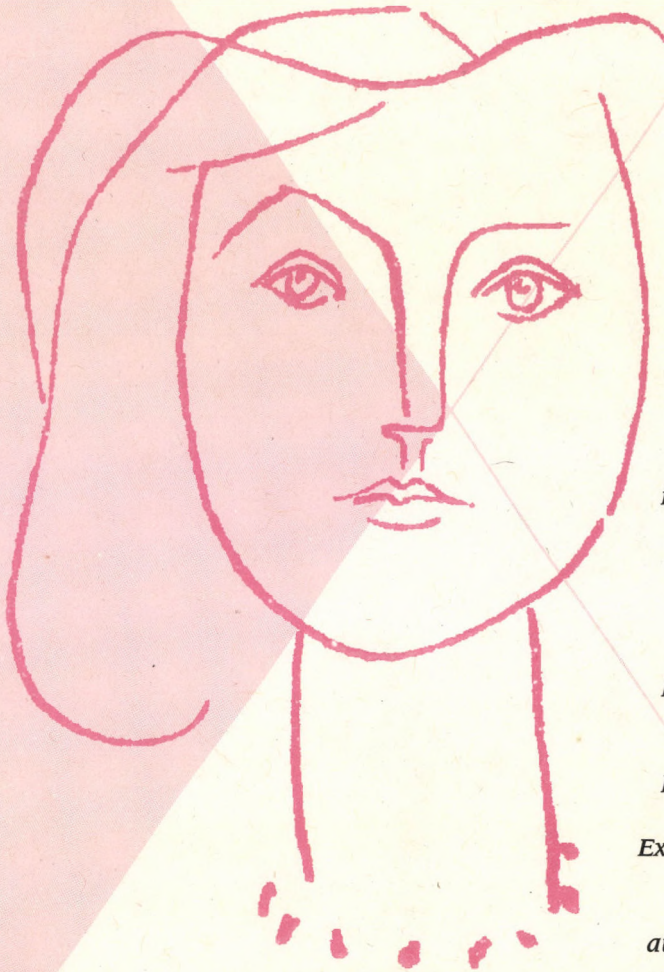
The Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 34 • Winter 1993 • $6.00



The Hungarian Quarterly

The Hungarian Quarterly
formerly *The New Hungarian Quarterly*
MTI, 8 Naphegy tér, Budapest H–1016, Hungary
Telephone: (361) 175-6722 Fax: (361) 118-8297
Published by MTI
Printed in Hungary by MTI Printers *on recycled paper*

HU ISSN 0028-5390 Index: 2684

Cover & Design: PART (György Kara & Péter Nagy)

Annual subscriptions:
$24 ($35 for institutions).
Add $6 postage per year for Europe,
$10 for USA and Canada,
$12 to other destinations and $20 by air
to anywhere in the world.
Sample or individual back numbers $9,
postage included.
Payment in dollars or equivalent.
Annual subscriptions in Hungary Ft 1,200
Single copy Ft 250
Send orders to *The Hungarian Quarterly*
P.O. Box 3, Budapest H-1426, Hungary

Articles appearing in this journal are indexed in
HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS;
INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE ABSTRACTS;
AMERICA, HISTORY & LIFE;
THE MUSIC INDEX;
ARTS & HUMANITIES CITATIONS INDEX;
IBZ (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF PERIODICAL LITERATURE);
IBR (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF BOOK REVIEWS)

The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. XXXIV • No. 132 • Winter 1993

HISTORY

BOOKS & AUTHORS

MUSIC

FILM

ILLUSTRATIONS

Courtesy of the Ludwig Museum, Budapest

László Végel

Balkan Testament

Part 2

Spring 1992

For years now the start of spring has been symbolized by the gradual filling up of the Újvidék café terraces. Here in the south, on the edge of the Balkans, and even further south, in the Balkans, or on the Mediterranean shores where I've been more often than anywhere else, the terraces are used earlier than, for instance, in Budapest. This spring, volunteers in their khaki uniforms bask in the sun around the tables, revolvers hanging from their belts, and brag about their battle experiences. It's alright for them: they go off for a few days' active service, then return to town as if it was only here they could sniff out new duties. These "brave men" were alarmed to discover in the battle-line that not only are they armed, but so too are those defending themselves. They are trickling back slowly to where the weak have no weapons. "Who do you think the fascists shoot at first," asks one of my Serbian friends. "At us, who have apparently betrayed our nation, or at you, the minorities?" I don't give it much thought. "At you, at you first," I reply in an objective tone. His relieved sigh makes me shudder. How many people wait for this form of penitence! The outside world doesn't hear the sigh, only those do who live here in this town and spy out the terraces from a distance to be sure of avoiding those where arms are vaunted.

N. tells me that the Moravica deserters keep about 10 litres of petrol in reserve so that, if they happen to get caught, they can set light to their own houses. Making sure that the fruit of their grandfathers', their fathers' and their own work doesn't get into alien hands, that strangers don't move into their houses if they are dragged off to the Bosnian hills to shed their blood for a new Serbian state. The war establishment talks about the Jan Palachs of the Bácska with loathing. Woe to any country that needs heroes like this!

Just about every day I find the doors of the bus are closed in front of my nose. I don't understand the wanderings of my attention, after all there's no focus for it any more. I'm absolutely aware that the door is going to shut, I only have to stretch my legs a little bit more, but

---

László Végel

is a Hungarian novelist and playwright who lives in Novi Sad (Újvidék) in the Vojvodina. Part I of a selection from his forthcoming journal was published in the previous issue of this magazine

I'm not capable of that either. Not capable, or don't want to? There's only a shade of difference left between protest and resignation, and it's more and more difficult for me to differentiate between them. For a moment, I waver, but I don't wait for the next bus, I set out on foot; I tramp down winding sidestreets, I choose the longer way because I haven't the patience to wait. Sometimes my days are spent in rushing about, sometimes in idle contemplation, there's no explanation for either, I make a guess that my sense of time has stopped functioning. My whole existence has become abnormal. In the morning I queue up for milk, in the afternoon for cooking oil. Yesterday I bought 20 litres of oil; my son insists it'll be enough for two years. Haven't I noticed we don't cook any more? How many years do I think the war will last?

The Belgrade TV news reporter proudly announces that the fourth Serbian state has been formed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, in other words, the killing has started in Bosnia. They start to tear at the most sensitive nerve, at the end of the first day there is news of about thirty dead. Early in the evening fighter planes fly low over Újvidék; they have been sweeping the skies for months, I live with them. I've also experienced that most of the planes fly over the apartment blocks between six and seven in the evening. I can't tell whether they are heading for Baranya or Bosnia. The hated Yugoslav Titanic is sinking embarrassingly slowly in bloody waves. Maybe the grandchildren will forgive her pitiable sins, maybe their memories will gloss over them, and they will draw quite different lessons from her than we do. Now, however, she is spoken of with the same loathing as the "prison of nations" at the turn of the century, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was. Everything that's going on around me is like a primitive reprise. Maybe there are still some people like me who think that their eyes are deceiving them out of sleeplessness, because they consider it unbelievable that the generations following the fall of the Empire have learnt nothing whatsoever. Behind the collapse of the supranational state structure the dreadful picture is exposed: the ruins of socialism are bloody almost everywhere in multi-national environments; in this region the multi-party system creeps stealthily towards us, armed and in battle fatigues.

At night a well-known actress telephones from Sarajevo. She asks me to check when trains leave from Belgrade to Budapest or Vienna. Anywhere! "Are the trains safe?," she asks. She wants to travel with her children. "Listen," she says, "the grenades are bursting, the children are awake all night. The Serbs are swarming down from the hills around Sarajevo and shooting at us, they're shooting up the old town," she sobs. One of the children cries out. His mother tells him to be quiet so that people in Újvidék can hear how the city is being shelled. I've got a feeling that an awful lot of people in Sarajevo are picking up receivers and phoning to all parts of the world. I can hear sounds reminiscent of the ominous midnight rumbling of the sea. In his short story "Letter from 1920", Ivo Andrić writes about the Bosnian disease: the endemic hatred which the Bosnians are unconscious of, yet which filters into all their deeds, even the best ones. All this is recorded by a Jewish boy,

Maks Levenfeld, who flees from the hatred in 1920. He dreams of Latin America, of getting as far away as possible from Bosnia. He finally settles in Paris, and in 1938, during the Spanish Civil War, he works for the Republican Army in a hospital in Aragon. He fled from irrational hatred and became the victim of an air raid. The writer admits that he listened in astonishment to Maks, who congratulated the victors after the Great War and at the same time was deeply sorry for them, because the losers at least know where they are and what they have to do, but the victors can't even guess what's in store for them. Maks's prediction came true. That becomes quite clear here at the very centre of this madness, which today everyone interprets or fans to suit his own political aims, and the brutality of which is so great that, when faced with it, many people are prepared to gilt their own former authoritarian rule, and cynically idealize the old days of the communist state. Many try to convince us that the sins will be forgiven, just let us go on lying. Others draw their arguments from everyday political skirmishes when describing the state of affairs. I think the roots go deeper than that. "It's enough to say that some of the victorious nations didn't learn from the fate of the Habsburg Empire, and a large part of the old methods are still in force in the field of education and public administration," warned Oszkár Jászi in the thirties. Victory tormented and morally mutilated the people living here who weren't capable of handling the moral burdens of victory, the duties of the victors. Serbia now has to confront defeat, something which several small nations in Central Europe were forced to do earlier this century.

The deserters aren't in hiding any more, they are demonstrating, grouping, and arguing in public. Is it possible that in the fear infiltrating our whole life the first seeds of a civil society are appearing? If they start proceedings now and again against those who refuse military service, the accused usually get a fine or, more rarely, one or two weeks in jail. All this means that the conscripts first and foremost had to conquer their own fear and with that they accumulated a little civil self-awareness. A big price had to be paid for the first seeds! I hate to think what dangers are in store for those who learnt the first lessons of freedom amid such fear. Sometimes I even feel sorry for those who left, who do not submerge daily in fear and don't feel that ghastly inner disintegration, the contradictory force of the yearning for freedom, the traces of which we carry within us like a birthmark. We'll have need of this fear, however nauseating an experience it may be. The galley-slave can speak enthusiastically about love for his country, not because fate has taken him far away, but because he is sitting forever in one place, every minute he repeats the same movements, and he doesn't think of that distant land which he sees from the bowels of the ship as reality.

I travel to Belgrade after a long break; I walk up the steep Balkan Street in trepidation. At one stage the East Central European opposition used to meet in this city. In the eighties the Belgrade platforms, magazines, literary papers were the meeting place for the Polish, Hungarian and Czech alternative thinkers. Now it has become the city of lonely intellectuals, suspected of being traitors and branded as

cosmopolitans. The disinherited have a hard task ahead: they have to revive a submerged tradition.

I don't see a soul in the centre of Újvidék. In the last few months I am more and more often surprised because I feel that the town is deserted, almost as if on a word of command, for some unknown reason. As the summer approaches, I am confronted with this constantly. Or has it happened at other times too, just that I didn't attach any great importance to it? In the office of the Reform Party they have created a radio bridge with Sarajevo. The transmitter is rigged up in a cellar and the programme is broadcast from there while the city is being shelled. I talk to Zdravko Grebo; our talk is broadcast live, people hiding in cellars listen to the cellar-radio. The Chamber Theatre has been hit by a bomb, says Grebo, that's where your play *Medea's Mirror* was put on a couple of years ago. We'll be playing to an empty square soon, he continues. Among the ruins, I mutter to myself with a sigh. It occurs to me that in this unfortunate region every performance should be staged among ruins.

In Belgrade the university students are demonstrating! At long last! This is something I've been waiting for for months, years. The whole day and night I sit beside the radio and listen to the news. All my life I've lived under a news black-out; I can't get the "free" Belgrade stations in Újvidék. I never had enough money to buy an adequate long-range receiver. Now I'm also more or less imagining the events, and meanwhile various timeshifts get confused inside me. I remember the night of March 9, 1991 when the phone rang after midnight. Then too I wished I could have bought a long-range receiver, and I worried about what would happen to the students trapped on the Sava bridge. The police had thrown tear-gas bombs among them and had sealed off the bridge. The cold *kossava* was beating against my window and I imagined how bitterly cold it must be on the bridge. Late in the evening the tanks of the People's Army had entered Belgrade, I saw them sweep down the main street of the city in some footage of silent film on the TV screen. Tito's generals ordered the tanks into Marshall Tito Street. At about two o'clock I got a call from the editorial office of one of the opposition papers. I felt as if I had woken with a start, though I'm sure I was awake. They asked me to express, in a few sentences, my opinion on the events of the previous day. The printing presses were ready. So long as tanks are ordered into the towns there can be no question of democracy, I said, and in the meantime I realized that my half-asleep state was due to the fact that the sight of the 1968 demonstration of Belgrade university students was weighing on my mind. Then too I had travelled to Belgrade and I saw the tanks advancing beside the highway. And on the morning of March 10, 1991, I travelled to Belgrade and I heard the newspaper vendors on the Terazia shouting out my name along with others'. I bought a copy of the paper from them and walked over to the parliament; in a nearby sidestreet I caught sight of a tank. Ever since then I've always been agitated when reminded of the difference between the possible and the impossible; my meetings with tanks convinced me that we don't interpret these concepts in the

same way. For decades those who were the advocates of the possible ordered the tanks onto the streets, and took care that in reality the temptation of the impossible shouldn't even arise by chance. In that case it was better for the tanks to come, commanded politicians who had taken an oath to organization and objective possibilities. The sense of reality was the whip in which many knots have been tied since them.

I run into Milena M. in the street. She is with her daughter of about 15; they are taking home the washing powder they have just bought from smugglers. The grey strands in her hair are glittering, but now, at the time of the student activity, I see her once again as the sociology student who marched in June 1968 to the walls of the university with her fellow students and proclaimed a strike. The authorities called them CIA agents. The workers condemned the students, as it happens. So, allegedly, did the peasants. Helmeted police surrounded the building of the Faculty of Humanities, and troops were concentrated in the neighbourhood of Belgrade. The party chiefs were contemplating the possibility of military intervention against Milena and company. When they had managed to crush the movement, they planted informers in the student hostels; the people's defence and home guard committees went into action and took care that children never again turned against their fathers. Milena's reward were eight years of unemployment. She had her child under the burden of being considered morally and politically unfit. And the morally and politically unfit could not expect to buy their children oranges. Maybe so that she should feel some moral satisfaction in front of her daughter, I mentioned the Belgrade demonstrations. Only then did her face show the sadness that she had had to conceal for years. Since I was well aware of the reason for her fear, after all in the interest of survival she had to forget her past, I was once again forced to conclude—as I've done so many times—that when maximalism doesn't bring about change, then the minimum too can make us happy. If one day this reluctantly accepted lesson will be unnecessary, then the dread, humiliation, hang-ups, and traumas of the past will come to the surface. Only then will it become clear how much this society has suffered. The worse thing is that those who twenty years ago stifled the student disturbances are now welcoming them; those who based their careers on the condemnation of students like Milena, and branded for life anyone who went as far as to say a good word about the hot summer of 1968, are crooning in a paternal way. In other words, nothing has changed yet.

I read one of the graffiti of the Belgrade student demonstrators. "Hang on, we're coming—The Sixth Fleet." Even on the streets people are talking about military intervention. Many think they'll bomb the airfields, the bridges, the railway junctions. I never felt the breath of civil war at such close quarters as I did then. Who had bought how many kilogrammes of flour and sugar, or the amount of oil someone had got in store became an everyday subject of conversation. But what is the good of oil and flour if we have to shelter in the cellars? Gangs of rowdies will loot the flats. What happens to those who will find no place in the shelters? The district heating

won't be working by the autumn. The hospitals, schools and theatres will be closed. Government party politicians will speechify on constructive pessimism. So far everyone experienced fear personally, now even that has become collectivized. One group of intellectuals accuses the other of putting themselves at the service of war mindedness. Anyone who does this out of deep conviction and with real arguments is bound to come up against the following dilemma: if thoughts could really have such force, did we do anything throughout those long years to express the kind of universal and sound ideals which would have nullified the former? Or could it be that only inhuman thoughts have any effect? Or in the stalls of the communist state was it just the enlightened, liberal, democratic ethos that was neglected by many in the name of comfortable aestheticism? What can we do with the irresponsibility of innocent intellectuals? If we confront these vital questions then it won't simply be a matter of wrangling or accusations, but the humane yet systematic decontamination of the totalitarian mind. It'll be as important as the denazification of Germany.

It is conspicuous that the failed politicians explain their time in power as complete determinism, even in the spirit of fatalism, in order to deny responsibility. But they look at the years after their fall only through the lens of personal responsibility, they reckon that at that time those legendary "objective necessities" weren't in force. Isaiah Berlin rightly points out the danger of this. After all, if we acknowledge the validity of determinism, we have to make a radical re-examination of the language of ethics. The freedom of the wolves always meant death to the lambs, and no amount of false interpretation can alter this, just as wolf-eating lambs don't exist, neither have lamb-loving wolves ever prowled among us. The prevailing wolves, on the other hand, only re-examine the language of ethics when it suits them.

What joy does a blind man take in looking at the sun? Does the surmise that the sun is shining soothe the bitterness of his blindness? It was easy for those who knocked down the solid and visible Berlin Wall! But what should be done about the walls built of gelatinous, slimy material, most of which have been made invisible? In ex-Yugoslavia we lived between walls like these. Why shouldn't I think that life here was like a boat which capsized on the open sea, with the members of a distinguished company sitting on the terrace of a smart hotel snatching the telescope out of each other's hands in their rush to delight in the unbridled power of nature.

Summer 1992

At long last! Following their Belgrade counterparts, the students of the Faculty of Humanities at Újvidék have gone on strike. Every ten years or so this small town in Central Europe wakes from its historical lethargy at least once—or not even once—but only to the extent of recalling of its wounds, about which no one ever dared speak openly. We carried our secret like a birthmark; only a suspended,

traumatic attitude to life bears witness to it. What sort of force produced this rootless suspension? What developed this inclination to escape into anonymity, to lead a protean life? What nourishes this permanent readiness for ever more options?

Újvidék was an important stage in the colonization plans of the Yugoslavia created at Versailles. The Great Migration after 1945 once again deepened the old wounds. Historical nostalgia was distorted into a flimsy decoration and, without autonomous civil freedom, the plan for a harmonious coming together of disparate elements ended in failure. It is impossible to build the Tower of Babel in a dictatorship. The principle of *divide et impera*, which logically derived from the one-party system, was concealed behind the slogans of fraternity and unity. What better proof of this could there be than the fact that the numbers of those who were meant to wane, certainly did so. Whole national groups disappeared from the Vojvodina, 300,000 Germans, for instance. The ethnic map of Újvidék was altered.

This is how the vacuum grew around us—and within us. We grew more and more depressed, meanwhile life turned false. Nor was the neurosis of feeling in a vacuum desirable, it was after all, a reminder of the permanent shortage which the new elite had created. Provincialism and the idolizing of decorum purred in the hands of authoritarian government—especially in the leaden years that followed 1968. This was the happy time of countrified bowing and scraping.

The students on strike in the amphitheatre of the Faculty of Humanities are making up for squandered time, which is something, even if right now it only stands for the distant breeze of Timothy Garton Ash's "refolution". The official press chastises the students' lack of patriotism, the authorities survey the events, helplessly and in ominous silence. I accept the students' invitation to speak at their strike forum, as if I were to step out from under an invisible frosted glass shelter. The hall is packed, the sinister outside quiet hangs heavily on the friendly silence inside. The militants would love to trigger off an incident. The students have most to fear from Voivode Šešelj's men. As far back as I remember, young people in Europe haven't ever had to look so closely into the Medusa face of evil. I end by reading a passage from my novel about the leaden decades, *Parainézis*, which is about the news spreading in town that the students are demonstrating. The heroes of the novel rush to the campus, only to find the buildings deserted. Nothing would cause me greater pleasure than to learn that, after all these years, the news proved to be true. Perhaps as a writer of fiction I may live to see the reincarnation of reality, that I managed to carve a shape from the fog of reality after all. There was no other reality, just that whirling fog of obscurity.

Columns of light on Liberty Square. The Újvidék clergy of all denominations pray for peace. I identify supplications in Hungarian, Serb, Slovene, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Slovak, and Arab. The citizens, whose majority are native Serbian speakers, are moved by words in languages unknown to them which, at other times irritate them, or give rise to suspicion. I am not just thinking of political intolerance but of more powerful instincts which, on the rare occasions of trips abroad, overcome me too, when, roused from dozing, *Angst* seizes me. At times like that I freed myself of the

anxiety which welled up from my subconscious—an anxiety that had been drilled into me for years—by telling myself consciously that I would spend the rest of my life enveloped by foreign words. There had been no Hungarian speech on an Újvidék inner city square for decades now, if on occasion, in keeping with communist political etiquette, there was a daft rhetorical phrase or two, the crowd immediately showed its irritation. But now there are verses from the Bible, the liturgical form cast the spell of a mysterious metalanguage over those present, who listened in awe to the clergy. Would the anxiously awaited civil society be capable of such a shock of emancipation? But will freedom ever be able to do what the fear of death can, or trembling in the face of hunger, or bombs dropping from the sky?

A man of about sixty wearing carefully pressed cream-coloured trousers and a white shirt is loitering at the corner of the Futak market talking to a cruedly made-up tart. A zealous lottery ticket seller is doing his utmost to force the first prize on them. An old man sitting on the market fence is gobbling a greasy *burek*. Hard currency dealers are pestering passersby; they are buying and selling marks. The policeman surveys the scene indifferently. Cigarette smugglers and lavatory-paper vendors are offering their wares. On the pavement is a cardboard box, on it Austrian coffee, Hungarian butter spread, German chocolate. Gypsy kids are making a din, soot and smoke everywhere. Our eyes happen to meet. He turns his face away in embarrassment, I too get a shock. I see a man who a few years ago used to be chauffeured to and from work in an official car, who never even thought of sinking this low, to a dirty, noisy market corner, among the currency dealers, the pimps and the cheap whores. I don't find his situation humiliating, I wouldn't really call it come-down or deterioration, rather a liberating existential erosion. As a consequence of unexpected political failure, the former big boss is brutally confronted with that reality about which for decades he didn't have a clue. I'd love to know how he feels now about civil liberties, about that noted "anarcholiberalism", all those western ideals he fought all his life. Seeing that scene, I realize that the roads leading away from authoritarianism are not heroic, but banal and trashy, sometimes even lethally dangerous. People are killed in great numbers, but politics has lost its ceremony. In the old days for an apparatchik to lose his office was an experience close to dying; the periodic purification of ideals was followed by heart attacks. The citizens of Újvidék spoke with considerable irony about the heart promenade, where failed politicians used to take a walk. In those days, authority showed its lethal side, driving people to self-destruction, or suicide, encouraging collective hysteria. Now, it has become tragicomic in the face of the scandalous world it itself created. I, too, turn my head away quickly, pretending that my eyes had wandered by chance into nothingness, after all it would be a great indiscretion on my part for my intrusion to disturb the one-time provincial dictator who, escaping his former role, is making the acquaintance of life, when I can't know whether ten thousand or a hundred thousand people will be sent to their deaths in the months to come.

Flour-moths are fluttering in the flat. It turns out that they have come from the

flour we bought for a wartime iron reserve. I'm sieving the flour into a huge plastic tub, the warning that one should store flour properly because who knows when one will have need of it is ringing in my ears. They say that in Sarajevo many died just because they lacked a supply of flour, and they set out to look for bread for sale. My arms are getting tired and the sweat is pouring off me in the heatwave. I switch on the radio and listen to the news about the uncheckable cancer of the Bosnian war from Belgrade, Budapest, Zagreb, and Újvidék. One suppresses this aspect, the other another, so in the end I plump for the BBC, I recognize it as the voice of objectivity, perhaps it's only there they know why I am sitting at the table sieving flour, nailed to one place like a Sisyphus whose sandhill was swept away by the wind and whose rock was stolen. I am left alone with the flour and the canned food. I snatch angrily at the flying moths. Is it worth the effort? My solitude has become permanent, in other words I'm getting used to the war.

Life, nonetheless, is a dream. It's as though, based on Calderon's play, a modern happening lasting weeks was taking place before my eyes. Exciting nights in Belgrade succeed each other. The students organize a protest march in Tolstoy street where the President of the Republic has his villa, but a strong cordon of police blocks them off. The young people strip off most of their clothes and hold up their attendance books. A dull noise on the road, deathly silence in the sky, in front of me police in bullet-proof vests. They're like stuffed dummies. An ironic revolution, with a background black as night. This is Dedinje, the traditional Eden of the commissars. Serb, Slovene, Croat, Muslim, and Macedonian apparatchiks used to live here, enjoying themselves quarrelling, bargaining, telling each other political jokes, drinking, intriguing, agitating; tomorrow they'll be part of the history books. Dedinje meanwhile proves an unapproachable fortress; the students turn back. Since they can't break into Tolstoy street, the whole town will be theirs. They barricade the streets, stopping the traffic in Belgrade. Cars sound their horns around London Corner. A woman of about forty in a hat is shouting: she has to get somewhere on time. One of the students smiles: the lady's menopausal, I bet her lover's waiting for her, he says to his friend, but later he explains politely to the woman that just this once she's not going to arrive and she'll be forgiven. The woman glares, she doesn't understand what the boy is trying to say and that makes her shout all the more angrily. Someone claims excitedly that young people are sitting on the railway tracks under the Gazela overpass—in other words, rail traffic is also at a standstill.

The next day, Tolstoy street is once again under police protection. The students put soap and washing power in front of the Serbian parliament. Out steps Šešelj, the Voivode of Četniks, he draws a revolver out of his belt and raises it high. "Queer, queer," the students chant. It is dusk by the time I get to Újvidék after an adventurous journey with several police checks (apparently they are looking for arms). Opposite my block of flats, leaning against the iron post of the bus-stop, some drunken reservists in their camouflage fatigues are puking. In the illuminated

ground floor shopwindow, new books by Lyotard, Gianni Vattimo, Jean Baudrillard, Gillez Delleuze, and Felix Guattari are on display.

Many national leaders gave a sigh of relief at the news of Václav Havel's departure. This too bears them out; another self-fulfilling prophecy has come true. What is a statesman, who stints on big words and doesn't want to be a prophet, doing in this part of the world? Within a few years the promising East Central European transformation took a turn into the autumn fog, and it's as though, from a distance, Rousseau's triumphant words were to warn us: the laws of freedom may prove to be more cruel than the yoke of tyranny. The mythical bird of the Hindus, Bherund, is flying in the fog—it was Havel who used this metaphor. The bird has one body, two necks, two heads and two independent minds. As a result of being conjoined a long time, the two heads get to hate each other and, in order to hurt one another, they eat stones and poison. The bird dies in painful spasms and great suffering, but Krishna resurrects it to serve as a warning and to remind people of the consequences of hatred. National hatred is similar, the life of generations crumbles away because they put their trust in the coming of Krishna. I belong to such a generation. I thought we had learnt from the example, but only the bird's wings were tied down, and its two heads were separated by an iron grating. When it took wing, it looked as though it was free, but that wasn't so: the wide horizon and the blue sky were only there so that the bird should poison itself in flight.

I got a letter from László Dornstädter, who once owned the Dornstädter Patisserie. He wrote from Budapest; he had come across my novel *Áttűnések* and some of my essays, on the Freedom Square of Újvidék, on the Catholic House, and on the Dornstädter Patisserie. He asked me what documents I had in my possession. What can I tell him about the last footprints, when in fact I feel like a sand-dune formed by the wind and which the wind will disperse? From the letter I learnt that the grandson of the owner of what had been a place of pilgrimage is also to become a pastrycook, the fourth generation in that trade. His father was killed in 1945, part of the reprisals against Hungarians. He fled to Budapest as a boy, and in his fear he even changed his name. The ones who stayed behind—what choice did they have?—kept theirs. It stuck to them like an octopus. Perhaps I should depart like that, I ought to change my name, to pre-empt that moment when my attention finally gives out and I absentmindedly come to the conclusion that I don't understand the world because, allegedly, it was not my duty to understand it. But I can't go to Budapest as a pastrycook, I can only turn up from time to time as some sort of idle writer, and I would have to trim my sails to quite different winds. For a grain of sand, this is an onerous task—it hasn't the strength for it, the local storms have tossed it around enough as it is. Often it has been wafted about because it's light and too small to drift far from the previous sand-dune. This is how the grain of sands turns into a look-out helplessly floating.

They are still compiling lists of the dead, I read in reference to our circumstances. What can they be like? Are they on snow-white A/4 typing paper? Or torn out of squared exercise books? Yellow wrapping paper, on which the names stand out in pearl type?

In East-Central Europe, the pillars of shame bearing the names of traitors are fervently carved. On the principle of national purity and loyalty, as a select document for the defence of the national spirit, Jovan Mandic, an electrical engineer in Belgrade, was exposed and given a good thrashing. If he continued to be unpatriotic, new beatings would be forthcoming. It was made known that it would soon be the turn of the student leader "Little Djilas", and the rest of the cosmopolitan intellectuals. Voivode Šešelj also keeps a blacklist of those devoid of national feeling. Various "moral inspectorates" see to the purity of national consciousness. A group of Krajina Serbs want to take Belgrade in hand because patriotism is endangered by the cosmopolitans, the Jews, the liberals and, of course, the diluted Serbs or, as they are called here, the "inferior Serbs". The writer Momčilo Selić warned some of the opposition that they should go to Israel if they want to criticize, their ancestry doesn't qualify them to identify with the sufferings of the Serbs. Mihalo Marković, the former *Praxis* philosopher, an influential ideologue of the party in power, supports him. He alludes to the fact that Ivan Štajnberger, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, is a Jew, suggesting that this has something to do with the students going on strike. In this part of the world, anti-Semitism was not a developed ideology. Though it seeped into the aura of the pro-Palestinian sentiment, this however seemed a secondary consequence of state politics, not part of the national strategy. I first heard of the Jewish question in Budapest, and as a member of a national minority I found it hard to comprehend. I've never been able to get my bearings in this labyrinth. Then I began to hear that kind of talk more regularly, and I only recognized its perils when it became part of everyday life in Serbia. The fact of ethnic war put this way of thinking into sharper focus. It emerged bluntly and crudely, there was no time for it to develop a complicated conceptual apparatus or a system of references, those historical patterns which take aim at someone and debase them. The Jewish question—I experience it from day to day—is the crystallization point of the anti-minority movement. Selić promptly names a diluted Serb, who was diluted because he married a Hungarian woman. The spirit of national martyrdom is permeating the air; in the meanwhile members of minorities flee from Torjanci, Szentlászló, Ilok, and Ruma, it wouldn't be a waste of time for the true Serbian activists to look up General Tudjman's famous book, *The Cul-de-sac of Historical Reality*, in which, citing the Jews as an example, he explains that ethnic groups living within the framework of state-creating nations produce dangerous cosmopolitan utopias. "Only those ethnic minorities who are prepared to assimilate to the majority nation without stubborn resistance will escape the fate of anti-Semitic pogroms," writes General Tudjman. Now I understand why the minorities are so fiercely warned against liberal ideas, and why liberalism was

public enemy number one. The anti-communists show a fine understanding of their own former communist selves.

The fedaral government is preparing a bill for a general amnesty. It promises a pardon to those who have fled abroad to escape conscription, those in hiding, or those who have openly refused military service. If passed by parliament, the real dilemma will arise overnight: to return or not to return? Who takes the responsibility on himself and how? No one who ran for his life, or didn't want to take part in a dirty war can be blamed for leaving at the sign of the first storm, even if now and again the suspicion arises that other people exploit the refugee rhetoric, people who were under no direct threat, but were lured by better living conditions, a desire to improve their lot or other practical objectives, which are harldy a cause for reproach—these, too, can be listed among basic human rights. But the misuse of national rhetoric can awaken doubts at such times. Dirty trains leave from the station, expensive cars head north on the highways—with well-to-do passengers. I witness the greatest exodus from the Bácska. Discord, pathos, suffering, hypocrisy, careerism, starvation, fear, humiliation, all mingle in a single concept. Forcibly or voluntarily, in wartime conditions, or in times of peace, the number of displaced persons in Europe is growing under the effect of poverty or ideas. In other words, Hannah Arendt's prophecy is coming true: the nature of the century will be decided by the homeless, those with no rights, the refugees: this will create vulnerable human situations. Deep wounds will be cut by the reaction of the radical right to foreigners and to alien influences. Who knows where and when the paradigm of Rostock will repeat itself? Could it, for instance, arise within the Hungarian nation?

Those nights when fathers and sons huddled in fear behind bolted doors and darkened windows —fear which was not groundless, since recently published authentic documents show that general mobilization was a hair's breadth away— I was roaming around the station, meditating on my own fate. I felt that those famous capillaries were like endlessly long thin steel threads and I wrote, "I'll stay here—as a motionless sentinel." In the hardest times we have to stay, otherwise let us be homeless wanderers.

Autumn 1992

A desperate and, once again, humiliated East-Central Europe is full of fastidious, foppish, affected, pretentious individuals adorned with European feathers. I've had it up to my neck with this flirting with Europe. Nietzsche's good European has no country; he bangs on the walls of his cell. On the other hand, those who kept themselves warm for decades in the soft nest of the communist state, where they didn't suffer as much as a scratch, are now chattering about freedom, meaning a comfortable life. They chatter about new experiences in garish blue and tired pink tones. They praise the European hotel chains. The architecture. The art galleries. The drawing rooms. The drinks. The splendid cars. The standard of living. For a long

time, this unrefined Europeanism was a bearable form of complicity with the authorities, but now it has turned into a comical local resentment.

There exists in my life a transitory point. I get on the train and head for a different transitory point. I know in fact at times like this both points move further away from me, but I haven't enough perseverance, and I imagine that I have arrived. I get out at the Keleti Station in Budapest and I feel quite sick when I listen beside a warm fireplace to the limp tales of eternal wandering. In poetry, prose and essays.

The noise of children playing wakes me. I'm surprised to hear people making a racket and yelling in Hungarian outside my window looking onto the street. I would be misleading myself if I were to resolve in a sentimental way the permanent paradox around which my life revolves, the constraint of double alienation. Yes, the din irritates me, the din in my native language warns me that I have woken up in a foreign country. Only relentlessly consistent thinking can expose the schizophrenia which the nation's professional prophets can't soothe, because they slash open my wounds to glorify themselves, whereas I would like to cover them permanently. My ears are only used to the din of children in my native language when it is made within the family circle or among close friends, I have never heard it in streets or squares. In the meantime, my children have grown up, and I watch anxiously to see when they, too, will begin to suffer the illness from which I suffer. Can all this be avoided? At what price? All my life I've tried to make myself aware of the equivocal situation, I shuffle about in the wonderful precariousness and ambiguity of existence (Nietzsche), as in a tiny circle, and I behave as if everything were all right. Should I tell them how exciting it is to go round and round in circles as if I were walking a tightrope? Only occasionally does a foot slip, as it did now when I ran into the everyday life of my native language, those details of my life I haven't had a chance to meet yet. I buy liver-sausage and cooked bacon. I ask the butcher for them in words I normally only use at home. At the dry cleaners they count up the things I've brought to be laundered: two sheets, four tablecloths, a tea-cloth, four towels. I read on the bill: pillowcase and duvet-cover. It's not the words that surprise me, but the fact that I see them written on a bill. Who am I? In Hungary, a foreigner. In Serbia, a Hungarian. A centaur for whom no cage could be found at the zoo.

A foggy morning in Budapest. In Újvidék I know which building is where in the thickest fog. Here everything is washed into indistinctness in front of me. I buy the morning papers and loiter in the street. I haven't got a room where I can open the window to let in the fresh air and engross myself in reading the papers. This is the only way I can get a feel of Hungarian reality; I've nowhere to retreat to dream about it.

The confines of my loneliness are marked by the confines of my native language. I meet some old friends in Budapest and we explain certain things to each other. Even so I feel like Wittgenstein's weaver, who thinks he is weaving cloth despite the fact that his loom is empty, just because he makes the sort of movements he would make if he were weaving. The only thing we have in common are seemingly pointless movements.

In Hungary I don't want to be a member of a minority, I want to be a man who meditates on things which others don't notice and for that reason is incapable of keeping up with the dominant trends. I don't fit into any literary category, however close to my heart one or other such category may be. I don't think of any of this as a noble spiritual virtue. My isolation is like an unexpected accident, in advance of which I didn't make my will.

Sentiments and pure attractions. Only the grain of sand preserves the memory of words recorded, and swiftly wiped out, in the desert. Unlucky grain of sand! Its fate reminds me of how—as Simone Weil writes—Christ died miserably and laughably. "Since misery is laughable too." Martyrs, on the other hand, are happy, she adds. That's why they take no notice of the swiftly obliterated words preserved by the grain of sand. It carries them stubbornly within itself even if the gentlest breeze hustles it wretchedly from one place to the other.

I pace up and down shivering in my cold empty Újvidék flat. There is no fuel, every day the effect of the UN embargo can be more keenly felt. I draw back the dusty curtains. There's a good deal less traffic. A war invalid is waiting at the bus-stop outside our building. He keeps scrutinizing the street as if he were viewing the world from a trench. The street is full of soldiers in uniform. The wallpaper in my wife's room is peeling off. In the spring I must strip it and whitewash the walls. I've got to paint the doors, mend the tap in the bathroom, and remove the rusty mosquito screens which I put up last summer. I'll do these things perhaps because I see in them the proof of my sense of style. After all what else can style be other than obstinacy in the face of the hopeless. The self-contained floating of a desire. Impervious, inexplicable.

Although travelling on the less and less frequent town bus is something of an adventure, even so now and then I leave my home and head for the bus-stop where people ask me whether it's true that the buses are going to stop running. Incredulity in the face of obvious facts has become a habit in every area of life. That's why people are waiting patiently for the bus, although the newpapers said and the radio announced that the city buses wouldn't be running in the later part of the morning and in the afternoons. The situation is made more fantastic by the fact that a bus always turns up eventually from somewhere and no one seems the least bit surprised. Like the others, I get onto the bus, the route of which I'm not sure about. What I enjoy most is when I find myself in a part of town I have not been to lately. I catch myself pretending to imagine learning to find my way, map in hand, in a strange world. Or else, the situation turns nightmareish: nothing in this town will remind me of Újvidék, and there will be no map to help me determine my bearings.

My wife phoned from Budapest; she complains about her stomach, so I'll have to comb the town in search of my doctor friend who, in these days when there is a dearth of drugs, may be able to get hold of the medicine my wife used before. He writes a prescription and gives me an address. We exchange a few words about our

school days; we have nothing to say to each other about the past few years. With the prescription in my pocket, I head for the outskirts and end up in a warehouse-type shed, where a woman grumpily hands over the medicine. She probably begrudges me this rare medicine which we nowadays begrudge even to those in great need of it. I trudge slowly home; my leg hurts and I sit down on a large rock by the side of the road. A few minutes later a young man comes and sits down beside me. I put the plastic bag on my lap. Without a glance at me, the young man gets a revolver out of his pocket, and with the casual movements he has seen in westerns, he places bullets in the chamber. The street is empty, the best thing would be for me to get up, but a sudden departure is likely to irritate him, so I go on sitting there quietly. I take the medicine out of the bag and start reading the instructions on the box. The young man puts his gun in his pocket and gives the medicine a poke. "What bad luck," he says. "I know everything about you but I didn't know you've got an ulcer. Take better care of yourself," he goes on in a gruff tone. I put the medicine back in the bag and stand up. "I'd advise you to move abroad. Your name won't protect you until the end of the war. They've plenty of medicine over there," he adds with a grin and offers his hand. I offer mine—and I laugh. I take leave of my new acquaintance in this cheerful mood, and as I stroll along the street I find the answer to my question as to why people laughed in Sarajevo when they felt that the earth quaked. An everyday story, but without the war I wouldn't have noticed it.

In the cemetery in Szenttamás I clear the frozen layer of snow on my father's grave. There are many freshly dug graves, mainly elderly people stand in front of them. One generation departs, another doesn't come in its place. This is a time for defeatists. "The educated have gone," said an old man from my street at the entrance to the cemetery. "What else can we do other than become Serbs?" The trouble is nobody wants to hear those words. Least of all those concerned. Damned catharsis! The old man takes my hand as if we were saying a final goodbye, and as if, like Socrates, he would know exactly which direction both of us will take. I stay silent, I can bring up nothing in my defence. Who knows which of us is moving towards a better fate. We have yet to face the real ordeals, but there are already people who descirbe those Vojvodina intellectuals who have chosen to leave as traitors. I feel like someone who has been sentenced to silence; I can't pass judgment because I was only granted the fetters of a roving spirit. I can't put myself either here or there. I stare at the old man's footprints in the snow. His walk is unsteady, but judging by the tracks he seems to be heading in a definite direction. I watch as the tracks get covered in new snow; this is a genuine track, the kind I am longing for.

