

STAR PUPIL IN THE COAL MINE.

I was born 24 years ago in a very small village in the Békony. My father should have liked to have a university education, but he couldn't afford to live in Budapest and pay the fees, and so he went to farm the land my mother got in dowry. My brother died in a French prisoner of war camp in 1946, and they had no other children.

In early 1945, the Russian troops, to defeat a German rear guard action, completely burnt our village and we lost literally all except the land and the clothes we stood up in. It was still winter and life looked rather gruesome. However, we survived. Nevertheless, despite the blows received at the tail end of the war, the general situation of the peasantry was not desperate. They lost much, if not all, on their livestock, some had no grain for either seed or bread, but recovery was starting, even if the start had to be made from a very low level.

The great change to Soviet Communism did not yet percolate down to the village level. The real trouble started early in and after 1949.

In September 1948, I went to the gymnasium in Tatabánya (a mining town in West-Central Hungary). My parents would not support me away from home, the less so as my maternal grand-father (the wealthiest member of the

family) was in that year declared a kulak, which meant his financial ruin and although my father farmed only 18 holds, and was not persecuted as my grand-father was, compulsory delivery and taxes began to weigh on him heavily and he could just about hold his own. I had an uncle and an aunt in Tatabanya and expected to be looked after by the former. However, he was unexpectedly transferred whilst my aunt had only enough to support herself. Fortunately, it turned out that the director of the gymnasium used to serve with my uncle, and he gave me board and lodging. During the summer vacation of 1949, he was interned and his household broke up. I took a furnished room and on week-ends did 2 shifts in the pits, shoveling coal. I earned good money, as did the miners generally, and could thus support myself.

Life among the miners in the pits influenced me a great deal. The miners were the favorites of the regime, they were being ostentatiously flattered and they were indeed communist.

In the school, the majority of the teachers were elderly, with a deep and thorough pre-war education and a wide outlook. In the lectures, they would state what they called the "current" position, and then would express their disagreement with it, and put forward their own, non-materialist view. On the other hand, the minority, generally the teachers of natural sciences, were young

post-war products and materialists. The divergences between their teaching and that of the older ones was the beginning of a certain confusion in me. However, on balance, I was enthusiastic for the regime, I was too young and I had no parental guidance.

I was something of a leader, because I was the best student of the whole school and the best sports-woman of the county. (Interviewer's Remark: it transpired that respondent never had other than top marks in any subject.) The other pupils were mostly miners' children, who too went down to the pits on weekends, and after working their Saturday and Sunday shift, went up to Budapest for a Sunday evening at the opera. Heavy manual work stimulated our appetite for culture and music, and we felt the one gave us a right for the other.

The new director of the school, who replaced my uncle's friend, was a stupid Party man, with whom I had much strife later. We weighed him up and decided he was an idiot and a bore. We quietly formed a front against him, with the intention of dislodging him at the first opportunity, but for a while could not do anything because we were just pupils and he hung very strongly on the Party line. (Later, we managed to have him removed. See below.)

Simultaneously with the new director, the school got two new teachers, a young husband and wife, who were wonderful people and under whose influence I fell. They had an enormous private library which gave me the first chance to read the classics, which I did to such an extent that I seldom slept more than four hours a night. This couple was politically quite passive and apparently disinterested. Their leitmotiv, which they never failed to impress on me, was "Go and learn, learn more", - they made me do extra Latin translations and gave me my first violin lessons. It was due to their measured, quiet remarks that I started to think more about matters I used to take for granted before, including the hostile pressure put on our teachers purely and simply because of their philosophical outlook, and the compulsion under which some of them joined the Party. Previously, I used myself to "agitate" them to join. The conflict between my general approval of the regime and my respect and sympathy for my teachers, particularly for the couple I mentioned above, came to a head when the head teacher of our class was taken away by the AVO for three days. This event made me and the whole school ponder. It may sound like boasting, but I was the spiritual leader of the whole school, the acknowledged star pupil and so on, and I now became the center of a series of discussions with school mates on whose attitude was right, that of the head teacher or that of the director.

