

I have asked respondent first about his life. Respondent's answer:

I am 24 years old, I was born in 1933 in Budapest. When the war ended in 1945 I was only 12 years old, but the struggle between fascism and democracy formed an important experience of my early life. My family and the circle of our friends was strongly anti-fascist, or to put it in positive terms, strongly democratic. During my ~~gymnasium~~ gymnasium years my class-room teacher in the reformed gymnasium of Lonyay Street had a strong influence on me. He was Dr Lajos Lengyel. He was very democratic and profoundly humanistic. He had a very deep influence on me. To give you an idea what kind of man was Prof. Lengyel, I tell you this story: During the war in 1943 or 1944 one of the students was unwilling to sit with a Jewish boy. Prof. Lengyel with strong words upbraided him and reminded him that they are all brothers. During the Communist era Prof. Lengyel ~~remained~~ remained true to his democratic and humanistic convictions. He was objective, even towards the Communists. I was witness of the following incident: In the school year of 1949/50 in the literary circle of the school a boy was criticizing a Soviet ~~exhibition~~ exhibition opened in Budapest, whereupon a schoolmate of ours of Communist conviction rudely attacked him and threatened him. Thereupon Prof. Lengyel stood up

and said: "Maybe that to-morrow I will not be here, but until I am here I will not tolerate any ~~threats~~^{threats.}" Prof. Lengyel more than anyone else instilled in me the respect for the opinions of others, the love of democratic ideals. He was teaching latin, but he deviated often from the subject and the found always an apropos to develop his philosophy of life founded upon the ideals of democracy and humanism.

I have asked respondent to tell more about his schoolmates and the spirit of the class; in particular whether there were many Communists ~~in~~ among his schoolmates. ~~Respondent's answer:~~ Respondent's answer:

In the graduating class of 1951, of which I was a member, we were 49 students. Out of these only two were Communists. One of those was a very intelligent boy. Later, at the university, he was student of Gyorgy Lukacs. His enthusiasm for Communism, however, did not last long. He got disillusioned and turned away from Communism completely. My other schoolmate, who was a Communist, was a stupid boy. He spied and told on his schoolmates; everyone hated him. The spirit of the class, as the spirit of the entire school, was excellent and it neutralized thouroughly the Communist influences. Among the members of the faculty there were two or three Communists, but I am convinced that not even they really believed in the Communist dogma. And there were one or two members of the

faculty who out of fear followed the Communist Party directives in the field of education, but the overwhelming majority of the faculty was democratic-minded, unafraid of standing up for truth. High above all of them stood, however, Prof. Lengyel, who more sharply than anybody else drew the distinction between truth and the Communist dogma. In his ~~was~~ class we did not even use the official textbook, but we had typewritten notes. In a parochial school, like our Reformed Gymnasium of Lonyay Street, this was possible because the official control was negligible. We had also our own Reformed Students' Association which strengthened our independence and enabled us to withstand Communist influence. We had a DISZ organisation, but membership in the DISZ ~~was~~ was not required and very few entered it. The spirit of democracy in our school was so strong that we could afford to poke fun of those teachers who were slavishly following the Party line, e.g. our teacher of history was a weak character who ~~often~~ often zealously parroted the Communist non-sense. At one occasion, when he was raising the Soviet Union and Stalin, we got fed up. When he next mentioned Stalin's name we stood up and applauded. He got so embarrassed that he also got up and applauded, whereupon we burst out in terrific laughter. He did not know what to do. He was so embarrassed that

I took pity on him.

I have asked respondent to elaborate a little on what he called the democratic spirit of the student body.

Respondent's answer:

This democratic spirit consisted mainly of recognizing the basic human rights, the principle of democratic equality. Of course, not all of the students had such definitive ~~at~~ positive views, but a good number of them did, e.g. my circle of friends was definitely ~~and~~ and positively devoted to the ~~the~~ Western type of democracy. We often spoke of the future and expressed the hope that following the Communist régime we would have a democracy along the Western lines. Of course, no one knew when such a régime could be established in Hungary. But thinking of the future we never thought of returning to the past, to the ^{Horthy} ~~Horthy~~ era. There were differences of opinion among us too. We had e.g. lively debates about the socialisation of industry, mines, banking, business at large. Few of us approved of wholesale socialisation; the majority was more in favour of a bourgeois democracy. Without exception, however, we approved of the land reform. Speaking about the views the students have held, I do not want to create the impression that these views reflected the opinions of the country as a whole.

