

This part of the interview deals chiefly with the Hungarian writers before and during the Revolution.

I entered the university of Szeged, where I studied Hungarian literature, in 1952, and graduated in 1956. However, I spent part of every year in Budapest and was in Budapest from September 1954 to February 1955. After I finished the university in the Summer of 1956, I was in Budapest until September, when I was lucky enough to visit the Soviet Union, where I stayed until the 18th of October. I was visiting an uncle in Carpatho-Ukraine and managed to get to Moscow from there - quite a unique ^{experience} for Hungarian youth.

As a young writer I was a member of FIM (Fiatal Írók Munkaközössége), the Young Writers' Work Community.

The Writers' Association had a variety of departments, and FIM was part of the education department.

~~was the head of the Education Department.~~
~~László Erdős, who was essentially~~
~~The work of FIM consisted essentially~~
of nothing. There were weekly meetings, separate meetings

for poetry and prose. Here young Titans read their writings and old lions, who appeared for the occasion, tore them apart. This was not bad. At first the lions were all sorts of stupid people, but around 1952 they began to bring in really good people, like Illyés, Benjamin, Aron Tamási, as well as Lőrinc Szabó. About the chief merit

of FIM was this; that it brought people like Tamási into the Writers' Association. Around 1953, ~~perhaps~~, FIM was dissolved, ~~and~~ but the Education ~~Department~~ Department was continued till the end.

The Writers' Association had a DISZ organization of very little value. I was the DISZ ^{organizing} secretary for a ~~few~~ ^{few months} in 1952, and during this period I did not hold a single meeting. We tried to organize literary evenings in a few factories; that's about all we did.

1951 was a terrible era in FIM. There were debates, in which it was pointed out, that a particular poem was good, ^{because} it was a "landscape poem" ("tájvers") in which there was a tractor, an important accessory of the Hungarian landscape. Finally, we got to the stage, where we were ashamed that we did not put a tractor in our poems. Sándor Bajai and Ferenc Tth were the secretaries of FIM, the former had horrible idées fixes. It was the golden age of schematism. There was no attempt to revolt against this in FIM, because the majority of us young writers, who were members, had Communist sympathies. We were outraged, of course, but at the same time we were intimidated because we felt the lack ^{the} of tractor in our poems, or were worried that our ^{iambic pentameters} ~~rolled~~ rolled along too smoothly. Kuczka was a ^{dazzling} ~~striking~~ example, a foremost practitioner of this school of poetry,

a vulgarizer. There was an ^{expressive} ~~passive~~ excited atmosphere, ^{and} at that time. Two ^{satirical} poems of mine, which appeared in *Ludas Matyi* in September 1951, entitled the "two poems of Ödön Egoist" (*Öncél Ödön Két Verse*) demonstrate the atmosphere, as well as the problem. The first poem, supposedly written in 1942, is raucous, and the other one, which is written in 1951, is all about the tractors and percentages. At the time we did not consider ourselves formalists; we wanted to write real socialist realist poetry. From the beginning we rebelled against Kuczka and his kind, and wanted to put more life and humanity into poetry, but ~~stay~~ on a socialist basis. This poem of mine, which I mentioned before, mirrors this state of affairs.

Finally, however, it became obvious that poetry had to be "written," and that socialism ^{in poetry} was impossible. The result of this was Benjamin's: Köznapi Dolgok Igézete (the enchantment of everyday things). Weres and Juhász lived in the magic of their own poetry throughout this period, which will probably be considered unforgivable by some, in the future. We really wanted to act as redeemers. We were not so sceptical that we should have considered this a feverish ^{impossible} dream.

Then came the period of ^{disillusionment} ~~disillusionment~~ when people cast off their Communist skins; then people became more sensitive, and the sun burnt them more. The Communists and the

Communist writers had a tremendous role in the preparation of the Revolution. Without Communists, there would have been no Revolution. Those who ~~were~~ ^{had} not walked along this same road, were considered suspicious. They were quite naturally unable to take problems to their heart to quite such an extent. The non-C.P. writers were apathetic, while the Communist writers started to be militant. It was not an accident that it was the Communist writers who made the Revolution. Partly, of course, it was due to the fact that the non-Communists were ~~unable~~ ^{not allowed} to talk and to write. But chiefly it was, because the non-Party writers, the populists, Tamasi, Kemeth, etc. were apathetic and at the same time they have gotten used to things and that is why they were apathetic. This new ~~process~~ ^{phase} was beneficial to some for an additional reason: it gave them more pride, it was the end of bootlicking and ^{it} ~~having~~ to humiliate oneself.

Youth turned against them, against the Communists, because it was they, the Communists ^{who had} ~~usually~~ educated us. Without a Marxist education, youth would never ~~have~~ been able to prepare the revolutionary platform. Youth wanted to carry out the principles of the regime more than the regime did. Youth was demanding some sort of variation on Marx and Freud. The whole thing started from a Marxist soil; not only youth, but the workers also learned from

Marxism; they learned the ideas of Democracy and the concept of Workers' Councils.

The writers' way of life consisted of a sort of free form of floating in society. The writers always managed to exist but it was a day-to-day sort of life. Writers could run up debts at the literary fund, which was administered by the Writers' Association. Every writer, I know of, had at least 5,000 or 6,000 forints debts. Zelk's debts amounted to 15,000 forints, and Benjamin's to 10,000. This was an accepted way of life.