TRAPS IN PROVINCIAL JOURNALISM.

Meanwhile, I got a prize for a Latin translation which was then published by the local paper, and the editorial office invited me to contribute more of the same stuff. I did Lermontov and other translations for them. The sub-editor, a young Peasant Party man, encouraged me. I soon became a regular contributor, and the assistant editor and I really directed the paper, because although the editor (a Communist) attempted to censor us, we always managed to get past him and put across whatever we wanted.

This paper, called "TOILERS' PAPER OF COUNTY KOMAROM" appeared twice a week and it was the official mouth-piece of the COUNTY COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY. I spent the mornings at the editorial office and went to the evening course at the school.

By this time, trouble was brewing at the school, apparently, the Communist director was making the teachers' life miserable by his political interference and bullying. He was humiliating all the teachers his intellectual superiors. Word reached the paper that the teachers are desperate and want to throw up their jobs, and that the atmosphere at the school is unhappy.

The sub-editor assigned me to write this up. I was reluctant and said I was inexperienced for this task. I was in something of a danger myself, because the director resented my influence over the children, wanted to persuade me to change schools and move to Esztergom, and even threatened/^{me} that he will have me sent to another school. However, I began having informal interviews at the school from the janitor upwards, and we had many heated debates with my sources as to the wisdom of forcing the issue with the director by publishing a report on his bullying. With his connections, he might prove strong enough to withstand the attack and revenge himself on my sources. Fortunately, it transpired that he embezzled some funds which he received from the Ministry for distribution as prizes. He turned this money to his own use, and this placed a strong card into my hands. Otherwise, I could not have got him. Our editor was away at the Party academy, when my article on the director's misdeeds appeared on a Sunday morning. On the Sunday afternoon, I was summoned to the County Committee of the Party, and taken to task. Do I stand up for what I have written? - Do I realize what I have done? I said I did, and that the teaching staff of the gymnasium would bear me out. They could not do anything to me, but they rejected my application for Party membership which was pending at the time. The rector of the gymnasium was removed to another school in another county where he was promptly made director. In effect, this was a promotion for him.

The storm around me in the Party Committee blew over. During the summer of 1950, I worked for the paper as a fulltime journalist. My job involved constant travelling in the county and thus I again got acquainted with village life. It was a very different sort of life from that I knew before 1948. Closer contact with village life presented both me and the assistant editor with ^{the} gravest problem of conscience so far. We had to make up our minds about the rightness of the Party's peasant policy and its collectivization program. We supported the idea of socialism in agriculture, whilst the peasants bitterly hated its every manifestation. Therefore we had to lie, and we did. To this day, I am ashamed to think of this period. In my articles on village life, I was putting laudatory words into the mouths of decent peasants, quoting their real names. Each time I called on a peasant family, they were absolutely terrified, they were frantically trying to give the right answers, breathlessly saying yes to every question. They had no confidence in me whatever, and they were straining every nerve lest an unguarded word should betray them. If I told them that I am a peasant girl myself, some would go as far as boldly to say "Then why are you doing this job?" They considered it an unspeakably dirty job.

Because of my work on the paper, a grave conflict developed between me and my parents, and my father would not speak to me for a long time.

Nevertheless, I have no regrets about this period. Had I not gone through this job, my eyes would not have been opened as they have been. Journalism made me realize that everything, but everything, is just a lie.

Meanwhile, certain changes occurred at the paper. The former Communist editor was replaced by a member of the County Committee of the Party. The new man was a typical Communist. Nothing I wrote could be printed without the most rigid scrutiny on his part. What leeway the assistant editor and I had before had completely disappeared, we could not even write about the most non-political shortcoming of a new kolkhoz, and our reviews of Soviet films could only contain praise. He would re-write our copy, which then appeared over our own signature. He was not only rigid, strict, and dishonest, he was also immensely stupid. If, in writing about a certain kolkhoz, I used a certain poetic figure of Hungarian speech, indicating remoteness, ("where no birds fly"), he would strike it out, saying that in our people's democracy, electricity and telegraphy reaches every place and there are no remote kolkhozes. It was this sort of thing which eventually drove me away from the paper.