Information from the Ministry of the Interior's secret files filters out here and there. What'll happen when the cellars of the Balkan *Stasi* are opened up? If they are, a spiritual war lasting for decades will begin after the civil war. Behind the art of living camouflaged by ironic puns, a life strategy based on cynicism will come to light. The

only art form which had rank and prespective. I'm musing over this with a shudder when an old acquaintance of mine staggers up to my table in a restaurant and sits down. He tells me falteringly that he was the lover of a woman who, in a a drunken state, was often lured into the Ministry of the Interior's office in the town centre, and who wrote a suicide note when the Titoist world collapsed. She sent it to her husband and to him. She can't stand this life any longer, she wrote, but in fact she didn't commit suicide, she escaped to Germany, from where she kept up a correspondence with her acquaintances. She had left the country because she was fed up with Balkan poverty, she wanted a decent life. "She drunkenly told me everything about her husband, who can guarantee she didn't inform on me—there?" my friend mutters to himself. I try to console him. "Come on, what could she have said about you?" My friend looks at me in mild disdain. "Don't be naive," he says, " we're all in it up to our necks. The best thing would be to emigrate. Do you really think that everyone was fleeing from the war? No. Most people are escaping their rotten past, their own illness."

At night, I'd say just a few hundred meters from my flat, a gun shot rings out, then another, then an explosion. The rattle of gunfire is the best reason for me not to dream. I stop writing and go from room to room opening doors. I reassure my daughter, telling her not to be afraid. The other rooms are empty. I turn on the light, let the windows glow. I want to go to sleep in the sharp light pouring down on me. If I wake up suddenly, at least I should see the rays of light. They're keeping a night watch. The newspapers regularly report instances of people going away for a few days to return and find that strangers have moved into their flat. So it's best to leave the light on all the time and turn on the radio close to the front door. But what am I defending in this flat? I wait daily for the dark night so that I can convice myself I'm defending that light which sparkles in my memory as if I had seen it in a dream.

Belgrade via Kelebia, Újvidék... I am waiting for the Meridian Express at the Keleti Station. My son keeps me company, my old, shabby overcoat is on him. I used to wear it some twenty years ago. He is preparing for University entrance exams in Budapest. My daughter will meet me at the station in Újvidék. I listen to the public address system and images of cities appear before my mind's eye. Arad, Szeged, Zagreb, Belgrade: Krleža listed thus the towns that lived within the radius of attraction of the Danube basin. He daydreamed of a confederation of Danube riparian and Balkan states in that year of ill-omen, 1935. I didn't have the money for the fare, that is why I did not attend Krleža's funeral, only official writers went from Újvidék at the expense of the public purse. Who knows whether I shall ever see Krleža's or Sinkó's grave in Zagreb. I embrace my boy before my train leaves; it seems like leaving him abroad, but I would be taking him abroad too, if he came with me. Perhaps we ought to go wandering together in the wide world, to find ourselves a place we could call our country, now that our imaginary country has ceased to exist.

In the afternoon the man in the flat above gives a long piercing ring on my bell. I open the door. Embarrassed, he hands me my call-up papers. He had no choice, he too was dragged from his bed, it's just a routine check, I have to report tomorrow to get a new posting. I have to sign for it, everything will be right, he assures me. Then he complains that it is hard for him, too. I sign the paper in resignation; quite frankly, I've always lived in situations like this.

I managed to buy ten kilos of flour and seven litres of oil. I carry the lot home, and, as I turn the corner, I see military police outside the entrance to the tower block. An elderly woman takes my arm. "You never know," she warns. "Though I know you'd refuse to join up anyway, it's still better not to take risks if you don't have to. I've also noticed that you live alone; they won't let anyone into the military prison but family members. No one will visit you." I shuffle about awkwardly in front of her; I don't want her to think that I'm cowardly or over-emotional. We meet regularly in the lift and say hello. I've often seen her in the avenue pushing her grandchild in a snow-white pram. For a while now she hasn't been out with the pram. I enquire after her grandchild. "My daughter's escaped to Germany," she replies. I'm watching the entrance out of the corner of my eye. An elderly man appears escorted by military police. They walk past me, we know each other. He replies to my good day with an angry flash of his eyes. He's right. He's probably five or six years younger than me and he's got two children. Why shouldn't he think it unfair that he is being forced to the barracks and I'm not. In the afternoon the doorbell rings, I open the door cautiously. The old woman has brought round a plate of cream cakes.

Unofficially I get to hear that I'm going to be dismissed in a few days time. At first temporarily, then, when the legal conditions can be created, for good. But even if I hadn't been told, I can sense something, the atmosphere around me has changed. The phone calls, which in any case had been diminishing, have stopped altogether. Those with whom I'm still on reasonably good terms give me pitying looks. I can see they are wondering why I had to wait for all this. "You'd do best to go and settle in Hungary; after all this no one could really accuse you of anything. You're the only writer who lost his job without his consent. The list on which your name was written is a real blacklist. It was published in the newspapers. You'll be a moving target. What will you live on? The people who have gone away so far, with or without reason, left their surroundings, their workplace of their own free will; you are being forced to leave." A few days later they do in fact hand me my notice, which is hardly bigger than my palm. The next day I wanted to go up to the office to get my books, but before I got to the main entrance I heard that the doormen use a metal detector on anyone on the blacklist who wants to come into the building. I slow down and turn to face the Újvidék view. The books can stay where they are. The time has come when objects start to leave me in the lurch.

Christmas is drawing near, the New Year. I've lost my job and now I can spend more time drifting about the streets. I'm being buffeted by the Kossava blowing off

the Danube. I wind my scarf around my neck. Buttons are missing off my overcoat, and off my shirt. I have to hide all this. The number of events that I have to keep hidden grows daily. I meet an old friend. His hair is snow white. I heard he'd been taken to Vukovar as a gunner. "I haven't seen you anywhere. Where have you been?" "At the front," he replies. I look into his watery blue eyes. His look is empty. But what do my eyes conceal? I'm reminded of the hero of one of Ivo Andric's novels who, on seeing the murderous destruction, hopes that it doesn't mean great, clever and eager people will disappear completely and for ever... But can we recognize them at the last, the very last moment, or at least an hour afterwards?

The snowflakes are falling softly and comfortingly. A face from my dreams blurs before me, a rough hand shoves me about, tearing away the burdens which I thought were memories, and I feel as if it would be lacerating my skin. It's not advisable to admit relief, since I have received a paltry reward due to ordinary mortals: I've been let go. I'm sitting round a table with my children and we are looking at each other. Then I get up and look out into the street. Now and again I listen to the war bulletins. If I want to see people I walk down to the little cafe nearby and have a coffee. I watch the passersby. By now I can tell apart the uniforms and emblems of the various pseudo military units. I read a demand made by one of the politicians: we must get rid of the Hungarian intellectuals. The plebs can stay. At one time I was proud of that word intellectuals. I don't know exactly what it means any more. I regularly leave the light on at night in my room nowadays. I've still got a bit of time to see reason, the melancholy of the twilight salutes me, and it doesn't make the slightest difference whether my eyes are open or shut. Although I still raise my head if someone keeps on knocking on my door, each evening I iron my shirts, I tie my shoelaces and straighten up in front of the mirror. I lock myself into my flat and prepare to write a long letter to my children, with whom I've lived through this year or two. They ought to put it in an envelope and stuff it into a drawer somewhere. But I put off writing till tomorrow; others encroach on our common experiences. Someone rings the bell, then knocks gently, but I don't care who it is. I stand in front of the window. Sometimes I feel like talking to someone, but more often than not it's a strain. I'm aware that I don't deserve the pardon, the war was a chance, an accident in my life, it was like a foggy, damp evening in which a flock of birds suddenly goes quiet. I can't lay any blame on it. Yet, people expect this lie of me. I stare at the faded call-up papers. Soon those people who make attractive bouquets out of the Balkan *fleurs du mal* will come home for a visit—this sought-after article will then adorn many pieces of IKEA furniture. The place is already ringing with foolish talk about the future. I belong to that squandered generation which deserved the war, and therefore wants to forget that there was more to it than that: the blossoming of all our lies so far and the coming into bud of future lies. We didn't dare to lose our inner war. I hang around listlessly in chance meeting places. I run into acquaintances and friends and am surprised to find that they don't know how they got there, or even that we've changed places at all and left ourselves behind once

and for all. The Texts inform us that nothing is the same, but they only strike this pose for the sake of the puns. No one acknowledges the fact that words are avenging themselves on us, their revenge is staring at us like a torso. This is where we found happiness, but I can't understand why. Do I have to live to see that? What punishment was it that forced us into the good old world where the sky grew cowardly and the earth ungrateful? If the grains of sand and the snowflakes could talk they would tell us what happened to the earth and the sky. But they are silent. I realize that is why I have no one to talk to.

It is impossible to return the swift stream to the spring, but the river doesn't need to be returned. Yet that's what has happened, just that—and nothing else. ❧

Translated by Elizabeth Szász

Robert Combas: "Guernica-foie poulet." 1987. Acryl. 188 x 245 cm.

Iván Mándy

One Evening

(Short story)

I was standing in front of the armchair. In front of the empty armchair. Rubbing my back. Preparing to do some exercises? Knee-bends? Hops? Head swivelling?

Someone had been sitting in that armchair just a short while ago. Mr Werner from German television. He brought an interpreter with him. A young man in a plumed hat. He had thrown himself down on the couch. But had jumped up at once. As though he knew they would not be staying for long. The German gentleman smoked his cigar and smiled. Talked about a documentary film. The subject of the film would be Budapest, and I would be writing the scenario. Who else?

The young man in the plumed hat nodded eagerly, and repeated, several times, first in German, then in Hungarian:

"You are the man of our choice, no one else will do. After all, you are the man who knows Budapest best."

Mr Werner cocked his eye jovially. Stood up abruptly, as if he had suddenly recalled something pressing to do. Said nothing, but the interpreter interpreted nevertheless.

"The project is still in the planning stage, at the moment, but we shall notify you in due time."

I seemed to remember hearing that before. The key sentence of a key man.

It sounded rather false to me.

Who knows, he may be involved himself. He could be someone else's candidate. And if not he himself, then perhaps a friend of his. For whom, if needs be, he'll join battle. Work upon the German gentleman.

They waved to me, as from the window of a departing train. The interpreter even waved his hat. His plumed hat.

They left. Simply and plainly left.

I bent over the armchair. Wanting to squash someone into it? Throttle the breath out of them?

I mean, you can't just up and leave this way, it simply isn't done! With such

---

Iván Mándy

is the author of novels and numerous volumes of short fiction. Many of his stories have been translated into German and other languages.

a casual air of superiority. Of contempt. Yes, contempt! Why, they left practically without a word of farewell.

I burst out laughing.

Why, of course! They took their leave down below. In the square.

I let myself fall into the armchair. Could almost hear the interpreter saying: "Mr Werner never has so much as a second to spare."

This was after our walk. Our great voyage of discovery.

I showed Mr Werner everything. Thrust houses under his nose.Those bomb-scarred houses on the outskirts, humbly self-effacing streets, the church, the pub, the square. But of course he never has so much as a second...

Well then why the hell did he come back with me? To smoke another cigar? Or is it this armchair that holds some special appeal for him ?

I opened the window.

A dismal, yellowish light coming from the opposite side of the square.

The house of illness.

Sickbeds behind the windows.

No one ever dies in this house. It is only the illnesses, the long drawn-out illnesses. The constant, interminable illnesses.

Sometimes they would sit on the edge of the bed. Perhaps walk a couple of steps. But that counted as a reckless jaunt. Those emaciated legs, varicosed calves, swollen ankles, cankerous bones.

Shadows around the beds. Oh, not from the hospital! From the neighbourhood rather; tenants from upstairs, from the ground floor. Tenants who could still move around, who had not yet taken to their beds. They fed pills and food. Their duties began after dark. Moving around with various receptacles. Dishes, bowls, cups, saucers. The sick did not trust anyone else. Would have none of the hospital staff. Would not hear of the hospital.

I shall go over to that house some day. Coughing, groaning, hawking sounds all around. Take hold of one of the iron bedsteads. Watch an emaciated face slowly shrink into the pillow. But this is not death yet. Death recoils from the bedside.

Tomorrow in the Bogyai with Vándor.

The Bogyai has gone to the dogs. The waiters are indifferent, at times downright rude. And the meals they serve! Terrible! Absolutely terrible! The manageress does not return my greetings. But why?

I bawled into the room.

"Whence this celestial superiority?"

I looked around me, enraged. As if wanting to call the whole world to account. One by one.

Mr Werner will never show up again. Never in this life. Of course you never can tell. What can't you tell, you idiot? Tell me, what can't you tell?

The telephone rang.

Mr. Werner! Of course. Mr Werner has come to a decision. Has taken stock of the

situation. And found that I am his man.

I waited a moment. Then, in a somewhat supercilious, nonchalant voice said:

"Hello?'

A woman's voice.

"Is that the Mándy residence?"

"It is."

"I hope I am not intruding upon you."

"As a matter of fact I happen to be in the middle of a story."

"I really am sorry." (A pause.) "It won't take more than half an hour."

"I'm afraid I can't take on anything right now. No adaptations or dramatizations or anything like that."

"It's not a job that I wanted to talk to you about."

"Well, what then?"

"I'll tell you when I get there. I got your address from Erzsi Havas."

"Erzsi Havas..."

"I'm cycling over."

A click. Silence.

And I sat rigid beside the telephone. Then began inching my way inside. But slowly, stiffly still. One foot may not be able to follow the other. And that feeling of numbness in my arm!

It's not a job she wants to talk to me about. Well then what?

She's cycling over. What did she have to say that for? Why did she have to make such a point of telling me that? Sternly, a trifle hostilely even. Yes, yes! Hostilely. She can come over whichever way she likes. By trolley-bus, bus, tram, car... No. Never by car. Cars are odious. She weaves her way among the cars with supreme contempt.

This girl's bringing me bad news. From where? From whom? It makes no difference. One thing is certain: it is not fervent enthusiasm that is flying towards me. Not an old love rekindled flaring up again.

She's cycling over.

I touched the back of the armchair.

Did not sit down.There isn't time to sit down. Or is there? I shan't let her in. I shan't open the door. I'll take the key from the lock. She can think what she likes. Let her ring the bell, if that's what she wants to do! Let her ring! She'll have to stop, sooner or later. She won't. She's the kind who'll never give up. She won't take her finger off the bell.

There! Already! Two short rings.

"Coming! Just a moment!"

A reddish-blond girl in a checked shirt standing in my doorway. Keen eyes. A briefcase under her arm.

"I shan't keep you long."

In the room.

"Will you have something? A glass of..."

She shook her head. Her face hardened. As if she suspected I was trying to get round her with that little glass of something. Or as if I were who was keeping her from doing her job. After all, she has a mission. She hasn't time to dawdle. I'm just a stage in her journey. A not too important stage.

"Do you insist on a proper introduction?"

"Not especially."

I retreated behind my desk. She stood before me, clutching her briefcase. Suddenly, her eyes softened.

"Actually, I'm Zsuzsa Szilágyi."

The briefcase slipped a little from under her arm.

"How are your eyes?"

"My eyes?"

"Erzsi Havas told me that, just lately..."

"...they are often inflamed and keep watering. Nothing serious."

"You should be using eyedrops.

"Yes, I should. Regularly,"

"And are you?"

"Weeell..."

A sheet of paper on the desk. Slipped there unnoticed by me. I looked up imploringly.

"Please read it! And, if you agree with..."

"If I agree..."

"Read it."

No sternness now in the voice. Something like trustfulness instead. Yes, the girl trusts the man sitting behind the desk. But what is this? What kind of document is it?

Slowly, carefully, I pulled it closer. How smooth, not a crease anywhere.

I picked it up with a flourish. Perhaps we'll just fly away together.

Sentences, passages catch my eye.

Heavy sentences were passed in Prague....fills us with deep apprehension...

I repeated:

"Heavy sentences."

"Don't say you haven't heard about it."

"Oh, I have, of course."

It can't have sounded too convincing. She leaned closer and began to read over my shoulder:

On October 24th 1979 heavy sentences were passed in Prague.

She fell silent. Disappeared from beside me. Left me alone with the sheet. I stumbled miserably ahead in the text.

We protest against the sentences passed at the Charta 77 trial.

I surfaced for a moment. Searched for the girl with my eyes. She looked back at me from the armchair. Her gaze was clear and calm.

I dived back again. Back into the sheet.

We demand that the convicted be set free.

So we do not only protest, but also demand. Do I, too, demand?

We have followed the news about the preparations for the Prague trial for months with increasing anxiety. Learning of the verdict, the cynical sentences passed aroused our indignation and a rightful anger.

And then the names. The names of the convicted.

Peter Uhl

Václav Benda

Jiři Dienstbier

Václav Havel

Here I stopped.

"Václav Havel...he's a writer."

"It's been known to happen to writers too."

"Yes, of course." (A pause.) "There was a play of his running here, wasn't there?"

"it's not running any more."

"Garden Party...that was the title. Or was it Feast in the Garden? György Kálmán played in it."

The girl nodded quickly. Quickly and a little anxiously. Perhaps she was afraid I'd reel off the entire cast.

I stretched my legs out.

"Daisies."

"What did you say?" She got up out of the armchair. Started walking towards me, quickly, like a repair service.

"Daisies. A woman directed it...Vera Chytilová. What about her? Perhaps she, too..."

"I don't know. I don't think I've heard her name mentioned in connection with..."

"No, perhaps not. They couldn't have...not her."

"I don't know."

The sheet slipped off the table. I caught it in the nick of time. And began reading again.

We believe it is crucial at this point that you assert your authority in defence of democracy and human rights and use your influence to intervene on behalf of the convicted to achieve their exoneration and release...

Here I got stuck.

"Who is this addressed to?"

She leaned over me.

"If you'd just read there, at the top of the page...."

I read there, at the top of the page:

Open letter to János Kádár

First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party

Member of the Presidential Council

I fell silent. Then, a short while later.

"Will it reach him? Will he accept it? Will he read it? Will he read it to the end?"

"Perhaps." Still leaning over me. Maybe getting ready to rap me on the head. I turned round abruptly.

"And how's he going to react?"

(React! I've never ever used the word! And now just listen to me!)

"We'll find out in time."

Silence.

"They say he plays chess well."

"I wouldn't know. I've never played chess with him."

Silence.

The words slipped out unexpectedly.

"Anywhere good films are made, a revolution breaks out."

She smiled faintly.

"I've never heard of your Chytilová."

"My Chytilová?"

"You're a great fan of hers, aren't you?"

"Maybe."

"There's no need to take offence."

"Who said I was offended?"

"You are a bit tetchy."

"Really? Was it Erzsi Havas who told you so?"

"You're not really tetchy." (A giggle.) You're just cantankerous. Yes, that's it! Cantankerous!"

"I have piercing eyes and I'm cantankerous. What else did Erzsi Havas have to say about me?"

She leaned closer to me. Our faces almost touched. Bright brown eyes. A small blemish above her upper lip. A healed scar. The mark of a knife? No, this girl would never get herself in a predicament with a knife. Why not? She could get herself into every sort of predicament. I could take her to the movies. I'm sure she's fond of the movies. She spends her time running around with sheafs of paper, but whenever she has a moment to spare...

In the meanwhile, with some kind of delirious obduracy:

"The First Secretary will never get this letter."

She shook her head patiently. Slipped another sheet before me.

"He might get this one."

Names, names, yet more names, one below the other. Spiky, angular handwriting, proud signatures full of flourishes, letters that lurch as though they had lost their bearings, the cramped writing of a convulsively jerking hand.

"The objectors?"

She nodded. Began pacing up and down the room. Turned towards me for a moment.

"I'll leave it to you then."

And I, in an almost hostile voice:

"I'll just run through the list of names, if I may."

"Certainly."

She went into the other room. Keeping an eye on me still. Watching every move I make. I bet she was a member of the pioneers as a child. A keen and active one at that.

I half rose from my seat. And almost shouted:

I refuse! I refuse!

The girl spoke from the adjoining room

"Tell me... is this your mother? Here...in the picture."

"Yes, it's my mother."

"The way she sits there in the garden in that straw hat with a shawl over her shoulders...there's a feeling of infinite tranquility about her."

"Oh, you really hit the nail upon the head there! She never had a tranquil day in her life."

An inquisitive little girl stared at me from the doorway.

"What did you say?"

"Never mind. Forget it."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to disturb you. But she loved you a lot, didn't she?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You think so?"

She made it sound disapproving somehow. As though she were disappointed. She retreated, went back to Mother. Perhaps a conversation is about to begin? Why not?

Before me, the list of names. The names of the objectors.

All of a sudden I felt a surge of heat. My neck burned. My head pounded, threatening to burst. I lost control over my hands. They began drawing circles in the air, circles that intertwined.

I heard my father's voice from afar:

"Lost your nerve, old chap?"

I need time, got to play for time. That's the main thing right now. I'll run through the list, to begin with.

Something's got to happen in the meanwhile. A fainting fit.

I could lose consciousness. The girl would come in and find me on the floor. She wouldn't find me at all. I'd be lost between the lines. Never to be found again.

I glided up and down among the names. Glided, spun, swung giddily, in such a daze!

Lajos Boross, professor. —Simple-minded fool! He'll have his chair taken away from him. He'll be banished to the country. To a village school or worse. He'll never teach in the capital again.

Géza Cziráky, editor. —He can say goodbye to his paper.

I slid down to the middle of the column.

Rózsa Merényi, poet.

That was a name to linger over.

I said hello to her three times on the bus. She just stared into my face with a stony, empty glare. Slowly turned away.

To be sure
Smiles froze
Faces turned inwards
and turned away
In those years
In the years in question
During the era of the personality cult.

Bertalan Tóth, writer. —Well, he did spot me in the Darling café. He didn't come over, oh no! He watched me from the doorway. Smiled. Waved. Then, with boyish facetiousness:

"Tell me, Iván, you still waiting for the Americans?"

Silence in the café. A spoon clinked against a glass. Someone groaned.

"I swear the time will come when they'll carry off the chairs from here!"

And silence again.

We were sitting together at one of the tables in the Darling, professor *Kálmán Kátay* and I. He looked at me with beaten eyes, both hands cupping his face.

"I've been made a scapegoat, Mándy, would you believe it? That Kassák lecture! You were present, no doubt. Then you must have witnessed the ignominious scene that took place there. I had barely uttered Kassák's name and they were already coughing and stamping and shuffling their feet, and when I mentioned the self-consistence and tenacity that characterized Lajos Kassák all his life, the storm broke. Hissing, booing, bawling, yelling. Stop it! Enough! Shut up ! Nobody wants to listen to anything you've got to say! Old polar bear like you!

How dare they use that tone of voice to me?

Where are their manners?

Old Polar bear indeed!

He fell silent. Then mumbled again:

"I'm a scapegoat!"

His head seemed to shrink. He was rubbing it as though he wanted to pulverize it.

A waitress scurried past.

The professor turned to stare after her. Sighed a deep sigh.

"I used to be a savage, Mándy, in my time!"

And when they took the sheet to him? Did he sign without hesitation? Or...?

Béni Balogh, poet, translator.—There! So the sheet reached him too. He, too, was visited by the girl in the shabby little room of the shabby house in Buda. They welcomed her together, Béni and Szüri, the large-headed, fat, grey tomcat. He's

quite old but still a great lady-killer. Prowls the streets at night. Béni opens the window for him always. And lets him in again when he comes back. Szüri's favourite place is the top shelf of the wardrobe, on top of the clean, folded shirts. He's the one who does the rough translations.

Béni Balogh took the sheet. And signed it like a shot.

"Aren't you going to look into it at least?"

"No need."

And when they were alone again, the two of them, they talked things over, Szüri and he.

Rubbish! They never spoke of it again.

I skipped to the next signature.

From one signature to the next. From one to the next.

János Sebők, painter. —We shan't be seeing any exhibitions of his work for a couple of years. He'll spend his time restoring pictures, or perhaps illustrating idiotic books. And he'll be getting off cheap, at that.

Balázs Czakó, literary adviser.

Andrea Zsótér, political scientist.

Gusztáv Várnai, writer.—Popular author of television plays. We shan't be seeing him on the screen for a while.

Andor Virágh, poet.

Where did they happen on him? In which subway?

Béla Návai, pharmacist.

But he's dead.

Béla Návai, pharmacist. His soul has gone to God. That's what it said in the paper. At the age of forty-nine, after long suffering. And that was at least a month ago.

When did he sign the sheet?

What difference does it make?

Henrik Ingusz, social worker.

Olivér Czövek, priest.

I stroked the sheet lying before me, smoothing it over and over while I kept repeating:

Olivér Czövek! Olivér Czövek!

And suddenly.

Éva T. Brenner!

Gusztáv Várnai!

Andor Virágh!

Henrik Ingusz!

And again

Olivér Czövek!

The names blurred, ran into one another before my eyes. I slid about, helplessly lost, on the sheet.

Silence around me. And from the silence, a voice:

"Well?"

The girl stood before me. Had been standing watching me since God knows when.

Stood and waited.

The girl's face melted away, vanished. The sheets too had disappeared off the table.

I was alone. Alone with my cowardice. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár

Pablo Picasso: Head of a Young Woman. 1946.
Lithograph stone. 49 x 32,5 x 5cm.

János M. Rainer

István Bibó—A Great Political Diagnostician

In the crisis years of the Kádár regime and during the transition to democracy, István Bibó's name was one to conjure with for all those who sensed the crisis and desired change. Ever since, his presence has been felt in the public arena, as the large number of essays and conferences dedicated to the discussion of his work shows.

This first publication of István Bibó's works in English[1], a selection intended as representative, is a happy occasion, since this volume provides an opportunity for the most original, and the most sympathetic political thinker in postwar Hungary to overcome the language barrier.

Bibó received a measure of international publicity only twice in his entire life. In 1956-57, and in the years that immediately followed, his name was mentioned in the world press as Minister without Portfolio in Imre Nagy's revolutionary government. The fact that he continued to work in his office inside the empty Parliament building after the Soviet invasion had started is, however, far less known. The dramatic proclamation he made on November 4 was published, either in part or in whole, in several of the world's major newspapers.[2] His arrest in May 1957 was also reported, an arrest that was later made all the more dramatic by the publication of his extensive analysis of the revolution in the Viennese *Die Presse* in the autumn of 1957, a few months after his imprisonment.[3] The note appended to the article, in which Bibó explicitly requested publication regardless of the probable personal consequences, could not fail to touch readers. This gesture faithfully expressed Bibó's calm and determined resolve always to hold the moral high ground, even in times of adversity; in this decision he was driven by what he called his "passion for objectivity". A number of eminent figures in the western democracies made several appeals for his release.

Naturally, his memory was kept alive by democrats among Hungarian exiles, who did what could not then be done in Budapest: they published his collected works. In 1977, two years before his

***János M. Rainer**'s publications include pioneering statistics on the reprisals following the 1956 Revolution (in* samizdat *1986-89), and a book on the 1953-59 debates in the literary press. He is currently at work on a biography of Imre Nagy.*

death, his name became known to another select circle, one that was unfortunately just as small as the circle of Eastern European experts specializing in Hungary: the scholars of international law. Bibó's last major work, published in English, was a work on the strategies for a rational and just handling of international (ethnic and political) conflicts, the legal, historical and socio-psychological aspects of which had occupied him all through his adult life. Indeed, the phenomenon of conflicts in general, along with the largely inappropriate responses to it (usually motivated by fear), had been Bibó's main pre-occupation ever since the early years of the Second World War. It is perhaps characteristic of Bibó, and even more so of the time and place in which he lived, that his great work was never to be completed with the standard of thoroughness and systematic rigour that he had set for himself. This English publication, which was his entry to the world of international scholarship, only represented a small portion of his work, leaving the essence of Bibó's oeuvre—familiarity through direct experience with the problems of Hungarian and East Central European history[4]—largely untouched.

To sketch a portrait of Bibó against the background of "the great but unjustly overlooked thinker of a small nation" would be an unfortunate error. In any case, the editor of the English publication of Bibó's works, Professor Károly Nagy (Rutgers College, New Brunswick, USA), and the team assisting him (with such prominent exiles as Gyula Borbándi, Lóránt Czigány, Pál János, István Kemény, Béla Király, Bennett Kovrig, Sándor Püski, and György Schöpflin, István Bibó jr. and Miklós Vásárhelyi from Hungary) did all they could: the selection does reflect all the important aspects of Bibó's work and interests, beginning with the problematic nature of (Eastern) European history (The "Distress of the East European Small States"), right down to a brutally discerning analysis of Hungarian politics ("The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy") and society ("The Jewish Question in Hungary after 1944"). The politician (in the publications of 1956-1957), the international jurist and social philosopher are all present in these writings. Thorough and informative notes from the editor help a deeper understanding, as do the introduction into Hungarian history by Géza Jeszenszky as well as a warmly recommended postscript. The latter, written by Sándor Szilágyi, gives a brief biography of the man, while also drawing a portrait of Bibó the thinker.

István Bibó came from a cultivated family and grew up in an atmosphere in which the values of a thorough education and the traditions of Hungarian national independence and Protestantism came together. His father, who was the head of a library in Szeged, was interested in philosophy and psychology; there was every reason to believe that his son, who first studied in the law faculty of Szeged University and then continued his studies in Vienna and Geneva, would become a lawyer, a university professor and an expert on public administration.

István Bibó, who maintained an interest in the law and legal studies all through his life, and whose style revealed a certain "dryness" or legal precision, did not in fact become a professor of law, although he did lecture in law for some years.

Although he fulfilled his teaching obligations with much enthusiasm and devotion, he probably considered teaching only as part of his work.

Bibó reached adulthood in the 1930s, at a time when one of the fundamental issues in Hungary concerned social change, and discussion was centred on the actual method of change, revolutionary or reformist, along with their direction and depth. With his family background, Bibó had no direct experience of the social tensions and the appalling poverty of broad sections of the population in that society which had to be changed; he was nevertheless well aware of the profound anachronism of the entire system.

Quite a number of proposals and schemes were produced in the 1930s whose purpose was to reform the Horthy regime. The political traditions of Lajos Kossuth and Ferenc Deák, the liberalism of the Reform Age and the 1867 Compromise, had been expropriated by the governing parties of the regime, who had added conservative and authoritarian features to them. Bourgeois radicalism, which had been so powerful at the beginning of the century, had become marginalized, stigmatized by a regime which blamed these radicals for the catastrophic peace treaties of Trianon and the Communist dictatorship of 1919.

The basic experience that the young shared was the idea of change, and of radical change in particular. However, the promises, or threats, of radical and revolutionary practice by both the left and the right, (the Hungarian versions of Communism and Nazism) proved unacceptable to Bibó, as they did to many others. Therefore, Bibó attached himself to a movement which, more or less deliberately, looked for a "third way", a specifically Hungarian solution in this situation: the Hungarian populists.

The ideological foundations of this movement derived primarily, although not exclusively, from a social critique fuelled by indignation over the pauperization of the peasantry. In Hungary's agrarian economy, the peasantry formed the largest social class. In one of his writings published after the Second World War, Bibó gave concise expression to this ideological foundation: "... and as to the freedom or otherwise of the Hungarian people, there is a sure test: the human condition of millions of Hungarian peasants." Therefore those "who believe that Hungary will be free when she is politically sovereign," as well as "those who believe that Hungary will be free as soon as the preachers of freedom are in power, are deluded."[5]

In keeping with Hungarian traditions, it was writers (Gyula Illyés, Géza Féja, János Ḱodolányi, Zoltán Szabó, Imre Kovács), rather than social scientists of Bibó's mould, who produced the ideology on which this social criticism was based. The one thing that they had in common was the moral outrage felt; thus, it was a spiritual brotherhood, rather than similarities of political views, that bonded the group. As to the political conclusions drawn from the criticism, these greatly differed from the outset, and with time changed considerably: the range ran from an authentic third-way ideology, based on a society of small producers, conjoining elements of direct democracy and an idealization of peasant life, all the way to Marxist socialism on the one hand and in the direction of German national socialism on the other.

István Bibó was undoubtedly the most important, if also the most isolated, representative of the populist school. Bibó, who shared the moral outrage felt by the writers, some of whom were personal friends, attempted to give rational expression to this feeling. As a scholar of law and political science, he worked all his life to substantiate this spiritual bond with a political programme that was coherent, practical and viable. Bibó saw the cure for all the social and political ills, typical of the age and of Hungary, in the populist movement; he believed that, in a harmonic cooperation between parliamentary democracy and local government, the populist movement might provide a solution both to the social problems and the problems of political participation and representation. Unlike several other figures in the populist movement, Bibó had no inborn mistrust for either bourgeois democratic or socialist ideals. For him the "third way" meant the rational, or even pragmatic, amalgamation of the various "ways" and solutions, rather than some kind of a specifically Hungarian "spiritual community". Bibó's rational survey of the problems of the country and the broader region—including Central Europe and beyond—to some extent separated him from the movement, although he always looked on himself as part of it.

Instead of using various political and ideological labels (populist, democratic, socialist), Sándor Szilágyi called Bibó a "political therapist" in his postscript to the English edition of Bibó's selected writings. This expression accurately describes his unique approach to the social and political problems. István Bibó's entire life was primarily dedicated to the search for a real cure for the ills of Hungarian and Central European societies. In the final analysis, he identified the causes of these ills with the unpropitious historical development of the Central European region (the influence exerted by the empires, the asynchronous development of nations and states, etc.), or, more precisely, with the rise of anxieties, both social and political, caused by these historical traumas. "In Eastern Europe ... a national framework was something that had to be created, mended, fought for, and constantly protected, not only against the dynastic state, but also against the indifference shown by a fair proportion of the country's inhabitants, as well as against the wavering state of national consciousness. This situation contributed to the development of a trait most characteristic of the unbalanced Central and Eastern European political attitude: an existential anxiety concerning one's own community."[6] It was this anxiety which placed the cause of democracy and democratic development in the Central East European region constantly in jeopardy; it was this anxiety which permitted, regularly and symptomatically, the damaging separation of the cause of social emancipation and political and human rights from that of national independence, finally distorting the political thinking—or "constitution", to use Bibó's terms—of the nations in the region.

"Being a democrat means, primarily, not to be afraid; not to be afraid of those who have differing opinions, speak different languages or belong to other races; not to be afraid of revolutions, conspiracies, the unknown malicious intent of enemies,

hostile propaganda, being demeaned, or of those imaginary dangers that become truly dangerous because we are afraid of them. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were afraid because they were not fully developed mature democracies, and they could not become fully developed mature democracies because they were afraid."[7]

As to the therapy and the physic, Bibó, good physician that he was, probably attached greatest importance to a sound diagnosis. His entire work appears to be some kind of a hopeless struggle, both internal and external, to provide a full diagnosis. Though he never aimed to write extensive and scholarly treatises, he was able to complete almost none of the books he did plan to write, let alone publish them.

The title of the planned but unfinished major work itself is highly revealing: *On the Balance of Power and Peace in Europe*. This is, indeed, indicative of the breadth of Bibó's thinking. The time when he started to write it should also be noted: 1942-1943. Probably never before had there been a more deadly disease threatening Europe and the immediate regions surrounding Hungary than that which attacked at the time of the culmination of Nazism and the World War; probably never before had there been a time when the chances of the European balance of power and peace adumbrated by the title seemed more remote; probably never before had there been a greater need for a cure at the hands of the "political therapist".

However, Bibó was also a "practicing physician"; having diagnosed the problem, he tried to help in the way that he thought proper. He tried to find the root of the acute problems: in writing his work, he made a long detour into German history in order to discover the causes of the "German hysteria". His reasoning was published a year after his death.[8] Foreseeing the social and political catalepsy of postwar Hungary well ahead of his contemporaries, Bibó, an intellectual with a middle-class background, drafted a "peace proposal" on behalf of the Hungarian working class, addressed to his own class. No political grouping was prepared to his work. Then, when he thought that the time had come for action rather than words, he forged documents for the persecuted. He was arrested and, following a fortuitous release, he went underground.

In 1945, in the wake of a democratic reconstruction, nothing would have been easier for him than to continue his work among his students at the university. He wanted, however, to take part in the intellectual and practical work of reconstruction and accepted a government post. Foreseeing the failure of democratic development as early as the end of 1945, he published writings on the crisis of Hungarian democracy and on the self-feeding fear that was growing between the two opposing forces of the communists and reactionaries. His calm analysis (included in the book in English referred to earlier) was received with general dismay. He was able to continue with his brilliant series of political essays and analyses right up to the time *Válasz*, the magazine publishing them, was forced to close down. During the Stalinist era he found refuge in the library of the University of Budapest. He took up

writing again, until the 1956 revolution came, when he was once again unable to confine himself simply to the analysis of events. When Imre Nagy's government, in which he accepted a ministerial post, was toppled by the Soviets and their Hungarian puppets on November 4, 1956, he could not force himself to return to the study of history. He stayed at his post in the House of Parliament to the utter surprise of the Soviet soldiers occupying the building: they simply did not know what to do with the modestly dressed gentleman who politely but fearlessly informed them that he was a minister of the government that they had just overthrown. In the couple of months left for him until his arrest, Bibó felt that he had something to say about the actual situation, and that he had to find a cure for the general disease of the country, and also for its acute crisis. His political actions and his suggestions on how to return to normality almost cost him his life: he was arrested in May 1957 and a year later received a life sentence for "counter-revolutionary conspiracy". After his release in an amnesty, Bibó again found employment in a library, and it was here that he made plans to complete his major works, but he never did. His writings were not published, as he refused to make concessions or formal gestures of loyalty. Nevertheless, in long letters written in 1969 to Zoltán Szabó and András Révai, friends in the West, he outlined a ten-year schedule of work. In addition to embarking on new projects, he would have liked to complete his writings abandoned in the 1940s: "I should like to write on the human condition of man burdened by fear, on the ideologies of hatred and life and death struggle which exacerbate this fear to a degree where it becomes unbearable: furthermore, on the institutions of rank, authority and wealth which tolerably hobble this fear, at the same time institutionalizing it; and on the principle of the division of power as the first successful and institutionalized attempt to ease this fear; and finally, on the prospects of the transition from a society based on the prestige of power (rank, dominion and wealth) to a society based on the mutual exchange of services, within the framework of which a common denominator can be found for liberalism and socialism and their separate inflation is punctured."[9] This, as so many of his old plans, never came to be realized.

To infer from the above incomplete biographical sketch that István Bibó failed to complete the works he wanted to write because he lacked patience, fortitude or calmness, would be utterly unfair. He possessed plenty of all of these qualities, as everyone who knew him would confirm. It was, more than anything, an age riddled with fear and anxiety that prevented him from completing these works—the age that had no better diagnostician in Hungary than him. The sick regimes of a sick age were afraid of Bibó and his like, and perhaps not without reason: as a historian and political scientist, Bibó would have been better tolerated than he was as a diagnostician who wanted to study the "thing itself" and who wished to call maladies by their proper names, rather than resorting to the practice, so fashionable in the region, of speaking in allegories. Such an attitude was extremely rare at that

time in this part of the world, but there were many who were ready to make compromises. Persons of Bibó's mould—people who are disinclined to accept a *modus vivendi* in a regime that hopelessly shut out human liberties—are often called naive. In Hungary, before as well as during 1944, and between 1948 and 1956 as well as after 1956 (in Bibó's case right up to his death), a wide range of totalitarian, pre- and post-totalitarian regimes alternated in Hungary, differing in the degree to which they were intolerable. For Bibó and those like him, however, these regimes all had one thing in common: the lack of freedom and, consequently, the want of a society based on complementary interests and the exchange of services.

István Bibó was never blinded by hatred for any particular regime or ruling doctrine. Just because he always looked at "the thing itself", being always aware of the actual balance of power in politics, did he try to understand and analyse the situation, not rejecting compromises. The majority of his political essays (especially "The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy," written in 1945, and "Hungary's Position and World Politics", written in 1956), were concerned with carefully considered political compromises between sensible, principled and equal parties. The regimes in which he lived, however, either demanded his unquestioning loyalty (as was the case before 1956, during the Rákosi era) or tried to dictate their own compromises from a position of power (as the Kádár regime did after 1963, when he was released from prison). Bibó was unable to accept any of that, quite simply because he did not speak the same language. "... I have nothing to say to those who believe that one has to come to an agreement with the ruling power of the day at all times and under all circumstances, and perhaps want to justify themselves by referring to the difficulties Hungarians encountered in the past. I myself grew up in a world where people were making compromises with the powers that be of the day whatever the circumstances—the Horthy-Bethlen era—and was able to extricate myself from its effect... only little by little, but then I did that once and for all. [...] In the area of my concern ..., which is the discovery and expression of valid propositions in the political and social sciences, these gestures of recognition and compromise are precisely the ones that least fit into the picture."[10]

Being a realist and rational-minded, Bibó was quite aware of the limited effects of his political philosophy on the course of events. Close to the end of his life he expressed this : "... I know that my work, too, is extremely naive; just as my articles written in 1945-1946 were naive, in which I explained to Ferenc Nagy[11] and Mátyás Rákosi what they would have to do if they had any sense, or just as my 1956 schemes were naive, which I put forward knowing that nobody would take them up. But even knowing full well that the truth inherent in such works becomes apparent only after a certain amount of time has passed, these writings were prompted by a possibility, however small, that perhaps they will exert an influence here and there, at the time and place of the events that had inspired them. And since it is this passionate obsession that urges me on to write this work, I must confess that all the wisdom that tries to prove the futility of it bounces off me."[12]

Bibó is said to have suggested once that the following words be written on his tombstone: "Lived between 1945 and 1948". Perhaps all the most important of his political essays are from these few years, all those which aroused the interest of the democratic and left-wing—non-communist and non-politician—intellectuals, giving them so much to think over. Although these works exerted an influence not on the people they were addressed to, they were at least published and they did reach a public. Now that nearly fifteen years have passed since István Bibó's death, it appears that a more appropriate epigraph would read: "Lived between 1979 and 1989", even though he died in 1979, at the age of sixty-eight. In a rather tragic way, or perhaps very much in line with Hungarian ways, his death coincided with the rediscovery of his work in Hungary: he provided the greatest inspiration for the emerging democratic opposition in Hungary. All that was best in the democratic Hungarian intelligentsia paid tribute to his memory in 1981 by publishing an extensive collection of essays (at that time in *samizdat*, naturally); the man and his ideas were discussed from many angles. To the critics of a post-totalitarian regime then going through a crisis but generally considered to be able to last for some time to come, Bibó's calm and reserved style of analysis and uncompromising respect for the law offered a model. There was a feeling, perhaps never actually expressed, that when Bibó rejected in his own unassuming style the regime's unilateral compromise after 1963, he somehow had done so on behalf of everyone else. (He himself would have certainly dismissed such a suggestion as nonsense.) In 1988 and 1989, just like Imre Nagy, István Bibó, too, made his presence felt in a way that was almost physical, showing the Hungarian public buried under the rubble of the collapsed Kádár regime a model of social modernization and political composure, social sensivity and solidarity, and empathic management of the conflicts that inevitably lay ahead.

