

SPECIAL ATTENTION: Mr. Galantiere
Mr. Sears
Mr. Walker
Mr. Michie
Mr. Griffith (36 copies)

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HUNGARY
(REDEFECTION)

RE-EMIGRANTS (2700) ✓

THE REPATRIATION OF HUNGARIAN REFUGEES FROM FRANCE

SOURCE PARIS: RFE News Bureau.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: From February to June 1957, with special regard on May 1957.

EVALUATION COMMENT: This is a very good and interesting round-up on the development of the redefection problem concerning Hungarian refugees living in France.

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General Movement (since November 1956)

During the seven months from November 1956 to 1 June 1957 altogether 11,375 Hungarian refugees arrived in France.

Included in this overall figure were one hundred persons holding legal passports and 700 refugees awaited at the METZ welcome center, between May 28 and June 1.

Excluding the 800 persons mentioned above, the remaining 10,575 refugees arrived from:

Austrian camps: 9,574
Yugoslav camps: 1,001

During the past three months, the number of Hungarian refugees from Yugoslav camps has been steadily increasing. Between May first and 25, 320 refugees from Yugoslav camps have arrived in France.

From the total of 11,375 persons, the following categories must be deducted:

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2,347 Hungarians who from France emigrated to other free countries (2,203 to Canada and the remainder mainly to Australia, the United States, Israel, etc.) and

447 Hungarians who demanded repatriation to Hungary.

Thus, according to official statistics, 8,581 Hungarian refugees remained in France, on 1 June 1957.

Present Situation

1,526 Hungarians are still living in the four remaining camps:

NANCY (Meurthe-et-Moselle Departement),
MONTBELIARD (Doubs Departement)
CHATELLERAULT (Haute Vienne Departement), where the number of refugees is already negligible, since this latter camp is to be dissolved in the near future; and

ROUEN (Seine-Maritime Departement) which houses about 400 persons all of whom wish to emigrate overseas.

Furthermore some 110 Hungarians are staying in two provisional dwelling centers, at

JOUHET (Vienne Departement), and
ST.GENET-LAVAL (Rhone Departement).

These refugees are already employed and are living only temporarily in the centers, until they can move into regular apartments.

The already mentioned group of 700 Hungarians arrived in the last days of May is accommodated in the barracks of METZ (Moselle Departement) where a welcome center has been organized.

The remaining 6,245 Hungarians are dispersed throughout France, mainly in the industrial regions around PARIS, as well as in the Departements of Nord and East and wherever they found work. They have started their individual adaptation to French life and about 2,800 of them have demanded and already obtained their refugee certificate ("Carte Blanche") from the French Bureau for the Protection of Refugees and Apatrides, which established their administrative position in relation to the French authorities.

It should be noted that only between 20 and 25 Hungarians who had been equipped with the "Carte Blanche" eventually demanded repatriation.

However, despite these encouraging signs, the primary

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worry of the Hungarian refugees does not involve their legal position in France, nor their repatriation, but their great desire is to proceed overseas.

Since the number of repatriation candidates is so small, no special camps for repatriates have been created in France.

Statistical Data of Repatriation

The total of Hungarian refugees in France who decided to return to Hungary is 447. This figure is valid for the time between February 27 (when news of the first repatriation train was published) and May 25. Of these 447 officially known cases, 36 only were dated after May first, 1957.

Thus, out of the total of 11,375 Hungarian refugees in France, these 447 represent 3.93 per cent;

out of the 8,581 refugees presently living in France, the 36 repatriates of May represent 0.42 per cent;

finally, the 36 repatriates of May represent 8.05 per cent of the total of 447 repatriates.

Characteristics of the Hungarian Repatriates from France

Division by sex of the 447 Hungarian repatriates is as follows:

381 men
50 women
18 minors (less than 18 years, of both sexes)

The 36 repatriated in May were:

24 men
12 women

So, May repatriation represents 66 per cent men and 33 per cent women, while the male-female proportion among the Hungarian refugees in France is 80 per cent men and 20 per cent women.

The division by profession of 146 repatriates only (the rest not having answered the question regarding their work) was:

107 workers (72 specialists and 35 skilled workers)
19 without profession (women)
6 students

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6 artists
5 free profession
3 intellectuals (teachers)
1 technician

More detailed statistics could be established for the group of the 36 repatriated during May:

14 workers (10 specialists and four skilled workers)
7 office employees and artisans
6 without profession (women)
2 students
2 miners
2 intellectuals
1 technician.