In connection with my job, I once visited Jegespuszta State Farm, and had talks both with the director and with

the Party secretary. They were both decent people, and the director was new at the job. Over lunch in the farm canteen, they warmed up and became quite frank and confident. They related what the previous director of the farm was like, giving examples of the harm he has done to the farm, and of his arrogance and laziness. They said that he was much worse than then bailiff of the Count. I wrote this up in the paper, quoting the Party secretary and other people, stressing at the same time that under the present management the State Farm is going ahead from success to success. For some reason, the incriminatory passages of the article, if not the whole article, escaped the attention of the editor and the article was printed in full. On the day of the publication, I was again summoned to the Party Committee. Did I know who the previous director was? I said "no". I was told he was a departmental chief in the County Party Committee. They then flatly told me: "Comrade, the article has to be withdrawn, you must write a full denial, explaining your bias and your lack of evidence. You do this, comrade, good morning!" - I left desperate and determined not to recant. The assistant editor edged me on. The next day our editor himself went to Jegespuszta. The Party secretary of the farm denied every word he said to me, and the editor came back with an article written over the Party secretary's name, arguing that my article was full of distortions, and putting the record "straight".

I caught the train and called on the Journalists' Federation" in Budapest. I lodged a complaint with them. I was never told of what went on behind the scenes in the next few days, but the upshot was that the editor's article was not printed, but on the other hand I had to leave the paper, although the whole office except the editor himself, backed me up. The representatives of the Journalists' Federation visited Jegespuszta on their own, while the County Committee of the Party made several attempts to bully me into calling them off. In the midst of this fight, the time came to sit for my final examinations (matura). I was a nervous wreck, incapable of working for the exam. Had it not been for the teacher-couple whose influence over me never faded and who persuaded me to risk it just the same, I would not have sat. In the event, I passed with rather undistinguished marks.

STURM UND DRANG AT THE RUSSIAN INSTITUTE.

I went home to my parents, and began applying for university courses. First I applied for pedagogy, then for medicine, then for history, then for Hungarian literature. In each case, my entrance examination yielded good results, yet I was turned down. At last, I applied for a course in Russian, and was admitted in the autumn of 1952. Compared ^{to} the regime's needs, there were not enough applicants for Russian and this made matters easier. At the Russian Institute of the Eötvös Lorand University, 50% of the students were the products of "Express" secondary schools, 30% were those who failed to pass the entrance examination for some other course or faculty, and 20% who could not secure admission elsewhere on political grounds. I suppose the percentage of "Express" people was higher at the Russian Institute than perhaps anywhere else. About one half of the teaching staff was Russian and one half Hungarian.

In the first two semesters, we had 20 hours a week Russian, 6 hours a week Marxism, 1 hour psychology, 2 hours Hungarian history, 2 hours Hungarian linguistics, and 2 hours paramilitary training (for us girls too).

Some of us attempted to transfer to another course within the same university, but although we thought we had prepared the ground carefully, our applications were

unsuccessful and one of us was expelled from the university altogether. I was not punished myself.

In our second year, we had 20 hours Russian, no psychology, no Hungarian linguistics, 6 hours Marxism, 4 hours geography of the Soviet Union, 2 hours pedagogy lecture, 2 hours pedagogy class and 2 hours Russian literature of the 19th century.

The standards, the level of lectures, and the methods were all those of a secondary school. Attendance at lectures was compulsory, and 2 hours missed meant disciplinary action. The study committee, the Party Committee and the DISZ Committee were bullying us right and left. In this year, ten of us got together and concluded that this is not a university, we are just wasting our time in a pointless extension of our secondary-school education, and that the standards here are atrocious. Besides, there were severe conflicts between pampered "Express" people and us proper students. We quietly prepared a DISZ meeting to which we invited the teaching staff. Emil Baleczky, the holder of the linguistic's chair (who was later dismissed) was with us. At the meeting, we got off according to a pre-arranged plan, and argued that we are getting nothing out of this, the Russian Institute ought to live up to university standards, it ought to give us comparative linguistics, one optional foreign language, philosophy, pedagogy etc.