From 1950 to 1953 the Communist writers grouped themselves into a variety of cliques. This was the era of clique battling. This was a penetratingly nasty and stifling era. Hungarian literature had never had so many cliques. There were the following cliques; 1. the Moscow clique, lead by Illés and Sándor Gargaly, to which Kálmán Sándor also belonged, by right of sympathy. These were the bigger guns. There were also some smaller guns in this clique, who were bootlickers. The Moscow clique was the mother church and people did not care for them, as people don't for the mother church. Actually, all the other cliques hated them; they agreed on this, at least.

2. the Berlin clique, lead by Gyula Háry. Many, in fact almost everyone, hated them. But they were closer, there were more points of contact, ^{more} ~~at~~ common ground, between

them and some of the other groups. Kuczka hated Háy, because the Háy group had nothing in common, had nothing to do with ^{the} "Magyar whosis" (*Chincz közik a magyar izéhez*.)

3. Déry. Everybody liked, or respected him because it was impossible not to. Some disliked him, but not from a clique point of view. He was above clique considerations. ^{He gravitated toward the Berlin group.}
 4. The group around Benjamin. He was incapable of hating, although he did hate the Moscow group but he did not dislike the Háy clique. He was closest to Háy and his group, and to Déry. Essentially, he had contempt for the Kuczka group. Benjamin had more delicacy and refinement. Benjamin was ^{conscience} personified. In 1948/49 he still had doubts about Communism, at the end of 1949 he wrote a poem about his return, and then from 1950 until the beginning of 1952 he attached himself unconditionally to the Communist ^{cause} ~~cause~~. He began to have doubts in 1952, became the editor of Uj Hang (New Voice) in the Summer of 1952, and did not publish anything until mid '53. He underwent a tremendous internal crisis during this period. He was the most honorable of all Communist writers, together with Déry; they liked each other for this. Benjamin was a favorite. His poems were events in our lives after 1953. Lajos Tamási, Zelk, and ^{Young} ~~Young~~ Eörsi were included in this clique. 5. The Kuczka clique, including ~~Dezses~~ and Somlyó. The inclusion of Somlyó

in this group was a new development, because in the past Somlyó and Kuczka had hated each other. Kuczka was nicknamed ^{Hayakuczka.} The Kuczka crowd looked down on everyone, which was very helpful for Somlyó, he had great need of this, because everyone looked down on him.

6. The Örkény clique. They were essentially not Communist at all; they were the most right-wing group among all the Communist writers. Örkény's arrogance and his appearance are typically that of the Budapest bourgeois intellectual, with a veneer of ^{partisan.} ~~partisan.~~ The Örkény group had some contact with Déry and the ^{Hay} ~~Hay~~ clique, and was, in fact, well disposed towards most of the other cliques. The Kuczka clique was one exception to this, because Örkény had the greatest contempt for them. Örkény had more contact than any of the other cliques, with non-C.P. writers, with so-called bourgeois writers. This was chiefly because Örkény was essentially also a bourgeois writer.

7. Those critics who loved Lukács. 8. Those critics who licked Király's boots.

There were many small shadings, and some people belonged to more than one clique. ~~There was~~ ^{there was} Juhász, who was a Party member, remained a lonely planet until the end. Both, he and ~~XXXXX~~ Weores, were lonely figures. Of the non-Communist writers, Peter Veres was hated or disliked by no one, ^{and} He disliked only the Moscow group, which was the

most extreme among the Communist cliques. One could not hate him, when he appeared, because he was a funny old guy and talked a lot of nonsense. He was an old fool, but at least he could write.

These cliques ~~devoured~~ each other in a marvellous ~~round~~ ^{round} dance to the accompaniment of ~~ukases~~ ^{ukases} from above. This went on until 1953. At the beginning of 1953 the clique battles quieted down a little and after the Imre Nagy program was introduced, they stopped all together. Only Gergely and his crowd remained a clique. After this, there were only circles of friends, and the united writers' front was slowly being established. It already existed to some extent by the fall of 1953 and was gradually strengthened until, during the Revolution Kassák, Sinka, and Zelk talked, joked, and cried together. It was a slow process, and was helped along by the fact, that people began to be more sincere, not only with themselves, but with each other. There was also a new group, a new generation which grew up around 1953, including Csóri, László F. Nagy, etc.

Meanwhile, no sooner had Imre Nagy taken power, Rakosi started to undermine him in his speech, etc. The writers knew the inside situation, and essentially they ^{all} joined the Imre Nagy camp, all the Communist writers, except the Moscow

group. Dery and Benjamin were probably the closest to him, but even Kuczka went over to the Nagy side; see ~~the~~ his Nyírség~~g~~ diary (Nyírségi Napló). Geori ~~became~~ also an Imre Nagy follower. The writers' united front developed somewhat in the spirit of "quick, quick, we have to discover all the bad things and horrors, which had taken place." At the publishers and newspapers, the old people were still in saddle and there was a battle going on to kick them out. This was essentially, the united plan of the writers and journalists.

Imre Nagy's victory was not a clear or final one. The apparatus was not in Imre Nagy's hands. In the Writers' Association the Party Secretary, Máté, as well as Gergay and his clique were opposed to Imre Nagy. Other anti-Nagy writers were Kálmán Sándor, Andor Balázs, and only a few others. Even Máté ~~was~~ had milder and wilder stages of anti-Nagyism, but essentially he remained on Rakosi's side, even during the Revolution.