I personally have had very great interest in politics and social problems at large together with my best friend - he is still my best friend and schoolmate, his name is ~~xxxx~~ [REDACTED]. We ~~xxxx~~ have worked out a scheme of an ideal society. We have called this ideal society among ~~us~~ ourselves a "Liberal Socialist" society. It had to be liberal in order to respect the basic human rights, the basic ~~social~~ ^{civil} rights; it had to be socialist, because we believed that the ~~main~~ principle of equality by itself cannot create a good society. To insure justice in the society the weaker members of the society need protection. The society must be built upon the principle of economic security. We have developed these ideas after the matura when both of us became university students; around 1954 we worked rather seriously on our scheme; and we continued working on it until the Revolution of 1956 turned our interest and attention in other directions.

(Interviewer's Note: In London we have interviewed the person mentioned in the above ~~xxxxxx~~ section Mr. [REDACTED].)

The next question was, what did respondent do after the matura. Respondent's answer:

After my matura in 1951 I enrolled in the Academy of Foreign Languages. This was a new school, it started operation in 1951. The purpose of this school was to educate interpreters, to educate people with a

knowledge of foreign languages, to carry on business with the outside world. The idea ~~was~~^{behind} this school was that those Hungarians ~~who~~ speaking languages all belong to the middle class. And the new academy was anxious to educate young people linguistically capable coming from new kaders, from the ranks of the workers and the peasant. In other words, to educate a new generation of reliable representatives who could go abroad and talk the languages of foreign nations. We were ~~explicitly~~ explicitly told these things when the academic year began and we were told that we will take over the jobs from those who are employed in jobs which entail relations with foreign countries and who are not reliable because of their social background. As far as I was concerned I have had no such ambitions, I actually have enrolled in this school because I was unsuccessful in enrolling in either the medical faculty or the law faculty or the philosophy faculty of the university. These areas were much closer to my interest than the objectives of the Academy for Foreign Languages. The reason why I could get easily in this academy was, as I have said, that it was a new school and the system of admission was not too severe, also I had some connections which I could take advantage of in support of my application. To explain my social background, I was considered of middle class origin. My father was a member of the orchestra of the opera

house; he died during the Second World War. But I was a bad kader on my mother's side too. My mother's family had a business in auto parts and appliances; the business has been nationalized in ~~195x~~ 1950.

I have asked respondent now to tell about his experience at the Academy of Foreign Languages. Respondent's ~~XXXXX~~ answer:

The three years I have spent at the Academy, from 1951 to 1953, I consider the darkest years of my life. I disliked my teachers and disliked my fellow students. The faculty was composed mostly of opportunists. The students were mostly of new kader origin with very little former education. Most of them did not have more than 4 or 6 or 8 grade schools. The standard was very low. Moreover, politically they were very aggressive, especially towards those people like myself, who were of middle class origin. In all fairness to my fellow students I should add, however, that the more gifted have changed in the course of the years we have been studying together; some of them became quite as outspoken in their criticism of the régime. The bulk of them, however, remained blind supporters of the régime evidently out of gratitude for the chance the régime had given them by educating them. In 1954 I passed my state examinations at the school and was looking for a job. I was anxious to get a job either at the radio or in the publishing field. This, however,

I did not succeed in getting. I became a corrector at the Academy Press. This was not exactly the job I was anxious to have, but was the only one I was successful in getting. I stayed on this job since 1954 until the end.