Now it seems that this "renaissance" is over. It might be some consolation that if István Bibó were alive today, he would not chastise with prophetic fervour the ills of society in Hungary and in the region, fed by old, revived and new fears. He would come up with a new diagnosis after some silent deliberation, but he would certainly object to labels such as "the conscience of the nation" and similar nonsense. He would welcome the first complete edition of his works in Hungary with a measure of bitter-sweet irony, concluding that his critical comments have lost nothing of their relevance.

They still help us to understand our troubles, though they are no longer constantly and ritually referred to in festive and other rhetoric. Nevertheless, they can (and let us hope will) help the world to a better understanding of Hungary.

NOTES

1 ■ István Bibó: *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination. Selected Writing.* Ed. by Károly Nagy. Translation by András Boros-Kazai. Atlantic Research and Publications, Highland Lakes, 1991. 578 pp.

2 ■ See the November 12, 1956 issue of the *New York Herald Tribune*.

3 ■ "Die Lage Ungarns und die Lage der Welt—Vorschlag zur Lösung der Ungarn-Frage". *Die Presse*, September 8, 1957.

4 ■ *The Paralysis of International Institutions and the Remedies*. The Harvester Press, Hassocks, 1976.

5 ■ István Bibó: "A Márciusi Front tíz esztendeje (The Ten Years of the March Front). *Válasz*, 1947. no. 4. p.304.

6 ■ István Bibó: *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination*. Selected Writings. Ed. by Károly Nagy. Translation by András Boros-Kazai. Atlantic Research Publications, Highland Lakes, 1991. p. 39.

7 ■ *Ibid*. p. 42.

8 ■ István Bibó: "A német hisztéria oka és története" (The Cause and History of the German Hysteria). *Történelmi Szemle*, 1980. no. 2. pp. 169-195.

9 ■ István Bibó: "Levél Londonba Révai Andrásnak, 1978" (A Letter to András Révai in London, 1978). In: Tibor Huszár: *Bibó István. Beszélgetések, politikai-életrajzi dokumentumok* (István Bibó. Conversations, Political-Biographical Documents). Kolonel Lap- és Könyvkiadó Rt. 1989. p. 320.

10 ■ "Bibó István Önéletrajzi monológja" (An autobiographical monologue by István Bibó—a tape recording). In: István Huszár: *op. cit*. p. 198.

11 ■ Ferenc Nagy, one of the leaders of the Party of Small-Holders, was Prime Minister of Hungary in 1946-1947.

12 ■ István Bibó: "A Letter to András Révai in London, 1978." In: Tibor Huszár: *op. cit*. p. 321.

Arnulf Rainer: Death Masks, No. 4. 1978-79. Mixed technique on photographic paper. 88 x 68 cm.

István Bibó

The Alleged Opposition Between Capitalist Liberalism and Socialist Communism[1]

The most universalized theory on their irreconcilable differences states that capitalist liberalism is based on the interests of the bourgeoisie, on democratic and liberal theories formulated to defend them, and on the French and other revolutions which resulted in the rule of the bourgeoisie. Socialism on the other hand, and communism, its most thoroughgoing manifestation, are based on the interests of the industrial proletariat, on socialist-communist theories formulated to defend them, and on the breakthrough effected by the Russian Revolution of October 1917, which ensured working class rule.

This is not merely the official communist point of view and the generally accepted Marxist interpretation; it is also the position of a number of so-called bourgeois political theorists who, far from being communists, are indeed, often enough, declared anti-communists. They accept it as self-evident that the bourgeoisie was conceived by ideological class-interest, all they do is to reverse the roles of angels and devils. They argue that the class which will come to include the whole of society, establishing a universally valid value system in its own interest, will not be the proletariat but the bourgeoisie.

The root of such errors in interpretation is a fallacy already known to antiquity: an attempt is made to explain what is obscure with the help of concepts of even greater obscurity. Let me, first of all, gloss the notion of a "basic interest".

This is presented as if the interests of a class were perfectly clear or, at the very least, could be objectively defined. But that is far from being the case. No kind of interest is clear, nor can it be objectively defined. It is one of the most subjective of concepts. The social interest of an individual may well be to exploit his fellow men to the greatest possible degree; or else, it may be that he should be held in the highest possible respect by them; or that he should close his life as a hero, as someone of great moral authority, or even as a saint. The latter may be rarer than

1 ■ Taken from an essay of the same title "A kapitalista liberalizmus és a szocialista kommunizmus állítólagos ellentéte", in István Bibó: *Válogatott tanulmányok* IV (Selected Studies IV) Budapest, Magvető, pp. 759-782.

the former, but they are all possibilities; rarer they may be, but they are all the more effective. Transposing to the level of class interests, we can equally well say it could be the objective of a class to squeeze as large a profit as possible out of the classes at its mercy, but it could also be in the class interest to pacify and satisfy the class that confronts it, or, indeed, to ensure that its own future disappearance would be as smooth and problem-free as possible. There are only differences in interpretation between what the soundest proletarian and the soundest bourgeois class interest are taken to mean. If we want to find our way in the web of opposed, reconcilable or irreconcilable, presumed or real interests, we must go back to the historical situation to which this confrontation turns so as to illustrate the argument, namely to the French Revolution.

1. The beginnings, principal blunder and loss of credit of the French Revolution

The French Revolution was propelled by two major motors. One was the troubled and less and less supportable state of the country at the end of the 18th century, the other that ferment in intellectual life which created significant systems of thought, chiefly in the field of political theory, which also served as an intellectual background for a critique of the existing situation. The great modern change—which is really behind the whole process—is that affairs of state are determined by human reason in addition to (or instead of) custom and the divine order. This notion had been somewhat neglected since Plato and Aristotle, especially in the Middle Ages. Its first major manifestation was Thomas More's *Utopia,* which gave rise to numerous similar theories in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. Amongst these utopias in the 18th century, those which gave priority to the problems of the state were outstanding or rather, they rose above the others. I wish to stress two at this stage: Montesquieu's principle of the separation of powers, and Rousseau's positing of the sovereignty of the people. Both played a dominant role in the French Revolution, on occasion in opposition to or alternating with each other. Neither idea can be substituted by the other.

Of similar importance were the English political system and the English Revolution and, even more directly, the American Revolution that had taken place just before. These all contributed to the idea of a well-functioning political system, presenting a political order which, for that time, guaranteed much freedom; the events overseas showed that it was possible to create a new constitution based on human reason.

Montesquieu turned to the English constitution for his concrete examples. There the common law assured the freedom of citizens. The separation of powers was nowhere near that prescribed by Montesquieu, but it could nevertheless serve as a paradigm of a pluralistic state.

Rousseau's ideas found powerful support in the American constitution. They were self-evidently associated with the notion that the sovereignty of the people was the due of all men, and of all men equally. The theory, inspired by Montesquieu,

put the emphasis on equality. It should not be forgotten that liberty and equality are just two cleverly stressed slogans of the revolution, and not the pattern of its concrete objectives, nor the principles from which the demands of the revolution could be, and had to be, derived. The utopians of the time treated liberty and equality as such basic principles, often deriving rather dogmatic and fantastic demands from them.

The real objectives of the revolution can be formulated concretely. These were:

- limitations on royal absolutism;
- an end to aristocratic privileges that had become altogether dysfunctional, which were a burden on the economy, harassing individuals, granting vain luxury to a non-productive section of society;
- some sort of formulation of the rights of man which could be derived from English and American institutions;
- and finally, on the basis of all this, a constitution embodying the separation of powers, which would in some way realize the principle of popular sovereignty and, at the same time, create some kind of equilibrium between royal power and the power of the people.

The end of the monarchy was not even mentioned amongst the initial demands of the revolution. The 18th century Enlightenment attacked the church as the most highly privileged institution, with determination, but it noticeably spared the monarchy.

It must be said of the French Revolution that, in its first two years, it succeeded in implementing these demands, which met with relatively little opposition. Noble privileges—both real and courtesy—were so to speak completely wiped out to start with. This was followed by the codification of the Rights of Man, serving as a paradigm for future constitutional provisions of a similar nature, which were later to add more modern rights, such as the right to strike and the right to work.

The third step, which crowned all that went before, was the new French constitution which limited royal absolutism. The functioning of the state was determined on the basis of some sort of power-sharing, creating numerous problems that could be, and were, often misunderstood.

The first two years of the revolution ran their course in a state of euphoria, both in France and in the rest of the world, which was keeping a watchful eye on her. The superior in morals and intellect had great expectations linked with this advance of the rational.

The revolution loses its credit and becomes a bogey

The problem which later derailed the revolution appeared at precisely this point, and that was the position of the Church. *Pace* the approval of a number of outstanding churchmen, the Church did not cheerfully accept the curbing of her privileges. The leaders of the revolution therefore responded with irritation and a desire to show the Church who was in control. This was manifest in the Civil

Constitution of the Clergy. That certainly was not a child of freedom. It was said that it could not really be considered a revolutionary step. It was rather a recycling by the people of the sort of enlightened absolutist church policy associated with the Emperor Joseph II. There were, however, things which a Church in league with conservative forces would take from an absolute monarch but not from the people. The result was a break which, for much of the country, replaced general satisfaction with conflicts of conscience. It was the beginning of revolutionary measures where the issue was no longer what the people wanted from those in power, but what those who had seized power in the name of the people wanted to force on the people. As a result of such measures, the resistance of a monarchy in retreat right along the line became both one of conscience and one of despair. This was followed by a war which both sides waged in a fit of absence of mind, into which the revolution drifted, and which the recently acceeded young Emperor Francis and his allies started. No one could have imagined at the time what suffering this was to let loose on both participants, the absolute monarchies of Central Europe and the French government and people.

The French monarchy, which had borne the curbing of its political powers with surprising patience, now took the bit between its teeth and bolted. The new legislation in church matters produced a crisis of conscience for the pious, and not over-intelligent, king.

A direct road led from the outbreak of the war to the Terror, the abolition of the monarchy, the proclamation of the republic, and the convening of the Convention, the new kind of representation of the people. Countless explanations have been provided since: thus, that it was all made necessary by the war, that the war could not have been waged without it. All fairy tales, with the aim of restoring the credibility of the revolution. What we are truly faced with is one of the great bouts of collective madness in history, perhaps the most notable, which essentially derailed the French Revolution. It prompted accelerated mindless progress, a cavalry charge in the direction of ever more radical institutions, with the result that much, including a great deal that was very important of what the revolution had achieved, perished. For the country it meant a twenty-five year war, including a despotism and its wars, culminating in defeat. France became what it had been after the first two years, in fact less, for the constitutional monarchy it became was based on the greater weight of the royal prerogative, much greater than that of the 1791 revolutionary monarchy.

The 1791 constitutional state was really only achieved again by France after eighty years, in 1871, after many great detours. The restoration of the Bourbons and a constitutional monarchy, based on the preponderance of the royal prerogative, was followed by the manipulated constitutionality of Louis Philippe, the citizen-king, with its pseudo-elections, then, following the brief intermezzo of the Second Republic, Napoleon III's police state. The 1871 constitution of the Third French Republic only followed after that. As we all know, it was going to be the constitution

of a monarchy, but the competing parties could not agree on the person of the king, and so it became the first French constitution which rested on parliamentary power. In other words, in effect, the derailment of the French Revolution in the 1790s meant a delay of eighty years in French, and with it European, progress.

I shall return later to the psychological role played in European political thought by postmortems on this blunder. Before that, however, I wish to establish a number of propositions which all follow from the self-evident recognition that it truly was a blunder. Everyone knew it, everyone said so, everyone mentioned it, but it nevertheless did not find a place in the collective European political memory.

In the context of what the revolution achieved, the fact that this is rarely described as a blunder was decided in the decades that followed, when a vital issue was whether the blunder was used to discredit or to justify the revolution. But it neither discredited the revolution, nor did it justify it: it was a genuine blunder, and this must be objectively established. It was a blunder because it put an end to the *élan* of the French Revolution. It produced measures and institutions which did not stand the test of time, nor did anyone mean them to be permanent. It was followed by the completely cynical struggle for self-preservation by the revolutionary élite. A situation soon came about where elections produced growing monarchist majorities. To counteract this, the revolutionaries started to look for a dictator, and finally found him: Napoleon. Napoleon was prompted, or rather forced, by his own ambiguous position into engaging in an uninterrupted series of campaigns of conquest. These conquests stood the whole of Europe on its head. Finally, after huge losses in men, blood and good sense, they led to a peace which restored monarchical rule in Europe. It pushed France back, perhaps not into the *ancien régime*, but certainly to somewhere before the revolution.

If this blunder is not placed somewhere between the extremes of justification or condemnation, oscillating between them, but established as a fact, then we can safely forget, and judge as meaningless, a childish model of the French Revolution that was specially tailored to explain it.

It is not true that the Terror was made necessary because France was drawn into war. France was victorious, not thanks to the Terror but because, in the early years, the French people really fought for the republic, and because the *levée en masse* which it introduced, gave the revolution a numerical superiority which the small, professional armies of the monarchies could not match.

That the people risen in arms in itself implied military superiority for a country is a fairytale. This was splendidly proved in 1870, when the French people, risen in arms, got nowhere against a Prussian army which, singularly in Europe for some time, was based on the universal conscription introduced by the French Revolution.

It is not true that the revolution devours its own children. It is only a mindlessly accelerated revolution, that has gone into a spin and lies upturned on the side of the road, that devours its children. A successful revolution does no such thing, but achieves what is to be achieved in a given situation.

It is not true that a revolution is a process where ever novel and ever more radical positions come out victorious, must be victorious and should be victorious. Those positions must be victorious in a revolution, and as many of them whose victory is feasible in the given situation.

This stagnation for eighty years on the part of European political development had extraordinarily serious and far-reaching consequences. Revolutions took place meanwhile, primarily in France, but they were no more than attempts to make up for running late.

The professional revolutionary and the dyed-in-the-wool reactionary

The first serious consequence was that two types of man, essentially unknown earlier, were born and came to occupy a decisive role in politics: the dyed-in-the-wool reactionary and the professional revolutionary, both completely sterile and futile. The type had not occurred earlier, though it was prefigured, primarily in the wars of religion. But those who really counted in the wars of religion were Erasmians, sceptics, more or less, though not necessarily lacking faith, people who did not allow the mindless madness of the wars of religion to affect them—for it was madness indeed, in its own time. The people I have in mind are William of Orange, Henry IV of France, Elizabeth of England; particularly William of Orange, who especially exemplifies of what small validity the reactionary and revolutionary models are for that time. William of Orange was a feudal magnate, and he remained that, indeed he succeeded in founding a dynasty. But he was also the most important revolutionary of the 16th century. He managed to arm the mariners and fishermen of the Netherlands coast, a deed any 20th century professional revolutionary could be proud of. But it would make no sense to try and establish conceptually whether he was a reactionary or a revolutionary.

Thus two sterile species of man were born. One has become the sworn enemy in all situations of every revolution and every kind of radical progress, the other always wants to produce a revolution, in any situation, and regardless of the cost. He elaborates the technique, and the science, and acts accordingly. But the essence of a good revolution is, seize the day, being tailored to the historical moment. It is that essential spontaneity which the professional revolutionary destroys.

Those two are the carriers of the virus of that schizophrenia which first appeared in Europe, spread to the world in the 19th century, and which has assumed pandemic proportions by our own time.

Permanently potentiating revolution and revolutionary violence

Another consequence of this dislocation is the modern theory of revolution. The central question of revolution should be the lessons that can be learnt from a good and successful revolution, instead the issue was whether the Terror in the French

Revolution was to be condemned or justified. This makes all the consequences drawn and the theories based on them meaningless as well. What came about was a fear of revolution, a political position that is anti-revolutionary at any price, an attitude which spread like wildfire. This is the origin of the psychotic terror of revolution felt by the middle classes, which has no earlier precedent. Ever since then, awakening this terror of revolution has been a sure earnest of electoral success.

A phraseology justifying the Terror of the French Revolution took shape at the same time. It argues that the Terror was made necessary by the danger of war. But, as I already pointed out, France was victorious in war not because of the Terror, but in spite of it. It is not true that a revolution is continuously potentiated. A revolution can and should be potentiated until those objectives are reached which can be achieved and stabilized. But those must not be transcended.

The theory of revolutionary violence has the purpose of justifying the Terror. It was then that a consensus took shape amongst revolutionaries that anyone who shrunk from the shedding of blood was not a revolutionary type from the start. It was, it was argued, one of the most important qualities of a revolutionary that he could learn not to object to those blood sacrifices which the high and lofty aims of the revolution demanded.

The most important revolutionary quality, and one rarely found amongst professional revolutionaries, is the courage to face the new, not allowing any fossilized idea, method or institution to stand in the way of seizing the novel, conceptualizing it. Those who like to shed blood will not only not be better revolutionaries for it but, looked at from the point of view of the revolution itself, they will concentrate their attention on what is not of the essence.

The distortion of utopianism

A third fatal consequence of the French Revolution's tripping over its obstacles was that utopianism—which in the 18th century not only engaged the attention of influential political thinkers but served even more as a pastime for all sorts of eccentrics (its various manifestations did influence particular participants in the French Revolution but had no real role in the realization of the great objectives of the revolution)—became an element of European revolutionary thinking.

A result was that the socialist revolution, one of the great causes at the heart of French revolutionary thought awaiting further solution, the idea of European socialism, also found itself in a blind alley, with no apparent prospects, for eighty years. Thus, utopian attitudes which were altogether absent from the original liberal democratic programme of the French Revolution, found their way into socialism.

That Marx cleansed European socialism of its utopian elements and gave it a scientific character is simply not true. The theory of socialism as a whole is full of utopian elements and contains many utopian demands. They have not so far been

eliminated and are present in a great many altogether unrealistic objectives, or else they have been eliminated too well and replaced by a Machiavellian pragmatism.

This was the origin of that chasm which now divides liberal democracy of a French revolutionary nature and communism, the most radical representative of the socialist revolution. This chasm is also present in the fatal confrontation of the two superpowers.

We have to accept that this eighty years' delay produced fatal distortions in the current features of both liberal democracy and socialism. To form a proper judgment of this situation, we must take into account what liberal democracy truly demands, as well as the distortions it suffered for the reasons mentioned above; we must also take into account the real import of socialism and the distortions that it suffered for similar reasons.

2. The valid achievements of liberal democracy

We have to familiarize ourselves with the achievements and ruling ideas and institutions of the first two years of the French Revolution if our purpose is to present the ideas and institutions of liberal democracy which have their roots in that revolution. Those were two years which created a state of enthusiasm and euphoria in France and the whole of Europe, giving rise to great expectations. Following the Terror, it took almost a century of struggle to recover these ideas and institutions.

These ideas had two basic elements: the separation of powers urged by Montesquieu and Rousseau's sovereignty of the people. It should be stressed that neither could be classified with any of the utopian brainwaves that pullulated in the 18th century, both had their starting point in concrete reality.

Montesquieu derived the idea of the separation of powers from English, and Rousseau the principle of the direct sovereignty of the people from Swiss practice. True, neither precisely understood the objective operation of the paradigms. More precisely, both raised to a higher theoretical level those practices which, given the circumstances, they judged to be better and thought worthy of imitation. It has frequently been pointed out that parliamentary rule in England did not operate according to Montesquieu's separation of powers, neither did Swiss relative democracy follow Rousseau's principles. The thinkers themselves picked and chose from the existing material what they wished to develop further, raising it to a theoretical level. All the same, what they produced were not mere abstract notions.

In the French Revolution the two principles were frequently absolutized and turned into dogmas, and were also opposed to each other. The principle of the separation of powers led to the idea of liberty being turned into a dogma, and its being treated in a dogmatic way was one of the results; the idea of equality was raised to an absolute status when derived from the notion of the sovereignty of the people, and it too was given dogmatic treatment. Their confrontation, however, was only possible on a level of abstraction. Neither the separation of powers nor the

sovereignty of the people, as concretely known, in English or Swiss practice respectively, were proper subjects for confrontation. All that the sovereignty of the people meant was that the road to power led through popular suffrage, and the separation of powers meant that there could be, and should be, more than one centre of power. The two are far from irreconcilable, and can only become so if they are universalized as absolute ideas. It is therefore thoroughly mistaken to imagine that the confrontation of wealth and equality was in any way the central idea of the French Revolution. The central idea of the French Revolution was the separation of powers based on the sovereignty of the people. The abstracted dogmatic, extreme, absolute ideas were not the leading ideas of the French Revolution, but merely the absolutized ideas of its dogmatic principles. It would be wrong to imagine that it was these ideas which motivated society from the start. Society was motivated by the prospect of the sovereignty of the people and of the utility in practice of the separation of powers.

Absolutized consequences drawn from a dogmatic handling of the situation were the result both of Cartesian intellectual attitudes and of the situation becoming more acute. Liberty and equality were not abstract notions from the start, they embodied what were very concrete practical problems, such as what should be done if, as a consequence of the war, speculators corner the market for food and create dearth. Dogmatic libertarians argued against the regulation of prices since that would contradict the principle of liberty. This was the position of those who were more or less wealthy. The poorer were egalitarian and argued that, given a food shortage, there could be no other principle of distribution.

This was how the principles clashed on concrete issues. It is obvious that such questions could not be decided on an abstract level. Food shortages and rationing naturally entailed egalitarianism, and plentiful supplies libertarianism, and neither is a principle that can be used as an absolute guiding post, whatever the situation.

The sovereignty of the people

Which institutions and ideas that can be derived from the French Revolution have stood the test of time? I would give pride of place to Rousseau's notion of the sovereignty of the people. Its importance is extraordinary. With it a new legitimacy replaced the monarchies which lost their credibility, gradually at first, and then all of a sudden. This principle allows one to decide who exercizes political power legally, in conformity with the established order, and not purely thanks to naked violence. Abandoning the monarchic principle created a great gap and all sorts of tyrants, dictators and oligarchies tried to fill it. It is in warding off such dangers that the role of the sovereignty of the people, which suggested all sorts of practical solutions, proved to be of such importance. The principle of the sovereignty of the people has grown so strong over the past two hundred years that world public opinion now looks to referenda as the method most suitable for deciding how a constitution should be created, what institution or person should occupy this or

that position of power, or where a certain territory should belong. This is true in spite of an awareness that referenda can be manipulated. Nevertheless, for these past two hundred years, it has not really been possible to question this principle. Of all the ideas produced by the French Revolution the principle of the sovereignty of the people must therefore be placed first.

Constitutional parliamentarianism

If the people is sovereign then it follows—and this is the second achievement of the revolution—that those exercizing power over society must take the sovereign people as their starting point. There is a choice of possible methods: a representative body, a parliament, to which the government is then responsible may be elected, or else a president may be chosen by direct election. The primary requirement is that the election should not be subjected to either the intervention of force or to manipulation. Force may not play a part in a true election, nor is it a true election if there is no choice.

The opposition

The next requirement of a liberal democracy is accepting an opposition. This proved difficult for the French Revolution, a penchant for the tyranny of the majority was ever present. The principle that it is part and parcel of the liberal sovereignty of the people to accept opposition within the new political institutions or vis á vis the established leadership could only be victorious at the prompting of the relevant English political practice.

The Rights of Man

The wiping out of all sorts of special privileges that do not serve the interests of the people follows from the sovereignty of the people and libertarian and egalitarian principles. One of the most clamarous and most successful actions of the French Revolution was the wiping out of privileges. The codification of the Rights of Man met with enthusiasm worldwide. These are those rights without which the sovereignty of the people would remain an empty phrase: free speech and the right of assembly, protection against every kind of arbitrary action, including arbitrary arrest. These were already more or less present in English political practice, but they were first codified in the French Revolution.

The independence of the courts

The independence of the courts was the most important aspect of the principle of the separation of powers. After all, the Rights of Man were not worth much if there

was no place where one could successfully take action against the administration, a place, what is more, which did not depend on the administration.

Control of the administration by the courts

It was soon discovered, however, that the principle of the separation of powers could be interpreted in a dogmatic way, making it the instrument not of freedom but of limitations on freedom, indeed of arbitrary action. It was soon recognized that the separation of the judicial and the executive power could exempt the administration from judicial control. This is a typical case of the kind of dogmatism which is not due to a certain rigidity of the human mind, but is motivated by a well-defined vested interest. It is important to the bureaucracy that its actions should not be subject to scrutiny. Fortunately England, the paradigm, did not practise a separation of powers of the Montesquieu sort. On the contrary, it was thought natural that administrative or executive measures should also be subject to the scrutiny of the courts. Under the influence of this practice, liberal democracies on the continent of Europe, though making heavy weather of it, created administrative courts in a manner that respected the principle of the separation of powers. Wherever the Rights of Man were taken seriously, there the administrative courts were equipped with all the institutional guarantees of judicial independence.

The system as a whole

The result is a chain the links of which, interlocked and mutually supporting each other, create what has proved the most successful system of institutionalized liberty. Many attempts have been made to drive wedges into these institutions, splitting them, creating differences between them. They must, however, be interpreted as a social and political system of cogwheels. Not a single fitting can be extruded without collapsing the whole edifice. The liberty of parliament cannot exist where freedom of speech is not guaranteed; there can be no freedom of speech where there are no writs of the courts that offer protection against administrative measures; the courts cannot offer protection against administrative measures if there is no freedom of the press. All these presuppose each other. The system as a whole constitutes what is the most perfect system so far for securing freedom, and freely operating sovereignty. Every kind of theoretical argument or experiment which aims to classify this as something peculiarly bourgeois, wishing to link it to this or that social class or historical situation, maintaining that it lacks meaning or justification in a significantly different situation, is really a transparent manoeuvre aimed at bringing back tyranny of one sort or another. Nothing better has been found so far. A particular social system may still have many faults which should be mended, to do that, however, there is no need to set aside the good that has been achieved.

3. The malformations of liberal democracy

The time has come to discuss those malformations of liberal democratic theory which occurred when liberal democracy—as a result of the worldwide reaction to French Revolutionary Terror—found itself on the defensive in certain respects. This primarily happened in areas where—while the tide of the Terror was still running high—extreme, excessively radical and hopelessly utopian aims were more or less compromized. Socialism later embraced most of them.

a/ Fetishizing property

The general opinion that the French Revolution was the revolution of the bourgeoisie, and that its chief objective was the codification and securing of its property interests, is mistaken in that form. Rousseau, the most influential thinker of the French Revolution, who set its course as regards ideas, wrote things about the noxiousness of the man who first fenced in his garden, declaring it to be his own property, which not even the most radical of socialists has trumped since.

Right from the beginning, there were forces in the French Revolution which urged the systematic implementation of such notions, with not much hope in the given situation, it ought to be added. In return for the abolishing of aristocratic privileges, it was precisely the securing of the property rights of commoners that did much to motivate people. The end of aristocratic privileges had seriously affected the financial interests of a large section of society; in the given situation, therefore, putting property in jeopardy, relativizing it, and limiting property rights on a large scale, would not have been too encouraging. For that reason, right from the start, people appeared who looked on the sanctity of property as a dogma, to the extent that as a result of threats offered by them, even the fairly large non-noble holdings of the nobility came to be protected. This transitional, neither fish nor fowl situation was reflected in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The right to property, as a human right, was listed amongst those Rights of Man which are necessary if security and freedom were to be guaranteed. From that aspect the right to property meant no more than an important requirement of personal legal security. Interestingly enough the Declaration of the Rights of Man, at the very end, includes an almost dithyrambic passage on property, first using a formula that has been oft repeated since, that property is sacred and inviolable. The usual attributes of highly respected royal power were here given to property. This was the beginning of the fetishizing of property. It must be presumed that, had the French Revolution not *faltered* soon after, a solution demanded by logic would have had to be found. That much property on a large scale was noxious and without function, was so self-evident already at the time that it is difficult to imagine that a differentiated—in terms of size—judgment of the nature of property would not have ensued. That this did not happen and the fetishization of property assumed a permanent character was, in my opinion, largely due to the *faltering* of the French Revolution, and to the general

antipathy which, as a reaction to the Terror, the middle classes showed vis à vis excessively radical measures.

This antipathy and general recoil spread to sections of society which had nothing to fear from a limitation or regulation of, or attack on, property in terms of size. The solidarity of small property owners, indeed of dwarf property owners, with giant property owners continues to this day. They are all kept at bay by the bogey of the confiscation of property. What has contributed to this bogey is that socialism, given its abstract and utopian conceptual scheme, did not accord the necessary importance to discrimination between property and property in terms of size.

The fetishization of property, and its close link, or rather association, with liberal democracy continues to this day. Liberal democrats generally consider it their duty to cry halt whenever anyone dares to touch the sanctity of property. As a result, forms of property which, owing to their scale, are no longer of a genuine property character but are simply turned into instruments of power, are also protected by liberal democracy.

b/ The myth of the bourgeoisie

The myth of the bourgeoisie, which was later elaborated by doctrinaire Marxists, was not present under the French Revolution. The rule of the *tiers état* simply included everyone who was neither an aristocrat nor in holy orders. It was only natural that the new opportunities were most fully exploited by that section of the *tiers état* which, thanks to its wealth, education or intellect, was most capable of action.

In addition there soon took shape, within the *tiers état*, a section which, even amidst the new advantages, went empty-handed. It was they who later turned into the fourth estate, the working class. Later, within the fourth estate, a section arose who, lacking skills, remained have-nots even after the working class came to power and its political power became a reality. The next step was the coming into being of that section of the working class which was excluded from the bureaucratic leadership: the excluded have-nots. These phenomena are completely identical. This, however, does not alter the fact that, at the time of the French Revolution, discrimination in favour of the propertied bourgeoisie was not deliberate or part of a programme. No one argued that this vanguard—to use the current term—the people who stood out within the *tiers état*, was destined for leadership, and not just anyone.

The taking shape of the bourgeois class in the course of history should also be discussed. We know that it took shape in the Middle Ages. Of all the sections of medieval society it was the bourgeoisie, the burghers, who subjected themselves to education by the clergy, more so than the nobles or knights, or even the peasantry.

That is why the image of the bourgeois or burgher includes honesty and reliability on the good side, and philistinism and pettiness on the bad, especially a judgmental attitude in sexual matters, and a limited understanding, not to mention hypocrisy, on occasion. ❧

1979

Péter Lengyel

The Year of the Újlak Fair

Short story

STEED—TITTY—RED-LETTER YEARS—DROPPING LIKE FLIES—LIVING FOLK ART—DOUBLE CREAM ICE CREAM—THE YOBS—DOODEEDOO DUDES—CRINKLES IN THE CORNER OF THE EYES—A HAIKU—CATERPILLAR TRACKS—SNOW WHITE, STONE HARD—GOOD

"Gimmedat-titty"—Little Kovács, future photographer, mutters rhythmically in parlando; there is just the hint of a melody.

We are in the year of the Újlak fair, the moment that Kovács enters the story. His pressing money problems are of the past. He is turning my kaleidoscope round and round in his hands. The bus from the hills arrives in a cloud of dust. It begins turning round cumbersomely on Fair Valley Street (Fair Valley Road to you, the place where the war between the police and the Gypsies started one day, with Judge Dajka in charge). The people waiting for the bus get on, the bus driver gets off and, palms pressed to the small of his back, stretches. It will be some time before he'll start up again. In the Császárs' tobacco-shop Cheta is listening to the Tabányi Dance-Band with her windows thrown wide open. The interval signal flows across the square like the spring-flood of the Danube, once, twice, three times. Snake-whistles uncurl with shrill crimson cries. Paper trumpets summon to victory. The smell of spun sugar candy, honey cakes, machine oil and dust mingles in the air. The kaleidoscope is featherlight, smooth. It is fairyland that Little Kovács sees, diamond-studded garments and man-eating giants, with an emerald palace and a golden-haired steed. The cardboard is cool to the touch, the glossy paper sticks to his hands and rustles mysteriously.

"Twenty for the titty!"—The kaleidoscope's magic can only call forth the words of the song, the melody is indistinct—the voices of the boys who have already seen the show are beginning to crack.

Péter Lengyel

is a novelist whose science fiction work Ogg második bolygója *(The Second Planet of Ogg), appeared in four languages. The novella "Rising Sun" is included in* The Penguin World Omnibus of Science Fiction *(1986),* Cobblestone: A Mystery for the Milleneum *was published in 1993 by Readers International Inc.*

Kovács and I are to hear it later, at the two o'clock screening (and for many years from then I shall be trying to discover the original words—in vain). This is the song that the whole street will be humming, whistling, chanting during the whole of that summer. "Letya-'avedattitty-NevernoIwon't."

In the cinema, Little Kovács will be watching the woman in the short skirt dancing on the bars of the giant xylophone, her breasts bobbing pertly underneath her blouse. He will feel for the first time that confusing sweet tingling begin in his groin. Titty, he will think. He will remember the kid called Bárán slipping under the chair in a dead faint at seeing a man being tortured in a Czech partisan film. And he will at once think that it will be this girl's tits that will send him into a dead faint for the first time in his life.

The day of the fair. We spent what was left of it until night-time together with my new-found friend. I had work at last, would earn enough to eat. He too had found work, would have money to spend in the evening. We listened to loudspeaker music and hummed street songs. We hitched ourselves to the shaft of the merry-go-round. We bought double cream ice cream from two little old ladies at a tea-shop near the market. We watched the gang play bull and football on the corner of Tow Street. We saw the variety turn at the Újlaki cinema. Gimmedat, said the xylophone. We went to the races. We ate frankfurters. We rode the dodgems at the Funfair.

In the evening, Smokey Fred danced in the largest square in Europe, and we watched him. Little Kovács took the silver-green tube to pieces to see how it worked. His constitution had undergone a baffling change.

Haller Square was behind us by then . The circus people will tell you what Haller Square is. It is their Waterloo, the place where the battle was lost for the Hungarian circus. Later I would flee ahead into the deep. At this moment twenty thousand people are working at Pentele. Came the time when it was easiest to pass unnoticed in the bustle and flurry of gigantic construction projects or in boozers like the Barracks 1,OOO, the Leprosy and the Slasher, among all the mud, booze and floozies. Only you had to take care not to overdo things and go one better than an unskilled worker.

All at once on a sunny Monday afternoon we found ourselves homeless and unemployed, all three of us. All four of us rather; the Ironman too. We set about finding our niche in the new world, each after his own fashion. The Friday before the day of the fair I was doing the rounds of the stationers'. I bought sheets of glossy paper, bright green, and silver foil. I grubbed round for scraps of coloured glass by the soda works near the Lukács baths. There were glaziers at work on Goat Hill; I picked up the strips they cut off the edges out of the rubbish.

On Saturday I began assembling three-sided glass prisms, the way a grumbling, itinerant Slovak glazier had taught me. I fitted the prisms into cardboard tubes and wrapped them in green paper and silver foil.

In the evening I paid a visit to the merry-go-round man. Showed him my fifty kaleidoscopes. Who's going to sell them? asked Lakatos. You are, I said. We'll go halves. And to make things even, you'll take me on.

Kovács was lonely that summer, hung round on the fringes of the gang; brand new lover of the city, he had moved to Old Buda from the village of Kunadacs with his mother in the spring. In school they called him a hick from the sticks.

I was out in Fair Valley Street bright and early in the morning, unloading goods, rigging up the merry-go-round.

Little Kovács woke with the feeling that today he was going to do something, something mysterious, something exciting. He'd been on the door all night, opening it to those coming home after closing time, but he wasn't at all sleepy, he had grown accustomed to it. Got it! In the evening he'd met Smokey Fred from Barge Street. I'm going to the street dance, he'd said. If I can skip out somehow. You coming? Fred's nineteen years old and a conscript, but he'd asked him to go along. He wanted to go, of course he did, but you need money for that kind of thing.

He whistled up for The Bread. "Tarara rampam pampam pam pa mushybashy doodadoo" scat from Bárán (to the tune of In the Mood): the kids in the neighbourhood had picked up the gang's earlier signature tune in no time at all and kept whistling us out at all hours. By eight o'clock the guys from Tow Street were advancing towards the merry-go-round with the nimble, catlike gait of the slums. Mister Lakatos knew all the teenage big shots of every suburb personally. Here he spoke to Big Kovács. (I watched the merry-go-round man's tired eyes, his unshaven face, the bulging pockets of his herring-bone suit, and was reminded of Ferke, former brother showman, also known under the Gypsy name Kodel. He is dead now, driven into the showers with half the tribe of Voivode Sastaras, babes in arms, greybeards and all, where it wasn't water that came in a fine spray from the rose. Kuli, his offspring, his and the nubile Lília's, is still alive—he sometimes comes and tells me how he's doing.) He'll take on the gang to push the merry-go-round, said Lakatos, for the morning. The boys from Tanner Street might turn up today too.

Anyone who's pushed three rounds can have a free ride. Little Kovács did not want a ride. "I'd rather you paid me instead." So the old man sent him over to me to give me a hand with whatever I wanted. And this will turn out to be the episode that will change his whole life . For I will take him to the Újlaki cinema to see the show in the afternoon.

At half past eight the boys from Tanner Street arrived, as scheduled. The two gangs eyed each other like mercenaries on opposing sides. The Consultant didn't know where to look. Lakatos was conferring with The King of the Dwarfs, who was a regular in that rough-house, the Kajner in Learner Street. *Mir*, said Big Kovács, holding out his hand at last, big *mir*. Peace was made. The Bread grinned.

Well, to cut a long story short: we were touching the bottom of the short but abysmal historical period that was later named after a big-moustached foreign politician. There are years, red-letter years covered by the story that are more important than others. In the one novel which we live in from the beginnings. The red-letter year is made up of autumn, spring, summer and winter, seemingly just like the ordinary year. In reality it stands out, surges up from the sometimes swift,

sometimes sluggish course of time, scintillates—a prism that has not four sides but four thousand and four, or thereabouts—absorbing the dough of neighbouring, pedestrian years. Miraculous year—*annus mirabilis*—we called it in days long past. Brooks overflow and flood the woods, uneasiness spreads. Small game use new trails to reach their watering places, are suddenly setting out towards the south by the thousand, and tumble into the great stream to find their death. The autumn winds shift round, uprooting forests, a twin-tailed comet roves the western sky, airplanes and battleships disappear by the dozen in the Bermuda Triangle. Years in which the fabric of space-time thickens, and after a long silence and stillness three things happen at once, that will determine the course of events for a long time .

Red rain comes drizzling down, frogs, crabs and other hideous beasts fall from the firmament, and sixteen-bit computers go berserk. Miraculous years and miserable years: *anni miserabiles*. Such is the year of the Turkish slave march, the same as when the Ottoman Empire spread furthest in the East. The year of the Chatty Cat Club, the deferred Hungarian Millennium, when they who belong together find each other. And maybe, maybe, though such things cannot be seen clearly except in retrospect, this year—the present, the time of writing. Such is the year of the Újlak fair: the police registration form becomes a totem, and it is bad juju to be without one.

The time I am working as a repair mechanic and barker, putting records on the gramophone, taking in the money. Pushing the merry-go-round. Little Kovács hitched himself right in front of me to the shaft of the wooden wheel. We are almost next-door neighbours, as it turns out. Working together brings people close fast. Electric motors were not yet in use. Nor microphones under desks, nor dark rooms with no water in the telephone exchange. At a given level of economic development, labour is cheaper, and this was such a year. A significant year.

We started the first round at half past nine. One of those days. Women's dreams of dashing engineers float behind lace-curtained windows. It is still morning, but slovenly-looking types with dyed moustaches are already scouring a Grand Boulevard that has long lost its bloom for women. What remains of the country amalgamates with the revolutionary new, like on the Lower Forest Row (in a minute).

"We are getting in the hay," a merry male voice brays from the top of the pole, outblaring the creaking of the wooden structure. I listened and heard: ears of corn, black earth, where Asia meets with Europe, *chernoziem* (every schoolboy learned the word, accurately, and did not learn "Dropping like flies, The heathen fell" instead). The dickey-seat of the cart, the scent of hay, fallen leaves beneath the trees, nightfall will (low note) bri-ii-ing (higher note) cold (higher still) wi-ii-inds (plural). Though the voice of reason told one that the wheedling lilt was but the slimier side of the Asian tyranny imposed on us, I liked the melodious, ridiculous rhymes that pulsed with a foreign culture. Could what exists ever have such immense power over the yearning soul?