Benjamin, Lukács, and the rest of the writers knew people in the central control commission, who knew people in Moscow and therefore were fairly well-informed about ~~impending~~ pending changes. For instance, before the 20th Party Congress, they knew that something was brewing. But in spite of this, in spite of the fact that we had all heard

about some new developments to be expected from the Party Congress. The style of Khrushchev's speech, his tone, seemed somewhat too strong. We received the secret Khrushchev's speech almost immediately in word, though never in writing. We only saw it in writing much later in western newspapers. In spite of the fact, that it was not officially published, the whole city, all of Budapest, knew about the Khrushchev's speech within a week. The tendency to gossip was part of the preparation for the Revolution. The various opposition fractions depended on each other for news. For instance, Benjamin got news from Losonezy and Donath.

In the provinces the situation, with regard to the new course and its acceptance, was different from place to place. In 1953 an important beginning was made in some of the provincial papers such as Dundatul, Az Alföld, and Tiszatáj. The latter was less important; it was extremely left-winged. In September 1955, the periodicals Csillag and Irodalmi Ujság held a literary evening in Szeged. This was the time when an issue of Irodalmi Ujság had been confiscated in Budapest, though not in Szeged, or the other provincial towns. It was a good literary evening, made even more interesting by the fact that people knew, that the issue of Irodalmi Ujság, from which the authors were reading, had been confiscated in Budapest.

Benjamin, Aczél and Kónya read from this issue. Other Communist writers, among them Csori and Hay, were present. Dery was not there, because he never went anywhere in those days. The ~~Szeged~~ ^{Szeged} Party Committee wanted to stop the writers from holding this evening, but was told that it could not be stopped, because the writers had permission from Budapest to hold it. The consequences were a series of attacks from the Szeged Party Committee, which eventually lead to the December resolution against the writers. Benjamin and the other rebel writers did not realize the ^{extent of the} vanity and stupidity of the functionaries. The Szeged functionaries waged a bitter battle against the Communist writers and said that literature imbued with true partinost, could be found only in Szeged. The Szeged Party Committee had good contacts in Budapest, with Komócsin(?), a central Committee member, and with Gerö and his wife.

^(most influential Communists) The ~~most influential~~ ^(Szeged's cultural life) ~~in the Party~~ ^{at the university, Szeged} were Béla Karácsonyi, a professor of history, Székely, also a historian, and the Party functionaries. They were the ones who directed a volley of attacks against us, against the writers, ~~and~~ ~~Sándor Nagy~~. Sándor Nagy, a Stalin price winner, refused to publish a poem by Ferenc Lődy, attacking Benjamin, in Tiszatáj. When, ~~when~~ he was fired from Tiszatáj, Nagy went to work on Művelt Nép, where he became a friend

of the Benjamin crowd. The Szeged Party Committee also attacked Juhász, and Uj Hang, in Délmagyarország, the Szeged newspaper. I was attacked as a right-wing deviationist, and they demanded that I be expelled from the university. The Communists had no use for me, claiming that I had decadent petty bourgeois tendencies. I was never a party member; they didn't want me in the party. None of the rebel writers had any concrete plans for the future of Hungary. But their negative conceptions, their ideas as to what was not needed, were most important. Their attacks were not constructive, but negative. However, these negative attacks were constructive. Thus, if I attacked the AVH, and the regime's dictatorial methods, this is, in effect, a positive demand for democratic status. When the writers attacked forced collectivization, this appeared to be a negative demand too, but actually it meant that they wanted to strengthen the economic life of the country and said "let the peasant decide, he will decide to form cooperatives anyway." The writers thought in terms of the Danish cooperative solution; it was obvious that agricultural cooperatives were necessary in Hungary. They thought of the future Hungary not as a battle field, but as a purified, cleansed garden, without the AVH, without the stupid planned economy, but with Freud, etc. They wanted a Hungary where Hemingway could be translated, where Faulkner could be read,

and where one could earn more, and the state would not interfere in one's private life. All these were negative things but essentially formed a constructive picture. Some did have constructive concepts; for instance, some of the economists, like Kornai tried to figure out how the planned economy could be revised so as to benefit the country.

People did not feel or realize the things which were good in the regime, the things which the regime could not spoil, such as the opportunity to spend cheap vacations on the Balaton. During the Revolution, when it was a matter of life and death, people realized that a great deal could and should be ~~kept~~^{retained} from the old regime. But now people said; "first stop ^{and} abolish those barriers, which prevent us from thinking and then we'll think, and see what to do.

I know a little about Benjamin's attitude for instance; I talked to him as well as to a number of other writers during the Revolution, and after, at the November 12th Writers' Association Meeting. Benjamin was in a terrible condition during the last year. He was completely destroyed by ^{qualms} ~~feelings~~ of conscience; he felt that everything was awful, and that nothing could be done to improve it. The ground slipped out from under his feet. During the Revolution he was very happy, although he had some doubts, but after

November 4th, he was completely crushed and suddenly became an old man. Benjamin had an excessively sensitive conscience, and held himself responsible for things, for which he really had no responsibility at all. He was the latest to join, and the earliest to leave the régime's camp. He had a puritan attitude - it was honorable of him. He felt that the entire machinery was rotten, that Rakosi and the entire criminal gang would have to go, and that Imre Nagy was the only solution. He felt, that perhaps with Imre Nagy we could sail to safety over this *deluge* and land on some more peaceful Ararat. He approved of Khrushchev, and his role at the 20th Party Congress.