Next I have asked respondent to tell me something about his job at the Academy Press. Respondent's answer: The responsibility of a corrector ^{was} ~~was~~ great, because it was he, not the type-setter, who was responsible for errors. I remember the case of a corrector who was interned for two years because not noticing ^{misspelled} ~~misspelled~~ ^{misspelled} ~~misspelled~~ ~~misspelled~~ word. The ~~misspelled~~ ~~misspelled~~ word, of course, ~~misspelled~~ ~~misspelled~~ changed entirely the meaning of the sentence. Instead ~~misspelled~~ ~~misspelled~~ that the counsel of comrade Rákosi was followed, the sentence read that to follow the counsel of comrade Rákosi has been refused. But my job was mostly to correct texts in foreign languages: In German, English, French, Italian, and Russian. I did not like the job, it was very monotonous and it was not the kind of work I was interested in doing. Nevertheless the job was not a bad one. My fellow workers were very pleasant people. This was the first time that I had the opportunity to know the printers, traditionally a very intelligent crowd. Also politically it was a very congenial company. They were mostly old people, former type-setters. They trusted me and

I trusted them. They were all opposed to the régime. Almost without exception they were Social Democrats. Some of them had very radical views, but none of them was a Communist.

Since respondent was unhappy both with the Academy of Foreign Languages and the job he had had, I asked him: "What was it actually he would have liked to do.

Respondent's answer:

I always wanted to become a writer. Since the age of sixteen I tried my hand at writing, I wrote poems and novels. It is my ambition to-day to become a writer, a novelist.

In the next question the Interviewer turned the conversation to the Revolution. Respondent's answer:

I did not take part in the events which ^{are} ~~have been~~ regarded as a preparation for the Revolution. Not because I have not been interested in public affairs, rather because I was very busy. My job itself was very exacting. In addition, to earn more money I taught privately English and French. Also I did many translations and in my free time I was writing. But although I did not participate in the events I was following closely the meetings of the Petöfi circle. I have not been present at any of the meetings, but I was reading the minutes which were prepared by participants, minutes which were a much sought after reading material. I was reading also regularly the Irodalmi Ujsag. Now, as to the Revolution

itself on October 23rd, I had a bad sore throat and I ~~was~~ was working in my office at the Academy Press. Later during the day I joined the street demonstrations. I have been present at the Bem Square demonstrations and also at the ^{Parliament} ~~Government~~ Square. During the next days I have showed up in the Academy Press and I attended also the meeting during which the workers' council of the Academy has been formed. It has not been clear to me then and it is still not clear to me to-day how the workers' council was formed. As a rule it is said that the workers' councils have been formed spontaneously. It was my suspicion shared by many others that the action taken was not entirely spontaneous, or not spontaneous at all. The government of Imre Nagy wanted very ~~very~~ much that these workers' councils should be formed. Since neither the army nor the AVO nor the police was reliable the government thought that perhaps through the co-operation of the workers it may stabilize itself. This was, I suspect, the reason why the government was encouraging the formation of the workers' councils.

I have asked respondent what is his opinion on Imre Nagy: Respondent's answer:

There were ~~was~~ several Imre Nagys. He was different ~~e~~ every day, e.g. had he been able to stabilize the Revolution on October 24th, I am sure he would have continued his policy of 1953. ~~It is possible that he~~

It is possible that he would have introduced broader reforms along the lines Gomulka has introduced in Poland. But this is not so certain. Nagy might have been satisfied with purging the regime of Rakosi's followers. This would not have amounted to anything more than the de-Stalinisation of the Hungarian Communistic regime. During the period of the victorious Revolution, let us say from Oct 27th, 28th on, Nagy already stood for something else and something more. He was ready to go as far as Gomulka went, but not farther. In other words, the set-up Nagy was willing to accept at that time, definitely excluded a multi-party system. And then again, after the further radicalisation of the Revolution after October 31st, Nagy had gone far beyond Gomulka. Nagy cancelled the Warsaw Treaty and accepted the multi-party system. As far as this last phase of Nagy's position is concerned, two explanations are possible. One explanation could assume that Nagy was sincere. In that case it could be argued that he subordinated the Communist interests, the interests of international Communism, to the interests of the nation. He could have realized that the nation demands the liquidation of the entire Communist system and he went along with the nation. The other explanation would assume that Nagy was just an opportunist. In that case the explanation would be that he realized his inability to stop the Revolution and therefore decided to go along with the Revolution.