The bell rang. Our customers got off, new ones came. Rattles clattered, wooden spoons rattled, girls squealed. I took the fifty fillérs. Rag balls thudded, cans clanked. I'll be here until noon, and so will Dani Kovács.

I looked at the noisy fair. I sang the Hay-cart Song. (Strange. The country is obviously hurtling towards its ruin, as anyone in his right mind will tell you—yet I am having a good time. For that matter, I believe that a country does not simply put up the shutters, like an old dump gone bust would, has not done so to this day, at the point we have reached in the telling of the story. I sang the Julcsa Song. "Julcsa, come see the transformer run. And I'll drive a thousand volts up your cunt." (To the tune of "When she goes to market.") Last year, when the country had still been underdeveloped and agrarian, the song had gone: "The best buy yet's a pound of geese necks, Julcsa, you'll find 'em up between your legs." Today, the people, in a frenzy of industrialization, have already created a new song, though the rhymes tend to be a bit lame: "Turn you into a dynamo, teach you rotary motion , Julcsa, Inota can't hold a candle to your devotion" (Inota: aluminium foundry, twenty thousand tons of equalized raw aluminium, unalloyed laminating and forging stock).

That kind of summer. Songs, songs, and yet more songs. The stars of the Balkans twinkled down on us in the songs. But the Volga awaited your return. Roses bloomed, broo-hoo-hooks babbled and boomed. The metals in the fa—ha—houndries boomed as they were poured. The victorious flag flapped, booming in the wind. (Of all the words that make up the rich vocabulary of our language, the verb boom has acquired a distinguished role—a statistically substantiated fact. Only the followers of the great Sigismund could tell what this is supposed to compensate for.) The rank foliage of purple lilac bushes. America, oh you wonderful world! In the alien genre of the *chastushka*. And the other: the variations of street poetry, set to international popular tunes. Songs and poems in living folk art. "Black and white, left and right, doodeedoo dudes." "Tarara rampam pampam pampa mushypashy doodadoo". "Auntie Terry lives out in the back of beyond." "Look out, Johnny, the bogeys are coming, Grab hold of the loot and scoot." Songs from East and West, the has been and the shall be fused into a gross reality in our streets; the overlords did have their flaws and blind spots.

"Tell me, tell me, tell me, fickle breeze as you pass by me, About the big wide world." We listened, entering fully into the spirit of this foreign operetta song on weekdays and holidays, at meetings and at school; friends and acquaintances could no longer tell you about the big wide world; for a long time only the ficklest of breezes could cross the borders (and of course the soccer players, anyone who can kick a ball immediately falls under a hitherto unknown class of special citizen.)

"On a prairie like you've never seen", I hum (to the tune of "I just came from Alabama", as I learned here, in the Bible Belt now. I made it to America. The songs that could be sung by such an international company were determined by the smallest common denominator. "Somewhere, over the rainbow; Oh, my darling Clementine". And then, suddenly: "On a prairie like you've never seen a tram comes trotting by." What has the Újlaki fair to do with all this, you may ask; well, this was the time when Europe was learning these songs, after the Second Great Organized Massacre. The country was not relocated, we stayed here, in the middle of Europe.

(There may of course have existed such a decree. By the time you caught sight of your homeland, it only needed a higher level decision for an application for its admission into the Third World.)

"You're getting old, Joey boy," the loudspeaker grated in a male voice. It was not an auspicious year for the advance of feminity.

We have our songs: they fly through our lives. Maroussia's mate, the fisherman. I could go on forever.

I was making good money and so was Little Kovács. The pagan festival of the late summer, the Feast of the New Bread, the holy day of Saint Stephen, our first king, Constitution Day, and Sunday—and all falling on the same day." Oh, Josef, Josef! You are such a nuisance!"

A snub-nosed Renault taxi pulls into the kerb and Smokey Fred gets out, still in uniform. He comes straight over to me. Starts talking without pausing for breath. He'll be coming to the street dance tonight. He skipped off sentry-duty. Come to think of it, overt disobedience of orders is what it amounts to, imperilment of the watch—his composure is amazing. I show him what I've been told to do. It'll take another hour or so. The two little old ladies' tea-shop by the market-place comes to my mind, a cool, curtained place.

After the next round I had to go over to the shooting-gallery. I passed the job of taking in the money onto Little Kovács.

Then, soon after, the bells of the Újlak church rang in noon. The radio had stopped broadcasting the noon bell ringing. The custom had been abolished, they had done away with the centuries following the battle of Belgrade, since when all the bells of Europe toll for us at noon (so they say—I for one thrust out my chest accordingly when I hear the noonday bell.Other sources have it that the pope was lacking in troops, cattle and crops, so provided chimes instead—and so, ultimately. *Si non e vero, e ben trovato*, strikes home. Every man is prepared to defend his home and customs, is ready to make sacrifices for them. And if we look at the actual borders of the Moslem world: those sacrifices were not made in vain.)

I wanted to give something to my new friend, and I chose the silver-green tube.

There are still the air-guns to load, the fallen score-cards to be fixed. The rag balls to be collected. Then I'm done. Free to go. I never like to be told what to do and when, so I choose to stay. I sit on an old tyre beside Császár's tobacco-shop. Fiddle with a crossword puzzle. You need love in the spring!The bus sets off for the hills again. I absorb the wild tempestuous eddy and surge of sounds and smells. Kovács is turning the cardboard tube round and round, seeing miracles, seeing nightmares. And suddenly the kaleidoscope world falls apart.

He raises the tube at a new angle. And waits for it to light up again, like a mirror through which you can see the world, see the moon, the sun, the morning-star rise.

And then asks himself: how did I get here? A good question from a ten year-old child.

He sits down beside me, my new friend. I hold the paper so he can see it too. Nine down (twelve letters): the street leading to the Houses of Parliament, adorned with a red star visible from afar. (Though it is not by the red star that the witless masses recognize it, but by the fact that neither man nor beast may cross it since the foreign politician's sturdy viceroy—only a courtier's ingenuity could devise such an adjective to describe the bald-headed, neckless man—has chosen to set up his headquarters there. The poetry of the streets sings of the new freedom of speech: "There's no such thing as a bald head, just foreheads that reach to your arse.") We later sent the sturdy all-forehead man back to the place he issued from, and so, just the other day, back home, we could once more walk down Constitution Street and you saw the green shoot of an acacia growing from the crack in the concrete of the cellar beneath the grating. I was telling you about the year of the Ujlak fair: you see, we did live, after all. You will find the Institute of Party History over the cellar.

High-brow stuff on the radio: Before the Comrades' Court of Justice. We scramble to our feet. I chuck the paper into the first litter-bin.

Until the morning when Haller Square happened we lived in comparative peace, the brother and sister, the Ironman and I, they let us be. If we did not think of the time they took Major Dajka away. We have had no news of his whereabouts for six months now. (On a ledge of rock enclosed by barbed wire.There was no crime to convict him of—and stone-breaking's the standard penalty for having done nothing wrong. It is an activity that calculatedly demands more energy than that provided by the food allotted, and the screws can hardly wait for the laws of physics to assert themselves.) On Monday they took away the wagon, the horse, everything, everything, circus and all, from Haller Square. They did not take away the children this time, the liberal element must have carried the day.

My two companions were permitted to begin work that evening, in accordance with the ideas of the National Enterprise for the People's Entertainment. As a last resort. I keep a tally. Just a few days ago, importuning for an immoral purpose was abolished by decree. (I'll explain how all this comes into the story in a minute). The decree was signed by Kádár, Minister of the Interior, M.P. In the brothels of Cabman Street , Union Street, Conti Street, and Merry Street (Tolnai Lajos and Pogány József Street to you) and in the rooms rented by the hour in the Upper Forest Row, the permits issued to licensed prostitutes (whores, to you) were withdrawn. Their means of production were not nationalized. Families were moved into the rooms. That is how the brother and sister found us a home in the Upper Forest Row, on the first floor. The ground floor was mouldering dank holes without even a water-tap, and one toilet for a hundred people out in the yard. Some girls stayed, of course, carrying on their by this time secret business, peaceably co-existing with the democratic tenants. All men are equal. The brother and sister would lend salt and firewood to a certain Kujtor, and kept asking: how can a decent whore work under such conditions?

I had to find lodgings too, at the double. I got twenty-five forints for my suit in Anker Close on the Pest side of the river, and they were asking three hundred for a furnished room behind the Western railway station, near the Kádár transformer (it was not named after the Minister of the Interior, but Brother, who writes, got into trouble over it. When permission had been granted for the four words, "Hungary was still there" to appear, the suspicion of lese-majesty, of high treason even, enveloped my friend's book like a bank of fog, just because the name of the converter station had appeared in print. What he thought was, shame on them, there's no arguing with the map, the name of the street at that intersection is there for anyone to see. Then he realized that the reader would never look to check.)

Then it turned out that Kujtor knew of a furnished room, and that is how I got to know the Tow Street gang. I had come home again. This neighbourhood: the young willows of the small park by the Danube, the market, the openings of the sewers all along the embankment as far as the building that later became the bar called the Little Bear and even further, down to the empty plot of ground in Fair Valley Street, had been home to Little Kovács since the spring. Five streets in between. (In place of the burnt-out Lujza steam mill. The finest houses in the city, built in the Hungarian Bauhaus manner at a time when the original Bauhaus had already been broken up by the tiny-moustached leader to the left of us. Over this country the delusive appearance of peace had settled. Just one year later the asphalt had not yet had time to cool on the new street when it was already being torn to shreds during the siege of Budapest. That is why here in the Carpathian Basin we feel that any time there is no shooting, we are living a drawn-out truce. Peace, if we do not count what's happening to the Ironman. If we do not count the pregnant women who are kicked in the belly, beaten with truncheons, have their eyes sprayed with tear-gas. Time after time the peace we lived in turned out to be phoney and burst like a balloon.)

The Tanner Street gang are pushing the merry-go-round. I shall be coming tomorrow, in the morning.

Let the fun begin with double cream ice cream. Double cream ice cream exists, and the cleansing tempest of the new world will need time to sweep out everything that is. We have no idea that the all-devouring Balkans are already reaching out for us with their pseudopods. The Balkans, where the word given does not count. Where it is the repairman who steals the parts out of the radio handed over for repairs. Where money must be slipped into the pockets of policemen, lawyers and doctors if you want to get things done. Where there is always a pile of shit in the public lavatories. Where pedestrians hiss at each other in hatred on the streets. An amoeba that, flowing around you, encloses you insidiously. Such is your picture of our country, having known no other—in this they have succeeded in creating something "more permanent than ore".

Two wizened, white-haired old ladies run the tea-shop by the market, their strange names evoke yellowed photographs, distance, love. Acrobats were called

thus, who had done the Great Round of Russia. A bead-curtain hangs from the door of the long, single-storey building. I do not know which of them is which. "Lília!" one of them calls back from over the cash book. "A customer's come." And now I know her name too. I ask for a double cream ice cream, the flavour I like best. (I almost said "liked best", as though they had the power to change one's tastes.) A man comes in, gulps a glass of some liqueur, and leaves. A regular customer with a green shoulder patch. By the time you started eating ice cream, double cream flavour had been wiped out, done away with too.

We turn into Oar Street with our cones. Snatches of song in faltering, cracked teenage voices drift from beyond the corner. The yobs of Tow Street. Big Kovács in the lead, Prijot, Half-pint, Dumbo, and Bárán following. In the rear, Cheeta, the only girl in the gang, and her brother, The Bread (they were quit of the orphanage, live in Barge Street with Olga, the charlady, whom their mother left them with). The Consultant: a strange kid, lives in Tanner Street, turns up every now and then, disappears for a while, they'd grown used to it. Involuntarily I begin aping the yobs: accompany them to the corner of Barge Street, shoulders drooping, hips swinging.

They squat down to play bull. I sit on the rough stone wall to watch.

"La lala lalla", Prijot hums. The Bread takes it up, sings the words "Titty's what I want". "Letya have'a titty"—that's Bárán. I know which one's Bárán now, Little Kovács pointed him out to me: the scared-looking small dark one whom anyone can thump (which is just his rank, of course; the bottom of the pecking order. They do not really beat him). "NevernoIwon't". I feel a surge of joy, a longing for distant lands. This summer, the Old Man said: the original number is German. I shook my head. How could a jazz hit be German? It's a key number. "Titty's snow white", I watch the bull-players. I cannot yet couple the song into the current of world culture. A considerable slice of its import is beyond me still."Titty's stone hard."

Dumbo has to fetch his lunch from the Sipos. This will come in handy, I have as yet no idea how handy it will be. Little Kovács, too, goes home to eat. I can just see Mama Anna in my mind's eye, the way he described her to me this morning: small and round—and nice. My friend props his book against the loaf of bread on the kitchen table, reads. I go home and prop a book against a loaf of bread. By the time I get back, I know I'll be going to the movies today, to the first afternoon screening. By then Little Kovács is richer by two horse-shoe nails that go under the name of bull in the street.

The heat is stifling, thirty degrees. I sit, moon around. The street takes the satirical song literally: America, well, it's got to be out of this world. We dream Americas. They are chasing the rubber ball across the potholes in the asphalt. Once Dumbo gets hold of it, no one can take it away from him. During our memorable autumn I knew him as a fighting male in the Square, in our cobblestone labyrinths; he became a refugee, a soccer-player in California, a Doctor of Philosophy thanks to a sports scholarship, then his life took a different turn, he had a spell in an insane asylum and came home. His mother waited for him, saved the flat for him, then died of a broken heart.

"Doodeedoo dudes, that's the way the cookie crumbles and no mistake,"—The Bread chants. Let's drop into the Caretakers.

The Caretakers' Club is the other centre of social life for those living in Tow Street: everybody's mother or father is a caretaker.

A festive lecture on dances. The waltz and the polka have become our traditionally democratic dances. The tango, the foxtrot and the English waltz—though they obviously are reflections of capitalist decadence—may now be danced, in a tasteful manner. The caretakers' dance group demonstrates the new progressive social dances: the Wolves' Play and the Round Dance, worked out from the infinite force of nature by experts guided by the tenets of leading modern Soviet social dancing. Capitalism is destructive in its effect, every manifestation of socialist culture must be rooted in the people. The new, lively collective dances at once ousted the sultry, perverse dances involving much erotic writhing such as the samba, jive, boogie-woogie, the rumba, and the conga, which are a means of aggression in the hands of American leaders. Dances preserved in small peasant communities are well suited to the festivities of the joyous people who have shaken off the thousand-year-old yoke at last. The dancer waiting in the middle of the ring chooses a new partner as the refrain is sung, while those forming the ring clap their hands, swaying.

Let's go to the cinema, there's just time to catch the two o'clock show. They've got a variety turn at the Újlaki, everyone's seen it except Little Kovács and me. Everyone's got their own native cinema, the Tow Street gang's is the Újlaki, out on Vienna Road. And now it's mine too.

A single-storey, rambling building with a long courtyard among the old houses of the Old Buda district. The interior is hung with black and wine-red, ancient, peeling wallpaper. We sit sprawled in our seats, craning our necks, having bought one forint tickets for the front row, two metres from the screen. There was an extra thirty fillérs to pay for the variety show. A fillér is a hundredth part of a forint. Little Kovács didn't let me pay for him, he's flush today. A box-seat costs three forints, and those who want to smooch always take the back seats. Our necks'll be stiff by the time the show's over. If I could have taken a look inside that cinema now, before taking the plane, I would probably have found it small, dark and grubby. That day, I took such things for granted: that is what cinemas are like. (I did not get to have a look inside, the cinema had been closed down, rain, wind and sun shred the big paper letters of the last film title; the Old Buda district stands empty, ready to be demolished. Homeless kids have moved into one of the houses of Bush Street, former abode of the late Rókus Láncz, respectable receiver of stolen goods, half a block away. The windows are smashed, the walls crumbling; empty beer-bottles, condoms and tattered stockings lie scattered on the floor, the hideous walls are spray-painted with the names of pop groups. Sunflower-seed husks spat on the floor make an audible patter.)

In the interval, the courtyard of the cinema, the tarred walls of the urinals, standing in line, the pungent smell of ammonia. Little Kovács buys liquorice in the lobby.

We return to our seats. I knew from the first that we would settle for the Újlaki. I had to see the variety show. And had no inkling that it would realize Kovács's stirring morning-time premonitions, and turn this none too easy day —which will bring about a change in my life, in the life of my family, and in the lives of the Tow Street yobs—into a red-letter day for him: and it will be the memory, the glimmer and sway of the variety that will remind him of today's country, all for thirty fillérs. (He knows nothing of this while he is watching the show; we do not notice when the earth trembles beneath our lives. The realization may come in the evening, at the kitchen table during supper. He told me about that evening many years later, when Man had walked on the Moon, you had arrived, and Little Kovács had become a grown man, earning a living as a photographer of wrecked cars, and his ribs had been broken in front of the Little Bear Bar.) In the meanwhile an enormous xylophone is pushed before the screen, the oval of the spotlight falls upon it.

The thirty fillér show is organized for the performers by the National Enterprise for the People's Entertainment, in the name of full employment, which has become one of the fundamental articles of faith ever since the circuses have been confiscated on the authority of other articles of faith. The audience is unaware of this process. The audience has come to see the film and will wait patiently for the variety turn to run its course and the real show to begin. Little Kovács keeps his eyes peeled nonetheless.

The man wearing tails and the woman in the short skirt sing their songs skipping on the stairstep-size white bars of the instrument, two live xylophone hammers: a realistic production in which art and life are closely intertwined. Their dancing feet first play the tune known in old Buda as "Ten kilos of the finest talcum, Just been fucked by Doctor Malcolm. He split and left me up the creek, And never looked back, the slimey creep ". Sorry, that's the way it goes. Your great-grandmother Vargha, such a refined lady, would never tolerate the like in her house.

One year after our show, in her dirt-walled room, she stares up at Barna through her sole remaining personal object, her steel-rimmed lorgnette with sad, wise eyes. " Things can't be going as well as all that, son. If they are deporting people again." True to the secret police's own brand of humour the lorry stopped in front of the house on Danube Row on her birthday (the holy day of St Stephen, our first king, the Feast of the New Bread, Constitution Day, Sunday, Summer Festival day), and deported them to a farm. By this time I know that the lorry means trouble (we could have a look round, at the moment of our show, to see where others have gone. Those who would be there with us in the cobblestone Labyrinth, when we had had enough, one fine autumn day, and shook them off, as a dog shakes cold water off its back. We can tell where they all are now, each and every one.)

And in the Újlaki cinema we come to the highlight of the show: the Titty-song.

The tall, heavily built man seems as light as a feather as he tap-dances. He wears his hair long and pomaded above the winged collar of the ruffled lace dress shirt, looking like a pre-war toothpaste-ad. But the male members of the audience have eyes only for the girl. Little Kovács too watches her with the precocious open-mouthed wonder of not-yet-begun adolescence. Stares at the sensuous crimson lips, the nimble thighs working under the short skirt. Hears jazz being played. And here everyone is in on the conspiracy: we all know what the tune implies. And it would remain so during the decades to come; when someone said give me a number, right off we'd say fifty-six, even if we'd been wakened from our deepest sleep.We knew. For the chaos of life interposes. We, people formed of ordinary clay, can have no idea what an awesome task it is—even in the case of the most ardent en-deav-our—to interfere in *everything*, from dances to be danced to the width of trouser legs, from ice creams to the names of cities and race-horses. From the amount of water, electricity and towels allowed per bather down to the recycling of boxes, the polishing of mirrors, the checking of measures and the branding of barrels, the smell of paid sexual intercours. The sheer quantity of things! The city bars were to come next in Little Kovács' life: the Spring, the Poppy, the Yerevan, the Dawn, and of course, in the year of your arrival, my place of work, the Little Bear. We are living the decades of cast-iron government issue hypocrisy, yet not only the yobbos, but night-club musicians—even our drummer, the Ironman—sang grinning, at the top of their voices: "Lemme have'a titty". Anything that exists is official. And the fact that this song is not banned creates the illusion that it is compulsory. Whereas the truth of the matter is that They were occupied elsewhere. Detitty's what I want. (Where could I get hold of the original English words? I wondered. I've got to find the original words. But I never managed to get hold of them, and when I did, they were not English words, and by then, I may say the question had been mitigated into a theoretical one along the zigzag tracks of history.)

My trip to America began well—now, on the way here. As soon as I had made myself comfortable in Amsterdam on the plane to Chicago, the first sound I heard on the fourth channel of the headphone was that song. Not with the familiar words, of course. I had found the original text. It went something like this: By mir bist du—and, casually— *shayn*. Which means " I'm hooked on you" in today's slang. This was made to rhyme with *explain*: "Please let me explain." What they really meant to say was *Schön*. The Andrews Sisters, and the title of the album was Beat me Daddy Eight to the Bar. German words. Brother knew what he was talking about, that's obvious. And I'd been shooting my big mouth off, as usual. Up until then I'd known only the one set of words to that song.

But let's leave this time, the age of the Third Great Wave of Immigration to America, the airplane flying ten thousand metres above the Atlantic. Let's see what's happening at the Újlaki in the year of the fair.

Up on the stage a sprightly pair of boobs is playing ball beneath the cheap lace blouse. One of her breasts seems slightly bigger than the other. Little Kovács feels

a stiffening of a kind he has never experienced before. Like the dribble of saliva from the mouth of Pavlov's much talked-of dog, this will happen to him again and again for many years to come whenever he hears this tune. And beneath the tune glimmer the clandestine words about the afternoon street. Twenty fillérs. Stone hard. My God, thinks Little Kovács, poetry. Twenty fillérs, why, he's got that much on him right now.

Russian films are sub-titled for the benefit of the workers, the age of dubbing has not yet arrived. From behind the screen the subtitles can be read in mirror-writing.

After the movies we go to the race-course, a horse-race is something you've got to see once in your life. We take a tram across Margaret Bridge. From Louis Street the booming of the loudspeakers gets wilder and wilder. "Fan the flame and batter down the wa-aa-all." Boom, fan, batter. And in the hiatus of silence, the delicate tinkling of the xylophone beneath the girl's sculpted feet. And from then on other scraps and snippets of lyrics throb in my head. Dynamo, rotary motion. Inota, Julcsa. Auntie Terry lives out in the back of be - yooond! Black and white, left and right, doodeedoo dudes. Ya never say alright!

We walk down a narrow tunnel towards the race-course. Can anyone win here? asks Kovács. Yes: the racecourse company can. Its all a question of mathematics. And the rest is the science of victimology. A study of those who believe they can get something for nothing.

On the course, a festive gala race is about to begin; for this special race the stables entered only the very best thoroughbreds.

That summer. Bebop, bebop, katch, katch, katch, Big Kovács shouted in Tow Street. Three mattresses cost twenty-four forints at the mattress-makers. A piano costs two thousand six hundred. Bologna sausage costs seventy-five fillérs at the horse-butchers. A kilo of bread is two forty, a hair-cut two forints and no tips expected: the forint was in its infancy as a currency.

Those who had no children were fined four per cent of their salary: a practical measure to induce an increase in the armed forces. Those who passed the decree ("They" according to the populace) could not have known that by the time these men would be called up for military service, they would not be soldiering for them. They never know.

Art criticism found new means of expression: jazz did not meet with approval, Ida Boros, the singer, and Chappy's band were sent to prison. The revolutionary reorganization of society continued. The un-relocated part of the population could sell typewriters for a good price even if they were in bad repair, provided the keys were in Cyrillic script.

"When I said white," chants Little Kovács rhythmically, "you said black".

Events are progressing rapidly on the racecourse. Naiade from the army stables takes the lead, with Merry Maide following close behind. It isn't going to stay a race-horse for long, not here. Not with an imperialist name like that.

In the offices, a gong signalled the end of the working day.

So-called plebeian Christian names such as Zsuzsanna, József, Péter, Erzsébet, and Mátyás became popular.

The Presidential Council relieved the Minister of Justice of his job. The cinemas were playing the Jolly Fair.

"You prou-hou-houd cossack!" warbled the populace on their way home from the Újlaki." Give me ba-hack my wa -hatch!" Life was gay if you sang. In the quarter of the city fondly named the Hellhole, a foundry foreman killed his mother with eleven strokes of an axe. (Soughing metal, fa-ha-houndry, casting mould, loop).

The *Forum* review ceased publication.The editor of the *Star* was dismissed. The Minister of Justice passed away in prison awaiting trial.

The tales of Elek Benedek disappeared from the book-shops.

Streaks of oil ran down the middle of the cobblestone boulevards. A couple of hundred street names were changed, then changed again. Owing to the carelessness of some goverment official, maturity exams in secondary schools and the blue-and-silver colour of buses were not abolished.

I said fuck, you said forbidden, I learn. White, black, forbidden to fuck, Ya never say it right!

The horses are turning into the straight. The Derby winner Giuliana goes on the offensive, overtakes and passes Naiade in the lead.

The Porta Limited Liability Company bought up large amounts of glazed and unglazed tiles. The Minister of the Interior was arrested.

A consignment of potatoes and apples arrived in the city. Mama Anna queued for them. The consumers (the country) were declared responsible for the queues. There were no eggs, no meat no butter. Two employees of the National Meat Distribution Company were sentenced to death, and the sentence executed that same day. The rhythm of life quickened.

Silence reigned in the capital in the field of fashion; it was too late for the novelties of the summer to put in an appearance, and too early for those of the autumn. I look at my own trousers. Everybody on the course is wearing trousers like mine: the seat hangs loosely, the bottoms flap, the turn-ups are narrow. Factory-pressed knife-edge creases. It beats me why, but it is the way that we dress that They interfere with the most. At that moment of history they impose a ten-year lag between the customs of the world and our own. Mostly trousers, dresses, dances that were in fashion before the Second Great Massacre. My trousers were made of dull grey cloth. Everybody wears grey here, Bárán would say, and the more daring wear beige. For some reason they persist in thinking that fashion exists.

I said bull, you said bullocks.

Sirene VII begins to move at full speed and takes the lead in a matter of seconds. It looks a winner—but then Alexandrine, a pretty biscuit-coloured horse from the State Stud Farm ridden by László Rózsa, leaves the field and pulls ahead with a devastating surge of energy and, after a furious struggle over the last hundred

metres, wins by a head. After the race, Our Pole, the horse-mad Wojtek appears, he practically lives at the race-course, we exchange a couple of words, at this moment the uninitiated bystander would think I was one of those in the know on the Tote. I am not, and thank God there are no bystanders.

The country lived, despite what is called history, through—so to say—an oversight. The construction of the Underground Express Line was decided, using deep-boring, shield, bridge cylinders, and tubing. The Ministry of Defense demanded a special train-service of its own under the Danube bed.

A resolution was passed on the building of a National Theatre. They do pass this one from time to time.

A small circle of persons elected themselves leaders of the country. These leaders expelled, imprisoned, deported, hanged, and shot the led (the population of Hungary). And then, though our numbers were not yet depleted, began doing the same to each other. Then just waited to be expelled, imprisoned, and so on and so forth at last, or did not wait but killed off their families, then shot themselves in the head.

I said balls, you said bollocks.

Also ran: White as Snow, Annie, Snow-Storm, To-do, Button Loop, Straggler, Fickle Virtue, and Generalissimo.

Bulls, Bullocks, Balls, Bollocks, Ya never say it right!

We scrambled to our feet. Kovács is teaching me the gang's signal. Bárán, the Radish, is in love, he says as we walk along. With Cheta, that is Marie Edelman, as she is rightly called. She's a looker, he says.

"And?" I ask. "Is she?" But Little Kovács shakes his head. "I'm not really into that sort of thing."

We stroll along in a leisurely way. A shoelace vendor sits on the pavement. Even on a holiday he is working. His stumps, encased in black leather, end above the knee. He moves about on a plank with four roller bearings screwed to the bottom. The kids in Tow Street use these contraptions for rolling down slopes. The muscles of his forearms bulge as he grapples his way ahead on the sea of asphalt, using knobbed stumps of wood. (We are not living in the land of wheel-chairs; Indian and Persian beggars use the same technique in their bazaars. We are peculiar, exotic creatures here in the centre of Europe, on account of history. Of geography.) I ask for a pair of leather shoelaces. Legless is a fixture in the middle of the city. You can count on him, rain or shine, he's always there.

We are tra—husty soldiers, of a better order. Pre-war walls shake with marching songs. He stood be-sa-hide us, at the fra-hant li-hine.

What you say is really crass, What you do's lick the public's ass.

By evening the ball's begun in the Biggest Square in Europe. A dance band and a Gypsy band are playing. Hungarian girls with the first batch of Korean students come to study in our country. (The only other foreigners that we get to see wear uniforms and use armoured cars for transport. Otherwise, we are among ourselves,

the Hungarian people, guarded from the contamination of alien lands, peoples, languages by fire, barbed wire and mines.) We can send gift parcels (value five forints) to Korea, to the soldiers of the militant North, since the South is barring the way of our new world in order that it may not reach them (aided by one million Chinese soldiers) and, indeed, return their fire aggressively. A gift parcel contains one hundred grammes of sugar, one hundred grammes of biscuits, fifty Five Year Plan cigarettes, needles, thread, safety-pins. Later, when we had concluded the period distinguishable by the name of the Újlak Fair, some of these students, belying their features, considered themselves Hungarian. What they have is one extra crinkle at the outer corner of their eyes— or we can say, just as precisely, that one crinkle is missing at the corner of ours. They picked our side, were there before the creaking caterpillar-tracks, under fire; they fought together with the more traditionally Hungarian inhabitants of Tow Street, in the Labyrinth, and fled together with Dumbo after the defeat. And now, here, in the American Biblical Belt, I paid a visit to the president of a Hungarian society: the chief engineer of the municipal power station, whose speech still smacked of Budapest. He used to live in the students' hostel of the University of Technology in Bercsényi Street. I have forgotten his name —again. In the Labyrinth, with thorough-going obtuseness, we called all of them Kim; they bore it well. This president of Mid-West Hungarians is a slant-eyed man, North-Korean by birth. This is what a haiku must sound like.

Ha—aa—aands off Koo—reea! We hunt for Smokey Fred in the great square. So far, he has managed to avoid the military police patrol. He has come to the dance. There are some people in Újlak who think Fred's a certified nut. He is in civvies. A tall, lanky boy in a dark blue shirt and silver tie: the slums' answer to fashion. We join the ring on the Arena Street side. Fred knows nothing about the Wolves' Play and the Round Dance. He continues to jive and to rumba, even if the band is playing a csárdás; the retrograde forces know no respite. (Kovács, as an adult, remembering Fred's brown skin and the customs of the local vernacular—why else should anyone be called Smokey—realized that the boy was a Gypsy. There, no one knows or cares. The street is like a trio in a night-club or, like novel-writing, it is a republic. Only one thing counts, whether you're good or not and no bullshitting.) There's none to beat Fred at the rumba. They form a ring around him and clap, corrupted like the workers of West European countries still stumbling in the dark. We stare at him dumbly.

At half past ten there's a firework display on Gellért Hill: we watch from what used to be the riverside promenade. Bengal lights pour down the hillside in all the shades of red. It was from here that we would watch the fireworks the summer before your arrival, with Imola showing you the sights so to speak, for you were there, in her belly— and had no idea that, in that very hour, Hungarian soldiers were marching towards Prague to the creaking sound of caterpillar tracks. It was a matter of chance that I was not there marching with them, I was of draft age, Little Kovács too, all of us who, barely twelve years before, had been there in the Labyrinth, listening to the sound of caterpillar tracks approaching.

Going home on the night tram, the 66. "At night, you know, cold winds will blow." Little Kovács has enough money left for the tram fare. "Twenty for the titty", we sing. "The titty's snow white. The titty's stone hard."

On the way home, as we get off the 66, Little Kovács gives the Újlaki cinema a long wistful look. The artistes have gone home, the building is dark.

That night, he does not go to bed right away. He makes himself a couple of slices of bread and dripping. Takes a tray and sits down at the kitchen table on the bench with the kaleidoscope. Curiosity spurs him, the great treasure of every man; here's a contraption, one's got to find out how it works. How does the man-eating giant, the diamond-studded garments, the golden-haired steed get into the green-and-silver tube? Where do the lopsided trenches, the stench of brimstone, the malefic charms, the oceans of blood, and the sloppy triangles come from?

He peels off the silver foil and takes the glass ring out of the end of the tube. Remembers the cinema. The step-dance, the giant xylophone. The woman's thighs. Her mouth. Her breasts. Twenty fillérs.

Once again, he hasn't got so much as twenty fillérs. He feels terrific.

He spills the bits and pieces he finds between the glass disks onto the tray. Remembers Fred's flings, his long slim fingers, the military police patrol. MPP, said Fred. Sang. "There's the MPP! There's the MPP!" (To the tune of Oh, When the Saints.) There are bits of wire, scraps of paper, pebbles, plate clippings, slivers of mirror-glass, pottery shards on the tray. He bends to the left, to the right, twisting his neck, changing his angle of vision. The twenty-five watt light-bulb shines through the blue, red, brown, green morsels of glass. My booty from the soda works. "Lemme have'at titty." Thinks with a thrill of the cinema at night, the interior of the silent building after the last performance, the small room behind the stage, one wall of which is the off-white screen, empty of even mirror-writing. This is a day of great changes in his life. He met me, saw the variety show—he thinks these things bear no relation to each other—and in some respects, as far as his sharp ten-year-old mind can judge, he is right, but in other respects he is mistaken. For his memory will instinctively combine the cardboard tube that he took to pieces to understand its soul with the incomprehensible tingling of his loins that he experienced for the first time in his life at the sight of the dancer's boobles and gams. He cannot know what his erection means, the advance signal sent by his approaching manhood that afternoon of the fair of long smooth glissades, of eruptive ejaculations, of warm moist completeness, of a life and death worthy of a human being. The very first occasion, and the second will not come for a long time. He remembers Cheta and Bárán, who is in love. And thinks he knows, for the first time in his life, who's a real looker. In one case at least.

He sits in front of the tray, baffled, shaken, loudspeaker songs reeling in his head: vanguard, fan the flame, at the front, cold winds to come. And always, over and over again, that song. And he knows, with the burning, prescient certainty of holy sibyls and prophets: titties are good. ❧

Szabolcs Várady

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

An Objective Outsider, Should One Exist

Egy kívülálló, ha volna ilyen

An objective outsider, should one exist,
a baby born with an adult brain,
or, let us say, the proverbial Martian,
an objective outsider, should one exist,
would hardly understand,
why it should be in his own interest,
in his own and the world's interest,
in the interests of world history, nay, of the universe
that such and such should,
that such and such ought,
that such and such should certainly be advisable

An objective outsider, should one exist,
should there be one such, so as not to understand,
or to understand in this way, this objective outsider
would not after all be wholly objective.

A still more objective outsider might believe instead that,
one from another solar system or fresh from the womb,
limited furthermore by the power of human language—albeit
in its most primitive form—this most
objective of outsiders might believe,

Szabolcs Várady
is a poet, translator and editor at Európa *publishers and on the staff of* Holmi, *a Budapest literary monthly. He has published two volumes of poems to date. "An Objective Outsider" and "Chairs Above the Danube" first appeared in English in William Jay Smith's translation in* The New Hungarian Quarterly, *No. 63, and subsequently in the anthology* Modern Hungarian Poetry, *Corvina—Columbia University Press, 1977.*

employing words in their most traditional,
most outmoded sense, might well believe:
nothing more desirable than that the
nothing more advisable than that the
and nothing could be more conformable than that the

The outermost of objective outsiders
from the utmost periphery might think something like this.

But we, who, in a manner of speaking,
do, so to speak, bear the brunt of the matter,
we, the insiders, through necessarily paying attention to
and following closely the pronouncements of our utmost superiors,
have so thoroughly modified our instincts for language
we prioritise the words' secondary meaning,
we who, for lack of an alternative, occupy the territory
cut out for us, and would happily make do with
the not least fortunate of necessary consequences—
who soon will certainly cease to comprehend
the stages of external objectivity,
nor why our noses no longer wrinkle as though we'd like to show
a proper disgust for it, the scent of a metaphor.

Quatrain

Négysoros

I stand in a hole between Will Be and Was
waiting for things to change but nothing does.
The dust will mount for ever. Rain? Unlikely.
Thunder perhaps. But not here, not precisely.

Chairs Above the Danube

Székek a Duna fölött

The two chairs were not at all ugly
in their way. Shame about the springs
protruding and about the covers
being so hopelessly filthy. But chairs
are chairs are chairs, and these would do the job.
And so we carried them, mostly on our heads,
from Orlay Street, across what used to be known
as Franz Joseph, now Liberty Bridge, right down
to Ráday Street 2, where P then lived
(as his poems of the time will testify).

A chair, or even two, can prove quite useful
in all kinds of ways. Two poets on the bridge
bearing chairs on their heads—*one could imagine*
a picture with that title. I'd like it to be
an objective picture not one of those
visionary things. The two chairs,
it should be clearly understood, are not to be construed
as haloes round our heads. About the middle of the bridge—
without wanting to make a point of it—
we sat down on them. The springs of one chair
stuck out particularly. I can't remember
which of us had it. No matter, what happened later
can't be explained by that. It was a pleasant
summer evening. We lit a cigarette,
enjoying the comfort of our circumstances,
which were a little unusual.

The chairs survived
for a while doing respectable service: they were
the chairs at P's place. But naturally one wants
to improve one's lot: so they gave the chairs
to an upholsterer. Then they changed addresses,
the first time because they had to, the next
because they couldn't stand the flat. We tend
to meet less often nowadays. Much has happened since.
G left A (P's wife) and M (the wife of B)
broke up with me, then the second M

(G's wife) abandoned G and came to live
at my place (the Bs too separated
in the meantime). P tried suicide
and spends most of the time in institutions,
not to speak of changes in world politics,
and in any case there's nowhere to sit down.

Villanelle

Villanella

I wake at half past three or near enough.
The chain unpulled, in one continuous wave,
the toilet bowl is draining itself off.

Does anyone out there go for this stuff?
You've worked all day, you need a wash, a shave,
you sleep till half past three or near enough

then spooks, who, not content to mope or sough,
sit and perform! And what you'd not believe:
The toilet bowl is draining itself off.

Better without the spooks perhaps? It's tough,
like waking in an untenanted grave
at half past three or four or near enough.

To sleep? Impossible. Mere blind-man's buff.
The world is full of dangers, won't behave.
The toilet bowl is draining itself off.

You fetch your market price though it seems rough
never to know the pimp for whom you slave.
I wake at half past three or near enough:
the toilet bowl is draining itself off.

The Moonlight Gets into our Heads

Fejünkbe száll a holdvilág

The moonlight gets into our heads, no need to force it:
its potent-spirits dribble like a faucet.
Our long faces light up, unwrinkle, mist.
But could we bear it otherwise, unpissed?
It's not just the madness of some horrid unction
composed of bursting ulcers (since pleasure too might
be on tap), nor of simple malfunction,
this anarchy, this chaos of the moonlight.
It's there in me! But what! A thing that can't quite
burst nor spread, some seething inner brew
whose name or substance I may never write.
Time wasted, time we leak away, run through.
A good thing the moon is frozen in its station!
May the attainable bubble down its flue
and offer the dusty soul its flighty salvation.

To an Unreal Phenomenon

Egy nem valóhoz

You should have stopped existing years ago.
Though one couldn't say: you are. Not quite.
You only seem, you servile ghost. Now go,
get on your bike!

Those hungry for you only received a part.
You can't give—since there isn't—a whole.
Who tastes you throws you up, is sick at heart,
from hole to hole.

Here you appear, then sneak off somewhere else.
Iron filings, wightless stuff.
Cheese in the trap to tempt a greedy mouse?
No more, enough.

Well go then. There's the door. Why hang about?
He gawks, a fish stuck in the silt.
Good intentions, words not found, spat out,
the good drink spilt.

What the Poem Wants

Amit a vers akar

Not theme, nor fact, nor even thought,
just words, the shape of words, the wrought
and formed, the songline's arcs and bends,
such lines as gather to their ends;
self-justified, self-justifying,
not the messenger's loud crying
but ever being ready to
serve that which will become the new,
which takes a space but won't exceed
nor underfill, if space it need.
But need for what? What does it want?
What tugs at me? What makes me grunt,
what strips me of my clothes, my shame,
my flesh and blood? What is its game?
Oh blood's the thing, the flow and clot,
it twists my viscera in a knot,
it drags me where I would not go;
the band strikes up, the dancers bow,
and however loud I may protest
my feet start gliding with the rest,
it drives me on, it won't consult,
and I am left with the result,
involuntary steps and starts,
a sum of (my own?) unwieldy parts.
Nor will it care or give a damn
if my poor gristle's packed like spam
as long as the shape that it presents
fulfils its own constituents,
so much it is, so clear a stigma,
so precise, the cursed enigma.

András Nagy

Plus ça change

Changes in Establishment Attitudes under Socialism

In the rapidly growing literature on the political transition in Hungary, far too much attention is being focused on the process of transition itself, and on the post-transition "how" and "where to". What is not being discussed is the "where from".