The writers' revolt was not a ^{conscious,} ~~unconscious,~~ deliberate movement by people aware of their aims, but ~~it~~ was motivated by passions and hatreds. Even the best did not have a plan, nor did their acts have a deep-seated meaning. Circumstances have always made demands on the Hungarian writer, which he could not fulfil, could not live up to. See Illyés ^{on page} "Duty" about this. The writers alone protested against leaving people in the lurch. This sense of duty of the Hungarian writer started with Petöfi, who went to the battle of Segesvár voluntarily and died. The people know that they can depend on the writers in their fight against the holders of power. In Hungary there always has been a great gap, clash of interests,

between the people and the holders of power. I believe that in the eyes of Rakosi and Kadar the greatest sin of the writers is, that they wanted to be wiser than the Party and ^{that they} then ~~they~~ proved that they were wiser. It is not true that the Hungarian is an opportunist. He has principles, which won't leave him rest and finally they make him explode. Hungary is an unfortunate country, always kicked, always the underdog. It's a ~~crue~~ fate for a talented people, never to be able to freely develop its talents, use its abilities. And there will be no opportunity for this within the next centuries either.

Everyone reacted differently, and had his own private pain, his own private story. Those who had had positive con-
ceptions before, ^{such as} the populists, were also somewhat foggy in their ideas; even their ideas were vague of contour. The conference of Szársz6 did not provide anything more than contours, and N6meth was also vague. In the following years, after 1945, this vagueness of the populists in-
creased, when some of the ideas were either carried out *by the regime,* or proven useless. The basic battle of the populists was for land-reform, and this part of their program disappeared when land-reform was put into effect in 1945. Some of the regime's policies, either in principle or in fact, were an improvement on the ideas of the populists.

For instance, it was discovered, that agricultural co-operatives were necessary, though, of course, not in the form which the regime introduced. An other negation of the ideas of the populists was that it was discovered the workers must be taken into consideration. To them the worker was always secondary. However, they now discovered that all three, the workers, peasants, and intelligentsia, were needed to establish a united national front. All these discoveries caused a confusion in the populist camp; it was this, which brought about the peculiar situation, that by the time of the Revolution the ideas, concepts, of Illyés, Benjámín, Déry, and Németh were approximately the same. But meanwhile, until the Revolution, the fronts were confused, revised, and blurred. It was the Revolution which forced people to concretize their platforms in hours and days. Actually Németh's and Tamási's concepts during the Revolution were more right-wing, than ours, than the Revolutionary platform; they were more small-holderish.

* * *

During the Revolution I was a member of the University Revolutionary Council, because I knew people, the writers, and because I was needed as a contributor for the university paper. I also worked on the newspaper (Igasság) Truth, from almost the beginning.

On the 23rd I participated in the Demonstration and I also

spent some time at the Writers' Association. From the evening of the 23rd on, the Writers' Association kept besieging Academy Street to grant the demands of the people. A delegation of five was formed, consisting of Kónya, Benjamin, Zelk, Sándor Erdei and Lajos János, which was constantly running to ~~the~~ Party ^{headquarters,} ~~Committee,~~ ^{delivering} the various memos of the Writers' Association, attempting to influence the Party. The Writers' Association wrote four memos that night, which were taken to Academy Street but were all found too strong by the Party. The fourth memo was written in such a delicate tone, that it was almost spineless; However, even this was opposed by Gerő and the rest. The writers warned the Party of the terrible consequences if they refused the demands, but they were told that they did not understand and thrown out of Party headquarters. I went to the Writers' Association at dawn and found the previously mentioned five there, as well as Mihály Gergely, Zoltán Molnár, Zoltán Fabian and others. They were all raging. At dawn Sándor Erdei phoned his brother, Ferenc, and called him every name he could think of. He shouted "you scum ---" etc. into the telephone. Zelk was ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~vaving,~~ ^{vaving,} and kept shouting "the filthy, dirty, foul ... " etc. There was this sort of atmosphere at the Writers' Association on the morning of the 24th. At dawn small posters, prepared by the Party, appeared, proclaiming

Imre Nagy prime minister. From this time on it was constantly the same problem: the Party always gave in, but it was always 50 feet behind the demands of the people. This was maddening. Erdei called Imre Nagy, who did not know that he was prime minister. He said "I am not the prime minister". Erdei called Losonczy, who did not know that he was a member of the Central Committee. The entire morning was spent in a silent fit of fainting. Then martial law was announced and the delegation, Zelk, Benjamin, etc. ran to the Party at Academy Street to try to dissuade them from it. At this time, they were decisively and finally kicked out and they did not return until much later.

On Thursday, the 25th, the Writers' Association delegation went to Party headquarters to talk to Imre Nagy, but he was not there. Zelk was ite

not do anything, although he understood the situation. They talked to Lukács, who said that Nagy would have done something as early as Monday, but he could not proclaim himself prime minister on the 23rd, because he would have been shot, by Gerö's people. Anyway, Nagy felt that he should accept power only legally, not against the wishes of the Party.