Only two of the repatriates of May did not answer the question regarding their profession.

So, the majority of the repatriates consist of workers who, together with the miners (i.e. 14+2) represent 44 per cent of the total of repatriates. It is to be noted, that the average repatriate is a specialized worker, while the average refugee is a skilled worker.

The division according to age, of 280 repatriates (the remaining not having answered that question) was as follows:

born between 1900 and 1910:	9
born between 1910 and 1920:	27
born between 1920 and 1930:	80
born between 1930 and 1935:	59
born between 1935 and 1940:	102
born after 1940:	3

Complete statistics could be established for the 36 refugees repatriated during May:

born before 1900:	1
born between 1900 and 1910:	0
born between 1910 and 1920:	2
born between 1920 and 1930:	7
born between 1930 and 1935:	9
born between 1935 and 1940:	15
born after 1940:	2

Overall statistics, as well as those established for only May, show that repatriation is most tempting for refugees aged between 22 and 27, although the average age of the Hungarian refugees in France is 28.

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The division according to dwelling place, for the 36 repatriated during May, only, was as follows:

10 were from BUDAPEST,
20 were from provincial towns,
6 were from the countryside.

Thus, the average repatriate lived in a provincial town, while the average refugees came from BUDAPEST (more than 50 per cent). It should be added that 14 out of the 20 coming from provincial towns had been born in the country.

Based on the above exposed statistical facts, the following characteristics of the average Hungarian repatriate from France can be noted:

a specialized worker, about 25, coming from a provincial town and born in the country;

while the Hungarian refugee in France is a skilled worker, 28 years old, who had lived in BUDAPEST.

The difference between the two groups is rendered understandable by the fact that skilled workers find work more easily than specialized workers; that family ties are still very strong in the young people who more quickly feel abandoned, and that provincials obviously encounter greater difficulties to adapt themselves to a new life than refugees from BUDAPEST who do not have to alter all of their habits.

Repatriation During May 1957

The recourse to repatriation receded somewhat during May. This was caused mostly by the fact that possibilities for further emigration overseas were brighter, particularly as far as Canada was concerned, but also with regard to the United States, since the difference between refugees coming from an Austrian camp and those sent directly to France had been abolished.

However, there are still some refugees among the 8,581 remaining persons who hesitate. No numerical evaluation is possible, considering the extreme instability of the persons involved. The idea of repatriation usually dawns during a moment of deep depression by either professional or economic hardships, or even fits of anger at various forms of everpresent red-tape. In other words, repatriation is a kind of "easy solution" to all problems.

Reasons for Repatriation

About 40 per cent of the repatriates returned because of family reasons (broken families, broken engagements, mistresses and lovers, old and needy parents remaining in Hungary, etc.);

About 30 per cent are disillusioned about the West. Apparently

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they had dreamt about the West as a kind of promised land where vulgar demands, such as study or work, were not necessary for subsistence and where "one can keep on dancing at 'Pigalle' all day long". (It seems that "Pigalle" has a particularly romantic attraction: a couple of young men who had escaped from a camp, walked more than 100 kilometers to "see Pigalle"). It should be emphasized that this "disillusion about the West" hardly ever had a political character.

About 15 per cent asked for repatriation being discouraged by various difficulties -- true or imaginary -- in the slow administrative procedures, by their incapacity to understand the language, and pushed forward by traditional Hungarian impatience.

About 10 per cent only of the repatriates returned as a result of the propaganda campaign led by the French Communist Party which sent out agitators to frighten the refugees by hinting that they will be "exploited", "forced into the Foreign Legion", "sent off to fight in Algeria", etc. Consequently it is "much safer" to return home.

About 5 per cent of the repatriates had various reasons, one of which was of materialistic nature: there were still some who possessed a little house somewhere in Hungary or a patch of land, and who decided to return to their property rather than face the uncertainties of refugee existence.

It is obvious that a combination of several of the above-mentioned reasons might have inclined the repatriates to return.

Concerning the attitude toward the decision for repatriation or not, the following incident should not be omitted: in one of the camps, a Hungarian refugee inquired from the commission recruiting workers desirous of remaining in France about the possibilities of further emigration to Canada. The same person returned the following day to the same commission demanding to be informed about repatriation procedures....