Fortunately, the sudden and fundamental changes did not arrive amid the bloodshed of civil war or violent revolution, the usual catalysts of such changes. Although, the Soviet Union had lost the cold war, this cannot, however, be merely ascribed to the existence, or the lack of, some internal or external pressure, (such as the loosening of the Soviet grip or the strengthening of the internal opposition). An inner transformation, taking place almost unnoticed, seems to have had a much more important role. To many people, the collapse seemed like the sudden fall of a huge oak, believed to be robust yet rotten at the core which did not require a gale to bring it down. Others compared the process to the fermenting of an organic material, which exploded when the poisonous gases had accumulated. Still others used the analogy of a highly developed organism, whose death was brought about by extreme deficiency in its immunity system, coupled with the gradual proliferation of foreign implants. The essential feature of all three analogies is their ascribing a major role to internal transformation with its subversive effects, and not to external factors.

A salient feature of all these changes is that those who supported the old regime put up surprisingly little resistance. Nobody in Poland and Hungary was willing to defend the socialist system in arms; even in Czechoslovakia and Romania, where there were casualties, the resistance put up by the old regime was incomparably weaker than what had generally been anticipated, given a "counter-revolutionary rebellion". Nobody expected the collapse of the socialist system, and the transfer of power, to take place so swiftly and so peacefully. It would be too horrible even to imagine what might have happened if those in power had tried to deploy the available forces and weaponry in defence of the regime.

One of the many questions to be asked is how it was possible that not a single individual of the several thousand in the well-equipped workers' militia was willing to fire a shot in the defence of the system? In fact, this army

András Nagy
is Senior Research Fellow
at the Economic Institute
of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and
the author of various publications on
structural change
and international trade.

of the party faithful was specifically established and trained after 1956 to protect the hegemony of the Communist Party. Equally surprising was the fact that not one of the commissioned officers of the Army and the Police, party members to a man, nor of the many "reliable" members of the secret services, was prepared to take to arms to defend the old regime, even though they had voluntarily sworn to do so. Fortunately, they all broke their oath.

But it was not just that there was no attempt to defend the regime: just as surprising was the active participation of several members of the political, economic, military and cultural higher leadership[1] of the regime in the political transition. Without actually quitting the Communist Party, or without openly rejecting its ideology, many of these participated, voluntarily and readily, in establishing a parliamentary democracy and a market economy based on private property. It was both pitiful and delightful to see some communist leaders trying to outbid each other in their bragging over their own part in the abolition of the regime.

For things to turn out in this way, the structure of the system itself must have changed, as must have the institutions running and protecting it, coupled with the motivations and values associated with it.

In what follows, I shall cover certain characteristics only of the Hungarian development which, primarily because of the revolution of 1956, differed somewhat from the developments that occurred in the other Eastern European countries. Nevertheless, the Hungarian example can illustrate several processes and causes which led to the general collapse of the system.

The vanguard

Since the old and overused dogma, that the Communist Party and its leadership were the leading force of the Soviet-type systems, actually turned out to be true, it is pertinent to examine the changes that took place within the party and, more importantly, within its leadership. Quite obviously the communist movement and its leadership, (which at the end of the eighties either impotently, or else, in the hope of some reward, so to speak voluntarily—on occasion even lending a helping hand in the process—handed over power bore little resemblance to the communists who had seized power forty years earlier.

After the Second World War, the Communist Party, earlier a rather marginal force, gained considerable influence not only because it had opposed national socialism, which had led the country into a lost war and devastation, but also because they promised a better world, economic and cultural improvements, redistribution of land, modernization, elimination of social inequalities and a social welfare net for everyone. Soviet military occupation and non-existing or frail democratic traditions and institutions were instrumental for the communists to acquire an influence far beyond their actual political weight.

After the communist takeover, and concomitant with the Stalinist dictatorship and terror, an atmosphere of hatred and intimidation came to dominate the Communist Party itself; words such as bourgeois became an insult. To be revolutionary and to promise a new world meant the rejection and elimination of everything that was bourgeois. Ironically, the majority of the revolutionaries were themselves middle-class intellectuals or of lower middle-class background, whose social decline could be traced back to the Great Depression or the anti-Jewish laws; there also were trade union leaders ambitious to become middle class. Deep down, they cherished the same bourgeois values and dreams which they

were rebelling against.[2] The 1956 revolution confronted the communist leadership with an entirely new situation. Ever since the 1921 uprising in Kronstadt, protests, rebellions, and insurrections had indicated that the majority was not prepared to put up with communist rule in the various socialist countries. But it was in Budapest in 1956 that an uprising succeeded, at least temporarily, since it had the support of almost the entire population. Nor were the army and police willing to protect communist rule; on seeing the scale of the insurrection, the leaders were forced to discard their disguise by resorting to the Soviet Army to suppress their own people. Naturally, a programme calling for freedom, democracy, neutrality, and an end to Soviet oppression was an umbrella for very different political forces, indeed it was the key to the revolution's success, enabling it to throw off communists and Soviet rule. The administration, firms and various institutions were placed under the direction of revolutionary committees and workers' councils. Miraculously, these bodies were able to function under directly elected leaders; the complete centralization and monopolization of the economy—the planned economy—simply ceased to exist. Although the revolutionary government was in power for only a few days, the events proved that a substantial majority were united in rejecting communist rule and that, in spite of all appearances, the system was internally weak and could be overthrown far more easily than had been thought.

There was something to be learned even from the supression of the 1956 revolution. Thirty years of brain-washing in the Kádár era was unable to erase from the collective memory the fact that the new leaders had to be smuggled out of the country in Soviet armoured vehicles and that, on November 4, it was the Soviet military command, rather than the Kádár government, that had taken over. Those who lived through the revolution, including the communist leaders, never forgot that a popular uprising had been put down by misguided Soviet soldiers with no help from Hungarians whatsoever; the party functionaries and the security forces, later known as *pufajkások* ("quilted jackets") remained in hiding during the fighting, scared out of their wits. This unique historical experience was the great trauma throughout the Kádár era, something that neither party members nor the opposition were able to forget or to admit openly. The lesson learned by one side was that it owed power to Soviet tanks, the other side could never forget that the "Party" were those who had been installed in office by foreign invaders, their legitimacy supplied by the Soviets and nobody else.

This gap was substantially widened by the terror unleashed during the first phase of the Kádár era. As soon as the workers' resistance was overcome, arrests, torture and executions began, despite earlier promises of a general amnesty. (The high number of executions, only revealed recently, shocked everyone.) The peasants, who had supported the revolution peacefully and without atrocities, were ruthlessly recollectivized in 1963. The gap between the handful of communists and the "rest", between *them* and *us*, became almost unbridgeable.

However, it was not the revolution, crushed by Soviet soldiers, but an attempt to restore the old system by Rákosi and the security forces that literally engaged Kádár in a life or death struggle. He correctly assumed that if Rákosi's followers emerged victorious, he would be executed alongside Imre Nagy for disbanding the Communist Party and supporting the demands of the revolution.[2] This explains why, concurrently with the terror and intimidation, Kádár began to replace the old guard from the underground days of the Communist Party with a somewhat more liberal leadership (including

people debarred earlier from higher posts because of a bourgeois background) and with the generation that had joined the party after the war.

Kádár discovered that he could exploit both the victory and the defeat of the revolution in order to maintain his delicately balanced power. The terror was paralysing enough to cow the populace, whereas the Soviet leaders could fear a new Hungarian rebellion. This twin, mutual, fear shaped the compromise which enabled the Hungarian leadership to adopt a more liberal policy and to use the threat of Soviet intervention to silence "extreme" demands. This was how a new generation of communists with no or very little underground experience came to power; they realized that, in order to dim the memories of 1956-1957, Kádár had to relax controls, because he would only be able to stabilize his power by a more conciliatory politics. This was helped by the fact that many people came to accept defeat, gave up the hope of future resistance and chose to cooperate. But the majority could not be deluded by flattery: they were not seduced by promises of a succesful career, they never rejected the memory of 1956, never joined the party and never accepted any kind of political post. The enormous advantages that went with party membership carried a correspondingly high price: party members had to condemn the "counter-revolution" of 1956, had to approve both the Soviet intervention and the execution of Imre Nagy and his associates. To agree to all this involved such a moral stigma that frank dialogue between party members and non-communists became impossible for a long time to come.

Breaking with dogma

The Kádár leadership had to break through isolation and moral contempt in the early 1960s. Had they been able to get off to a better start, it is possible that they would not have been forced, nor would have been able, to produce a turn as sharp as the one that we eventually witnessed. Not only did they declare an amnesty and end to Hungary's isolation, allowing people to travel to the West, but they also embarked on a programme of economic reforms. All this effort was aimed at pacifying the populace[3] by relaxing the most irritating restrictions and achieving some acceptance. They tried to draw a veil over the memory of 1956, which was hardly mentioned at all in the years to come—even the retaliatory sentences were never to be brought up. Gradually, these memories became too shameful even for party members. All this coincided with the beginnings of a change in the thinking of party members, a break with the fundamentalist and sectarian views of the periods between 1949 and 1952, and between 1957 and 1960. The persecution of bourgeois values and behaviour ebbed, coercion to "build socialism" in your free time abated and the right to privacy was better tolerated.

The economic reforms were crucial in changing the thinking and behaviour of the communist leadership. The heavily centralized Soviet-type system introduced in the early 1950s soon produced its own antidote—the need for decentralization. The huge and centrally supervized monopolies took on a life of their own and early on started protecting their own particular interests. As the rigour of central supervision declined, the power of enterprises, especially those in monopoly position, increased. "Planning" also went through changes: instead of detailed and specific instructions, the central offices now produced plan directives; firms then had to transform these into the final plans, nowhere near as rigid as hitherto. Managers became capable of representing their own interests in their dealings with the

centre as well as with each other. The main element in drafting a plan became a search for compromises, as the large firms fiercely fought for more investment, higher wages, more imports, and larger workforce—in other words, for as many resources as possible. Conversely, they tried to undertake as little in the way of production, exporting and services as possible.

It was mostly in this institutional change and changes in the structure of interests that the economic reforms, their successes and failures in the 1960s, were rooted.

Popular discontent undoubtedly played a major part in the political leadership's contemplating substantial economic reforms when trying to escape the isolation of the early 1960s. Since doctrinaire Marxist economists, who had the upper hand after the suppression of the 1956 Revolution, and who had declared war on revisionism—any deviations from the Stalinist model and the Soviet example—were unable to come up with a practical solution to the economic problems, economic experts earlier castigated as right-wing revisionists, came to play a greater role.

In fact, neither public discontent nor the proposals put forward by economists had much influence on political decisions. Although claims to this effect were frequently made, decisions were shaped only by people who had power: managers of large firms and leading officials in the ministries concerned. It was their discontent, their desire for (or aversion to) changes that influenced the introduction (and later, the withdrawal) of economic reforms. The duality of the reforms derived from this, as did the cycle of hopes and failures.

Basically, the attempted reforms had two purposes, interconnected but also substantially different. It was obvious that a more efficient economy would require a reduction of centralized control and regulation, and an augmentation of market relations. The main goals thus became increasing enterprise independence, and reducing the powers of the Central Planning Office and government interference. These goals accorded well with the interests of enterprise managers; it was probably for this reason that the higher party bodies were willing to accept at least some of the proposed reforms, albeit with difficulty.

An efficient economy required far greater changes, however, than simply reducing the powers of the Central Planning Office and the Ministries and increasing enterprise independence. The economists working on reform proposals wanted to create market conditions; this would have meant competition, liberalization of prices, wages and imports, and a more efficient investment policy based on profitability. However, the large enterprises wanted to increase their independence without sacrificing their protection against domestic and imported products, without having to improve efficiency, without having to achieve greater productivity, and without having to worry about improving quality. The conditions in a shortage economy are extremely favourable for monopolies, especially when price control is eased, allowing firms to raise prices openly or covertly, without having to worry about competitors.

There seemed to be complete agreement between the reform economists and managers in wanting to improve efficiency by linking bonuses to profits. The difference was, however, that the former were thinking in terms of profits made in competition and the latter of profits made in a monopoly position, with less government interference.[4] In the struggle by managers and reformers to decentralize the economy, the first signs of a change in outlook were appearing; these later led to a wider acceptance of bourgeois values. The authoritarian interactions of the command

economy were replaced by a demand for interdependence, a growth in enterprise independence and an extension of market conditions. The possibility of linking earnings to economic performance, as opposed to egalitarianism regulated from above, began to appeal more and more to a large section of the working population as well as to managers.

The rise of a new bourgeoisie[5]

By the end of the 1960s an influential group of managers had come into being, openly seeking greater independence and personal affluence. Although they saw themselves as communists, their values and behaviour were no longer those of the men who had fought for socialist ideas before and during the war, fiercely opposing bourgeois values. The majority of them cynically preached but did not practice socialism, while making sure of generous salaries, large bonuses and a widening range of perks for themselves. Many travelled the world on government money, depositing their savings in foreign banks. They introduced regulations enabling themselves to sell, at high profit, goods purchased abroad and brought into the country without paying duty. They tried to procure, for themselves, or for their children, lengthy foreign assignments as diplomats, military attachés or trade officials, if possible in one of the more developed countries. Volunteering to fight for the world revolution somewhere in Angola or Afghanistan was far from their minds.

Naturally, this was a gradual change, initially embarrassing to some of those concerned. The process had started with the privileges party and government leaders had procured for themselves[6] under the Stalinist regime; at that time, however, the circle of the privileged living in grand style was relatively tight, while the difference in incomes between managers and staff was not all that great. After the suppression of the 1956 Revolution, the Kádár government considerably raised salaries for party apparatchiks and officials in the Ministry of the Interior, securing loyalty for money and power. During the 1960s a growing number of managers had incomes significantly in excess of the average and the trend continued.

Admittedly, there were some who rejected "fridge socialism" and "goulash communism", and who would have liked to send the apparatchiks and management with "bourgeois airs" to the labour camps of the Red Guards. However, criticism by populists and left-wing Maoists had little influence on actual economic processes. There were sporadic attempts to limit bonuses, travel and expense accounts and the use of official cars, but such directives were usually soon withdrawn. Once the values system had been transformed, the ruling elite quite openly rejected all forms of "hypocritical asceticism".

The demand that expertise should be better rewarded was made more loudly. Those who had acquired important senior management jobs as a reward for loyalty to the party and flattery to superiors—people quite often wholly unqualified for their positions—began to believe that they owed their positions to special skills, that their privileges were deserved and that their achievements ought to be even better rewarded. Undoubtedly, managers did a better job; one cause was the growing independence of firms since market forces had begun to operate. However, the skills managers needed could only be acquired in managerial positions. This contributed to the slowing down of upward mobility and widespread lateral reassignment, which led to the formation of an exclusive society. Ex-party or Young Communist League apparatchiks were more frequently appointed to direct

large firms or to high official posts; they then swapped positions, so that an ex-secretary of the party's county section or the head of a local council could head a huge agricultural cooperative and vice versa. In this way a ruling caste emerged, the *nomenklatura*, which became increasingly difficult to break into, but entry guaranteed a place there for life. The principal conditions for membership of this exclusive club were loyalty to the party and opportunism. To fall from grace was almost impossible, except in cases of political "perfidy", criticism amounting to treachery and the disclosure of crimes; none of these were likely to happen, since those capable of such acts would not have been allowed to join the club for a start. A new ruling caste eventually emerged, enjoying the same privileges; they knew (and mutually overlooked) each other's illegal, or barely legal, dealings; they knew, and kept silent, about the skeletons in each other's cupboards.[7] All this was part of a process whereby dependence on central power was replaced by a more decentralized and oligarchical mutual interdependence; the cohesive force was no longer a shared ideology but shared interests—their reciprocal recognition and protection.

Even quite legally, those who spent decades in important positions were able to accumulate significant personal wealth. In terms of average wages, incomes at the top increased substantially, not to mention bonuses, which, in some cases reached six-figure sums. As growth in the economy declined and problems proliferated, incentives for top management to show results in certain areas (increasing exports for hard currency, saving imports, energy saving, etc.) became more frequent. Added to these extra bonuses, the well-placed helped one another, sometimes by favours to each other's firms, or sometimes by arranging for cheap loans, or simply by informing one another about goods at bargain prices. This was how the lavish residences and palatial summer houses were built, often using state labour and state money; the market value of these houses usually exceeded not just the savings capacity of their owners, but quite often their entire income. Some were able to multiply wealth thus acquired, profiting from the fact that the absence of commercial banks, together with the clumsy bureaucracy of those existing, greatly restricted the borrowing opportunities of private enterprises. It seems quite plausible that a considerable proportion of the credit needs of the rapidly multiplying small enterprises were supplied by moneyed cadres, presumably at usurious rates. Such financial dealings naturally involved further advantages for entrepreneurs: well-placed cadres intervening for permit applications further increased their own prestige, while lending protection for irregular or illegal activities.

I have still not mentioned downright illegal dealings, embezzling and corruption, committed ever more and more openly and frequently. The typical forms of corruption[8], widely known but not prosecuted, involved accepting backhanders for subdivided plots of land being allocated by the government, both central and local, for the purchase of commodities impossible to buy otherwise, for the issue of permits required to purchase or exchange homes, and for avoiding custom tariffs and stamp-duties. Almost everyone knew about these, even if not everyone dared to take advantage of them. Much more mysterious were the cases involving important construction tenders (hotels, for example), or the appointment to highly paid posts (professors of medicine or agricultural cooperative presidents). It can be safely assumed that in these cases, too, it was possible—or even necessary—to offer substantial bribes to get results.

Nevertheless, it does not follow from the above that every single member of the *nomenklatura* was corrupt, nor that they all accumulated great wealth. It is generally accepted that several top officials led a modest[9] life, or even condemned, in private conversation, those who speculated for private gain or abused their positions. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the inclination to clean up the economy almost completely disappeared from the top leadership: no great corruption scandals were disclosed. The thinking behind the decision to hush up crimes was given: it would be bad publicity for the party and its cadres for these infamies to be known, it was claimed, and quite rightly so. Solidarity among party members proved stronger than morality or respect for the law, and so the "ascetic" came to resemble the blind who have chosen not to see. We know that they are blindest of all.

Paradoxically, this easing off of controls humanized the system. Changes in thinking at the top justified the pursuance of personal interests at the bottom, giving the go-ahead to the accumulation of wealth. Starting at the end of the 1970s, the petit-bourgeois class was reborn in the second and third economy; household farming and other forms of private enterprise (boutiques, restaurants, etc.) earned small fortunes for "entrepreneurs" (i.e., smart operators without scruples). Less documented is the emergence of a haute-bourgeoisie among the *nomenklatura.* Without any reliable source of information, we can only assume that there was sizeable wealth in private hands.

An important part was played by a new generation around 1980. This is similar to the situation after 1956, when there was a specific age-cohort of cadres—born in the 1920s, reaching adulthood after the war, power-hungry first-generation communists who were happy to replace Rákosi's followers. In the last decade of the Kádár era, too, a new generation was making its bid for power: the generation of Young Communist League-apparatchiks, born in the 1940s and with no recollection of either the war or of the 1956 Revolution. For them, the anti-Nazi resistance and the dictatorship of the proletariat, decolonization, revolution and counter-revolution were simply boring stuff for the class-room. They smiled condescendingly on the naive enthusiasm of the reformers of 1968, who still believed that it was possible to make the socialist system efficient and competitive. This new generation knew that the gap between the socialist countries and the western democracies was widening; that the Soviets were only competitive in the military field; that the economic stagnation of the socialist countries was bound to be followed by decline. Although doing good service to their superiors for the sake of personal advancement and although ready to churn out the slogans of the propaganda of the day, these ambitious young men no longer believed in the rhetoric and said what they had to only in order to further their own careers. They ascribed their own success to expertise, since they were no longer the self-taught working-class cadres; they went to university, spoke foreign languages, and began to look around with an open mind—some even studying at Harvard on scholarship.

Naturally, the changing attitude and behaviour of the ruling elite does not lend itself easily to accurate measurement, and to study the topic ex post facto would be extremely difficult.[10] Yet it was faithfully reflected in the new dress code that appeared at the time among the top cadres. The respectable Sunday best worn by the working-class had long been gone, and the casual jeans and pullover of the left-wing

intelligentsia was also out, as were "folksy" pleated skirts and neckerchiefs. The East European version of executive dress was in: blazer with gilt buttons with a matching tie and handkerchief. Apart from foreigners and the wives of obstetricians, the clientele of the expensive Budapest boutiques now came to include the wives of ministers and managers. The first privately owned Mercedeses, each worth several million forints, appeared, and the competition to hang more jewelry on the wife was on. Their adoption of western fashions in clothing suggested that they had already caught up with the civilized West and wanted to be seen there as equals. Having learned from 1956, the party leaders, former self-confessed revolutionaries, had become true conservatives, dreading sudden change and disruptions. They began to feel anxious, not just for their hold on power, but for their property.[11] This was the time when the country was loud with talk of law and order and the security of property.

A sense of insecurity

Of the spread of bourgeois values and behaviour among the leaders of the Communist Party it can be said that it was a strange sort of embourgeoisement. First, it was not simply based on private property, but was accompanied by the dominance of state ownership; it occured not in market competition, but amid hierarchical and oligarchical conditions and a monopolized market. The success of managers depended little or not on company profitability or competitiveness, since they operated as monopolies in a shortage economy at home, or in the completely distorted Comecon market.

As the independence of firms and agricultural cooperatives increased, managers began to identify with their organization. Although they might have justifiably claimed that they were working round the clock for their firms, this was not enough to make them act like the managers of a capitalist company. Over-employment, poor quality, a narrow product range, high prices and the elimination of competition were some areas where the interests of workers and management coincided under socialism. Since their interests did not depend on the efficient management of capital, they did their best for their firms by procuring as many resources, and accepting as few obligations as possible, when bargaining with the central authorities. Paradoxically, greater efficiency was often against the interests of the whole workforce. This explains why conflicts between management and workforce were less acute and trade unions and enterprise councils were easily manipulated.[12]

There were further distortions due to the way in which money could be made and put to work. The methods, both legal and illegal, of converting privileges into wealth, were mostly directed at making occasional quick profits, rather than a steady return on accumulated capital. This brings to mind the pirates and robber barons of early capitalism, or the mafiosi of today. Moreover, since accumulated wealth could be invested only in a limited way and insecurely, it often flowed into illegal channels or into conspicuous consumption.

Sociologists have long been aware of conspicuous consumption as a form of misdirected accumulation among small entrepreneurs and peasants growing rich on household farming, but it could be observed amongst the top cadres too. They bought expensive cars, built luxury homes, and went on overseas trips, all apparently well beyond their means. Such consumption patterns were connected with the fact that top cadres had never felt secure and therefore they exploited their advantages while they lasted. In spite of their privileged status, they lived

in an atmosphere of suspicion, not trusting each other, concealing the true scale of their wealth, together with the methods whereby it was acquired.[13]

Advantages in promoting change

The sudden collapse of communism had several causes, but the distorted embourgeoisement at the top level was clearly important in Hungary, where demand for a move towards capitalism was conceived also among the top cadres holding political power.[14]

Their sense of security was shaken by the recognition that socialist economic backwardness would inevitably lead to defeat in the arms race. The Kádár regime no longer looked like lasting forever. It became obvious that hostility to reforms, or "prudent progress", which had been taken to be stability, was mere immobility, which in turn caused backwardness and endangered stability.

The communists of the late 1980s were not revolutionaries; they were the party of law and order, longing for security and bourgeois prosperity.[15] A number of top cadres reached the conclusion that peaceful change was unavoidable, that their chances of a secure future would not be improved by a stubborn clinging to doomed socialism. Of course, they did not imagine—no one did—that the Soviet Union would collapse so rapidly, nor that the change in the political system would be so radical and that they would be ousted from power so completely. They were hoping for some kind of *perestroika*, in the course of which the reform-communists would share power with the opposition moderates willing to cooperate with them; maintaining the domination of state ownership, moderate economic liberalization would be introduced.

The consideration that it might be better to prepare and initiate a gradual transformation in a constitutional way, and in cooperation with the opposition and western powers, than to confront either mass discontent or a united stand by the West and the opposition, must have helped in making the transition peaceful.

It is not yet known to what extent negotiations with international monetary institutions and with the western powers affected the political leadership. The huge foreign debt, (which doubled in the 1980s) and the frequent references to it meant that the opinion and advice of the West could not be ignored. It was around then that the role of financial experts in economic decision-making grew; presumably, they mediated in negotiations between the international monetary institutions and the West and the Hungarian government which preceded the changes. At the moment we can merely guess at the bargains struck, at what was promised, for instance, in exchange for opening the border to let East Germans out, or for multiparty elections.[16] We do know, however, that the insistence on stability, the threat of financial collapse and the possible absence of an agreement with the IMF were all seriously taken into account in economic policy. It can also be surmised that it was the position of dependence as a consequence of indebtedness, that inhibited a firmer handling of the ever bolder democratic opposition—eventually forcing the leadership to bargain with them.

They no longer listened to those who urged either debt repudiation or repayment involving hardships, following the Romanian example. By that time, the leadership was afraid of shocks, and tried to avoid them at all costs, even—it can be said *ex post facto*—at the cost of sacrificing what they thought of as the socialist system.

The most important change, in theory and in practice, in the period before the

political changes was that the question of privatization could be raised: the debates on the reform of ownership and its legislative preparation could commence. Generations of economists and social scientists had been brought up to believe that social (state) ownership of the means of production was the principal criterion of socialism. Some of the reform economists had known since the early 1980s that low efficiency in the economy was mainly caused by the form of ownership, but none would openly proclaim that the remedy lay in privatization. Probably they did not even admit it to themselves. Instead, they recommended other remedies, such as specific forms of "social ownership," in which there was a greater interest in the amortization and profitability of capital (holdings, ownership by cooperatives, local governments, associations, insurance firms, etc.).

Quite remarkably, at the same time as (although usually unrelated to) the debates concerning reforms of ownership took place, top management made a move towards acquiring as many of the ownership rights as possible. The first step in this direction was the extension of the rights of enterprise management in the early 1980s; this was followed by the struggle of managements against the central bureaucracy for a greater scope of authority. Many were surprised to find that, instead of developing the market, one of the most important changes concerned the introduction of enterprise councils, which in itself pointed neither towards a competitive market, nor towards greater efficiency. It only became clear later that this was another victory for the managers in their struggle for decentralization, as these enterprise councils, instead of becoming instruments of local democracy protecting the workers' interests, turned out to be easily manipulable by management.

An even more important step came with legislation preparing the transformation of state-owned firms into limited and joint stock companies. The first draft would have still left state-owned firms in public ownership, and aimed only at further broadening of managerial authority and at more efficient management of capital. Behind these claims, however, can be detected the concept of privatization—the transformation of state ownership into private ownership, whose social basis was to be the wealthy managers and aspiring capitalists, rather than the economists and administrators working out the proposals for the reform of ownership.

The Act of Association (1988) was the legal framework within which the process of "privatization", later termed "spontaneous", could commence. In addition to serving long-standing managerial aspirations for independence, these acts secured the stability and survival of enterprises. This was when it was decided that the core of large companies should remain in state ownership but their valuable, and potentially profitable, sections should be turned into limited companies, usually at substantially discounted prices; with the injection of some private capital, a considerable amount of public property thus turned private—sometimes legally and sometimes illegally.

The Act of Transformation (1989) openly defied socialism, including its cornerstone, social ownership. It was a sudden move which took almost everyone by surprise, even though the process leading to it, embourgeoisement in values and in attitudes, had taken place over a long time. Managers, heads of agricultural cooperatives, Young Communist League and party apparatchiks, top ministry officials, heads of local councils, people selected so carefully for their loyalty to the party and to socialism, began founding limited companies and joint stock companies, unscrupulously undervaluing the assets of their firm in the process of privatization.

The fact that so many of those who owed high positions, privileges and wealth to the party and the socialist system suddenly broke with it all and willingly became the protagonists of capitalism, could be explained by two factors: first, the top cadres' dependence on the party was becoming burdensome, since it no longer provided protection and, second, stood in the way of their prospering further.

No matter how "soft" and decentralized the late-Kádár dictatorship was, it was still a dictatorship in the sense that all in high positions had to watch how the wind blew, they had to be careful not to deviate from the "line", not to fall from grace, knowing that even without making mistakes, they might lose their positions without notice, should the leadership want to make room for a new cadre who was better-connected or simply younger. Admittedly, this constant anxiety was not the fear that people suffered from during the Rákosi era, since now neither imprisonment nor unemployment threatened. On the contrary, once the *nomenklatura* was entered, the person concerned almost invariably remained there for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, once power, a comfortable life and foreign travel were tasted, even the slightest decline in life-style was intolerable, especially when how to increase and secure these privileges was one's main concern.

And not only that; the upper caste were increasingly finding obstacles in their way to fortune. There were a host of regulations limiting further increases in their incomes, expenses on foreign assignments and bonuses. They were offended by the fact that their income was nowhere near that of chief executives of Western European companies. The expectations to be met in order to obtain recognition and privileges from the top were numerous—as well as frequently changing. They were not allowed to manage freely the wealth that they had accumulated; numerous regulations prevented them from investing sensibly. Having to conceal their actual wealth was also hurtful. But it was probably the two factors of wishing to secure stability and the right to freely manage personal wealth, that urged most of the leadership first to bring into joint ventures even the newspapers, buildings and companies formerly owned by the party, the Young Communist League and the trade unions.

Preserving advantages and continuity

The future course of the transformation will have to be discussed insofar as it follows from the above described situation. Given that the top management of the communist economy, in their own perceived interests, rather than offer resistance to the transformation, gave it a helping hand, several conclusions follow.

First, it is only natural that most of them retained their positions in the economy. This was not because they are irreplacable or because they had long considered themselves as highly qualified professionals rather than communists[17], but basically because it was they who possessed most of the economic power. Therefore, the frequent charge against them of converting political into economic power does not hold; instead, they preserved, and increased when possible, the power and the capital in their hands. Their opportunities were substantially increased by the disappearance of the hierarchy and control of the party by the weakening government bodies and the arrival of semi-anarchy. Since they maintained their connections and continued to be well-placed and well-informed in the new institutional framework, their actual strength was multiplied by their monopoly on information and connections.

Since there were no purges, considerable economic power remained with the old management and top government ad-

ministration, right until the clients of the new government coalition came forward, demanding their share. By and large, the style and pace of privatization and the receptiveness to foreign capital is determined by these factors. Why things turned out this way can be explained by there initially being no restraining forces, as central institutions had been weakened and trade unions were almost non-existent. The managers' position vis-à-vis the entire privatization process is rather ambivalent: their chief interest lay in stability and improvement of their own immediate positions, hence they only welcome forms of privatization that pose no danger or even increase their incomes. Their own personal resources are not enough to buy outright, or large stakes, in major companies. Indeed, buying into ailing Hungarian companies without knowing who is to have control is not an attractive option. There are much more profitable investments, promising quicker returns. The claim that the government, and the Agency, set up to sell government-owned companies, (State Property Agency) are not doing their all to make privatization a success, and that the SPA's bureaucracy and indecision actually discourages potential investors, is well-founded. However, it is also true that company managers themselves bear some of the blame for slowing down the process.

Everything said so far seems to confirm the claim that "the political transition has never happened". It should be clear, however, that replacing the old management is neither a condition nor a guarantee of a political transition. Naturally, people's sense of justice has long been affronted, and quite rightly so, by seeing the political leadership and management securing for themselves extraordinary incomes and privileges, the actual scale of which was anyone's guess; and a hypocrisy always ready to refer to the power of the working classes and to social equality.[18] This moral outrage is naturally the greater when it turns out that the majority of the former ruling elite have not only preserved their power and extraordinary incomes, but, by clever speculation and by taking advantage of privatization, have even been able to come by fortunes.

This widespread and justifiable indignation is being exploited by the radical right. On the basis of past injuries (sometimes real, sometimes imagined), they are hoping to acquire positions now occupied by the old leadership, simply through political action. Sadly, usurping and redistributing positions and property on political (and/or racial) grounds is not without precedent in Hungary: a sense of secure possession could never grow strong here. Most Hungarian aristocrats received their lands from property confiscated by the King from rebellious magnates. The older generation still has memories of how the shift to the right created new opportunities during the Second World War, especially after the anti-Jewish legislation, when opportunists used political connections to secure high-salaried posts and Jewish property in the name of ethnic purification. A similar process was seen in the territories returned to Hungary during the war; the same thing started all over again after 1945, but this time it was the left-winger and Jewish victims who were given leading positions for political motives.

As much as the moral outrage over the fact that many of the old guard have preserved, or even strengthened, their positions, is understandable, the demand that positions should be assigned in compensation for past injury, or in reward for political loyalty, regardless of qualifications and experience, is morally just as unacceptable. Most people are opposed to the idea of replacing the old nomenklatura with a new one; they are fed up with the practice of replacing top management with every political swing.

As a consequence of underdeveloped political and civic institutions, unfamiliarity with democratic procedures and freedom of information, and of unregulated and chaotic conditions in general, a considerable number of the newly rich have acquired their wealth in unscrupulous dealings. Since scandalous cases of corruption are rarely disclosed, we have no idea how large this iceberg is. The majority of the people obviously do not like this, but they feel there is very little that they can do about it. Civic organizations, which would monitor legality, openness and morality in this area, have not yet appeared; in this situation the responsibility of the administration of justice is enormous.

The direction of development now largely depends on the areas in which continuity will be preserved, as opposed to those in which there will be a break with the past. Since considerable numbers of the old economic management and administration remain in office, attitudes and behaviour patterns of the old regime will survive; despite the fact that the democratic transition will bring a great many changes otherwise. The people concerned will oppose the elimination of monopolies, will resist the emergence of a competitive market, will try to maintain or restore government subsidies and protectionism. They will resist all efforts to increase efficiency in production, their experience tells them that profits come easier through influencing taxes, subsidies, exchange rates, tariffs and import barriers than by increasing efficiency, improving quality or better marketing. As they are used to seeing economics in terms of politics, they quickly adjust to the new course; they realize that good connections can still solve problems and that legal obstacles should not be taken too seriously. The "deep structure" of the old regime is still with us, making it uncertain what kind of a market economy will emerge and how far government intervention will be driven out of areas where it is out of place.

A study of those areas which show a lack of continuity is similarly revealing; the gaps allow unregulated relations to emerge. When the communist machinery of information, supervision and control collapsed, often nothing replaces it. For many, this vacuum means freedom. But in the absence of appropriate organizations (together with a market mechanism), and since it remains unclarified which agents of supervision and control are superfluous, this vacuum creates chaotic conditions. This semi-anarchy often favours those enterprises in difficulties after the changes; which had lost their markets and their government subsidies, and it is impossible to tell what more they could lose through privatization. Survival is quite often considered the overriding goal, justifying any means: they begin to sell off assets and refuse to pay taxes, social security contributions and utility bills, they even withhold payments to suppliers. The old economic regulations and behaviour patterns had disintegrated, and no new business ethic has developed yet. Those, who had been accustomed to the idea that there was always a way round even the strictest legal provisions, quickly adjust to, and profited by, these *ex-lex* conditions. Presumably, it will still be some time before legislation and, most importantly, an unwritten code of business ethics evolves. Catching up with the West will likely be just as difficult and protracted a process, as it appears to be in regearing production and technology.

It would be difficult to predict the direction in which Hungarian society and the economy are headed. What is sure is that the "conception" of the political transition goes back to the gradual spread of bourgeois attitudes during the socialist era, and this will greatly influence the actual course. One of the factors mainly responsible for both the

peaceful transition and the willingness to cooperate on the part of a large number of communist cadres—was the number of the wealthy determined to retain and to increase their wealth under secure conditions. Retaining and increasing wealth and influence, the old nomenklatura are likely to merge into a middle class now being formed by the entrepreneurs and investors of the private sector and by the clients of the new administration—the new *nomenklatura.* ❧

NOTES

1 ■ I deliberately avoid using the currently fashionable term "elite", together with "advance guard", its synonym in communist terminology, as both imply excellence. In fact, counter-selection was so strong within the Communist Party that these terms would be highly misleading.

2 ■ This has been confirmed beyond doubt by the recently disclosed petitions addressed to top Soviet officials by leading Hungarian exiles in Moscow.

3 ■ This was neither a compromise, nor the often—and tendentiously—mentioned "consensus"; at best, it was pacification.

4 ■ The temporary success of the managers' interpretation was illustrated by the outrage expressed after the first year of the 1968 reforms, the huge profits made by some firms, and the uncommonly generous bonuses paid out to management--a practice quite often rightly criticized as completely unfair.

5 ■ The notion of "bourgeois" should be used with certain reservations in connection with the communist leadership. As the next section explains, this was, indeed, a very deformed and peculiar bourgeois transformation.

6 ■ The following comment by a leading communist apparatchik was much circulated at the time: "we have already reached communism: we work according to our talents and get our share of the produced goods according to our needs."

7 ■ Like the ruling caste of the Rákosi era, they, too, placed themselves above the law; their unethical practices ranged from minor offenses, such as building summer houses in protected areas where building permits should not have been issued (in the Buda Hills or on the Tihany peninsula, for example) up to serious breaches of law, such as failing to press charges against ministers and party leaders for running over and killing pedestrians.

8 ■ It was widely claimed, with much justification, that a worker would be severely punished for stealing a screw-driver, while bosses could steal portland stone by the ton without ever having to worry about the slightest reprimand.

9 ■ It was, of course, easy to maintain a modest life-style for someone who was guaranteed every luxury for life.

10 ■ Much to my regret, the party always regarded the so-called "social elite studies" to be a taboo, giving permission to carry out such research only to its most loyal supporters, with the result that precious little research was actually published.

11 ■ This was when a joke about a top cadre was born. He invites his mother from the provinces to see the magnificent palace he lives in, the expensive car he drives, and the extravagant life he leads. His mother keeps nagging: "But, son, but what will happen if the reds return?"

12 ■ The same argument could also be used to explain the re-election of company managers.

13 ■ The same did not apply to the majority of the cadres on foreign assignment; in order to save hard currency, they were willing to live extremely modestly. This also might have had something to do with the fact that they could never be sure whether a similar chance would ever come their way again.

14 ■ This was well illustrated during the round-table negotiations preparing the transfer of power, when there was hardly any

disagreement between the economists representing the communists and the opposition respectively.

15 ■ The communists of the 1940s wanted to set up a dictatorship of the proletariat via the revolution; the fighters of 1956 were not afraid of the revolution; and Kádár himself did not recoil from violence when he attached himself to the Soviet army.

16 ■ The diplomatic and secret service reports in connection with these events will make very interesting reading when these are made available for study.

17 ■ They like to refer to themselves as technocrats, suggesting that their powerful positions were due to expertise rather than to their loyalty to the party.

18 ■ This is one good reason why it is difficult to take the alleged leftism of the ex-leaders of the MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) and their successors seriously.

Georg Baselitz: Head. 1987. Oil on beechwood. 99 x 65,5 x 59 x 5 cm.

András Bozóki

Intellectuals and Democratization

This article discusses the political role of the Hungarian critical intelligentsia in the recent past and after the change of system, employing the methodology used by Konrád and Szelényi in *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (1979). Here, the critical intelligentsia is defined as a group who are related to authority first and foremost on an ethical-normative basis. In a revised Hungarian version of their book, Konrád and Szelényi describe the intelligentsia as a schizophrenic actor, characterized equally by "telos" and "techné", by teleology and rational knowledge (1979, 31-39); for the first time in history, there has emerged a social actor with the opportunity to organize itself into a class and, with the development of bolshevism, to ascend to power and not only to figure as an estate (as in pre-capitalist societies) or a stratum (as in market societies). Konrád and Szelényi defined the intelligentsia as the possessors of knowledge that is independent of situations, who legitimize given social status exclusively by their knowledge. Thus when I speak here of the critical intelligentsia I mean a group who reflect upon political conditions from a universal-moral perspective.

András Bozóki
is lecturer in the Department of Sociology of Law at the University of Budapest, and one of the editors of the political science quarterly Politikatudományi Szemle.

The intellectual as rational redistributor

Konrád and Szelényi wrote when the Stalinist phase of state socialism was being replaced by the post-Stalinist phase, at a time when the dictatorship, although still maintaining the demand for the centralization of authority, was becoming more lenient and less concentrated. By the time of post-Stalinism, the bureaucracy had lost legitimacy and needed intellectuals who could, through their professional knowledge, legitimize the existing system and strengthen the basis of bureaucratic authority.

Such regimes differed from authoritarian regimes in that they tried to base their rule not upon naked violence, as did some Latin American dictatorships, but upon the technocratic rationality the intelligentsia produced. In Hungary, the first sign of the softening of the system was in the efforts made by the communist party bureaucracy to reintegrate into society intellectuals either condemned or marginalized after the revolution of 1956.

Konrád and Szelényi rightly supposed that the intelligentsia, occupying the "planning" positions would not be satisfied

with a modest contribution to the technocratic legitimation of the system. Therefore they assumed that the intelligentsia would acquire class power as "rational redistributors" and by hiding their teleological aspirations behind their professional knowledge. With hindsight, it is clear that Konrád and Szelényi overestimated both the international cohesion and innovative capacity of the state-socialist system and the strength of the intelligentsia.

As Szelényi acknowledges in a paper written in 1986, bureaucracy proved to be more "stubborn" in the struggle for the preservation of power than he and Konrád had supposed (Szelényi 1990, 68-77). First, the party bureaucracy repressed those philosphers who challenged the ideological legitimation of the system and wished to restore its original Marxian bases; then even the reformist technocrats were pushed into the background. All this had an international context. The suppression of the Prague Spring of 1968, and the repression which followed, indicated that the Soviet leadership under Brezhnev recognized the system's lack of legitimacy and rejected the option of humanizing it.