Meanwhile they started to establish the Revolutionary

Council of the intelligentsia. On Saturday night, the 27th, we marched down to the law school, - Aczél was there too - and passed a resolution with our demands. From that point on, the Writers' Association ceased to do anything constructive during the Revolution. Actually the Revolutionary Council of the Intelligentsia proved impotent; it had no concrete active role during the Revolution, but even the actors, as well as the university students, kept going to the Writers' Association for advise.

The Writers' continued their attempts to influence Nagy. On Saturday they saw Nagy at Academy Street; Tamás Nagy talked to him, and was told by Imre Nagy that they had wanted him to sign a note, admitting that he had called in the Russians. However, he angrily made a big cross across the note and refused to sign the note. After this the writers still continued to bombard Nagy and Lukács, but in effect, the writers' Association had been dispersed. It kept in constant telephone contact, ~~with the~~ ~~Proclamations~~ Proclamations were constantly being issued, which needed the name of the Writers' Association; ~~and~~ Sandor Erdei was given the power to talk in the name of the Writers' Association in such a case. Whenever there was a decision to be made, he would phone some of the top writers for their approval: Illyés, Benjámín, Déry, Tamási, etc. Háy's radio speech was prepared this way.

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Some of the writers began to leave the Association, then Benjámín and Fabián. Zoltán Molnár stayed at the Writers' Association headquarters until the end, Filipos and Remón, once in only occasional days they lived so far away in Uda. Generally, the big guns stayed home, and the little ones did the work. There was a frustration feeling at the Writers' Association, a feeling of "What are we supposed to be doing here?". Everyone came to the Writers' Association for advice, but in practice the Association was impotent. On October 20th some men arrived from ¹⁹³⁴ ~~the~~ barracks, with the intention of removing their arms at Writers' Association headquarters; the Association protested, afraid that the ~~authorities~~ would shoot up the headquarters if they ~~allowed~~ allowed the AVG men to leave their weapons. The Association had constant contact with the Workers' Councils. Rucskó and Zoltán Molnár dealt with them either by telephone or by talking to workers' delegations. The bigger factories, Egység Iszák etc. had agreements to act unitedly, in cooperation with the Revolutionary Council of the Intellectuals. The Workers' Councils asked the Writers' Association for advice on everything. But the Association proved helpless. For instance, a delegation from Egység Iszák asked for advice and was told to do what they saw best, because the Writers' Association could not interfere. Essentially

the Writers' Association could not take a leading role, because writers are not made of that sort of stuff. It was their fault; they did not dare to make any decisions, because they were over-conscientious. They could have become leaders in the Revolution, because people listened to them and respected them.

We had a feeling that nothing mattered. We listened to the radio and tore our hair; such stupid speeches, 15 meters behind the demands of the Revolution. We knew that we had to get hold of the radio and in the second week of the Revolution Hay and Tamasi did so. Although the bigger names stayed home, some of the writers did do something, for instance, we prepared Russian leaflets asking the Russians not to shoot with some sort of text of this sort "Tovarish don't shoot, we are not fascists" etc. The writers' feeling of impotence reached its deepest ebb on the 27th. From the 27th to the 30th people generally stayed home. The active young guard was still preparing leaflets, etc. but not the big names; during these 3 days even Hay and company was silent. On Saturday the new cabinet was announced; people ~~shook~~^{shrugged} their shoulders and went home. On Sunday another government was formed but people just shrugged again. The phone existed until the end and was supplemented by a messenger service. There was no central headquarters for anything.

Everything was in a state of confusion. By the 1st, the majority of newspapers transferred their headquarters to the new capital, where the new newspapers had their offices. On the 29th Losonczy brought out the first issue of Magyar Nemzet. By the 29th the New York bureau was still in the old capital.

On Friday, the 29th (Losonczy's note: the 29th fell on a Monday) Márton and I went to Losonczy to discuss the newspaper Igazság, which we intended to publish. One of the problems was, that there were too many new papers. There was Igazság, Egyeteni Igazság, Független Magyarország, Dudás's paper, etc. The problem was to get ^a sufficient quantity of paper for all the planned newspapers. Somebody had to decide how many papers were to be published. There was some sort of central guidance needed, since the amount of space and the number of press machines were limited. Some sort of permit was needed to assure a fair distribution; Losonczy gave his approval to the publication of Igazság. Márton and I also told him that we were for a multi-party system and Losonczy told us that he agreed with us. The Journalists' Revolutionary Committee met, at which the members decided what papers should be published. Losonczy, who was present, stated that he would not become a minister in the new government; next day his appointment to minister was announced.

On the 30th we decided to interview Imre Nagy. Sümjén, now in London, and I dragged ourselves to the parliament to talk to him. We had four questions to ask and since we did not dare to ask them directly, we decided to put them like this: what is your opinion about neutrality, what is your opinion about the Russians' leaving the country, what is your opinion of free elections? and what about Béla Kovács? At the parliament we could not say that we wanted to see Imre Nagy, ^{so} we said that we wanted to visit the press department. From the *corridor* I looked down and saw Russian soldiers in the main hall. The parliament was guarded by tanks on the outside and doors were locked. There was an oppressive smell of history in the air. ^{The Russian soldiers were} Big gray blots on the red rug.