I think that in his heart Nagy was willing to go to the limits of an orthodox Leninist system. He was willing to liberalize the Communist regime to the extent permissible according to the Leninist conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Interviewer asked respondent to discuss his interest in the workers' council more in detail:

"As I have said before, in order to understand the way the workers' council ~~was~~ ^{have} been formed, one should bear in mind that the Imre Nagy gov't was strongly supporting the formation of these councils. The gov't evidently believed that such workers councils could be instrumental in stabilizing the position of the new regime. As an evidence of my opinion I could cite the fact that the gov't through radio appeals urged the workers to form these councils immediately. By emphasizing this, I do not wish to create the impression that I exclude the element of spontaneity. All what I am saying is that the Nagy gov't viewed the workers councils as an instrument of its own policy. Now, as to the question of spontaneity, I can attest from my own experiences that such an element existed. Moreover, the element of spontaneity that stood behind the formation of the workers councils, was not necessarily running parallelly with the intentions of the gov't. For instance, at the Academy Press the formation of the workers's council had been accompanied by certain mistrust of the gov't.

When on October 26th we called the workers council into existence at the Academy Press, the consensus of the workers was on the one hand that we are carrying out the instructions of the gov't, on the other hand it was no less the ~~consensus~~ ^{consensus} of the workers that we will follow and support the gov't only as far as it will promote the objectives of the Revolution. Finally, there was an element of fear too. It was not an all-too important element, but it existed. Since the gov't instructed the workers to form the workers councils, many workers were in favor of the proposition in order to carry out the gov't's instructions. They were afraid of being accused of sabotaging the gov't."

Since respondent was closely associated with the workers through his membership in the Workers Council at the Academy Press, next Interviewer asked him what did the workers think of the chances of the Revolution to succeed:

"There were some who had no doubt at all that the Revolution will be successful. Great many believed that the West will help and that the Russians would not start a world war if the West would render help to the Revolution. But everybody, without exception, felt that the Revolution cannot succeed unless the Russians will withdraw from Hungary. Broadly speaking, the Revolution had a very strong nationalist character. The chief objective, overshadowing everything else, of the Revolution was to restore Hungary's national independence.

But the Revolution had also a socialistic character, something that in the West not everyone is ready to notice or understand, and in this respect the role of the Workers Council was supreme. The Workers Councils carried the Revolution in the direction of Socialism. The idea that the ownership of the plants should be transferred to the Workers Councils, that is to the workers themselves, was a spontaneous product of the Revolution and the most important product of the Revolution, I believe. This was a Socialist idea, no doubt, and a new idea at that. Because it advocated not the nationalisation of industry, on the contrary it advocated the transfer of ownership from the State to the workers themselves."

(Interviewer's Note: at this point respondent taking notice of my reference to his membership in the Workers Council at the Academy Press, explained that he was present at the formation of a so-called temporary Workers Council, of which he was elected a member. This was on Oct 26th. When on Nov 1st the permanent Workers Council had been formed, he was present again but was not elected a member of it.)

Everybody believed, the respondent explained earlier, that the Revolution cannot be successful unless the Russians withdraw from Hungary. Therefor Interviewer asked respondent what he thought of the chances that the Russians could have been compelled to withdraw from Hungary:

"When the Russians withdrew from Budapest, the conviction prevailed in Budapest, that the Russians yielded to the

superior strength of the people. In my opinion the Russians were carrying out only a strategic maneuver. By withdrawing from Budapest, I believe, the Russians were preparing the ground for negotiations with the West for the settlement of the Hungarian situation. It is a great tragedy that the West did not seize this opportunity and did not understand the Russians' intentions. I could be of course wrong in my interpretation of the Russians intentions. It is a fact, however, that negotiating with the Russians about their withdrawal was supreme in the workers' minds. The main reason why the workers Councils recognized and supported the Nagy gov't was, that they wanted to strengthen the Nagy gov't's position for negotiations with the Russians. Even those workers, I have good evidence to say, who wanted to continue the strike, did so because they thought that by continuing the strike they can exercise pressure on the Nagy gov't to negotiate with the Russians about their withdrawal. Here I would like to interject that although everybody spoke about the Russians' withdrawal from Budapest, what was meant was the withdrawal of the Russians from the entire country. It was this demand, that the Russians should leave, that created that phenomenal unity of the entire nation and concomitant with this demand was that the Communist system should be abolished. These were clear-cut aspirations of the entire nation.