The bureaucracy made further concessions but not, as might have been expected from its behaviour earlier, towards the intelligentsia. Instead, and despite recurrent (but increasingly merely rhetorical) campaigns against the petite bourgeoisie, it extended tolerance to small business and the second economy, from which direction no rival ambitions were apparent. In this way the pragmatic Kádárist bureaucracy sacrificed the remnants of teleological ideology on the altar of social peace. Where the party bureaucracy is no longer Marxist, the reform intelligentsia can no longer be revisionist. Where there is no "telos", the intelligentsia may withdraw into the trenches of technocracy, but it cannot be the agent of rational distribution. The intelligentsia was able to remain close to authority, partly as an estate and partly as a social stratum, but the dream of class power, if ever there was one, evaporated.

The intellectual as reformer

The end of revisionism (Rupnik 1979) further fragmented the already divided ciritcal intelligentsia. Four significant groupings can be identified.

1. *Technocrats and Meritocrats.* Those social scientists who had managed to retain their jobs turned towards their disciplines and, in the reform period renewed in the early 1980s, expressed their criticism in the languages of their disciplines. It is difficult in retrospect to determine how sincere were the arguments advanced in the professional and reform debates. Some certainly believed that the system could be reformed, and advocated a kind of self-managing socialism, whereas others proposed "market socialism", as a combination of a planned economy and market redistribution, either out of conviction or as a kind of Trojan Horse. A contemporary analysis (Gombár 1983) showed that the majority were unambiguously leftist of their thinking and worded their criticism from that position. The reformist economists, enabled by their networks and their empirical research to see the condition of the economy, were the decisive figures. They could rely on the secret support of politicians who, though pushed into the background by the anti-reform policy of the seventies, had lost little of their authority. In this shelter, there grew up by the 1980s an entirely new generation of reform economists, who, due to their fluency in foreign languages, their schooling and connections, appeared to be more competent than the party bureaucracy. It was this group that, after the change of system (1990), despite the mistrust of the

new political leadership, produced (though in smaller numbers than their professional competence would suggest) the heads of banks, advisors to parties and the leading officials in the administrative institutions. Also worthy of mention are the sociologists who, as disciples of the exiled István Kemény and Iván Szelényi, dealt with issues of social and regional inequality, of the "second economy", and poverty. The professional war for the independence of political science was also waged in the 1980s. The discipline had grown out of, but had turned against, vulgarized Marxist 'scientific' socialism. Its most important figures for a while acted as informal advisers to reform communist politicians, mostly to Imre Pozsgay, and the younger ones to Prime Minister Miklós Németh. These groups represented rationality within the domain of officialdom but they never for a moment gave up asserting the teleological ethos in politics (Kovács 1984; Kovács 1990). By the end of the decade, they were joined by jurists, constitutional lawyers in particular, who, as well as influencing the decision-making process and giving legal advice to the nascent parties, criticized legislative bills that could not be reconciled with the principles of a state based on the rule of law; they also tried to democratize the Patriotic People's Front, or worked on a new constitution. In 1988 the Independent Lawyers' Forum was founded, and its members subsequently rendered practical assistance to the organisation of the Opposition Round Table that negotiated the terms of the hand-over of power with the communists.

By the late 1980s the normative models of these pressure groups of the reform intelligentsia came into being. Earlier the economists were speaking about the harmonization of plan and market, the sociologists were preoccupied with the transformation of the inner workings of the redistribution system, the constitutional lawyers were talking about socialist constitutionalism, and the political scientists discussed democratic socialism, corporate pluralism or a new Compromise. By the late 1980s the picture had changed. For the economists, the self-regulating market economy based on private property became the normative model; for the sociologists it was the welfare state, for the constitutional lawyers a state based on the rule of law, and for the political scientists a representative democracy based on a multiparty system.

The populist critical intelligentsia

Another group of intellectuals was a circle of so-called "populist" writers. Anti-bourgeois and anti-urban, they regarded the politics of left and right as irrelevant and focused instead on issues of "national destiny", on the collective identity of the nation and the dimensions of social inequality. In a spirit of opposition to the élite, they undertook to represent the underprivileged, identified with "true" Hungarianness, and described the élite of the day as "alien" to the real interests of Hungarians. For a long time they rejected open opposition to the regime but, despite tactical co-operation with different official and unofficial groups, they worked to develop an autonomous policital stance and criticized the system on a moral basis, arguing that it had refused to see the root of the crisis in the uncertainty over national values and morals. The members of this group mainly occupied important positions in the arts, particularly in the literary world, and believed that it was worth cooperating with anybody in the interests of national destiny, even, if necessary, with the "urban" opposition, or with certain groups of social scientists outside the urban opposition, and even with reform communists.

The normative model of this group is "the people", building itself up from small communities and identifying itself primarily with national values (and less with individual or supranational ideals), with a mission to create a kind of "Hungary of gardens", a middle-of-the-road programme rejecting capitalism as well as socialism. Its historical outlook is romantic, opposed to modernization, and regards freedom as a joint acceptance of values oriented towards a goal set by individuals and communities. Freedom is not an objective in itself, but the nation is.

The urban intellectual opposition

In the 1980s the philosophers, historians and sociologist, most of them previously dismissed from official posts, who defined themselves as the "democratic opposition", appeared as the hard-core open opposition to the Kádár-regime. The ideas of this group, mostly consisting of people who lived in Budapest and tightly linked through personal contacts, went through two stages of development. First, they moved from Lukács to Bibó (in the seventies), and second, from Bibó to modern liberalism (in the eighties). The leading figures in the group broke with György Lukács's revisionism in the early 1970s, and increasingly espoused a democratic amalgam of liberalism and socialism, derived from the political thinker István Bibó. This was also a kind of middle way. The ideology of this group crystallized only gradually, because of its political strategy of breaking out of the urban intellectual ghetto, and because of its heterogeneous composition. The normative model of human rights elaborated by János Kis represented the common denominator that could be accepted by the "anti-politicians" of the new left, by the social democrats, the liberals, the erstwhile anarchists turned conservative liberals, the socialists and the plebeian radicals of 1956.

The group gradually shifted from a radical to a liberal stance. The party created in the autumn of 1989 by the core of the group, the Alliance of Free Democrats, was not a social democrat or middle-class radical but a liberal party, largely due to the pressure of its younger members and economists. The party stood for rapid capitalist development, spontaneous privatization and the Western model of modernization. Perhaps the group believed more than others in the possibility of establishing a western-style democracy in Hungary relatively quickly, through one or two "big leaps". It can be regarded as the representative for modern rather than conservative liberalism, in so far as it keeps to liberal (and not conservative) principles in both social and economic policy.

The group has undergone changes not only in its ideology, but also in its form and its relationship to politics. Between 1977 and 1981 one can only speak about a cultural, or more precisely, a "lifestyle" opposition, about the challenging behaviour of a group of Budapest intellectuals. This was gradually accompanied by the appearance of the first samizdats, the foundation of the Fund Supporting the Poor (SZETA), the flying universities, and various acts of solidarity expressed through petition campaigns. In 1982 the group came to a cross-roads after the introduction of the state of emergency in Poland. Simply making a moral break with the system and being an "opposition" irritating to the party bureaucracy by its sheer existence, was not enough. From 1982 onwards the group, retaining the elements of cultural opposition, made more and more efforts to offer a programme, to find allies, to become a political opposition. Using the example of the Polish opposition (Michnik 1988), they set out on the road that had been taken by the Polish critical intelligentsia,

albeit in a country whose condition was far from being identical with Poland's. They were realist enough not to turn revolutionary and, as a circle, they were not to become a revolutionary sect. Recognizing that their social base was modest, their strategy was that of a broad coalition, increasingly opening itself up to society, in the spirit of radical reform.

The mediacracy

Finally, reference should be made to the role of journalists among the critical intelligentsia. Journalists were basically loyal to the system until 1987. Any intellectual wishing to publish journalism had hardly any alternative; only certain literary and social science periodicals would publish articles in a critical spirit. The party bureaucracy was eager to keep the critical voices of the press isolated and adequately counterbalanced, and not to allow papers to represent other political viewpoints.

The appearance of samizdat journals established an alternative point of reference for readers of the official press. The voice of the democratic opposition was amplified primarily by Radio Free Europe, which introduced samizdats to a multitude of listeners. All this influenced the official press and encouraged the editors of some journals to openly confront the authorities. Even though these editors lost, the ensuing scandals forced those representing official cultural policy into producing embarrassing explanations and challenged the (already increasingly shaky) belief in the omnipotence of the party bureaucracy.

The rigid borderline separating the two types of press began to weaken during the 1980s, and a "grey zone" appeared, manifest in universiy newspapers, magazines and low circulation periodicals; these popularized or expanded ideas expressed by that part of the press not controlled by the *nomenklatura*. Meanwhile, the three major camps of the intelligentsia were able to communicate with university students and the local press through public lectures delivered at the invitation of newly organized clubs and circles. An increasingly free flow of critical ideas began.

This was the state of affairs when Gorbachev's *glasnost* reached Hungary. The younger generation of journalists must have felt like fish first brought to the shore and then returned to the water. The "explosion" reached the dailies, serious radio and television programmes, and subsequently even political programmes. The "revolution of words" was accomplished, critical rationalism was victorious, and the critical intelligentsia as communicator or as "intermediary" had inflicted a humiliating defeat (in the sense of "telos" as well as "techné") on a bureaucracy which knew only the old style of discourse.

Intelligentsia and revolution

If 1989 was a revolution, it was primarily a revolution achieved by the force of free ideas made public. Yet 1989 was not only a revolution of the intelligentsia; a "quiet revolution" (Konrád & Szelényi 1991) had been going on for many years in daily life, and there was a tenacious insistence upon certain middle-class values which permeated not only most of the critical intelligentsia but had also reached the second generation of the techno-bureaucracy within the party. The influence of middle-class values meant not that intellectuals in and out of power became bourgeois, but rather that, considering themselves the representatives of "civil society", they began to behave as "civilians" (Arató, 1991).

An intelligentsia producing ideology, expressing ideas in the language of the age,

and capable of handling the media, had won a decisive battle against the bureaucracy of the old order. When the post-Stalinist system collapsed, not only did the third stage of socialism fail to appear, but socialism as a system collapsed. The intelligentsia had not been victorious as an organized class, but as the "vanguard of the building of capitalism" (Böröcz, 1990).

The older generation of the bureaucracy and political leadership had disappeared, and the technocrat and critical intelligentsia was unable to find either strong allies or strong adversaries in the "classless" society of the post-Kádár world. The evolving vacuum practically sucked it into politics. A rapid process of forming political parties started under the leadership of intellectuals, and pluralization took place by reconstructing the fragments of political traditions (Vajda, 1992, 67), that is by the recreation of tradition. While in the early 1980s many people thought that the economic rearrangement launched by slow embourgeoisement would not lead to democracy (Szelényi, 1990, 93), in reality democracy evolved more rapidly than capitalism.

The intellectual as politician

From the end of 1988 onwards, the intelligentsia found itself in the front line of the nascent parties. The emerging political vacuum encouraged them to represent democracy not only theoretically, or as citizens, but to participate in its practical realization as well. Many interpreted the politician's role as a mission or at least as a response to an exceptional historical challenge. Who else should "shape history" if not those in possession of a plan, an idea, a normative model?

In the year of "democratic change" perhaps the only two parties that could say that they were not, at their core, intellectual formations were the Social Democratic Party (MSZDP) and the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP). Some members of the critical intelligentsia did appear among the social democrats, but they failed to make an impact, the supporting advisers left, and subsequently, or simultaneously, the party itself failed. The elite of the Smallholders' Party was recruited first and foremost among small cultivators and surviving Smallholder politicians of the pre-communist era; the small number of intellectuals who joined them later had never belonged to the critical intelligentsia of the Kádár regime. The same was true of the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), with the difference that the intelligentsia was more dominant in the core of the party. They were mostly elderly Catholic intellectuals who had not opposed the Church's policy of collaboration with the regime, and some younger critical intellectuals who were close to the lower clergy; initially, however, the leadership of the party clearly came from the older generation (Such, 1992).

FIDESZ, the Federation of Young Democrats, the radical-liberal party of the urban young, came on the scene as a curious intellectual—semi-intellectual formation. This group of the young and well-educated, mostly of rural origin, representing the radical generation of the young critical intelligentsia, was the first to openly form its political organization (March 1988). It was "intellectual—semi-intellectual" because, though the core of FIDESZ was university-educated (some had even studied at Western universities), the majority, entering politics directly from university, had had no time to be socialized into an intellectual role. With few exceptions, they did not develop the intellectual ethos which characterized and shaped the political behaviour of the older generation. This, together with the fact that these young people had not sensed the rigid

resistance of the bureaucracy and the irremovable taboos at the time when Kádárism was disintegrating, explains why FIDESZ's criticism of the system has been pragmatic almost from the start.

The fact that the aspirations propelling FIDESZ to become a party were those of politicians not of intellectuals (Róna Tas, 1992) is explained by the dual mobility of the core of the party. Mainly lawyers and economists, these were people who were intragenerationally mobile from country towns to the capital, from non-intellectual families to the intelligentsia. One step further from the decision-making centre are those born into intellectual families in Budapest and themselves launched on intellectual careers. The old intellectuals of the earlier democratic opposition who joined FIDESZ are not politicians but have taken on an advisory role. With inevitable exceptions, the young people in FIDESZ are first or second generation intellectuals for whom catching up with the social hierarchy is a primary criterion of success.

In 1989 the "politocracy" of the intelligentsia found its political representation mainly in the largest liberal party, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), where it worded a radical programme for systemic change. If there was any representation of the intellectual behavior called "political capitalism" (Staniszkis, 1991), then it was primarily apparent in the liberal core of the SZDSZ. It was in this party that those sympathetic to the earlier democratic opposition met a major group of earlier reform economists turned liberals and the leading figures of 1956 who had been followers of Imre Nagy. Even in the 1980s, these (mainly Jewish Budapest) intellectuals had understood each other better than any of the "populist" intellectuals because of the similarity of their objectives and also because they shared modern Western-oriented attitudes. The more heterogeneous company of reform economists and the apparently more united urban opposition saw each other not as enemies but as strategic allies, whereas the relationship between the urban opposition and the "populist" writers can be described as rather an occasional tactical alliance with tinges of rivalry. The intelligentsia of the SZDSZ entered politics after successful professional careers without being absolutely sure whether they wanted to be engaged in politics, and if so, for how long: many of them continue to be ambivalent towards the professional politician's role.

Although some attempts at co-operation by the "populist" and urban groups proved successful, the first sign of the pluralization of Hungarian politics was manifested when they came forward as separate movements. The "populist" group complained that the urban opposition had prepared a programme without consulting them (Kis et al., 1987), whereas the urban group said that the "populists" had entered an alliance with the reform communists in power whilst the urban group was evolving as a political movement (Agócs & Medvigy, 1991). The two ideological traditions of the Hungarian intelligentsia, established in the 1920s and 1930s, were again separated in a time of systemic change.

The "populist" critical intelligentsia was organized in the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), which, with its claim to be the "calm force" and a programme promising a less painful economic transition, won the first free elections. The founders consisted mostly of writers, historians and other graduates in the humanities from Budapest and the provinces: some practising lawyers of the Independent Lawyers' Forum and some less eminent reform economists joined them later. Initially, the party was dominated by the plebeain-Protestant ethos that advocated a leftist middle-of-the-road position, promoted cooperation with the populist wing of

the reform communists, and for this purpose defined the MDF as "neither pro-government, nor opposition". However, it became clear by the second half of 1989 that this fellow-traveller policy would make it impossible to participate in the elections with any hope of victory. The party's founders were forced to make a pragmatic turn as they sensed the growing anti-communist mood of the public. Thus an intellectual active in politics (Zoltán Bíró) was replaced as chairman of the MDF by an intellectual politician (József Antall). The appropriateness of this choice was justified by subsequent events: after the referendum of 1989, Antall's tactics proved succesful in the face of SZDSZ as well as the communists (Kolosi et al., 1992).

Economic transition accompanying systemic change inevitably causes social dislocation, and the popularity of the government involved declines. Thus the "populist" intellectuals, many of whom considered politics as a calling and not as a job, and regarded their role as the solution of the "issues of national destiny" and not the development of daily consensus, found an opportunity to reunite against the "helpless government" through "rightist populism" with the people as they imagine them and not as they really are (Bozóki, 1991). The August 1992 paper expressing extreme right views (Csurka, 1992a) is not only a document of the struggle between politicians of different principles, but represents an attempt to reclaim power by ideological intellectuals incapable of adjusting to professional politics.

The former party of the old regime, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), was an interesting conglomerate of intellectual politicians and a "mass party of intellectuals," and an "elite party of the workers". One of the most important lines of division was generational and divided the party between old cadres and the Young Turks. The old cadres were not intellectuals, though some of their younger representatives called themselves economists or historians. Those with higher education diplomas had acquired them either at party schools (at the Lenin Institute or at the party college) or in the Soviet Union. It was in the later 1960s that intellectuals began to join the party in larger numbers. For the majority of intellectuals, a party membership card was needed to smooth progress in their professional careers and not because they wanted to become politicians, yet some younger intellectuals, given that opportunity via the Young Communist League (KISZ), used it as a springboard. The Communist Party leadership preferred the ideologically less polished technological intelligentsia; thus young technical intellectuals came to occupy the leading ranks of the ruling estate (Nyírő, 1989). Those who were unable to do so, filled the ranks of the techno-bureaucracy, at a distinctly higher level of skill than the old cadres. As politicians, they showed no trace of critical attitude and faithfully supported the Kádár gerontocracy until May 1988.

Kádár's generation was overthrown in May 1988 by a curious ad hoc coalition. It consisted of communists of the old kind, who were ready to subordinate certain taboos in the interest of acquiring power, the earlier techno-bureaucrats of the KISZ, sensing the peril and wishing to abandon the sinking ship in time, the reform communists who had been pushed aside because of their earlier intellectual deviance, and the young career technocrats, who were mostly economists and stood for economic efficiency.

Imre Pozsgay played a key role in the gradual liberalization and, as a Hungarian Gorbachev, in a matter of months he extended the freedom of the press. He started to negotiate with the intellectuals who had been organizing the germs of political parties, and accomplished a

symbolic but significant political breakthrough when he declared, on the basis of the "investigation" of a committee of intellectuals set up by him, that 1956 was a "popular uprising". It was in a debate within the Central Committee, following the removal of this taboo, that the hitherto heretical idea of a multi-party system was accepted. As Pozsgay primarily made his approaches to the "populist" opposition intellectuals, the leftist intellectuals organizing themselves in the New March Front were trying to find their mentor in Rezső Nyers. The urban-liberal groups regarded both with suspicion. The technocrat and ideological reformers, who were gradually coming to the foreground in the MSZMP, needed Károly Grósz simply to get round the followers of the old system inside the party. Miklós Németh, replacing him as Prime Minister, not only legitimized himself with a good team of professionals, as Grósz had done, but by the fact that he had also been a reformist expert before becoming a politician.

The Communist Party's successor, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), deleted the word "worker" from its name and with this new name rid itself of reminders not only of the state party but also the contradiction between its declared objective and its sociologically demonstrable intellectual composition. Pragmatic "techné" was victorious over ideological "telos"; in the MSZP led by Gyula Horn, the intellectual was needed as a hard-working expert politician and not as the "conscience of the nation". The remaining members of the reform circles became professional bureaucrats, and Pozsgay left the party in the autumn of 1990. In the meantime, initial uncertainties in the party's self-legitimation made it necessary to include among its representatives "ornamental intellectuals" who demonstrated the "social roots" of the MSZP.

It is of parcitular interest that it was the MSZP, an increasingly social democratic party of intellectuals, which, due to a sudden vacuum on the political left, became a major political beneficiary of the dissatisfaction with pauperization, a growing unemployment, and a steadily weakening protective social net. This party of intellectuals found itself in the paradoxical position of trying to become a leftist "blue-collar" party representing wage and salary earners.

Intellectuals at the negotiations

The historic meeting of intellectuals turned politicians took place in the spring of 1989 at the Opposition Round Table and, subsequently, in the summer of the same year, at the trilateral negotiations, where the political realization of the change of system and the basic principles of the new set-up were discussed. On the opposition side, it became clear which of those among the politicking intellectuals were going to become politicians and which were those budding politicians who continued to think as intellectuals. It was an exceptional moment; the emergent and the declining "political classes" faced each other in the negotiating chambers of Parliament.

The top delegation of the MSZMP, headed by Pozsgay, was made up of technobureaucrats who had entered the party in the 1970s and moved clumsily in the medium of democratic debate. The topmost representation of the MSZMP at the negotiations was a politically suicidal undertaking and it is not mere chance that Németh and representatives of his government of "experts" did not attend. The situation was different at the lower, expert, levels where the participants were mostly not party bureaucrats but younger technocrats from the ministries, who used all sorts of gestures to detach themselves from their role and to

indicate to the opposition that they had not volunteered to be there but had been delegated by the party. The new parties were struggling with an enormous shortage of cadres, and the MSZMP technocrat who could call attention to his expertise was able to "save himself", and to lay the foundations of a career in the administration of the new system. It was mainly at the political negotiations that the stakes were high; the negotiations on the economy, by contrast, were conducted by people who knew each other well and who had been discussing these issues for a long time. With some irony, one could even say that the discussions on the economy were conducted between two groups of reform economists: those who had left the MSZMP in time, and those who had failed to do so.

The Opposition Round Table (EKA) was a far more colourful and mixed company than the MSZMP delegation; it gathered a large number of intellectuals, academicians and students, film directors and museum directors among them. The dominance of intellectuals in the humanities was conspicuous. The Opposition Round Table was a meeting place of generations, each with a different political socialisation, past experience, historical references, and political culture: the oldest sat alongside members of the postwar generation, the people of 1956, the "great generation" of 1968, and the generation of the late Kádár regime and systemic change.

Despite some descriptive accounts (Bozóki, 1993; Bruszt, 1990; Richter ,1990; Szalai , 1990; Sajó, 1991), little is known about the events of the trilateral talks and about the motivations of the participating intellectuals. Nevertheless, this extremely heterogeneous group reached a consensus about constitutional democracy, even if there remained serious differences about details of its realization.

A test of the intellectual's role

In the new political field that emerged after the trilateral talks, four types of intellectuals and intellectual attitudes could be distinguished according to the individuals' attitudes to politics and to the idea of becoming politicians: the "professionals", those having a "sense of mission", the "brooding", and the "people of rapid retreat".

The first category consists of "natural" politicians. It soon became apparent that, for a large number of intellectuals, the profession they had practiced had been a detour. For them, politics did not mean something shameful or "lowly"; they lacked the typical intellectual's arrogance towards politics, felt they were born for politics, and admitted it. They easily and rapidly identified with the politician's role and sought quickly to raise it to a professional level.

The second group consisted of intellectuals taking part in politics with a sense of mission. It is not evident why they entered politics and they had to justify their entry even to themselves. However, self-legitimation is easy as "we live in extraordinary times", and if the country and duty call, "all of us have to go". Many of them felt that the present was a direct continuation of their earlier existence as critical intellectuals; after all, if they had been fighting for the nation and for democracy, they couldn't stop half way, just as their ideas seemed about to materialize. Quite a number had a politician's make-up even when they were prophetic or ideological intellectuals, but did not admit it, even to themselves. They did not start to take up politics as writers so that they might write freely, but they had been writing so that they might freely take up politics. However, neither politics nor writing was a goal in itself; both were subordinated to a higher ideal, to a moral, "meta-political" objective. This group was not homogeneous and did not consist

only of extremists or populists. Most came from the earlier group of "populist" writers but there were also members of the earlier opposition, committed advocates of 1956 among them, and people who wished to atone for their earlier lapses and ill-judged compromises by serving democracy.

The third group consists of intellectuals brooding over their political activites. They were the people for whom morally elevating power in itself is an insufficient justification for the acceptance of the politician's role. Initially, they had to answer the question daily why they were engaged in politics, and after some time they would have to decide what they actually wanted. Some attempted the impossible: to make the one consistent with the other; by piling up intellectual and politicians' jobs they tried "rationally" to divide themselves and soothe their consciences. Many are highly popular with voters because it is clear that they are not power-hungry. They do not want to be politicians at a price, they are not much disappointed if their destiny lets them continue their intellectual calling. Yet as professionalization and bureaucratization of the parties progresses, they became increasingly irritating to many within their own parties, and sooner or later became an "alien body". Some were pushed out or voluntarily gave up politics, but the majority submitted themselves to their fate and willy-nilly became professional politicians. However, cases of compromise also occurred when people retired from the front-line of politics but left a foot in the door and, alongside their main vocation, remained members of various non-executive bodies of their party.

If the politician is defined as somebody who "is able to make unprincipled compromises" (Vajda, 1992, 66), then neither the members of the second nor the third group are real politicians. Neither those with "a sense of mission", nor those who "brood over politics" are able to make unprincipled compromises, and their attachment to the transcendent justification of political action is always, potentially, a threat to democratic politics.

The fourth group, the "people of rapid retreat", are intellectuals interested in politics who regarded flirtation with practical politics as a passing adventure, a short détour created by the exceptional situation, and who, as soon as they felt that the situation had changed, returned to their old vocations. Some may have been attracted by politics but realized that constitutionally they were not suited for it and quickly drew the necessary conclusion. However, they did not lose interest in politics and later functioned as advisers.

Hungary reached the age of democracy with the free elections of 1990 but the role conflicts between the intellectuals' and politicians' identities were resolved only slowly. "Commuting" between these roles continued for a long time and the intellectuals enjoyed this masked ball far more than the professional politicians.

The role conflicts of critical intellectuals turned politicians are among the causes of the disturbances generated by the interior factions ("movements") within these parties. The development of a political situation which pushes the movements and their ideologists out of the parties seems to be a significant step toward the stabilization of the party system, but it also calls attention to the occasionally weak legitimacy of the system of democratic institutions, as well as to the weakness of the organizations that represent interest groups.

The critical intelligentsia and the press

After the elections of 1990 the press, liberated only a year earlier, became one of

the most important spheres of mobility for the old critical intelligentsia. Never before had so many interesting articles been published in Hungarian periodicals, yet most of the intelligentsia was reading not the periodicals but the dailies, and watching political programmes on television. The intelligentsia was in a feverishly politicized state.

The magazines founded by intellectuals close to the different parties varied in their relationships with their parties. *Magyar Fórum,* representing the populists in the MDF, was acquired by politicians with a "sense of mission". "Brooding" politician-intellectuals edited *Kis Újság,* which differed from the FKGP (the Smallholders) party line, and *Beszélő,* a former samizdat journal which became a weekly, is close to the SZDSZ, concentrating primarily on social issues. *Magyar Narancs,* sympathetic to FIDESZ, was edited not by politicians but by "people of rapid retreat", and consequently the paper acquired greater independence from the party. The liberal periodicals soon developed good relations with the established Hungarian Journalists' Federation. Journalists and politicians close to the "populist national" line set up a new journalists' association. This experiment did not come up to expectations and, despite the papers founded or reorganized by the government, the majority of journalists viewed the activities of the government critically. Most journalists felt that their own independence was endangered by the removal of the chairmen of both the radio and television authorities, who had been appointed after the parties had negotiated a consensus; when the government launched its "media war" (Farkas 1991; Sükösd 1992) against them, most journalists sympathized with the President of the Republic, counterbalancing the government, and with the opposition parties.

Like the intellectuals, most of the press experienced the liberation of 1988-1989 as a kind of moral revolution. The profession of journalism was radically rejuvenated and its older members also tried to renew themselves and to forget the submissive practice of earlier years. Intense competition for readers began and, under the new democratic conditions, news value, attractiveness and sensation have become decisive. Newspapers survive either by providing information that would resist any challenge, or—characteristically—by exaggerating events, by presenting the paradox of events in bold relief. Criticism attracts more readers than apologetics or even factual reporting, it is a consequence of the nature of democracy that the majority of the press has gone into "opposition".

A variety of causes have produced the conditions described by Pokol (1992) as the "interpenetration" of liberal intellectuals, politicians and the press, where the shaping of politics by intellectuals is counter-productive to the functional differentiation of modern political life. Historical reasons apart, the critical intelligentsia outside the parties, insofar as it does not wish to give up its influence, may also be "blamed" for the retention of a close relationship, often accepted even by opposition politicians who feel that, without the legitimation offered by the intelligentsia, their own legitimacy is weak. A long-term strengthening of a system of political rotation is necessary for the full separation of the functional role of the press and political institutions. Until this happens, neither actor is interested in winding up the alliance, though the intelligentsia, with its universalist inclinations, has become dissatisfied with the opposition parties as well. A recent recurrence of activism in movements is a sign that its retreat from the parties to "political society" has begun.

After an excursion into professional politics, a large number of intellectuals have

returned to the politics of "movement", although their voices are no longer likely to be decisive; they will be lost in the noise of the struggle between various social interests in the new democracy. The programme of the intelligentsia as a "political class" is not going to be realized, and after the change of system, the task of the earlier "politocracy" would again be to create a "political society" in the Tocquevillian sense of the term, between state and society, by articulating the opinions of groups active in politics. The Democratic Charter, and other new extra-parliamentary initiatives have offered an opportunity to the politically active intelligentsia to find its way back to a role of its own. But, to be able to perform this role, it has to emerge from the earlier political organizations of the "estate" type and, emerging from the prophetic role of the "nation's conscience", it has to become a modern social stratum. The critical intelligentsia of the post-communist society can be the advocate of democracy if it becomes democratic in its mentality and daily political routine. ❧

References

Agócs, S. & E. Medvigy (eds.) 1991. *Lakitelek, 1987. A magyarság esélyei* (Lakitelek, 1987. The Chances of the Hungarians). Budapest: Antológia-Püski.

Arató, A. 1991. "Revolution in East-Central Europe: Interpretations". In *Demokratikus átmenetek* (Democratic Transitions), G. Szoboszlai (ed.), pp. 112-136. Budapest, MPT.

Bihari, M. 1990. *Demokratikus út a szabadsághoz* (A Democratic Way to Freedom). Budapest: Gondolat.

Bozóki, A. 1993. "Hungary's Road to Systemic Change: The Opposition Round Table." *East European Politics and Societies*, forthcoming.

Bozóki, A. & É. Kovács 1991. "A pártok megnyilvánulásai a sajtóban a taxisblokád idején" (The Political Parties in the Media During the Taxi Drivers' Blockade). *Szociológiai Szemle* (1).

Böröcz, J. 1991. "A kapitalizmus építésének élcsapata" (The Vanguard of Capitalism). *Magyar Nemzet* , October 25.

Bruszt, L. 1990. 1989: The Negotiated Revolution of Hungary. *Social Research* 57, pp. 365-387.

Csengey, D. 1990. *Mezítlábas szabadság.* (Barefoort Freedom) Budapest, Püski.

Csoóri, S. 1991. *Nappali hold.* (Day-time Moon). Budapest: Püski.

Csurka, I. 1992. "Néhány gondolat a rendszerváltozás két esztendeje és az MDF új programja kapcsán" (Some Thoughts Concerning the Past Two Years of the Systemic Change and the New Programme of MDF). *Magyar Fórum,* August 20. pp. 9-16.

Csurka, I. 1992b. "Keserű Hátország" (Bitter Blighty) *Magyar Fórum,* December 31, 809.

Faragó, B. 1986. *Nyugati liberális szemmel* (From a Western, Liberal Point of View). Paris: Magyar Füzetek Könyvei.

Farkas, Z. 1991. "Állóháború" (Ongoing War) In: *Magyarország politikai évkönyve (The Political Yearbook of Hungary),* pp. 207-212. Budapest: Ökonómia Alapítvány - Economic Rt.

Fehér, F. & Á. Heller 1992. *"Kelet-Európa "dicsőséges forradalmai"* (The "Glorious Revolutions" of Eastern Europe). Budapest: T-Twins.

Garton Ash, T. 1991. *A balsors édes hasznai* (The Uses of Adversity). Budapest: T-Twins

Gombár, Cs. 1983. "Van-e, s ha van, milyen a politikai tagoltság nálunk?" (What Kind of Political Articulation is There in Hungary, if There is Any?). In: *Politika és társadalom. A Magyar Politikatudományi Társaság Évkönyve.* (Politics and Society. The Yearbook of the Hungarian Political Science Associaton). G. Szoboszlai (ed.), 32-66. Budapest: MPT.

Gouldner, A. 1979. *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class.* London: Macmillan.

Havas, F. (ed.) 1992. *Beszélő Összkiadás I-III* (Beszélő: A Complete Edition). Budapest: AB-Beszélő.

Hofer, T. 1992. "Harc a rendszerváltásért szimbolikus mezőben: 1989. március 19-e Budapesten" (Symbolic Struggle for the Political Transition in Hungary: the March 15, 1989 Demonstration in Budapest). *Politikatudományi Szemle*, 29-51.

Kis, J. 1992. "Gondolatok a közeljövőről" (Thoughts on the Near Future). *Magyar Hírlap*, December 24, 11.

Kis, J., F. Kőszeg & O. Solt 1987. "Társadalmi szerződés" (Social Contract). *A Beszélő különkiadása* (A special issue of *Beszélő*).

Kolosi, T., I. Szelényi. S. Szelényi & B. Western 1992. "The Making of Political Fields in Post-Communist Transition: Dynamics of Class and Party in Hungarian Politics. 1989-90." In: *Post-Communist Transition: Emerging Pluralism in Hungary*, Bozóki, Körösényi & Schöpflin (eds.). London: Pinter; New York: St. Martin's Press.

Konrád, Gy. & I. Szelényi 1979. *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; Brighton: Harvester.

Konrád, Gy. & Szelényi 1989. *Az értelmiség útja az osztályhatalomhoz*. Budapest: Gondolat. (A revised Hungarian edition of the above)

Konrád, Gy. & I. Szelényi 1991. "Intellectuals and Domination in Post-Communist Societies". In: *Social Theory for a Changing Society*, P. Bourdieu & J. Colleman (eds.). Boulder, Co.: Westview.

Kovács, J. M. 1984. "A reformalku sűrűjében" (In the Middle of the Reform Bargain). *Valóság* 3, 30-55.

Kovács, J. 1990. "Reform Economics: A Classification Gap". *Daedalus* 27 (2).

Lengyel, L. 1992. *Útfélen* (On the Side of the Road). Budapest: 2000—Századvég.

Michnik, A. 1988. "A New Evolutionism". In: Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Nyírő, A. 1989. *Segédkönyv a Politikai Bizottság tanulmányozásához* (A Handbook for the Study of the Politbüro). Budapest: Aula.

Pokol, B. 1992. "Political Culture and the Intelligentsia in Hungary". Paper presented at a conference on "Political Culture in Eastern Europe". Oberjoch, Germany, August 23-28.

Richter, A. 1990. *Ellenzéki Kerekasztal* (Opposition Round table). Budapest.

Róna-Tas, A. 1992. "FIDESZ—Mi DESZ?" Nemzedékek és pártok (FIDESZ—What kind of Democrats? Generations and Political Parties). In: *Tiszta lappal. A FIDESZ a magyar politikában*. 1988-1991 (A New Chapter: FIDESZ in Hungarian Politics, 1988-91), A. Bozóki (ed.). Budapest: FIDESZ.

Rupnik, J. 1979. "Dissent in Poland, 1968-1978". In: *Opposition in Eastern Europe*, L.R. Tőkés (ed.), pp. 60-122. London: Macmillan.

Sajó, A. 1991. *Round Tables in Hungary*. Unpublished MS.,

Schöpflin, G., R. Tőkés & I. Völgyes 1988. "Leadership Change and Reform in Hungary". *Problems of Communism*, August-September.

Staniszkis, J. 1991. *The Dynamics of Breakthrough in Eastern Europe*.

Stumpf, I. 1990. Pártosodás '89: "A magyar társadalom önszervezodési folyamatának tipizálási kísérlete" (Party Formation in 1989. An Attempt at a Typology of the Self-Organizing Process of Hungarian Society). In: *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve* (Political Yearbook of Hungary), Kurtán, Sándor & Vass (eds.), pp. 386-398. Budapest: Aula-Mikk.

Such, G. 1992. "Christian Democrats: Too Meek to Inherit". *East European Reporter* 5 (6). pp. 18-19.

Sükösd, M. 1992. "The Media War". *East European Reporter* 5 (2). pp. 69-72.

Szalai, E. 1990. "Útelágazás" (Crossroads). *Valóság* 32 (12).

Szelényi, I. 1986/7. "The Prospects and Limits of the East European New Class Project: An Auto-Critical Reflection on *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*. *Politics and Society* 15. pp. 103-144.

Szelényi I. (1990): *Új osztály, állam, politika*. (New Class, State, Politics) Budapest: Európa

Vajda, M. 1992. *A történelem vége? Közép-Európa, 1989* (The End of History? Central Europe, 1989). Budapest: Századvég.

László Csaba

End of the Tunnel in Sight

The State of the Economy

Between the first and second free elections Hungary has lost about a fifth of its gross domestic product. Investments are about a third less, hardly reaching the critical minimum level of 10 per cent. Inflation has stayed double digit and will surely be no less than 25 per cent in 1994. Half of the domestic debt has been incurred in this period, and even the net debt of the country, which had been stagnating around $13.5 bn since 1988, started to grow, reaching $15.5 bn (with gross debt reaching 24 bn) by the middle of 1993. Previous full employment has given way to unemployment of around 13 per cent, i.e. about 2 per cent higher than the EC and over 3 per cent higher than the OECD average. Real income has dropped by about 10-12 per cent.

In many ways, this is a depressing picture indeed. Many observers have produced gloomy visions, forecasting further drops in economic activity, or continuing stagnation at best. Given its length and sustained nature, many observers talk about a depression worse than that of 1929-33. Ideas of catching up with the West, or hopes for quick recovery, have vanished.

Three qualifications must be made before subscribing to this gloomy vision. First, we may well not know what we are measuring: problems of statistical recording have been amplified by the very nature of the change of system. For one, surveys do cover the entire decay taking place in the public sector and in large organizations, but the recording of small scale, private and semi-private activities is less than adequate. The Central Bureau of Statistics, thus—in keeping with the internationally accepted methodology—uses tax declarations of private entrepreneurs to assess their contribution to wealth creation. Due to widespread underreporting and massive tax evasion, this is grossly misleading. Accordingly, for the year 1992, the enterprise sector was showing a deficit of 170 bn Fts, due to the new depreciation rules and due to the massive underreporting of incomes. The same year, tax authorities found an average entrepreneur earning 25 per cent less than an average employee. This is obviously counterfactual and runs counter to both financial and consumer statistics. Likewise, registered drops in retail turnover do not encompass direct sales (both on the

---

László Csaba
is Professor of International Economics at the Budapest College of Foreign Trade and an advisor at Kopint-Datorg, a large consultancy company. His latest book, The Capitalist Revolution in Eastern Europe, *will be published by Elgar in Britain in 1994.*

streets and by primary producers), production for self-consumption, large—partly illegal—private importation of commodities, and purchases in discount stores (which are still classified as wholesale trade). The latter types accounted for at least 15 to 20 per cent of total consumption in Hungary in the period under scrutiny. If we do not disregard these well researched though little publicized elements of daily life, we will not be impressed in the least by the reported 5 per cent drop in retail trade in 1992, followed by a drop of 3 per cent in 1993. If these are adjusted for the above listed items, a stabilization of consumption in 1992 and its modest growth in 1993 can be discerned. The monthly state of the savings index also appears to support this finding, as solidly—in some months over 10 per cent—negative returns on deposits do induce people to reduce savings. Therefore the savings rate, which peaked in 1991 at 17 per cent of disposable income, has come down somewhat below 10 per cent in 1993. This is hardly surprising. The roughly 3 per cent growth in imports in 1993 is a figure congruous with, even positively supporting, my argument, and so is the moderate growth in the use of electric energy, which is always an index of actual levels of economic activity. In sum, though final GDP figures for 1993 will probably be available by mid-1995 at the earliest, it can be established with a reasonably low margin of error that economic contraction in Hungary has come to a halt in 1993. The 2.6 per cent growth in industrial production, especially in the key engineering and construction industries, rounds up the picture. This is, of course, a very modest level of recovery, which—if it could be extrapolated—would imply Hungary's reaching the pre-crisis level in 1999. Public dissatisfaction thus needs no explanation. However, from a purely economic point of view, there clearly is light at the end of the tunnel.

My second major observation concerns growth. Economic theory, especially in the 50s and 60s, has become obsessed with increments in output and current consumption, and has tended to neglect stock variables, like wealth and equilibrium. The latter has proved a mistake equally serious in terms of the environment and of the money flow. Economic theory in the 70s and 80s therefore attempted to overcome the previous short-sighted emphasis on current output/physical indicators. Sustainability and equilibria concerns have come to the fore. More attention tends to be devoted to the social and environmental consequences of technological change, a thrifty use of scarce resources (including human resources), quality of life, and other non-quantitative aspects. It might as a result sound somewhat old fashioned to assess any economy in transformation in purely quantitative terms. One wonders what "reaching the pre-crisis level" means, whether it is a realistic measure of overcoming difficulties. Is it realistic to expect a return to full employment, given the presence of a real market economy? Is it really desirable to continue to produce large quantities of high-rise prefabricated apartment blocks which nobody wants to live in, except as a last resort? Is it really a loss if Hungary discontinues the production of military electronics which could only be used in the Warsaw Pact or in third world countries of "non-capitalist orientation?" Should one object that fewer than 30 per cent of Hungary's population earns its living on the land, when in Britain and the USA the figure is below 2 per cent? Realistically not all growth should be taken as a plus and all decline as a minus, as this is the very heart of structural change. Without changing the inherited structure of over-industrialization and of a disproportionate amount of employment in agriculture, there is no way for Hungary to become part of a modern post-industrial Europe.