The Hungarian Refugee Office in PARIS, moreover, has in its files twice as many repatriation applications as actual repatriates who have left France according to official statistics. Most of the additional applications were made by persons who later changed their minds.

It should finally be mentioned that repatriates coming out of a camp (they are not many!) are, sometimes, very active persons who cannot stand months of enforced idleness in camps, while repatriates already moved away from camps (considerably more!) are passive elements who encounter great difficulties in their adaption to the Western way of living.

Repatriation Procedure

Once a refugee has made the decision to return to Hungary, he has to visit the Hungarian Consulate General in PARIS. If this is impossible, he has to write a letter, announcing his desire to be repatriated. All such letters demanding repatriation are forwarded to the Consulate General, even if by error of the applicant it would have been addressed to the French authorities or to some international body.

The Consulate General sends out a questionnaire and when it is filled out, the same Consulate issues a "Return Certificate" against payment of 10,000 francs to cover the costs of the voyage. The first repatriation convoy of mid-February was entirely financed by the Hungarian Legation, but since then both the Consulate and the Legation systematically refused all requests for train fares. They even notified the French authorities that they wish for the repatriation candidates to continue their work, until they have amassed the money needed for the trip. The payment of the 10,000 francs is a condition for the delivery of the "Return Certificate". A few exceptions for the benefit of "particularly useful" persons, such as technicians and specialized workers, are known to have been made. But, in general, the Hungarian authorities are so adamant that several would-be repatriates finally desisted, lacking the required sum.

A Hungarian refugee who obtained his "Return Certificate" is called for an interview with a French police official who gives him an oral warning (see chapter "Attitude of the French Authorities"). If the refugee still insists upon leaving the police will help to get him -- via the Ministry for Foreign Affairs -- a transit visa for Austria (Western Germany does not demand any visas for direct transit). Although the visa applications are presented collectively, the visas issued are individual and personal. This fact facilitates late change of mind during the trip. Austria usually grants the transit visas within a week or two, and has hitherto not refused a single one.

Once the refugee has obtained his Austrian transit visa, he is again called to the French police, where all his French papers are taken from him. The only document the repatriate is left with, is the "Return Certificate" which is to be stamped with the French exit permission and the Austrian transit visa.

No restrictions exist as far as luggage is concerned, and normal French customs regulations are applied at the French frontier. It is, of course, impossible to say what happens to the suitcases on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Certain repatriates were able to do extensive shopping before they left France.

The repatriates are by no means obliged to travel in groups. Yet this is what happens most frequently and very few

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cases of individual travel are known.

Activities of the Hungarian Authorities

Until now, the Hungarian authorities have only sporadically and feebly interested themselves in repatriation in general and in propaganda in particular, with the only exception of the cases of minors who are treated in chapter "Repatriation of Minors".

No official or systematic action was taken at any moment or in any sector. The only action worth while mentioning was the Hungarian Consul General Imre REVESZ's visit to the camp of METZ, last April, which did not result in anything, but some erratic personal contacts. The Consul General, convinced of the hostile and decided attitude of the majority of the refugees, quickly retreated from METZ.

Apparently, the Hungarian authorities prefer to establish letter contacts with refugees. All kinds of newspapers (mainly "Magyar Hírek") and propaganda brochures, printed in BUDAPEST, keep on arriving in the camps, where repatriation appeals are also regularly received. It appears, that the Hungarian Consulate General in PARIS has a more or less complete list of the addresses of Hungarian refugees resettled outside the camps. This list may have been established thanks to systematic and minute control of mail to and from France by the post censorship office in BUDAPEST. It is also possible that local branches of the French Communist Party help the Hungarian Consulate General in this matter. At any rate their list seems -- as far as resettled persons are concerned -- far more complete than those of the French or Hungarian Refugee Offices.

The only marked "success" of the Hungarian authorities was the repatriation last February, of 80 Hungarians from the MONTLUÇON (Allier Departement) camp, where Hungarian Communist agents, infiltrated among the refugees, took over practically the Hungarian leadership of the camp and organized a repatriation convoy with themselves in the first row. Since then, any repetition of this attempt has been made impossible by the vigilance of the French authorities and the common sense of the refugees.