What lay behind it represented complete confusion. And as far as that confusion is concerned, I am sorry to say that the unity of the nation was not so phenomenal. There were great many people who, believing that the Revolution had been successful, were anxious to secure their own power. But here again I am of the view that only the Workers Councils could have led the nation out of confusion. The program of the Workers Councils, if carried out, could have led to economic consolidation and once economic consolidation could have been achieved, also the essential prerequisites for political consolidation would have been attained."

At this point Interviewer asked respondent what would he say what gov't structure did the people in general have in mind:

"I think it is safe to say that the overwhelming majority of the people believed that the final structure of gov't should be decided in free elections."

Next, Interviewer asked respondent about the role of the Workers Councils following the Russian attack on Nov 4th:

"After November 4th, because of the fighting, most of the Workers Councils were not in session and after they have met again, most of the councils, especially in the smaller plants, were politically not active. This was true for instance, in the case of the Workers Council at the Academy Press. Bitterness was overwhelming, also fear began to spread again. People were afraid to talk. The main concern of the Workers Councils in these smaller

plants was to provide food for the population. They were dealing with administrative problems rather than political ones. The Workers Councils in the big plants, like in Csepel, of course remained politically active. In general I would say that most Workers Councils in the beginning at least, trusted Kadar. They believed that once the Kadar regime will be able to consolidate itself, Kadar will resume the negotiations with the Russians about their withdrawal. The logic behind this reasoning was about the following: We did not succeed by our own strength, nor did the West help us. Now, therefore we should try to reach agreement with the Russians without the help of the West or of the UN. The main spring of this reasoning, of course, was not logic, but bitterness, desperation. In fact, the Workers Councils were negotiating with the Kadar gov't for some time. They viewed the Kadar gov't as an instrument through which they may still achieve the withdrawal of the Russians from Hungary. When Kadar broke off these negotiations with the Workers Councils, the workers lost the little trust they had in Kadar. At this point I would like to stress something which in my opinion has passed almost unnoticed in the West. This is the following: When the workers became convinced that they cannot trust Kadar, they gave up the hope that the Russians can be induced to leave the country through negotiation. But, and this is the important point, the Workers Councils still did not give up the hope that they can carry out their

program of transferring the ownership of the plants from the State into the ownership of the workers themselves. This was the last objective of the Revolution the workers were desperately trying to achieve, and this proves my contention that the program to own the national economy by the workers councils was the most momentous product of the Hungarian Revolution. It was an important step forward in the history of the Socialist idea, and I am surprised that Western Socialists did not pay enough attention to this fact. Incidentally, when I left Hungary on December 5th, the desire and hope among the workers that they will succeed at least in transferring the ownership from the State to the workers themselves, was very strong and widespread."

In concluding the discussion on the Workers Councils, Interviewer asked respondent what was the role of the workers councils in organizing armed resistance:

"It is wrong to assume that the Workers Councils organized the armed resistance. The Workers Councils, as a rule, approved of the armed resistance, but they did not organize it, nor did they lead it. The armed resistance, the raising of the workers, was entirely spontaneous. There would have been an armed resistance of the working class even had the Workers Councils not existed."

Interviewer's last question concerned the ~~present~~ ^{present} situation in Hungary:

"Life in Hungary goes on today very much the same way it did before. What I mean is, that living under the present terror in Hungary is not a new experience for the Hungarians. Of course, the impact of the Revolution remains strong and it affects also the attitude of the people. For instance, they are speaking more freely today, inspite of the terror. The Revolution, no doubt, has also changed the people's views of the future. In what way is impossible to tell. Some people think that the hatred of the regime and the bitterness is so strong that a new uprising is almost inevitable. I would not say that this is impossible, but frankly I do not think that it will happen."

INTERVIEWER'S RATING: Rapport, frankness, cooperativeness were excellent. No sign of compliance and flattery. Interviewer thinks that respondent's account and interpretation of the emergence of the Workers Councils is extremely interesting. Respondent agreed to write in cooperation with his friend [redacted] ~~Walter~~ a paper on this subject for our project.