We put forward certain specific reforms, making it clear that they were feasible because teaching staff for them was available. The meeting was strained and stormy. Baleczky seconded us. Probably as a result of this meeting, in our third year (Interviewer's remark: Respondent appeared oblivious of the fact that her third year coincided with the softening of the political line.), general linguistics, phonetics, history of language, morphology of grammar, world literature, optional French, English and Slavonic languages were introduced. Students Societies were formed, where papers on a high standard were presented. Students began to be judged on scholastic rather than on political considerations. The result of all this was that the "Express" students were simply unable to stand the pace. Not more than a third of the whole class succeeded in passing the end-semester examinations. This was a very tough, but satisfying year, with really thorough examinations.

In the summer vacations of 1953 and 1955, I went to work as a navy for the Number One Civil Engineering Building Enterprise. In 1953, we were building an air-raid shelter in Budapest for the Ministry of Transport. This work was never completed and the unfinished shelter was abandoned. In 1955, we were working in Csepel on the foundations of a new saw-mill. I sent half of my earnings home because my parents were in a bad way, they could not even buy bread.

During the summer vacation of 1954, I was employed as a Polish interpreter at the Student Olympics, and got to know Polish students. We had very frank political talks during their stay, and I kept in touch with them right up to the Revolution. Meanwhile, my grand-father, who was on the Kulak list, has been reduced to begging and I even sent him loaves of bread from Budapest.

The fourth year of my university course was the touch stone of political maturity for me. It was the culmination of all that went before. Before that, too, I used to move in oppositional circles, which were strongly under Tibor Dery's influence. Now, however, I fully identified myself with these circles. In this year, there was a philosophy course at the Russian Institute, and in the second semester we used to hold very open talks and debates on the touchiest subjects in connection with this course. We knew who was the class spy, and we also knew with whom we could be quite frank, both among fellow students and among the staff. The solidarity of our group at the Russian Institute was, of course, noticed, but we had the strong card of superior intelligence, we were the better students, way ahead of the conformist side, both in Russian and in other subjects. There occurred some expulsions from among us, because we vouched for a member of our informal group in connection with his application to be sent to Finland for Finno-Ugor studies.

His application was granted, he went to Finland and sought political asylum there. The unpleasant consequences for our group of his defection can easily be imagined.

The most important event for us in that year was the famous Madach Debate in the philosophy seminar of the Russian Institute. We staged this debate after George Lukacs' article in Szabad Nep on the "Tragedy of Man". The Tragedy of Man was at the time being performed in the National Theater. Lukacs argued in his article that it was harmful for the masses to show this drama, because it reflected an idealist philosophy and because of the despairing and false phalanster scene, etc. He strongly proposed that its performance should promptly be discontinued in the National Theater. As we learned, the background to this article was, that a Soviet comrade was taken to the National Theater, and he threw up his hands in disgust at this "destructive" piece of drama. In a few days it was duly taken off the stage. We felt very strongly about this and invited Lukacs to a debate. He did not condescend to appear in person, only small Party nobodies came, whom we could easily corner.

We had a lecture course on masses and personalities in history, and in connection with some of the arguments I voiced there, I was accused of being a Social Democrat,

but at that time this was no longer a grave enough charge to enable them to expel me. After all, I and others in my group were just following the invitation of the 20th Congress to "debate". This (the first half of 1956) was a period of chaos. I think we were beginning to see fairly clearly by then, but the Party bosses were utterly confused. For instance, they were greatly upset and bewildered about the teaching of Party history. They did not know what to demand at the exam, the pre-20th Congress stand or what else?

By then, we were establishing contacts with similar groups at the other faculties through friends at the student hostels where we lived. We attended the Petöfi Circle debates and there was talk of us, including myself, being admitted to its membership. We were rapidly clarifying our stand for ourselves.