According to information emanating from sources generally well informed about the intention of the Hungarian authorities in PARIS, it is very likely that repatriation propaganda will start again from June on, and that the bait will be, this time, the repayment of travel expenses.

Notwithstanding the relative passiveness of the Hungarian authorities, voluntary agitators turn up time and again, in various

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camps. They propagate repatriation either out of excessive zeal, or because they want to chalk up some merits prior to their own repatriation, or upon the instigation even of the French Communist Party which hands out "pocket money" to assure itself of such services. However, these amateur agitators are not much more successful than their masters.

As far as agitators from the outside are concerned, who have been identified in the camps, they never refer themselves to the Hungarian authorities. They are invariably sent out by the French Communist Party and are mostly old Hungarian exiles (from 1919 in particular) who still speak Hungarian but are already French citizens and as such cannot be expelled.

Attitude of the French Authorities

The French authorities permit no pressure whatever to be exercised upon the refugees and it is thus just as illegal to retain a Hungarian by force in France, as to entice him to repatriation.

However, the French authorities issue a warning -- through an interpreter -- to each Hungarian refugee who announces his decision to return to Hungary (see: chapter VII, point 3). This warning simply notifies the refugee of the difficulties he might encounter in Hungary and of the fact that he leaves fully conscious of the consequences of his step and thus relieving France of all responsibility for him.

Official lists demanding Austrian transit visas, carry moreover a clause which again liberates France of her responsibility. Yet the same text guarantees the possibility to return to France for anyone who changes his mind on his way toward Hungary. This text runs as follows: "The persons listed below have declared of their free will to return to Hungary and agree to be handed over to the Hungarian authorities. Those who, during their transit of Austria revoke their decision to return to Hungary or who are prevented by the Hungarian authorities to enter Hungary, will be taken back to France. In any such case, the cost of transportation from Austria to France will be met by the French authorities."

The French administration also pays travel expenses from the provinces to PARIS for would-be repatriates and, in case the refugee finally decides to remain in France after all, the trip back to his former domicile.

From the above, the French attitude clearly emerges: France has declared herself willing to receive an unlimited number of Hungarian refugees and this liberalism is applied also to their departure, even if it means repatriation. The French authorities, however, issue a serious warning and explain the risks run by the repatriates. Only minors are excepted from this procedure. Even if they agree to repatriation, they are not permitted to leave France until an individual inquiry has been made.

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It should be added that the French authorities — who have ample experience with refugees — are fully aware of the fact that almost everybody who once toyed with the idea of repatriation will remain an unstable and troublesome element.

The attitude of the Hungarian Refugee Bureau in PARIS is completely adjusted to that of the French authorities.

Attitude of the International Red Cross

The International Red Cross Organization has declared itself incompetent to deal with repatriation matter. The same attitude was adopted by the French National Red Cross too, according to a letter sent by its president, H.E. FRANÇOIS-PONCET, to the Foreign Ministry. The Red Cross also declined a French proposal to handle the investigation concerning the true intentions of parents who remained in Hungary and whose minor children demanded repatriation. (see chapter "Repatriation of Minors").

Clandestine Repatriation

Considering the liberal attitude of the French authorities, there hardly exists any "clandestine repatriation" which would imply too many hardships in view of the distance between France and Hungary, the ignorance of the language, etc. Exceptions are criminals, professional vagabonds, romantic children and the like. In case if any of them would be apprehended, nothing would happen unless the person were guilty of some crime.

The most frequent and simplest procedure is to seek the aid of the Hungarian Consulate General as described in chapter "Repatriation Procedure". Those who repent their decision before they leave French territory can return without any further formalities and their French documents will be restored to them without further delay.

Thus there is nothing to promote any clandestine repatriation movement from France.

Repatriation of Minors

The repatriation of minors constitutes a very specific problem. Three times to date, Consul General REVESZ has presented energetic notes at the Quai d'Orsay, clamoring for the immediate repatriation of Hungarian minors in France. He was told that France would not repatriate anyone against his free will, except in cases stipulated by international law that is when the parents demand expressly the repatriation of their minor child. PARIS was convinced that no such demand would be made in BUDAPEST.

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Conclusions

The relatively limited number of Hungarian repatriates and the rather negligible reasons for their decisions seem to indicate that this entire matter, despite a certain ephemeric importance, remains in the margins of the life of the majority of Hungarian refugees who really chose freedom, for well defined reasons.

End.