At the press department Piroška Vigyázo, an old worker kader, examined our passes and papers, and asked what was going on outside. It was amazing; here he was in the seat of power, and did not know what was going on outside. As in history, the aristocracy became separated from the people. We were taken to the anteroom of Imre Nagy's office. A cabinet meeting was in session. There were a few people in the anteroom, among them Gergely Szabó, the minister of chemical industries, who was not at the meeting. Szabó said "finally now we'll have everything." And then he asked "what is going on outside?"

Then Apr⁶, Károly Kis, and Tildy came out of Nagy's office. Kis was frightened to death; he told us that he was afraid that all Communists would be murdered. I told him no, the university students would not allow this. He asked "are you sure?" He was afraid of the revenge of the people. He was scared to death. We went to the office of the secretary, where we listened to the speeches of Imre Nagy, Ferenc Erdei, Tildy and Kádár, announcing the multi-party system. Present were a number of ministers, staff members of the prime minister's office, delegations from the provinces - I met a friend here, who was a member of the Szeged delegation. Just about every county was represented with an ultimatum to Nagy, demanding the announcement of a multi-party system etc. They had been waiting there since dawn. All this contributed to Nagy's decision to ^{announce} ~~announce~~ the multi-party system. We were the only two journalists there. Tildy asked the delegates to come to Imre Nagy's office. We went in and sat down. Tildy stated that the government's chief task was to prepare for free elections. Then Imre Nagy appeared and we all rose and applauded him. He asked "did you hear my speech?" and asked the delegates if they had any questions. Kádár was present too. A delegate from Sopron said "there are rumors that Imre Nagy called in the Russians. What is the truth about this?" Tildy answered "Imre Nagy is an

honorable man, a Hungarian patriot. It was not he, who called in the Russians." Imre Nagy added that it was Hegedus who called them in. Then a delegate rose to address Imre Nagy and said "comrade", at which somebody, I believe it was Tildy, said: "please do not say comrade, but Mr. prime minister, because that is the custom." The someone said "let us proclaim neutrality". Imre Nagy smiled and asked "do you really want it?" Shouting: yes, yes, yes. Imre Nagy said "I want it too, but I don't know how to proclaim it legally." A group of Corvin Place fighters came in then, and announced that the Russians were shooting at them. Imre Nagy said "I instruct Janos Kadar, minister of state, to examine the matter." The Corvin fighters left. Then someone jumped up, one of the delegates, and said "let us denounce the Warsaw treaty!" Imre Nagy said that this was not possible. There was shouting, the delegates asked why not. Nagy said that the approval of ^{the} parliament was needed for this. The delegates shouted that there was a revolution, we do what we want, we are the parliament, etc.. Imre Nagy said something about the need for a legal formula, international law, etc.. There was wild quarrelling. Imre Nagy got very angry and said "this ^{is} anarchy and I can't work in anarchy. I prefer to resign rather than do this." A voice shouted "that would be the best." Shocked silence.

The man who made this comment was kicked out. Imre Nagy continued "we can't proclaim neutrality in such a fashion, although I agree that it is a desirable thing, but there are certain forms we have to follow. I'd rather leave my post than do it illegally." Then somebody asked, when the Russians would leave Budapest, and Nagy's answer was, that they would leave immediately, in fact they have already started to leave. He pointed out that there were no more Russian tanks on the outside of the parliament. He also promised free elections in January. Then Tildy closed the meeting. There were about 50 people present, together with the ministers. Igasság had an extra edition about this.

Imre Nagy's October 30th speech pulled people together; most of the writers, even Iljés, went to Writers' Association Headquarters. Then on the afternoon of the 1st, neutrality was proclaimed. Everyone was there and very happy. People chattered, they talked about the necessity of taking over Budapest radio and the need to publish an issue of Irodalmi Ujság. They actually started preparing the issue on the 28th, ~~and~~ ^{and} then they, Iljés, Benjamin, and Erdei, etc. ~~came~~ came in on the 30th to finish it. It was they who decided what was to be included in the revolutionary issue of ~~the~~ Irodalmi Ujsag, and Pálczy-Horváth carried it out. They decided that it was necessary to hold back,

to watch out, to make sure that we did not go too far and anger the Russians. People had misgivings, but at the same time they were happy and embraced each other. The radio station had also been captured by Háry and Tamási. I went to Székesfehérvár on the ^{afternoon of the} 31st, ~~the 31st~~, on a mission for the Revolutionary Council, and returned on Thursday, the 1st of November.

Around the 3rd, there was ~~anxious~~ anxiety in the air. Illyés said: "there will be trouble." We had known since the 31st, or the 1st, that the Russians were coming, since we had a Radio ^{monitoring} service at the polytechnic institute, where they listened to all the broadcasts. The MÁV (Hungarian railroads) telephone service was also monitored. MÁV had a separate phone service, which had talked to Záhony and reported that the Russians started coming in on Wednesday, adding the number of Russians entering the country. The Russians stopped streaming out, and started streaming into the country. Thus, on the 3rd, there were many ominous things mixed with our joy. Referring to Dudás, the writers said, "this anarchy must be curbed." Innumerable parties were being established; the writers said "let's leave the parties, they are not needed yet." They all said this. Veres proclaimed it at ^a meeting and everyone approved. There were many meetings and conferences, but nothing came of them; they were drowned

in impotence. The association was responsible for several smaller manoeuvres, leaflets, etc., but that was all.

Then came a variety of rumors: the Russians are coming!