After I did my final exams, (receiving top marks in every subject except Marxism), it became known that most of us will be placed in elementary schools. We greatly resented this because we had a right to teach at secondary school level. I flatly stated that I will not go to an elementary school, and succeeded in securing allocation to the Kapuvar Secondary School. I spent a hectic summer in visiting friends here and there all over the country, talking politics with them and becoming convinced of the need to do something.

Unlike during term time when we were all in Budapest, during the vacation we were dispersed, and it was difficult to keep in touch with each other. Yet we all felt the need to be in close contact just at this time.

TEACHERS IN REVOLT.

Upon receiving my allocation to the Kapuvar School, I did not report at the school as would have been the custom. I was too busy with politics. Instead, I wrote the director asking him when he wants me to start. In my letter, I addressed him as "Comrade Director". He answered with "Dear Julia". This was a slap in my face. I was slightly ashamed of myself.

I arrived in Kapuvar in the second half of September 1956. The director met me and we talked till 3 a.m. Neither of us quite dared to show what we had in mind, we were running in circles around each other, feeling our way and getting nowhere. All my colleagues were young, all male except one. For the first week or two we just sat in the common room saying nothing at all, afraid of each other. It took several weeks for us to realize that we are all feeling the same way. One reason for the lack of confidence was that my predecessor, the former Russian teacher, was a dirty Communist, the horror of the whole Kapuvar. It was probably believed that all teachers of Russian must be Communists like him. The whole intelligentsia of Kapuvar, the doctors and other white collar people, were quite conspicuously seizing me up, but eventually they must have made up their minds that I am not the same sort as my predecessor. Never in my life will I again be in a crowd as good and honest and

intelligent as my fellow teachers at Kapuvar. We were all one after a month. We were incensed at the crimes against the human spirit committed by the syllabus. We quietly attempted to fill a few of the worst gaps in our respective subjects. I gave voluntary afternoon classes in world literature and made my pupils read. They were mostly peasant children, and had good brains. We began to be increasingly open with the children, and they responded wonderfully.

On the 22nd October, a student from the Sopron Academy called at the school, and we assembled the children for him. He talked about the 14 points. We declared the school's support and formulated 12 points for secondary school students. From the time of that meeting right until I left on the 7th November, no more lectures took place. Literally everybody was in the school from dawn to nightfall. In terms of action, we did nothing much, except that we removed the Red Stars from a few public buildings and went demonstratively to Mass in a body. Otherwise, we just talked and talked things over with the children.

Attila [REDACTED]'s daughter was my pupil and Uncle [REDACTED] himself was our focus. We all looked up to him for guidance. We had very close contacts with the teaching staffs of the Kapuvar elementary ("general") schools.

They handled the children during these days the same way as we did, although on a different level. Kapuvar delegated three people, including myself, to the Dunantul Revolutionary Council in Győr. I went to Győr on foot and spent one day there. I merely attended the council and played no active role there. I took home leaflets, the children copied them and distributed them to peasants, etc.

On the 7th November, Russian tanks arrived in Kapuvar and asked for interpreters. We (I and a few other teachers and a good many other Kapuvar people) did not even go home from the gymnasium, but walked straight across the frontier.

I am sure I could have stayed ^{at} home. Nothing much would have happened to me, I was no more compromised than the average person in Kapuvar. But after the way I talked to the children at the school, after they placed all their trust and confidence in me, I just could not begin again to teach them in a way they did not want. I could not start lying to them again. After these days of exhilaration, I could not again face the intellectual and spiritual misery which Communism involves. Maybe the children would have known that what I teach and what I say is not my real conviction, but the authorities would have transferred me to another school before long, where the children would not know me.

They have already begun to do this to my colleagues who stayed in Kapuvar. At new schools, they do not share with their pupils the experience of last October, the children have no means of knowing who they really are, and nor have the teachers a way of revealing their feelings. The result is distrust by the children, and this I just could not bear again.