Third, although it goes on surprising those responsible, Hungary is in the throes of a textbook adjustment crisis. In the years 1990-92, indicators of domestic activity—such as output, employment, or inflation—deteriorated, whereas external indeces—current account and balance of trade—have regularly exceeded the most optimistic expectations. This is precisely how an adjustment crisis works. Likewise, economic theorists are well aware, and the experience of developing countries bears out, that the recovery of domestic economic activity can take place with steady or even growing surpluses in the current account and especially in the balance of trade. Unless one's thinking continues to be dominated by French mercantilism, there is no reason why external balances should not deteriorate in the recovery phase. There is no reason why this should be a source of anxiety if the size of the deficit is kept within manageable limits.

It is instructive that Hungary's trade balance started to show a deficit from November 1992 onwards. That was the month—seasonally the most unfavourable—when the growth of unemployment was evening out. Contrary to the Ministry of Labour forecasts of the time, which feared an explosion to 17-19 per cent levels, unemployment has remained stagnant ever since at the level of 13 per cent. (This is a clear inflexion point in the trend.) Added to modestly growing imports, the stabilization of energy use and of consumption (with both net wages and prices growing at 23 per cent) these figures demonstrate that contraction has evened out. The fact that inflation is no longer declining, and is even modestly accelerating, is yet another textbook sign of an early phase of recovery. This point is particularly relevant in a comparison with the past as well as in our assessment of future prospects. There is nothing to exclude the continuation of a modest recovery with slightly more inflation and more external disequilibria, provided the latter can be calibrated properly.

In terms of the latter, the three conventional levers of economic policy, fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies, should be mentioned. In a small and open economy, the latter especially plays a crucial role.

There was much uncertainty in the Hungarian economy between 1989 and 1991. Economists disagreed, the best minds being divided among themselves in their evaluation of the implications of trade liberalization and of the collapse of Comecon. Furthermore, when the first freely elected government took office, the reserves of the country stood at a $800 mn low (with immediately mobilizable operative reserves of only 300 mn, covering only 10 days of imports). Some feared a flight of capital, others political shocks, as well as that the government might lose control over macroeconomic processes. Such fears seemed legitimate at a time when the taxi drivers' strike in October 1990 invalidated attempts to abolish subsidies at one stroke and the first government economic programme was published only in mid-February 1991, nearly 10 months after they took office. Under these circumstances, the National Bank was perfectly right in using all the means at its disposal, especially the exchange rate, which carries a signal recognized by millions of households and tens of thousands of entrepreneurs, to stabilize expectations and to bring inflation down. Inflation peaked in May, 1991 and started to come down for a year and a half. The target was attained. But at a price. From May 1992 on, the Ministry of International Economic Relations started to express its unease about the flattening of the previously steady growth of exports. This fear was by and large neglected by the major decision-making agencies, the National Bank and the Ministry of Finance. Thinking in terms of

abstract econometric models, these worked on the assumption of a steady growth of exports, without any justification. The Hungarian currency appreciated by 25 per cent in real terms in 1990-92, and the 1993 devaluations only sufficed to avoid further appreciation. In other words, the profitability of exporting companies, especially those selling the bulk of Hungarian exports, has declined dramatically. This was coupled by two further unfavourable circumstances. In the principal external markets severe constraints occurred: a liquidity crisis in the CIS, whereas in Central Europe and in the EC—also in EFTA—repercussions of a recession and of protectionist tendencies surfaced. Domestically, the funds for trade promotion accounted for 0.5 per cent of fiscal outlays in 1990, and this declined to 0.15 by 1993, i.e. to a third. Financing of foreign sales has become more difficult, and no organization comparable to the US Exim Bank has come into being.

All in all, small wonder that Hungarian exports virtually collapsed in 1993: their value will hardly exceed the $8 bn level, that is, they will be at 1988 levels.

Since Hungarian exports are generally price sensitive (such as agricultural produce, intermediaries, consumer goods, tourism, etc), there is no reason to be pessimistic about the elasticity of exports. If it is profitable, Hungarian entrepreneurs are more than willing to turn to foreign markets, whereas tourism, transit fees and other invisibles have a good chance to continue to be in surplus. Export promotion is therefore a fully respectable goal, even though the measures approved so far in the governmental package of September 1993 seem to make only minor differences in practice.

It is important to recall a fundamental difference between 1993-94 and 1989-90, and this is the level of international reserves. Nowadays these are in the range of $5,5 bn dollars, twice the Czech level, and able to cover roughly half a year of imports. In other words, there is no need to be dramatic about the current account, whereas there is a need to be dramatic about exports. If the latter grew, the trade deficit could be described as normal and healthy, since growing exports allow for convenient financing. This, however, is the big if for the months to come.

Would a change in exchange rate policy not imply an inflationary push? This is of legitimate concern. But as we have seen, the objective for which the exchange rate had to carry the full burden of an anti-inflationary measure was successfully dealt with in 1989-91. A change in the situation calls for a change in policies. Those anxious about inflation may not be particularly happy about the National Bank creating a money supply exceeding the growth of nominal GDP by at least 10 percentage points for over two years now. Anti-inflationary concerns may operate within the monetary authority proper. Likewise, fiscal spending, especially its growth rate, seems to be unrelated to development trends in revenue. Moreover, no account seems to have been taken of two important financial innovations of 1990-91. The first means that the National Bank is independent of the government, and can cover only 3 per cent of the fiscal deficit by crediting the Treasury. Hence, and secondly, the Treasury is compelled to raise money on the capital market by issuing treasury bills and other bonds. This makes credit-financed deficit spending an extremely costly exercise. While government spending continues to be determined by and through political bargaining, revenue falls due to recession and privatisation alike. This problem was obvious already in 1991, yet the Ministry of Finance still stubbornly resists calls from MPs and the Auditor's Court to present a long term strategy of managing its exploding debt burden. This is a most serious problem,

since actual government deficits have regularly been about twice the *ex ante* approved figure, and the rest needed to be financed in the costly way outlined above. There seems to be no easy way out. If nothing is done, the debt servicing burden triggers further tax increases and a primary budget which is in fact a surplus. If fiscal spending is rolled back, demand is weakened, social strains become greater and the quite modest recovery might be weakened.

The most efficient way of supporting recovery would certainly be a well-functioning banking system. But this again is something more easily suggested than put into operation. Hungary inherited a two-tier banking system from its reform socialist period and most firms were already corporatized—in other words, totally unlike the situation in Poland or Bohemia. Thus, there was no possibility of simply writing off old debts as a communist heritage (as many Western economists proposed), since both lenders and borrowers enjoyed a fair degree of independence and thus also responsibility for their debts/non-performing loans. Moreover, with the large number of new entrepreneurs, from 150,000 to over 700,000 between 1990 and 1993, merchant banks simply had no compass to steer by: most clients were brand new, with no track-record or references. This kind of business is normally called high risk even in the most advanced market economies, with a 70 plus per cent failure rate. Furthermore, banks, along with most of their clients, were overtaken by the lure of expansion. With contracting effective demand, such over-inflated balloons often burst in market economies as well. Thus it is small wonder that the largest banks carry the worst portfolios. For several years, there was no strategy for tackling this issue. Except for the Foreign Trade Bank, which had no large domestic debtors inherited as part of a political game, and the Budapest Bank, which pursued an unprecedentedly aggressive policy of building up reserves for loan-loss provisions at the cost of regularly paying no dividends to its various shareholders (including the state), banks were muddling through. In other words, they were rolling on their burden ahead, with the sums involved growing by the year. With the introduction of Western accounting standards in 1992, the previously high nominal profits of merchant banks simply evaporated. In 1992-93 they are hardly breaking even.

This triggered off two serious problems. First, loan-loss reserves can only be built up if the margin between deposit rates and lending rates becomes extremely wide (on occasion over 12-14 per cent), which is punitive to savings and investment alike. This is further strengthened by the banks' accumulating safe but low profit state bonds—thus interests charged to entrepreneurs are becoming prohibitive. Second, the state has to intervene. As is to be expected, it tends to bail out those in the deepest trouble, and thus intensifies the moral hazard involved. In addition, the bankrupt companies, which are at the root of the problem, are often bailed out or simply left alone instead of being wound up. The problem may therefore easily re-emerge in the coming years. Losses of hundreds of billions are "bridged" through incurring new state debt, that is they are financed by tax increases. The soft and complex "credit consolidation operation" is more or less the opposite of what any Western financier would recommend as an incentive to responsibility and soundness in banking while saving public money—if not now, then at least in the future.

It is difficult not to see the fiscal problem as the single most important unknown variable in the economic equation of the coming years. Putting merchant banks on a

sound footing will certainly mean more rather than less state involvement and outlay—there is no other way (though many techniques). Raising revenue is a tough job. Over 25 per cent of individual tax payers found themselves in the highest tax bracket in 1993, thus personal income tax cannot be reasonably raised. Corporate tax and VAT are also high enough. Subsidies account for less than two per cent of government spending. Thus, unless transfers for various state agencies and for social services is reduced, the fiscal bomb will inevitably explode. In an election year, it is not realistic to expect drastic cuts. However, the new government in 1994 should certainly not commit the mistake of its predeccesor of wasting the honeymoon: it should take some of the most unpopular decisions on spending cuts while its newly won legitimacy is still pristine.

What are the prospects in the medium term? In my view, the most encouraging sign in Hungary is the pragmatism of the general public. This is reflected in millions taking care of their own affairs and businesses rather than expecting the Nanny State to come in. This is why grass roots privatization is expanding steadily. Despite all the complaints against the bankruptcy legislation, there has never been a single month since 1990 when the number of new firms has not exceeded the number of firms wound up. In 1994 half of Hungary's GDP derives from the private sector—its growth is unprecedented. Furthermore, while Russia recorded an inflow of $200 mn in foreign direct investment in 1992, in Hungary the inflow stabilized at the level of $1.5 bn in 1991-93, reaching a stock of $5.6 bn. Therefore—unlike in many theoretical writings—the privatization and modernization of large companies, as well as greenfield investment is not something to be achieved in 50-100 years. Through FDI—rather than through governmental projects of various sorts—top-down privatization is also gathering momentum. All this reflects a certain depoliticization and a definite disideologization of society as a whole. Political scientists may sometimes see this as a setback, but from an economist's point of view it is quite promising. Loudly preached extremist statements of various brands do not command a following—and this is good news for a capitalism awaiting stabilization. ❧

Tibor Erdős

Post Mortem

János Kornai: *The Socialist System. The Political Economy of Communism.* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992. 644 pp.

In his new book, widely and favourably received, János Kornai undertakes no less than a comprehensive and critical analysis of that socialist economy which recently collapsed. Kornai has discussed the socialist economy in earlier books and articles. The new element in this work is its comprehensive summary of socialism and careful description of the political structure of the system that accompany the economic analysis. He argues that the "communist social system" cannot be understood without this political structure.

The first part discusses classical socialism, by which the author means what prevailed in China under Mao Tse Tung, in the Soviet Union under Stalin, and which also appeared in the smaller Eastern-European states. The second part describes the reform processes. Kornai considers it more important to understand classical socialism, which he considers a coherent system. Without that understanding, neither the reform processes nor the post-socialist transition can be understood. He does not undertake a discussion of the transition after socialism, although he does refer to some of its problems.

Tibor Erdős
taught at the Budapest University of Economics from 1952 to 1975. He now heads the Department of Finances and Economic Development at the Institute of Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The quality of the socialist system

Kornai's starting point is that the key to the understanding of socialism is the examination of the power structure. "In my opinion, the characteristics of the power structure are precisely the source from which the chief regularities of the system can be deduced." (p. 33) The decisive element here is the undivided rule of the communist party. The classical socialist system in its nature presumes a one-party system. The dominant force within the party is the party apparatus. The official form of relations within the party is democratic centralism, but the role of democracy is formal and the reality is centralism, hierarchy and subordination.

The activities of the party and the state are intertwined, but even in these common activities the role of the party dominates. This is why many critics of socialism have called the state a party state. The domination of the party is also fully exercised in its relations with mass organizations.

Kornai's important argument is that wherever the communist party seizes and monopolizes power, the classical socialist

system is bound to develop. It is also important that the communist party is permeated by the ideology of the socialist system which is determined by Marxism-Leninism, which has an ideological monopoly in socialism. As Kornai writes, the communist party and Marxist ideology are as inseparable as "body and soul". The fact that the development process following the communist party's seizure of power had a "genetic programme" which resulted in "classic socialism," can only be understood in conjunction with the monopoly of Marxist ideology.

The undivided power of the communist party and the "genetic programme" explain property relations under classic socialism. A cardinal point of the programme of Communist Parties is the "expropriation of the expropriators" and the organization of an economy based on social property by rejecting private ownership.

Kornai describes the proposition that state property is the property of "the whole of the people" or "the whole of society" as ideological. It is not the property of the people because the residual income (basically that part of the price above costs) goes into the state coffers and is allocated by the bureaucracy. This also means that the profit motive cannot be a spontaneous stimulation for state firms and that society needs artificial stimulation. It is also contrary to the notion of the "property of the whole people" that nobody can alienate property rights, and that ownership rights of control are exercised by the bureaucracy. As the author put it, an unprecedented depersonalization of property is implemented. State property belongs to all and to none. He considers this to be valid for cooperatives as well—with certain modifications—because the influence of the bureaucracy is also considerable there.

That the power structure is based on the undivided power of the party with a Marxist ideology and that state property (suspending private ownership) prevails, also determines other aspects of socialism. Plan bargaining, the paternalistic behaviour of those in higher positions of the hierarchy, or the ways of expressing relations among the economic agents (thus, soft budget constraint), are all among the phenomena expressing economic interest relations. If we delve into the essence of these phenomena, we find that each group is determined by all groups which determine the quality of socialism at a deeper level. Soft budget constraint is thus determined by the prevalence of bureaucratic control, but also by the preponderance of state ownership and by the political structure. Kornai establishes five main groups of phenomena: 1. The undivided power of the Marxist party and the domination of Marxist ideology; 2. The dominant position of state ownership (or quasi-state ownership); 3. The prevalence of bureaucratic coordination; 4. The phenomena expressing interest relations, motives and the relations among economic agents. Kornai places the economic phenomena and processes which are constant characteristics of the socialist system into a fifth group: forced growth, labour shortages, a shortage economy, unemployment whithin the factory gates, etc. These are determined by all the four other groups, directly or indirectly.

This classification has a key role for Kornai. Using the main line of causality sketched above, he evaluates the economic phenomena of socialism. It is his starting point when examining the process of growth, the price system, inequalities of income, or shortages. He expresses this conviction in the sub-title of the book: "The political economy of socialism".

The classification is of key importance if we want to understand Kornai's views on economic reform. He considers steps which have been carried out to be pseudo-reforms

or reforms determined by whatever sections of whatever groups of phenomena are involved. He speaks about revolutionary transition or reform according to how the changes alter the undivided power of the communist party. He also determines the substantial reform options of the socialist system—he clearly denies their very possibility—in relation to this grouping.

The coordination mechanism of socialism

Some coordination of the activities of economic agents, citizens and organizations exists in every society. Bureaucratic coordination is the most common and the most vigorously implemented mechanism in the socialist system. The main direction of influence is vertical, from top to bottom, and the "voice" of criticism and dissatisfaction from bottom up, but that may not transgress a certain tolerance threshold which differs in time and according to country. Criticism cannot touch the basic principles of the system, the main political line of the party, or the overall economic policy outlined in economic plans. What is unique in history, as Kornai writes, is that the central organs of power intervened in social development using the law as an instrument in order to get rid of horizontal (market) coordination or, at least, to reduce it to an insignificant role.

Kornai pays close attention to the economic aspects of bureaucratic coordination. In doing so he mainly concentrates on plan bargaining, efforts to prepare taut plans, money and price relations, the state budget, and the category of soft budget constraint.

Plan bargaining is a direct consequence of the dominance of state ownership and of bureaucratic coordination: plan bargaining means hierarchical dependence between the firm and the superior authority. The object of bargaining is the performance requested of the firm and—in return for this—the amount of material, labour and capital to be allocated to the firm. The latter is due to the fact that residual income is withdrawn from the firm: it is natural that firms expect input allotments for a growth in performance. It is one of Kornai's important arguments that planning is closely connected to policy. The "plan law" is first and foremost a political document which expresses the given political line of the party. Policy is expressed in forcing "taut-plans" and in chasing quantitative goals. The interest of firms and of subordinate organizations in general lies in withholding performance so as to meet the expectations of superior authorities as easily as possible when the need arises. Political and economic considerations are always connected, information and productive capacity are concealed by the firms, which know them best, so the plans, permeated with politics, are full of inconsistencies.

Political structure, ownership relations and bureaucratic government make their mark on money and price relations as well. It is for this reason that money is not convertible even within the country: money is "earmarked", that is, money allocated to purchasing materials cannot be used, say, to pay wages. This is why the central bank lacks even nominal independence. This explains the monobank-system and one-tier banking system. The whole system entails the subordinate role of money relations.

Since firms in a socialist system can count on input allowances provided by the state, it is not the price of a certain raw material or other inputs that matters but whether inputs can be procured at all. Price sensivity is weak in the state sector. There are no rational calculations or market-clearing prices. It is not important how prices are related to costs and prices provide poor information on relative scarcities.

The position of consumer prices is no better. Economic management does its utmost to shape the structure of consumption in the direction it thinks appropriate. Those in charge determine what is important for the consumer. Moreover, consumer prices are treated as a means for the redistribution of income. Consequently, the market mechanism cannot assert itself, a false picture develops concerning the relative cost ratios of labour and capital, there is a chronic shortage of products (whose prices are kept low), prices offer a misleading guide to consumers and producers alike. There is good reason why the role of non-price signals—shortages, surplus, longer or shorter waiting period, queues for products, complaints, informal information among managers, etc.—is much more important in the functioning of a socialist economy than in capitalist countries. The behaviour of firms differs from their behaviour in market economies: price sensitivity is weak, guiding motives are different, signals have a different role, and it is not the same kind of information that has practical importance.

The most significant feature of the special behaviour of firms is that if we look at a larger group of firms, "soft budget constraint" applies to them: financial resources available to the firms set weak limits to their expenditure because they can usually count on state subsidies or the indulgence of tax authorities—the role of the exchequer is important here. Besides, they can count on credits on favourable terms, and on the inclination of price authorities to settle prices favourably for the firms: the ability to cover expenses is not limited by finances.

Main economic processes and problems of classic socialism

Kornai pays much attention to the examination of some constant economic phenomena, development processes and economic problems he considers important, and which he places in his fifth group. He puts special emphasis on their being determined by the other groups of phenomena which express the socialist system more thoroughly.

a) Investment and growth

Kornai identifies the reasons for forced growth in the ambitions of, and promises made by, the leaders of the socialist revolution and their followers. Socialism was established in under- or at most, moderately developed countries. The leaders of the revolution promised a fast improvement in living standards, something that could only come true given fast growth. Forced growth was also important for defence considerations: a military capacity can only be secured by high spending on armaments, which again have to be based on fast economic growth. Forced growth also has system-specific reasons: in an economy based on private ownership, both growth and investment imply risk-taking by firms. For that reason investment decisions are carefully considered. This risk factor is absent in socialist economies, the budget constraint is soft and firms can count on the support of the state.

Kornai carefully examines the damage done by and the consequences of forced growth. The falling consumption ratio, as a result of a high and growing investment rate, starts an irreversible and detrimental process: in health services, in environment protection or higher education, for example, such negligence has been the rule for decades and cannot be compensated for later by a sudden redeployment of resources. Kornai also describes how forced growth is necessarily extensive and results in a peculiar cyclical movement, which is a direct consequence, not of insufficient demand, but rather of the restrictions occasionally applied by the central leadership.

Kornai says: "The word 'forced' also implies that the system tries to run faster than its legs can carry it" (p. 197). He argues that the growth performance is actually large but not lasting. "This type of growth undermines its own economic performance" (p. 202).

b) Employment and wages

One characteristic of classic socialism is full employment and shortages of labour. The communist parties promise full employment; this is, however, not brought about by a well-thought out employment policy but by forced growth and, behind that, the mechanism of classical socialism.

This creates a special situation in relations between employer and employee. The labour shortage creates a sellers' market for labour which may make nominal wages rise too quickly. There is good reason why strict wage controls are in place and, even though the budget constraint is soft on the total spending of firms, it is hard as regards spending on wages. The sellers' labour market does not mean that employees are in a favourable situation and it does not confirm the notion that the political system expresses the power of the working class. Much depends on the good will and the decisions of the man in charge on the job: employment can only be terminated with his consent and leaving without it, even after giving notice, is a way of blotting one's copy book. At the same time, many advantages, e.g. getting a telephone, a flat, or credit depends on the support of the boss, and goods in short supply can often be acquired with the help of one's firm, etc. So, in spite of the sellers' market for labour, the situation and future of the employee is completely determined by the managers of the firm.

c) Consumption and distribution

Because of forced growth and investment, the growth in consumption is considerably slower than that of production. Furthermore, in numerous areas closely connected with consumption, development standards are well below those of the West. Poor quality goods are a further factor. The system does, however, provide some security. Full employment, free education, the pension system, fairly low rents are all factors of stability. The weak can count on a protecting hand. Low and order prevail, a feature closely connected with totalitarianism: criminals simply have nowhere to hide.

The distribution of money income is more egalitarian than in capitalist countries. If we consider, however, the distribution of goods and services as a whole, it is the rich who can make better use of the income redistributing effect of price policy because of the low price of cultural services and of organized holidays; furthermore, if the privileges of the *nomenklatura* are also taken into account, the inequalities of income distribution appear as closer to those of the capitalist system.

d) Shortage and inflation

Kornai holds shortage—the subject of a previous book of his—to be one of the most striking and problematic economic features of the socialist economy. In this book he first examines the different types of shortage phenomena.: 1. The buyer can buy the product required but has to queue for it. 2. The product is not available, hence the buyer abandons the original intention to purchase and forced substitution takes place (for example poultry is bought instead of pork). 3. The buyer tries to find the product in other shops. 4. The buyer postpones the purchase. 5. The buyer abandons the intention to purchase. If these shortage phenomena are *general*, that is, occur in every sphere of the economy; *frequent*, that is, cannot be considered exceptional; *intensive*, because their effects can be strongly felt in economic processes, and *chronic*, that is, their emer-

gence is not only temporary, then the economy is a shortage economy. The socialist economy is such an economy.

Kornai also examines the relationship between shortage, the shortage economy, and equilibrium. In doing so, he uses the term "notional demand" which means: "what the buyer's buying intention would be, assuming prevailing prices, the buyer's prevailing income and wealth, and prevailing social and economic conditions, if there were not supplyside constraint on fulfilling one's buying intention." (p. 235) He also uses the term "completely adjusted demand", which means the adjustment of the buyer's buying intentions to every already known supplyside constraint. The two categories represent two extremes, while the transition between the two is "partially adjusted demand". According to Kornai, a special state of equilibrium can finally be established. "It is possible (but not certain) that a curious state of equilibrium will arise. This can be called the forced adjustment equilibrium. [...] Emergence of this forced adjustment equilibrium is compatible with a persisting sense of frustration in the buyer, since she is unable to satisfy her notional demand and obliged to spend her money on forced substitutes." (p. 238) If it fails to happen because the buyer is unable to find acceptable substitutes, a "shortage induced forced saving" takes place. These savings can pile up over time, households may move further and further from a forced adjustment equilibrium. This leads to the emergence of a "monetary overhang", creating tensions in each sphere of the economy.

According to Kornai, this special state of equilibrium can be established only in the case of consumer goods and services. In the case of investment goods a real ongoing excess demand prevails. Kornai distinguishes between horizontal and vertical shortages. Horizontal shortage occurs between buyers and sellers, while vertical shortage occurs between superiors and their subordinates, e.g. concerning the quantity of raw materials to be allocated to firms. He uses the terms "normal shortage" and "normal surplus", representing the customary degree of shortage and surplus which are subject to changes over a long period and vary in different socialist countries.

Kornai's important proposition is that the shortage economy cannot be analysed without disclosing its relations to the basic features of the socialist system. It is not enough to refer to mistakes in the trading sector and ministries only, or to the inappropriate economic policy and the relative economic backwardness of socialist countries. The causes of a shortage economy are system specific. The managers' interest, the soft budget constraint, and investment hunger, along with several other factors, "form a major, direct cause of shortage, but equally they are also effects; they derived integrally from the system's deeper traits: the typical structure of power, ideology, ownership, and coordination." (p. 291)

Shortage phenomena are accompanied by a propensity towards inflation. If they exist, the economy always shows a propensity to inflation since there is excess demand on the macro level. The producer's interest is to raise prices, wages are pushed up by the labour shortage, and the permissive monetary policy allows a faster-than-required growth in the money supply. That is why classical socialism has a propensity towards inflation. However, inflation often does not emerge or simply stays at a moderate level. There are several reasons for this, for example the lack of independent trade unions or that the size of profits is not a "life or death" question to firms. Inflation can be open, repressed or concealed. Inflation is repressed when the rise in the price level is slowed or even halted by administrative price control. Inflation is usually repressed in the interfirm

sphere but can be repressed in the consumer sphere as well. Repressed inflation is not the same as concealed inflation, because in the latter case prices go up but this does not appear in the official statistics.

e) External economic relations

External economic relations are also marked by the characteristics of socialism. That explains the state monopoly of foreign trade, the structure of exports and imports by destination (by main markets), the insulation of the domestic market from the world market, the segregation of domestic prices from import and export prices, the absence of a uniform rate of exchange between the domestic currency and each foreign currency. As regards socialist countries' foreign trade with capitalist countries, Kornai examines the reasons for the high import hunger and export aversion and the propensity to debt. He attributes all this to the system-specific features of the socialist countries, for example shortages or the soft budget constraint. Regarding external trade with socialist countries, he examines the terms "soft" and "hard" products and the reversed inclinations in the area of imports and exports, compared to trade carried on with capitalist countries. Kornai closes his analysis of external economic relations with a discussion of CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance), which was an attempt to integrate the economies of the socialist countries. He argues that something similar to the Common Market "was impossible in the CMEA, because each country functioned as a separate, bureaucratic command economy, and prices and money hardly played any part in the relations among its member countries." (p. 359)

Moving away from the classical system

Following his overall analysis of the classical socialist system, Kornai examines the reasons for its disintegration. First he asks what contradictions and tensions lead to the change of the classical system given that it is a coherent system, what causes it to move away from its classical type, a move which also entails an end to the system's coherence.

He lists four main types of tension. 1. Accumulation of economic difficulties; 2. serious economic problems becoming a threat to the military strength of the socialist countries: the maintenance of the balance of military power taking up an ever higher share of GDP, thus reducing the standards of living and leading to social unrest; 3. the faith in the superiority of the system of those in power being shaken; 4. the "domino effect" of changes and political events in other socialist countries.

Kornai evaluates the moving away from classical socialism based on a) the depth of the changes, and b) the radicalism of the changes. The depth of the changes depends on what groups of phenomena are affected by them. If they affect the setting up of growth priorities only—e.g. to what extent the production of consumer goods should be increased—the changes stay on the surface since they belong only to symptom-group No.5. However, if they affect the co-ordination mechanism (that is, symptom-group No. 3), the changes go much deeper; not to mention the case when the problem of privatization is already on the agenda.

The radicalism of the change is also important; change in any group of phenomena may be radical, inconsiderable, or even a "surrogate" action. It matters whether a multiparty system is openly proclaimed or groups in opposition are simply tolerated. It is also worth distinguishing between a full and a partial elimination of short-term planning instructions.

Taking into consideration the depth and radicalism of the changes, Kornai writes about pseudo-reform, reform and revolution.

He calls the changes a reform only if they alter at least one basic attribute of at least one of groups No. 1, 2, and 3 permanently and essentially, i.e. if the changes are sufficiently radical. If changes take place in groups 4 and 5, or only modest changes happen in groups 1, 2, 3, pseudo-reform occurs. Reform does not include a complete change of the system. The latter is a revolution. It occurs if, for instance, the undivided power of the party is broken. "It is not a reform any more, but a revolution". (p. 388). Kornai refrains from qualifying the revolution, i.e. whether it should be called a "revolution" or a "counter-revolution", since this, in the terminology of socialism, implies "forward" or "backward". "As said before, I reject this evaluation concerning superiority and inferiority. This leads to the rejection of this distinction between 'revolution' and 'counter-revolution' as well." (p. 390).

Political liberalization, the rise of the private sector, and self-management

In Kornai's view political liberalization is an important aspect of the reform process because it provides the key to reform measures. Liberalization was not total, the main elements of the ideology survived, but many taboos were abolished. Seeds of pluralism appeared, an opening took place toward the capitalist world, openness and candor became greater, and secretiveness became less prevalent. However, the behaviour of the leadership was ambivalent right through and political liberalization was strictly limited, as was the expansion of the private sector. Opposition from the official ideology and the bureaucratic apparatus were responsible for these limits.

Kornai considers self-management another important tendency in the movement away from the classical socialist system. Self-management, unlike private ownership, is not an element alien to socialism and stands for a less radical change than the expansion of the private sector.

What is important is that if the monopoly of power by the communist party prevails, management cannot operate freely. The party and local authorities have several ways of influencing elections to management. If the bureaucratic apparatus dislikes management, it will be removed sooner or later. Managers still depend on the bureaucratic apparatus but what is specific to self-management is that the managers also depend on the workforce. The fact that they have to think of their re-election must not be ignored. When discussing political liberalization, the expansion of the private sector and self-management, Kornai points out that, although the changes cause some shifting away from the classical system, they do not cause basic changes in the viability of socialism. The same is emphasized when discussing market socialism.

Market socialism

Market socialism includes the idea of combining planning with the market, maintaining that these two are compatible. The idea is that combining them makes it possible to exclude their disadvantage and only the positive elements should and can be kept. "The sphere of ideas of market socialism and plan cum market plays a central part in the official ideology of the reform socialist countries." These try "to reconcile incompatible elements: Marxian political economy and respect for the market." (p. 478-479).

In the attempt to establish market socialism, deregulation and moving away from instruction-based bureaucratic control played an important part. The process involves the economy's development from vertical towards horizontal dependence. The main point of the latter is the interdependence

of buyers and sellers. As a result of different deregulation measures, a dual dependence occurs. Vertical dependence does not disappear; it still dominates but its form alters. Consequent upon the changes, informal relations dominate, and financial instruments are given greater weight. Due to the repeated application of informal and financial methods, firms do not pay sufficient attention to the market, thus, economic regulators cannot be effective enough and the soft budget constraint survives.

In evaluating market socialism, Kornai points out that partial deregulation reduces the extreme rigidity of direct bureaucratic control, alleviates shortage in many fields and humanizes the overall economic atmosphere. But there is no breakthrough in quality improvement and technical progress. New tensions appear and the shortcomings of the bureaucratic and market mechanisms tend to reinforce each other. "The 'public sector' falls between two stools. What takes place in the name of coordination is neither plan nor market." (p. 508). However, the attempt(s) to establish market socialism "have a leavening effect on society in general and particularly the part of the leading stratum of society with enlightened inclinations. They shake the blind faith in the command economy, all-powerful centralization and all-embracing planning as the highest form of control of economic processes. [...] Once people have accepted the idea that a market is needed in the public sector, they look with less prejudice and more sympathy on private enterprise. All these changes prepare the ideological ground for deeper and more radical movements in society." (p. 511).

Macroeconomic tensions

Kornai demonstrates that when the economy shifts from classical socialism in the direction of market socialism to a palpable degree, tensions emerge. Some of the tensions Kornai examines are:

- The commitment of the workforce to the job is diminished and wage pressure grows. As a result, labour mobility becomes much greater. As there is a labour shortage, employees' bargaining power improves. This shows in the runaway of nominal wages resulting from the diminishing bureaucratic resistance to it. "This tendency strengthens as inflation accelerates and the wage-price spiral begins." (p. 532).
- Ambivalence manifests itself vis á vis economic growth and investment decisions begin to be decentralized. The leadership partly wants to continue with forced growth and partly inclines to slow it down in favour of improving standards of living and rectifying earlier anomalies. Contradictory intentions play an important role in the periodic acceleration and deceleration of investment. Although decentralization takes place in investments, the overheating of investment activity does not wane but actually increases.
- The state budget usually shows a considerable deficit. This can be explained in part by the budget deficit not being strictly concealed from the public any longer, as a consequence of the more open political life in reform economies; there is also the fact that the process of reform itself sets in motion currents that tend to increase the budget deficit.
- Tensions derive from the absence of a direct, unqualified interest in profits by the commercial banks, which appear with the introduction of the two-tier banking system. This causes problems in their loan allocations. Banks give way to pressure from the bureaucracy. All this plays an important part in the high share of bad debts in portfolios of banks.
- Shortage phenomena always generate inflationary pressure, which this time appears partly or entirely as open inflation. Since

there is no trade-off between inflation and shortage once reform measures are introduced, shortage and a higher inflation appear at the same time.

• Commercial and financial relations with capitalist countries intensify together with the fact that the reform economy is more inclined to indebtedness than the classical system. The reasons are that the economy is still a shortage economy, competitiveness does not improve sufficiently, and isolation from the capitalist world outside is abandoned in part and there is weaker resistance towards external indebtedness.

In his final chapter, Kornai draws attention to the fact that the classical system is coherent and does not show inconsistencies. On the other hand, the reform economy is inconsistent. "So long as the classical system can be sustained at all, it has a degree of stability and robustness, whereas the system undergoing the contortions of reform is inherently unstable [...] nowhere has it been able to survive lastingly." (p. 573). Kornai states that a third road does not exist. It is impossible to reject the classical form of socialism without going back to the capitalist system. "Mankind has experimented with a great many third-road solutions. The reform of the socialist system, directly affecting the lives of almost 1,4 billion people, is the biggest third-road undertaking so far. At the end of this book [...] one can risk putting forward the following statement: this gigantic experiment has failed up to now. One can go on to add that if the prediction that follows from the line of thinking in this book proves correct, it will never succeed in the future, either." (p. 574).

At the end of each chapter analysing the reform process, Kornai offers predictions on the possible future problems in the post-socialist transition. These predictions are generally confined to a few remarks. The look ahead after the final chapter goes much further. Kornai says that one has to face a serious situation in the transition period: it is characterized by the poor condition of the assets of the nation, the weakness in human capital, the survival of serious macroeconomic tensions, the survival and operation of old institutions over a longer period, the survival of socialist moral values and, with this, the fact that many people want socialist values but do not want socialism. "The change of system is a historical process that seems likely to require a long period of time." (p. 577).

"The transition will certainly be made easier if those involved in it, particularly those in responsible positions, realize as fully as possible where it started and what the nature of the old order was that has left such deep marks on the new. This thought was my primary inducement to write a book analysing the socialist system, and this knowledge may reassure the reader that it was worth reading the work all through." (p. 580).

I read János Kornai's new book with great enjoyment from cover to cover. The intellectual experience should not be missed. Whatever one's politics, one is sure to find it instructive. ❧

Susan Rubin Suleiman

Excerpts from the Motherbook

A Budapest Diary 1993

The pages that follow are from a diary I kept between February and July 1993, while I was in residence at the Collegium Budapest, a new Institute for Advanced Study modeled on those in Berlin and Princeton. When I was invited last year to go to Budapest during the inaugural year of the Collegium, I accepted immediately. Besides the usual luxuries of such a Fellowship period, the invitation offered me what I thought of as a near-providential opportunity to continue the autobiographical project I had started some years back, and which was assuming increasing urgency.

I left Hungary with my parents in the summer of 1949, and rarely thought of it again until thirty-five years later, when I decided to return as a tourist with my two sons, then aged 14 and 7. That return triggered a desire to reconnect with my childhood and native city, a desire that took the form of writing. I published two short pieces I occasionally allude to in the diary ("My War in Four Episodes," *Agni*, 33, 1991; "Reading in Tongues," *Boston Review*, May-August 1992.) Then, as a preparation for my current trip, I wrote a longer memoir, still unpublished, about the 1984 return and the memories it brought back. The decision to write the diary did not crystallize until after I arrived here—I simply found myself writing on my computer, sometimes for hours, at other times for a few minutes, from the first day on. After a while, I realized that I was writing "for a public" as well as for myself, and the project of a published diary began to take shape.

Wednesday, February 10

Took my first *villamos* (tram)ride this morning—I rode from Kosztolányi Dezsö tér all the way to Deák Ferenc tér, traversing a good part of the inner city, or rather its rim formed by Múzeum körút, Károly körút, etc. From Deák Ferenc tér I went to the bank, in a small street off József Attila utca; opening an account didn't take long, so I strolled over to Vörösmarty tér, which is truly a wonderful place—no cars allowed, and in the middle is a large statue of the poet, now wrapped in burlap to protect it from the cold. From

---

Susan Rubin Suleiman
is Professor of Romance and Comparative Literatures at Harvard University. Her books include Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre *(1983, reissued 1993),* Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde *(1990), and the forthcoming* Being Contemporary: Criticism, Autobiography, and History.

Vörösmarty tér I walked toward the river with the intention of finding a taxi, but as none came I ended up near the Chain Bridge, on a beautiful big square with elaborate buildings facing it, and yet another statue in the middle. The square is so big and full of traffic that I didn't cross over to see who the statue was of. Instead, I crossed the bridge. It's quite magnificent, heavy granite and elaborate ironwork, with a superb view on both sides even today, when it was a bit hazy. Walking on the narrow passageway for pedestrians, I thought I felt some memories stirring of having crossed there as a child. But when, and with whom? Mother used to take me for walks, and so did Madame, after the war. Would we have walked this far from home? Maybe to go up to the Castle, on a Sunday afternoon.

Right in front of the bridge is the *Budavár sikló*, the cable car to the Castle. It goes up at almost a 90 degree angle, quite impressive—drops you off very close to the National Gallery and the theatre, about a five minute walk from the Collegium, where I arrived tired but happy at 3:30 p.m. I felt elated by the beauty of the city. "It really is a great capital, it really can be compared to Paris," I told myself at various moments during the day. That thought somehow makes me feel very proud, and also in a strange way "integrated"—since Budapest turns out to be a city I can put up with, the city I find most beautiful and seductive of all, and that has been part of my mental and emotional life during all the years when Budapest was totally outside it. Finding the link of beauty is a way to connect Budapest to my whole life, the life I spent not here, and which has nothing to do with here.

Thursday, February 18

Exhausted. I must have walked miles today, all around my old neighbourhood. *Villamos* to Deák Ferenc tér, then up Király utca to the yellow church, then right on Akácfa utca. Király utca has some beautiful turn of the century buildings on it, or even older—from the last third of the 19th century, I was told later by T. Very interesting and varied decorations on all of them. Some look in bad shape, others look redone, and it's the same in that whole neighbourhood. Király utca itself is a grab-bag: some decrepit shops and some newfangled ones selling computers, electronics, etc. Akácfa utca is mostly decrepit, at least the part I walked on, from Király to number 59, in the middle of a long block. The first two houses on the odd-numbered side are black with soot and practically crumbling, though once they must have been quite noble, with columns and other elaborate decorations. Then comes a long low building which I didn't remember at all, and after that No. 59, which could be quite beautiful. I don't think I noticed last time—at least, I didn't remember—that there are three statues decorating the curved top of the facade. The three balconies, including our old one on the top left, look as if they're ready to fall down—I don't remember that from last time.

I went into the courtyard, which is very rectangular indeed, and then into the stairwell. The wrought iron railings are still there, still very fine. An elderly woman dressed in red was crossing the courtyard when I walked in, and looked at me curiously. I felt odd, a bit like an intruder. No question of going up to the third floor and knocking on the old apartment door again, though I may do it one of these days—maybe if someone else is with me. In the meantime, standing at the bottom of the stairwell, I remembered the time after Daddy's heart attack when he had to be carried up the stairs every day, since there was no elevator and he was forbidden to climb. He had hired two men who would come and join hands to form a

seat, on which he sat with his arms around each man's neck. I think this must have gone on until we left the country—or rather, until we moved out to the summer house in Rómaifürdő, where he didn't have to worry about stairs. That was around June 1949.

He had the operation for his ulcer in March or thereabouts, then the heart attack a few days later, followed by the long recovery, first in the hospital and then at home. It must have been around May or early June that he gave the "thanksgiving" dinner for all the Talmudic scholars, of which I have a photograph at home: a large table full of men dressed in black caftans and black hats, with Daddy the only one wearing a regular suit. He wrote a learned speech for the occasion, a textual commentary which he practiced for weeks beforehand while I listened. It was in Yiddish, so I didn't understand a word, but every time he said the word "Rambam" I would go into gales of laughter—for some mysterious reason, I found that inner rhyme hilarious. After a while it became a whole production, I would laugh even though I no longer really thought it was funny, because I thought he expected me to. What did it matter that Rambam was Maimonides, a great scholar of antiquity? All I cared for was that Daddy should find me rapt and charming.

