism. It is ~~xx~~ obvious that this could not have taken place 10 years ago. The very ground ~~on~~ ^{on} which the Revolution was rooted was Socialism, ^{though} aside from this it was realized by all that the one party system was bad. Actually no parties are needed. The majority of the people hated the many parties and organisations sprouting during the Revolution. Instead we wanted intellectual, ^u worker, and peasant unions, and worker councils.

Anti - Semitism.

There was less of this now than in the forties ~~and~~ ~~was~~ although the anti - Semitic feelings had their roots in the past. A very important element was the fact that a large percentage of the central leadership was Jewish. The percent of Jewish background leadership in the country was gradually reduced, it was higher ^{till} ~~from~~ 1952/53,

and it has lessened by 1955, and there were practically none in 1956 after the Revolt. During the Revolution people were attacked for making anti-Semitic remarks and there was very little of it, but the issue is still up for a final decision.

This is the end of part I. of interview. For continuation covering literary activities and activities during the Revolution see interview with Miss Marian Low.

Interviewer's impression of respondent.

In several instances among which this perhaps was the most pronounced, interviewer noticed a strong sense of rationalization. It is therefore very hard to distinguish between degrees of conviction and apologia. In contrast to some of the others in this group respondent offered no apologies of youthful naivety and ignorance for closely cooperating with the system. Bright and ambitious he is now forced into a philosophical demeanor leaving some doubt as to his sincerity and the professed or actual strength of his convictions.