On November 4th, Házy's S.O.S. message over the radio was prepared the same way as all the other proclamations and leaflets of the Writers' Association. Házy wrote the speech and translated it into various languages with the aid of his wife. Then the presidium was consulted Déry, Illyés, etc. ^{who} all approved, and then it went on the air. After the 4th there was nothing, everything was *paralyzed* for a while.

Then on the 7th or 8th the thread was taken up again. The ~~University~~ Revolutionary Council had fallen apart. It dissolved itself on the 4th on the initiative of István Pozsar, its leader. On the 8th the last poster appeared, a tri-colour poster, with the demands of the Revolution, signed by the University Revolutionary Council, the Writers' Association, and the commanders of the armed units. Erdei signed it for the Writers' Association. This was a miracle. Such a poster on the 8th of November! There were conferences and exchanges of telegrams in the Writers' Association, demanding that the presidium be called together at Házy's apartment on Sunday, the 14th. On Sunday morning Házy called it all off, saying that his

apartment was watched and that he was afraid that the whole group would be arrested, if they met at his apartment. Finally, the presidium of the Writers' Association met at headquarters on the 12th of November. Just about everybody was there, except Déry and Lőrinc Szabó, who were unable to come. Present were Illyés, Németh, Kassák, Sinka, etc, as well as Bessenyei from the Association of Film Artists, Miklós Szakács, representing the actors, Pál Járdányi, representing the musicians, and Dezső Keresztúry for the academy of sciences. Three members of the University Revolutionary Council were also present. The proclamation of the Hungarian intelligentsia was born here. Máté was also present, but he was booted and for the second time kicked^{out} of a meeting of the Writers' Association.

There was talk about two proclamations, one theoretical and one practical. There was a long debate concerning this; at first there was talk only about one proclamation, but finally the meeting decided on two. Illyés, Németh, a young poet, István Lakatos, and Áron Tamási marched off to draft ^{one} of the proclamations. The first paragraph was written by László Németh and the third paragraph by Áron Tamási.

The Workers' Councils were discussed; ^{the} ^{was} a question whether they should offer armed resistance to the regime and the Russians, or not. Some people said that armed resistance was senseless, but others said that we had no right to tell the workers not to

resist with arms. We passed a resolution against armed resistance; the general opinion was that armed resistance must be ended and a different form of resistance should be chosen, but the workers should be allowed to decide for themselves what form it should take. There was complete impotence, and helplessness - it was maddening. The resolution finally stated that there should be no bloodshed or revenge; all this is in the proclamation.

The question of political parties was also brought up. Veres made a speech, stating that there was no need for parties yet, all that was needed was a peasant association, a committee of the intelligentsia, and a Workers' council. In debate, various people brought up the terrible behaviour of the newly emerging parties the fact that they cared only for the number of cars they were able to get and behaved quite selfishly in general. Nemeth also disapproved of the large number of parties, which mushroomed during the Revolution and said that they were a symptom of the eternal Hungarian danger, adding that the beautiful magyar unity, established during the Revolution, must be kept intact. He said that either we must reach a compromise with Kádár or else we must have him kicked out.

Meanwhile we heard of the Szolnok counter-government against Kádár, headed by Andics and Szalai. I heard that Kádár had

threatened Andics on the phone. Szabad Nép was brought in from Szolnok by the Russians. We began to fear even that Kádár would be kicked out and Rákosi would return. The question now was, should we compromise with Kádár, or not. The establishment of the Andics government proved, that a compromise with Kádár was necessary. All the other debates centered around the question of whether to compromise with Kádár or not. There was no decision about this or about anything else; finally it was stated that the association should get together again at another meeting; this was not done until December.

The practical, substantive, proclamation was never issued, because we could not reach any decision about the most important problems. There was a very sharp debate, regarding the necessity to continue the strike. Illyés said that we had no right to force people to strike, since we did not know the possible consequences. Kassák agreed with us of the University Revolutionary Council, that we should reach some sort of decision regarding a strike, because people were looking to us for guidance. Kuczka spoke up against ~~the~~ a strike, because it would ruin the country, causing damage worth millions of forints. He said it was necessary to go into the factories and stage a sit-down strike of sorts, that is, the workers should not produce but should keep the machinery going in order to prevent it from freezing, and

hence destruction. Some people said, that it is easier to use ^{force against} ~~the~~ the workers if they were in the factory, while others said, that it would be easier for them to resist if they were in the factory. I exploded 3 or 4 times, urging them to decide on striking. They said that they must think it over; finally there was no resolution about this and the discussion drowned in complete impotence. Illyés was the most impotent and Németh agreed, but less decisively. My feeling was, that it was now the 12th, the beginning of the second week of the strike, without consolidation on the part of the new regime. This was a definite sign of strength on the part of the people, therefore if the resistance could be united, the people could overthrow the regime. Everyone knew this, the problem was only whether we could undertake the responsibility for possible reprisals against the workers. Benjamin was the most tragic, he said that the workers must strike, although they would not get anywhere with it; they must strike and then drop dead. Háy was confused; he said that the strike was harmful but what else was there if not this? It was thanks to our aggressiveness, the aggressiveness of the university delegates, that there was no resolution declaring that the workers should decide separately whether to strike or not. We felt that this would have been utter anarchy.

The solution was quite obvious. To some extent, the power was lying in the streets for us to pick it up. Nobody ~~was~~ had real power, least of all Kádár. The situation had no outlines. ~~They~~^{we} could obviously not fight, because then the power would fall into Kádár's hands; but we could have *sat*. The Writers' Association had sufficient prestige to pass a resolution for a strike and give its reasons. It would have been followed by the people. There were worker delegations, impatiently waiting for a decision outside the meeting room and there were others on the phone, demanding a decision.

Kassák make a speech, demanding that the writers declare a strike. He said "if we could do it for 8 years, you can too."² Some people here lived well under Communism. If we could do it, then others can do it too; those who benefited from the regime in the past should show ----" This speech was very popular. Then we passed a resolution, proclaiming a strike of writers, actors, etc.

Then there was a discussion about the various social achievements of the regime, whether they should be kept or not. László Németh was the most outspokenly in favor of the social achievements. See his two articles in Irodalmi Ujság and Uj Magyarország about this.

We talked to Németh at the meeting. He said that we should

exploit the fact that even the Russians were uncertain and undecisive and did not know what the outcome of it all would be. He said that the Russians were obviously afraid that the Revolution would be pushed to the right and with some reason (Veres had said this too). Németh added that we should assure the Russians that the Revolution would not drown in reaction, and then sit tight. He said that in that case everything would go differently especially since the Poles were on our side, and there were rumors that the Chinese would support us too. Németh promised us an article about this, for the illegally printed University Youth, the university newspaper. He promised, but it never worked out that way; Németh was frightened, he had a persecution complex. He also felt, that it was too late for this, that this policy he outlined, should have been followed earlier. He expressed disapproval of the numerous parties, which had sprung up, and said that they had done a great deal of harm. He also said that Imre Nagy should not have proclaimed neutrality, ^{he should not have repudiated} ~~the Warsaw~~ the Warsaw Treaty, since this was what made the Russians come in. We said that Imre Nagy had to do ^{it} because the people demanded it. Németh's answer was, that perhaps there was no other way of doing it, perhaps Nagy was forced to do this, but on the other hand he could have explained to the people that neutrality could not be proclaimed, because the West would

not help us and then we would be alone against the Russians. People would have understood. Then Nagy could have reached some sort of compromise with the Russians. I said that the Russians would have interfered ^{and} anyway, ~~the~~ the principle^s question was free elections. I added

After the 4th, the University Revolutionary Council was resurrected ~~under~~ ^{under} ground. A poster, and an issue of University Youth, were printed on November the 8th, at the small Szikya press, next to the Academy street, ~~the~~ headquarters of the Party. We were preparing another issue, but by then the AVO had taken over the press. Then we printed some leaflets by stencil, or by a handpress at the Kossuth club. At the student dormitory we used aliases over the phone; my alias was ~~the~~ ^{Eagle}. We met in a boiler house by candlelight, since there was no electric light here; just like the carbonari. Our plan was to call together the Workers' Councils, and ^{form} a constitutional assembly, consisting of Workers' Councils, intelligentsia, and peasants. We decided on Sunday night to call together this constitutional assembly for Wednesday, the 14th, in order to name a new

government. But the general impotence was so great, that the Workers' Councils could not be called together, in spite of the fact that we had contact with the factories at Csepel, Ujpest, and Egyesült Izzó. We also contacted the actors; I went to discuss the matter with Szakács. We did organize Workers' Council meetings at Ujpest and Akácfa Street, for Monday the 12th, and Tuesday the 13th, respectively. The regime obviously tried to stop these meetings, because Russian soldiers surrounded Akácfa Street, until somebody came from Kádár's office, saying that it was all a mistake. However, most people thought that this was a planned mistake to intimidate us. Déry appeared at the Akácfa Street meeting and stated in his speech that the workers should decide what they want themselves, and suggested that Kodály should be president of the republic. The workers shouted him down for this latter part of his speech. Then the workers carried on a bloody debate about the strike. The trouble was that the Worker's Councils could not decide either whether to strike or not. They were not united either.

One of the assistant professors of the university was a member of our group, and the apartment house, where he lived was organized as a Revolutionary House. The entire house was organized to work for ^{our} ~~an~~ underground group; some people did typing, some people listened to the radio, or cooked for us.

After we returned to the university, a student's ~~mother~~ father came in one day, saying that he received a note that his son had been taken to the building of the ministry of interior together with 70 other students and that they would be executed. The Revolutionary Council, which was semi-legal at this time, decided to go to Munnich to ask for their release. Gömöry and some others formed a delegation and went to Munnich, where first somebody denied that the students had been arrested, but then the students were freed. This was the only essentially productive act of the university Revolutionary ^{council} ~~council~~, after November 4th.

I left Hungary on the 17th of October together with other members of the university Revolutionary Council, including Gömöry, and another student, who had since returned to Hungary. We were sent out by the University Revolutionary Council, to establish contact with Western universities. At that time I had every intention of returning to Hungary, so that I did not even say good bye to anyone. Now it appears very naive on my part that I intended to return to Hungary.

Interviewer's comments on respondent:

An articulate, precocious, talented boy, - his poetry is not at all bad - respondent is a strange mixture of revolutionary ardor, and a somewhat soft, overripe, fin de siècle hedonism. The latter is just talk, of course, but nonetheless somewhat incongruous in this context, though not at all illogical. His comments about the writers are probably fairly reliable.

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See also Nick Syary's comments at end of first part of interview.