Friday, February 19

This morning, I finally got to the Gellért baths. It was around 9:30 and not too many women were there yet, so I only had a half-hour wait for my massage. In the meantime, I went in to the common hot pool, the thermal bath. What a place! When we first go in and get our cabin, we're given a funny little apron, which most people don't wear. I tried mine on in the dressing room—it's made of white (slightly yellowed) cotton, and covers approximately one third of the front of the body. In the back, there is only the string. This is a truly odd piece of apparel to wear into a pool, or anywhere else for that matter—except perhaps a kitchen, but only if you're fully dressed! Its function is evidently to hide the belly and pubic area, as well as a bit of the breasts, but since it leaves all of the backside uncovered, it looks more like something out of a Victorian porn novel than a modest coverup.

So, carrying my apron, I went down the stairs, crossing a number of women of various shapes and ages who were also promenading naked. A few actually had their aprons on and looked quite strange. After passing through the "forebath" (*előfürdő*) and taking an obligatory shower, I entered the actual baths, which consist of two symmetrical pools on each side of a central walkway. They are located in a very high-ceilinged, mosaic-lined hall with a glass ceiling, from which all sounds reverberate in deep echoes. Thus there is a constant sound of chattering, as of birds singing, in the baths, even though relatively few women are actually talking to each other. This chattering sound is the accompanying music to our ablutions.

Again, women of every shape, size, and age. Most are wearing shower caps or swimming caps on their heads; some are doing exercises in the water, moving their neck or throwing their arms out to the side or even jumping up and down. A few are slowly swimming from one side of the pool to the other (there's a sign on the wall saying it's forbidden to make a noise or swim around, but no one pays attention to that). One or two women are sitting directly under the tap from where the water flows in thin streams, turning their body so that the water hits it in a number of different places. At one point, two women who look like mother and daughter, perhaps 55 and 30, enter the pool. I notice how firm the body of the younger woman looks, compared to the sagging outline of the older one. In some cases,

however, there is an interesting contrast between the face and the body—for example, the woman in a swimming cap whose face is that of a 60-year old or more, but whose breasts are high and firm like those of a 30 year old. The rest of her body, however, is not so young, even though she is not fat. Some telltale sags around the back of the thighs and the hips announce that this is an older woman's body. Then, of course, there are some really old women with big rolls of fat and breasts that hang down to their knees (or so it seems). And in between, an astonishing variety: round breasts and flat breasts, big breasts and small breasts, high breasts and low breasts. It is rare to see a really beautiful body, with well defined breasts, a nicely indented waist, and curvy but not too big hips. I compare mine to those of the other women, and decide that it's not among the worst. There is too much fat around the belly and the lower back, but I do have a waist and my ass is fine—not to mention the legs, which are truly grade A.

Later, in the Collegium, V. told me he had just seen our Hungarian colleague Z. and they had talked about me. "I told him I thought you were having a good time," he said, laughing. I went over to Z.'s office to say hello, and he seemed genuinely pleased to see me. He was about to go out with two women who were waiting for him, but said he would come by later. He did, and we had a good chat. After a while, he said: "Your Hungarian is much much better than the last time we talked. It's extraordinary!" That made me feel very proud, as if I'd gotten a good grade in school.

Sunday, February 21

Hóvirág, *snowdrops. Small white bouquets wrapped in green leaves, beckoning at the flowerstands. Evening on the boulevard, the shops are still open when darkness falls. I stop with Madame and we buy a bunch of* hóvirág, *snowflowers for the end of winter. A few weeks later it will be* ibolya, *violets nestled against velvety leaves—I bury my face in them, inhale the sweet smell. How I love the coming of spring!*

I bought some carnations at a stand on the way to the tram stop this afternoon, to put in the vase on my desk. As the young man was wrapping them, I noticed the bunches of snowdrops, dozens of them with their stalks in a shallow pan. These flowers are smaller than the ones we have in America, so you need quite a few to make a tiny bouquet. It must be a huge amount of work to make dozens of bunches, each one wrapped in a green leaf and tied with string. I wasn't sure of the flower's name, so I asked the vendor. Until then, I think he took me for a Hungarian, but my question obviously told him I wasn't. "*Hóvirág*," he said, looking at me curiously. Snowflower. I took a bunch out of the pan and gave it to him to wrap up. "Are you from England?" he asked. "No, from America." After that, he spoke to me only in English.

Neither a foreigner nor a Hungarian, but something in between. Just a little off-center, not quite the real thing, but sometimes close to passing for it. One could make this into a sign of unhappiness, or on the contrary, a sign of uniqueness, special status. Except that there are whole armies of people like me—not unique, unless it's a collective uniqueness. Is that what we call history?

Most of the current issue of *Magyar Fórum* is devoted to the founding meeting of the *Magyar Út* movement, the Hungarian Way. So Csurka got to be on page 1 in a large photo showing him on the platform at the meeting, on page 2 with his weekly column, and pages 3 and 4, which printed the complete text of his speech. There is a close-up of him at the podium, a thick, blunt-faced man with

a receding hairline and double chin. He wears tinted glasses. Looks a bit like Le Pen—why do all these right-wing demagogues look like beefy parodies of "real men", the kind that would never in a million years eat quiche?

Well, anyway. The page 2 column is about the ministerial shakeup of last week. Mr Csurka is not happy that the MDF may be contemplating an alliance with the Young Democrats (Fidesz), which would definitely require them to squeeze out the "national radicals", whose leader he is. National radicals, the phrase comes up at least four times in his article—sounds ominously like National Socialists to me. The usual theme: the People, the *Nép*, is being kept down by the *"nomenklatura,"* who used to be the Communists but who are now the liberals. They will certainly do all in their considerable power to keep the Hungarian Way from developing but it will win out in the end, because you can't keep the People down, etc. etc.

The speech? More of the same. True Hungarians have "Hungarianness" (*Magyarság*), a matter of blood. They're descendants of Árpád. Christians. What all true Hungarians detest is "Naphta-liberalism"—and here Csurka the one-time playwright and short-story writer opens a parenthesis to explain about Naphta. Thomas Mann, he tells us, modelled this character in *The Magic Mountain* on George Lukács, who, "as everyone knows liked to vacation in Swiss resorts" during the years before "he threw his lot in with the terror and with the Hungarian Red soldiers"—that's an allusion to the short-lived Béla Kun government of 1919. And of course everyone also knows that Lukács was Jewish, or rather, "of Jewish origin", as were all the other members of the Kun government. So basically, liberals=Communists=Jews, the tried and true formula. But he says that the *Magyar Út* is neither right nor left, just Hungarian.

Wednesday, February 24

Saw the operetta *János Vitéz* (based on Petőfi's poem) tonight, at the Arany János Theatre. There were about 300 children there, and maybe thirty adults! The kids were obviously in groups, probably class excursions. They ranged in age from about 9 to about 12—just around the age I was when I left Hungary. The *"daljáték,"* play with songs, has some lovely music and a few comic moments too. "A cross between Ferenc Lehár and Gilbert and Sullivan," I whispered to George, who had come with me. The King of France in particular is a real Gilbert and Sullivan character, and the actor who played him did a wonderful job with the comic aspects—basically, he doesn't like being King, not having any of the required chracteristics such as bravery, arrogance, or an overriding sense of self. Very cute. The play is about fidelity in love, but even more about fidelity to the native land. Kukorica Jancsi is offered half of France and the King's beautiful daughter after he saves them from the Turks, but he remains faithful to his blonde Iluska and the village on the *puszta*, where he grew up. In the end, even Iluska has to take second place to the home town: when he finds her in Fairyland, she expects him to stay there with her forever—but just as he is about to drink the cup of forgetfulness, he hears the melody he used to play on his shepherd's pipe, and realizes he must go home. "If you love me, you'll follow me," he tells her. And she does. The big red, white and green Hungarian flag is waved twice in the play, with great flourish. *Honvágy*, longing for the native land, is probably the strongest emotion expressed.

I kept expecting to hear *"Túl az Óperencián, boldogok leszünk"*, but it never came. It must have been a popular song around 1948, or maybe it's from another operetta. I did recognize one of the last songs, though, *"Kék tó, tiszta tó"*, in which János begs the

Lake of Life to give him back his beloved Iluska, just before throwing in the red rose from her grave. So it's quite certain that I saw the play as a child, though I have no idea exactly when or how. Did I go with my class in third or fourth grade, like the children tonight? Or did Mother take me? I tend to think it was the latter (I know she took me to other plays), but I could be wrong—or maybe I saw it both ways, once with the class and once with her. "Boy, if I had seen this as a child, I'd be crying buckets of nostalgia right now," George said at the end, when I told him I remembered the "blue lake, clear lake" song. "Or else," he added, "I'd rush home to write about it."

Is it nostalgia I feel, remembering that song? I don't think so, at least not more than any adult feels in re-experiencing an event lived in childhood. But I'm beginning to feel a strong curiosity about what my life would have been like, had we not left. "Everytime I walk down the street, it's as if my *doppelgänger* were walking behind me," Judy S. told me the other night when we met at T.'s party. She is a Canadian journalist whose story is quite similar to mine—the minute we were introduced I could feel we had a lot to say to each other.

I loved Stalin. Sometimes, before falling asleep, I would ask myself with a tightened throat, "What would happen if Stalin died? Who would protect us then?" Protect us from Hitler, or the dreaded nyilas *with their leather boots and guns? Just protect us.*

I would have been an ardent úttörö, *wearing my uniform with pride and reciting inflammatory poems against royalty on Prize Day. Later, I would have belonged to the Party Youth, and been among those marching in silence, tears streaming down my face, when Stalin died. When 1956 came around, I was not among the rioting students, pulling down Stalin's statue. I was in my last year of* gimnázium, *studying for my entrance exams to the University—I wanted to be a doctor, like my uncle Luli in Bratislava, who was married to Aunt Ica and who had been a partisan during the war. When I was denied entrance because of my bourgeois background and suspect family (the Czinner couple, arrested in 1949 for being bourgeois exploiters, were still remembered in high places), my faith wavered, but only for a moment. The following year, I was accepted.*

I would have been an ardent úttörő. *In 1953, at one of the Party Youth meetings, I met my first love, a philosophy student at the University: Csaba. Not Jewish, and not much of a Party member either. Csaba's friends were sardonic, brilliant, and increasingly critical of the regime. The more time I spent with them, the less I believed in the Party or in Stalin (who in any case was dead). When 1956 came around, Csaba was among the leaders of the insurrection, and I was by his side. Mother tried to keep me from going out, but she couldn't really stop me, and Daddy was an invalid. After Csaba was shot, I lost the desire to live. I did crazy things, taking wild risks, but for some reason I was never caught. I even graduated from the* gimnázium *on time, and went on to University to study philosophy. There I met Gyuri, my husband, and dropped out of school after two years when my first child was born. I later went back and became a schoolteacher.*

I would have been an ardent úttörő. *In 1956, after Daddy died, Mother and I left the country—I didn't want to, but she insisted and I couldn't let her go alone. In New York, I met another Hungarian student and we got married. We still have many friends in Budapest—it's the only place where we really feel at home.*

The fact is, though, I don't know enough about what it was like to live here between 1949 and 1956, and again later. The film I

saw yesterday (Péter Gothár's *Megáll az idő*, Time Stands Still about adolescents whose parents were among the rebels in 1956) gave some indication, but only about the 1960's. I must find out more about this.

Thursday, February 25

At dinner, Judy S. and I talked quite a lot about our feelings toward Hungary. Do we feel Hungarian? Yes, but that statement (and that feeling) must always be qualified if one is a Jew. Her great-uncle, still living and now 93, tells her stories about how hard it was to become a doctor in Hungary if you were a Jew, around 1920. After the 1919 Kun regime, there was so much anti-Jewish sentiment that Jews were excluded from university altogether, and he had to study in Prague. But he was expelled from there after a while too, and when he came back he had to submit long documents showing how long his family had been in Hungary in order to be allowed to attend the university.

So who needs Hungary? "We don't realize how unique we are in North America, where one can become a Canadian or an American citizen by choice, and be considered full-fledged," Judy said. "None of the 'blood and earth' stuff one is constantly hearing about in Europe." Yes, the hyphenated American is not such a bad thing. According to some people, like that true Magyar, István Csurka, a "Hungarian Jew," let alone a "Chinese-Hungarian," is a contradiction in terms.

Saturday, March 6

For the first time since I arrived here, this morning I pulled out the folder marked "A Return to Budapest." It contains the memoir I wrote last summer about the 1984 trip with Michael and Daniel, and various other notes and papers. The first thing that caught my eye was a letter from Mother, dated July 23, 1984—she sent it to me in Paris, giving some addresses and advice. Next to it in the folder was the old document I found in the safe in Miami Beach after she died, an official copy of her and Daddy's marriage certificate. I had read this document before, and found it very moving with its spidery handwriting and its "authentic aged" look: it has been folded and unfolded many times, and there is even a small hole in the middle. I had noticed the big brown blotch over the number "910" in Mother's birthdate, indicating that the numbers had been tampered with. That's the place where someone (she? Daddy? It looks too obvious to have been done by a professional) substituted the 1910 birhdate for the authentic 1908 date. I had noted this awkward job of forgery with fond amusement—here was the clear, incontrovertible proof of Mother's vanity! She didn't want anyone to know she was two years older than her husband.

Looking at the document again this morning, I found a lot more that interested me. First, the date of this copy is November 19, 1947—they must have gotten it as part of their preparation for leaving Hungary, when they were requesting the exit visa that never came. Did the false birthdate get put on while we were still here, so that Mother's passport—had she been given one—would carry that instead of 1908? Or did she get the idea later, when we were applying for various papers abroad? That's one thing I'll never know—but I should get a new copy of the marriage certificate. The Hungarian term for copies of such documents is very poetic: *anyakönyvi kivonat*, "excerpt from the motherbook."

The date of the marriage: July 21, 1936. Mother was just six days shy of her 28th birthday, which would qualify her as an old maid by the period's standards. Daddy, on the other hand, was a young man—he had just turned 26 a month before. There are

separate columns on the certificate for information concerning the bride and the groom. The abreviation "*Izr.*," for *Izraelita*, Jewish, appears in both columns. Her address is listed as Akácfa utca 59, in the VIIth district; his as Szinyei something street 1, in the VIth district. This latter piece of information was completely new to me—I had never noticed it before. Just for the fun of it, I looked under the S's in the street list of my Falk map, 10th edition—and there, in clear letters, was Szinyei Merse utca: a side street off the upper end of Andrássy út. Number 1 had to be on the corner of the avenue.

All previous plans for the afternoon were scrapped, and I ended up walking the length of Andrássy út from Liszt Ferenc tér, where I got off the bus. I passed in front of No. 60, a light green building that looks like all the others—one would hardly know that it was for decades one of the most dreaded places in Budapest, the headquarters of the Secret Police, and before that (from 1939 to 1945) the headquarters of the Hungarian Nazi party, the Arrow Cross (*Nyilas*). Two plaques, placed on the façade in 1991, inform the passerby of the building's history, which (says one) may be forgiven but must not be forgotten. The other plaque states that this was the place where Cardinal Mindszenty was imprisoned and tortured by the "traitors to the homeland," actually naming two people. This public display must be a form of what anthropologists call "shaming".

At number 88-90, the avenue broadens out into a circular piazza, Kodály körönd, with space for four grassy plots and satutes of great men. At the four "corners" of the circle are large and very ornate buildings which wrap around from the avenue into side streets. Each of these wraparound buildings has several entrances, but was obviously designed as a single entity. The 88-90 complex is the most ornate, with frescoes (now faded) covering every inch of the tall façade—this in addition to the columns and other stone decorations. Szinyei Merse utca intersects the semi-circle formed by this complex and the next one, which wraps around from Szinyei Merse utca to the other part of Andrássy út. The Szinyei Merse courtyard is a bit smaller and more irregular than the one on the avenue, and the entrance on the avenue has a nicer, square staircase on the left as you come in, but by now both entrances and courtyards look badly in need of renovation, as indeed does the whole once-splendid round of buildings on the körönd.

While I was examining the courtyard at Szinyei Merse utca, I could see a woman in the shadow near the staircase, evidently the concierge, looking at me. After a few seconds she asked "Can I help you with something?" "I'm afraid not. I used to know some people who lived here long ago," I answered. I went over to where she was standing, in the doorway of her apartment. "Well, I've lived here for forty years, so go ahead and ask me. What's their name?" "Rubin. But they were here even before your time. When my father got married, this was the address he gave—in 1936." Her face fell. "That was before my time." "Have most people in the building lived here very long?" I asked. "Yes, everybody." "Well, thanks anyway." I noticed three large plastic garbage cans near the door on the way out, marked in big white letters: Szinyei Merse 1.

Another revelation hidden in my folder was on the piece of paper on which Milton Lebowitz, Mother's distant cousin, scribbled what he knew about her family last May, as we sat in the kitchen table at my sister Judy's house the Sunday after Arielle's bat mitzvah. I had told him I would be coming to Budapest and trying to track down some of the family past, so he took a piece of lined paper we found in a drawer and drew a rough family tree of the Lebowitzes, Mother's maternal

family, accompanied by a few parenthetical notations. A single sentence jumped out at me from the page this morning. Next to the name of Moshe Stern, who appears as my Grandmother Raizl Lebowitz's husband, is the remark: "Died c. 1919, result of beating by Hungary Firster."

I had always been told, by Mother and grandmother and everyone else I can remember, that grandfather died of a stroke. My image of him, the solemn rotund moustached man whose enlarged portrait hung in grandmother's room next to a matching one showing her as a young matron around 1910, was that of a man who had died young, the way some men keel over with a heart attack before they're forty. Suddenly, that story is replaced by one of anti-Semitic violence. Why was he beaten? Did he find himself, by bad luck, in the way of a bunch of fascist thugs? Was he perhaps involved in a street demonstration? 1919 was the date of the Béla Kun government: did he have something to do with that? Or could it be that the thug had it in for him for some other reason, for example, if Moshe owed him money. Another of Milton's remarks, which I wrote down, was that Moshe Stern was a "compulsive gambler".

The version I've always heard is that he was a wealthy man when he died, and that Raizl lost all the money after that because there was no one reliable to advise her. Is that a myth too? Or could it be that Milton is wrong about his death, and the story of the stroke is the right one? If the story about the beating is true, that adds a whole new dimension to my passionate interest in neo-fascism and neo-anti-Semitism in Hungary.

Reading again the letter Mother sent me in 1984 made tears come to my eyes. Not for the conventional reasons one could think of, that these are words from beyond the tomb, etc., but because of something specific she wrote in the beginning, which goes like this: "I was so happy talk to you and received your letter. I can remember Budapest only Svábhegy Normafa vendéglő," and after the word *vendéglő*, restaurant, the letter continues in Hungarian to the end, close to two pages. The passage that made me teary includes the continuation, which I translate: "where every Sunday we ate lunch and we walked there from the cog railway. The Fishermen's Bastion is in the Castle in Buda very beautiful is Margit Island and the Museum at the end of Andrássy út. That is what I remember." (The ambiguous punctuation and syntax in the last sentence are that way in Hungarian).

Of course, she remembered more; in the very next sentence, she mentions that our hiding place in Buda during the war was on Sas-hegy ("but don't go there because it must have a different name by now"—in fact it's the same name, only it's a pretty big neighbourhood, I would need a street address), and on the next page she wrote down our address on Akácfa utca and the address of the Orthodox *Hitközség* (Jewish Community Bureau) where Daddy worked: "but after 35 years I don't think there would be anyone there from the old group." So she remembers more, but not much more. At least, and that is what I find so sad, she is not able to gather, in writing (would it have been different orally?) more than a few stray items under the heading of what she remembers about Budapest. These few poor fragments, "that is what I remember."

Does it have something to do with the loss of language? Her very first sentence shows that she didn't master English, despite her more than 30 years in the U.S. And the moment even these few memories were allowed to appear, she switched to Hungarian. ("I hope you understand my letter since I wrote it in Hungarian"). Thinking about this, I feel sad and guilty at not having

asked her to talk to me more, not having taped her as I taped Daddy's sisters, my aunts Rózsi and Hera, last May. By the time I got around to thinking about taping her, she was dead; and I even missed out on Lester, the last of the four siblings—so that whole generation of her family is gone with hardly a trace. That is what makes me feel like crying, and what is making me write this diary and undertake pilgrimages like today's. It's an attempt to recapture something of the dead, for their own sake, but also for mine—to transmit something of them, and of me (for they are part of me) to my children. Past and future.

Thursday, July 8

The really big news, which I'm almost afraid to start writing about, is my return visit to the *hitközség* yesterday afternoon.

The first matter of business was Daddy, and there I'm afraid we drew a blank. The earliest records they have date from November 1949, after we left. All the others were destroyed. There is one thing I can and will do, which is to write to the government office that handles health insurance and ask them if they have any record for him. I'll ask S. to help me write the letter when I see him on Saturday. The next question was the marriage certificate (the one for the religious marriage), and there too, no luck. We looked through two different books for the years 1935-1938, but there was no record of a religious wedding for Rubin Miklós—there was a Rubin Ferenc, but not Miklós. So, does that mean they weren't married at that synagogue? Very likely. But where, then? "Maybe it was a small, low-key ceremony," Mrs. H. said. But then I remembered the wedding pictures—Mother's beautiful white satin dress, Daddy's frock coat and top hat. That was no small private ceremony, unless the photos lied. So we agreed I would try to find out from Rózsi exactly when and where the wedding took place—to be continued.

But then we hit paydirt, for Mrs. H. found my birth record. There, on the bottom half of a page, between Zuszman Róbert born on July 14, 1939 and Kohn József born on September 20, was I, Rubin Zsuzsanna Magdolna. Born on July 18, 1939 at 12:15 p.m; girl; legitimate. Parents' place of marriage: Budapest VII (where Akácfa utca is). Father's Hebrew name: Yitzhak Moshe Hacohen—I never knew that "Hacohen" was part of one's name. Father's family name and profession: Rubin Isaac Moses, *hitk.* [short for *hitközségi*] *tisztviselő*: administrator? clerk? I have to look it up. Mother's Hebrew name: Rivka; Family name: Stern Lívia—"You told me her name was Lillian" Mrs H. said. "Well, everyone always called her Lilli," I replied. But it appears her name was really Lívia—I wonder why it was never used. Maybe it was like my sister Judy, whose real name is Eve—but her middle name is Judith, so it's not the same. Parents' address and child's place of birth: Akácfa u. 59, Bókai tér 4. "Ah, that's the Children's Clinic on Bókai, there was a famous doctor there but he didn't perform deliveries," said Mrs. H. So now I know where to go for the official *anyakönyvi kivonat* of my birth certificate. ("Excerpts from the Motherbook, that's a great title!" Margie exclaimed when we told her about that word tonight.) Day of the name-giving: July 20, 1939. Helpful Mrs. H.: "What day was the 18th? Must have been a Thursday, and they gave the name on the very next Shabbos."

Could we photocopy the birth record? I asked Mrs. H. Yes, of course, she said. "I'll go down with you and get it done in the place downstairs." But I wasn't quite ready to do that yet, because I had remembered something else. "In 1946, my mother gave birth to a boy, who died after a few days. Is there a chance that we can find an entry for

him?" "It's doubtful, if he only lived a few days—no, they probably wouldn't put him in the book. Let's look." Nothing. But he would certainly be in the death registry. "My husband handles that. He takes care of the deaths, I do the living," she laughed. "Laci!" she yelled loudly. From the other room, he yelled back, "What is it?" "The lady has another person she would like to look up." So he came in, and we told him the story. He disappeared for a little while, and came back carrying a register. "He was a day old." There, down toward the bottom of the page among the other R's, was my little brother: Rubin András, 1 day. No Hebrew name, he died too early. The date of death was given in Hebrew, but Mr. H. looked it up: September 1, 1946.

This morning, I woke up with a sudden thought: When little András was born (must have been August 31, 1946), I was 7 years and one month old; when (my younger son) Daniel was born, Michael was 7 years and one month old. Uncanny coincidence—once more I have the feeling that I am "repeating", with variations of course, Mother's life. That's why I keep thinking that I'll get married again, or at least find another life companion, someday. But she was an "alonestanding woman" for 18 years after Daddy died. By that standard, and even if I use 1979 as the starting point (the summer all hell broke loose), I still have another four years to go before meeting my man! Mother married Gyuszi when she was 69, so I guess I'm still ahead.

Next Wednesday, I am going to go to Nyíregyháza to get Mother's birth certificate. Maybe it will list an address for her place of birth—wouldn't that be interesting? I have the feeling of living a truly exciting detective story—and yet, when you think about it objectively, it's a poor little story of nothing at all. But it's mine, and that makes all the difference. I do feel sad that so little, almost nothing really, remains about Daddy. When I think back to how important he seemed to me during the years when I was going to school in the building where he worked, as if he were the chief director of a major enterprise, and then look around at the dusty little office which contains not a single trace or record of his ever having set foot in it, I experience a strong sense of irony—but that's probably not the right word. More a sense akin to the "Ozymandias syndrome"—the wind blowing away all the desert sands, covering up the monument of the great Ozymandias. Or maybe it's Ecclesiastes: "Vanity, all is vanity."

It's true that some people do leave a trace behind when they die. Even I will, with my books and my "Memorial Minute" as a Harvard professor. But, being philosophical about it, we have to say that it's simply a matter of scale: Rubin Miklós's traces took less time to disappear than Susan Rubin Suleiman's will. In the end, they will both end in oblivion.

Gloomy thoughts, especially considering that today, officially, finally, I really finished my book. With David's help, it has a title I'm quite pleased with: *Being Contemporary*. It's dedicated to Judy, which I think is perfect. I kept telling people I was writing this book in a language my sister could understand, so what more appropriate dedicacee could there be than she?

Anyway, the gloomy thoughts describe only part of how I feel about all this tracking-down-the-past stuff. The other part, as I've said, is a feeling of excitement and pleasure.

Tamás Stark

Hungarian Jewry at the Time of the Holocaust and after the War (1941-1955)

A Statistical Overview

Every work on the Holocaust, without exception, quantifies the losses suffered by Hungarian Jews. There appears to be not much left worth saying on this subject. However, even a superficial overview of the published figures shows that the abundance of data is rooted in uncertainty. Estimates in books and research papers concerning the total number of victims within the present territory of Hungary range between 123,000 and 294,000. It is discrepancies of this kind that prompt further analysis and research.[1]

What happened to those Jews who survived the Holocaust (including their subsequent migration), has not really been studied either. Little research has been done and there are few data.

The differences in the published estimates of losses are often the consequence of different figures relating to the number of Jews in Hungary in 1941. Based on the 1941 census returns, and taking into consideration the most recent analyses of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the total number of those subject to persecution, including baptized Jews, can be put at 800,000. This breaks down into 480,000 within the present territory of Hungary, and a total of 320,000 from Northern Transylvania, the Northern Territories, (now part of Slovakia), Sub-Carpathia (now in Ukraine), and the Southern Territories, (largely within the Vojvodina).[2]

The first losses suffered by Hungarian Jews occured in 1941, when ghettos and pogroms were everyday events in Eastern Europe. At that particular time, Romania and Slovakia took the lead in atrocities against Jews. In contrast, tens of thousands of exiled Jews and Jewish refugees, most of them from Poland, found refuge in Hungary. In the summer of 1941, however, increasing German pressure made their fate uncertain.

Decree No. 192/1941, issued by the Ministry of Interior on 12th July, suspended this liberal treatment. The police were directed to take foreign Jews to the Sub-Carpathian village of Kőrösmező and hand them over to the military authorities. Approximately 18,000 were deported to Eastern Galicia in accordance with these instructions; this is the figure recorded by the Central Authority for the Control of Foreigners, the institution "supervising the organization of deportations". German sources, on the other hand, estimate the number of deportees at 11,000.

Some of these non-Hungarian deportees

Tamás Stark
is the author of books on Hungary's human losses in the Second World War. His current research is postwar migration in the Carpathian basin.

were scattered around various towns and villages in Galicia, but most of them were taken to Kamenec Podolsk in Podolia. Proclaiming that the area must be cleared of Jews, Ukrainian policemen rounded up the deportees in the second half of August. The mass-murder that followed was presumably carried out by Einsatzgruppe C. The number of victims could not have exceeded 15,000 or 16,000, since at least 2,000 deportees later fled back to Hungary,[3] where, as before, they were treated liberally.

The massacre at Novi Sad was an isolated occurrence. Early in January 1942, the Hungarian General Staff instructed Lieutenant General Feketehalmy-Czeydner, commanding the Fifth Army Corps stationed in Szeged, to eliminate the partisan forces active in the Southern Territories. Under the direct supervision of Major General József Grassy, 4,000 persons suspected of partisan activity were executed in the operation. This generally accepted figure was established by the 1943 investigation of the case by the Hungarian military. Approximately 1,000 Jews were included because of their race.

The deprivation of civil rights resulting from the anti-Jewish legislation of 1938, 1939 and 1941 took the form of undisguised brutality on the part of the Hungarian Army. As a result of ill treatment, casualty rates among Jews in forced labour service units exceeded combat casualties.

By the end of 1943, the losses suffered by forced labour service units in the campaign against the Soviet Union totalled 24,000 (13,000 recorded as Killed in Action, 11,000 as POWs.). Of the forced labourers taken to Bor, in Serbia, 4,000 lost their lives.[4] Breaking down the number of victims (44,000) in terms of the Jewish population of the present territory of Hungary and the Jews from the territories returned to Hungary in 1938, 1939, 1940 and 1941, yields Table 1.

The next stage in the tragedy of Hungarian Jews, and the stage that saw the heaviest death-toll, was their ghettoization and subsequent deportation following the German occupation of the country in March 1944.

Between May 15th and July 8th of that year, 435,000 were deported. This figure, frequently mentioned in the literature on this subject, appears in three unrelated contemporary sources. The most authoritative number available is the one given by László Ferenczy, a Lieutenant-Colonel of the Gendarmerie involved in implementing the deportations: 434,351.[5] The figure of 401,439 people, registered by the Kassa (now Kosice, in Slovakia) railway station command, is also precise,[6] as approximately 20,000 to 30,000 persons were taken via routes that did not go through Kassa.[7] These figures are also supported by one totalling 412,000, as recorded by the National Jewish Executive Committee. Detailed data for these three sources permit the deportees to be broken down according to regional provenance, as shown in Table 2.

In his report of October 28th, 1944 to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Edmund Veesenmayer briefly described the situation of Hungarian Jewry: "Exactly 430,000 persons transported to the territory of the Reich. Exactly 150,000 persons detailed for Jewish forced labour service. Exactly 200,000 persons in the area of Budapest."[8]

Veesenmayer's estimate concerning the number of those who evaded deportation roughly corresponds to my calculations. The Reich Kommissar was, however, mistaken in his estimate of the proportions of those in forced labour service and those in Budapest. In fact, the number of men on forced labour service was less than 150,000. But how much less? The literature on the Holocaust evades this question, which, to be sure, cannot be answered precisely. Contemporary documents provide merely two figures concerning

Jews who were exempted from deportation in this way: 80,000 and 150,000. The former was included in Undersecretary László Endre's report presented to the Cabinet on June 21th, 1944: "At the beginning of ghettoization, the national defence authorities drafted 80,000 Jews for forced labour service through call-up papers or proclamations, and they at present are not covered by Jewish forced labour transports going abroad."[9]

In a report sent to the Wilhelmstrasse on May 26th by Counsellor Thadden, the above-mentioned figure of 80,000 includes all Jews on forced labour service (which was indeed the case), and not only those called up most recently: "Only 80,000 Jews are being retained [i.e. by the Hungarian government], who are employed on forced labour in the Hungarian war industry, under the supervision of the Hungarian Army."[10]

As well as in Veesenmayer's report, the figure of 150,000 is also given in Randolph Braham's outstanding *The Hungarian Labor Service System*.[11] Professor Braham points out that an agreement between the Hungarian and German governments determined that 150,000 Jews capable of work should be retained in Hungary in order to maintain the continuity of industrial and agricultural production.

The number of Jews on forced labour service was, in fact, much lower. Tables compiled by the Registrars Department of the Ministry of Defence enable us to follow the number of Jews in forced labour service almost from the very beginning right up to March 1944.[12]

On May 31st 1943, immediately after the rout and return from Russia of the remnants of the Hungarian Second Army, the number

Table 1

JEWISH POPULATION BEFORE THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF HUNGARY X 1,000

	Buda-pest	Prov-inces	Total in present territ.	Sub-Carpathian region	North Tran-sylvania	Northen terri-tories	Southern terri-tories	Total for Hungary
Jewish population in1941	240	240	480	110	150	45	15	800
Victims of the 1941 deportation and Killed in Action/ POW casualties of forced labour service	13	3	26	6	7	4	1	44
Population before occupation	227	227	454	104	143	41	14	756

of "[Jews] in non-combat service" was 83,919. By July 31st, this had dwindled to 55,000, whereas it exceeded 78,000 in August and September (and thus still below the figure of 80,000 appearing in various accounts). Numbers again fell slightly in the winter of 1943, being only 67,073 on December 31st.

Obviously, the figure of 80,000 appearing in accounts for 1944 must have been based on figures referring to the 1943 contingent. The 1944 Order of Battle mentioned 331 companies, though more were actually formed.[13] Company strength was determined at 225. In the summer of 1944, the number of enlisted Jews presumably reached 100,000.

The records kept by the Casualties Department of the Ministry of Defence provide reliable data on the losses up to October 31st 1944 in the forced labour service. According to this source, 1,656 were killed and 571 were wounded in the course of battles fought by the 1st, 2nd (Transylvanian) and 3rd Armies up to the Arrowcross takeover. A further 1,039 men were captured by the enemy and 10,471 were reported missing.[14] Counting half of those reported missing as killed, the actual number of the dead could have been close to 7,000. However, the total loss in the Jewish population attributable to battle casualties was approximately 13,000 men, half of which (i.e. POWs) were supposed to be missing.

It was under Arrowcross leader Ferenc Szálasi (October 15th 1944 to 4th April 1945) that the Holocaust reached its climax. Records kept by neutral embassies and relevant authoritative sources mention approximately 50,000 Jews (most of whom were forced labour servicemen or from Budapest) as being handed over to the Germans.[15] A further 15,000 fell victim to the terrorism perpetrated by Arrowcross organizations and to increased wartime mortality.[16] Several thousand civilians were also taken prisoner by the Red Army and almost 10,000 Jews managed to emigrate or escape in 1944.[17] (See Table 3)

The joyful moments of liberation were followed by months of painful suspense. For those who had managed to stay at home, the most important question was as to how many deportees were going to return. The optimism of the first press reports fostered

Table 2

HUNGARIAN JEWS REMAINING UNDER HUNGARIAN JURISDICTION (FORCED LABOUR SERVICEMEN, RESIDENTS OF BUDAPEST) AFTER THE DEPORTATION X 1,000

Population in March, 1944	227	227	454	104	143	41	14	756
Deported in the summer of 1944	10	170	180	85	130	30	10	435
After the deportation	217	57	274	19	13	11	4	321

high expectations. For example, the East Hungarian regional newspaper of the Hungarian Communist Party, *Néplap,* reassured survivors at home in an announcement on April 1st 1945 that "...according to the latest information received, the Red Army has liberated approximately one hundred thousand Jews; this number is much higher than the one we reckoned with after the first reports arrived."

The first groups of survivors from those 230,000 persons (50,000 from Budapest and 180,000 from the country) who had been deported or driven in death marches to Germany from the present territory of Hungary returned as early as March 1945.[18] The reception and care of these returning deportees was assumed by a number of government offices and by Jewish and non-Jewish charities. (World Jewish Congress, the Zionist organization Ezra, the Jewish Community of Pest, the Orthodox Community, the Borchow Circle, National Support, International Red Cross, etc.)

However, the care of returning deportees soon became confused, given a lack of central control and coordination. An April 26th 1945 article written by a correspondent of the socialist-Zionist newspaper *Háderech*, clearly illustrates the chaos which prevailed in those days. The journalist was looking for the information office of the returning deportees:

"...12 Síp utca...I am confronted by a hand-written sign: 'The Department for the Provinces has moved. The new location is 2 Bethlen tér.'...2 Bethlen tér...ten or twelve shabby-looking men with tortured features are standing about at the gate...Suddenly you notice the sign: 'International Red Cross'...But is it that? All at once another sign catches your eye. It is stuck onto the sign for the International Red Cross and reads 'Deportees from Debrecen'...Inside. Terrible bustle.—Where are those who have returned from deportation?—Here everybody has...at last an office. Another sign: 'American Joint'. What on earth is this? The sign below is at least clear enough: 'No access to the public here...'"

In fact, one organization was behind the relief services. The American Joint Distributon Committee financed the National Relief Committee for Deportees (DEGOB, short for *Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság*), and, in cooperation with the National Support and the Department of Social Welfare of the Mayor of Budapest, it brought into existence the Support Committee for Persons Deported by the Fascists.

In addition, the DEGOB kept a record of returning deportees. According to this source, 47,500 persons returned in May and June 1945. In July, a further 14,800 persons were registered, 9,757 in August, and 4,600 in September, totalling 74,657.[19] Unfortunately, records break off at this point while deportees continued to return until as late as 1946, although in smaller numbers. The incomplete figures kept by the Department for Social Security of Returning Deportees in the Ministry of Public Welfare give a figure of 5,000 for deportees returning in 1946.[20] (The primary reason for the absence of data lies in the fact that responsibility was only taken over by the Ministry in July 1946.)

Including the figures of 4,000 and 5,000 recorded before the setting up of the DEGOB, and registered by the Ministry of Welfare in 1946,[21] the total number of deportees who returned to the present territory of Hungary can be estimated at 80-85,000. On the basis of reports by the Casualties Department of the Ministry of Defence, the figure of 20,000 to 30,000 as an estimate for the total number of Jews in Soviet POW camps (approx. 20,000 labour servicemen plus several thousand civilians) is corroborated by a number of Jewish sources published after the war. During a meeting of the National Association of Hungarian Jews (MAZOT, *Magyar Zsidók*

Országos Társadalmi Szövetsége) on 28th October 1946, Domonkos Max, the secretary of the Jewish Community of Pest, pressed for the return of 25,000 of his compatriots.[22] In 1953 in Paris, after he had fled the country, Zoltán Klár, the President of MAZOT spoke of 30,000 Jews on forced labour in the Soviet Union.[23] The list of 8,617 names, prepared by relatives of Soviet POW-camp inmates, and sent to the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Jews in Moscow, is more convincing.[24] The majority of people searching for relatives were from Budapest. To the question "When could he/she have become prisoners of the Russians?" the most frequent answers were: "He/she was taken by the Russians after the liberation," or else "He/she was captured by the Russians in Germany."

The long lists of prisoners had greater historical than practical significance. Although Gyula Szekfü, the Hungarian Minister in Moscow, did discuss the question with Ilya Ehrenburg, he was compelled to admit in a report to Budapest sent on January 14th 1947: "...Considering what Ehrenburg said, such a large project would meet with little success; even if we decide to try, other intermediaries should be used to search for those whose personal particulars are known, and not the Council of Anti-Fascist Jews which, according to Ehrenburg, does not have considerable influence here."[25]

The registration of prisoners returning from Russian captivity was in no way smoother or more systematic than that of the deportees. Since the official registration and care of the returning prisoners was not organised by the Ministry of Welfare until June 1946, we have precise data only on those returning after that date. The minutes of the Prisoners Repatriation Committee in Debrecen taken up to the autumn of 1948 register the particulars of approximately 2,000 returning from forced labour service. Presumably about the same number returned before June 1946; we can also presume that a few hundred prisoners returned on sporadic repatriation transports after 1948. The total number of those who perished in Soviet POW-camps was around 20,000.

The extraordinarily high mortality in the Soviet camps had a particularly devastating effect on those 10,00 labour servicemen who fell into Russian captivity in the winter of 1943. Hardly any of them survived, as the POW-camps of Marshansky and Davidovka, where they were held, could not supply even the most essential needs in 1943. The chances of surviving and returning were much better for those who were captured in 1945. They were mostly taken to the Ukraine or the Danube delta. It was much easier for them to return than for those who were in forced labour camp in the most remote regions of the Soviet Union, often in the company of, and under the same conditions as their former guard members of the skeleton staff.

With approximately 85,000 survivors returning, and, according to estimates, 185,000 Jews within the borders of present day Hungary at the time of the liberation, the Jewish population came to 270,000 in 1946-47. Because of the lack of data on the home of returning Jews, this survey does not make an attempt to determine their proportions as to whether they had been taken away from the provinces or from Budapest. Comparing the figure of 270,000 with the original Jewish population of 480,000 within the present day borders (estimated on the basis of the 1941 census returns), the population loss amounts to 210,000.

The total number of victims, based on the mean of the limit values, is 205,000. (Deportation in 1941 accounts for 8,000, labour servicemen killed in the Soviet Union and those they dragged off, together comes to 32,000, the deportations in 1944 account for 150,000 and victims of Arrowcross

terrorism and of increased wartime mortality amount to 15,000.)

There is only an aggregate figure available for those who returned to the Sub-Carpathian territories, to Northern Transylvania, to the Northern Territories (Felvidék), and to the Southern territories (Délvidék). The total for these regions, as recorded by the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress from an American Joint Distribution Committee source, is 56,500. Table 4 takes as its starting point the territorial distribution of the Jewish population in 1941. In the territories lost by Hungary after the war, the population shown by the 1941 census returns was depleted by 224,500 (provided that the number of returned prisoners was 1,500). The loss, as calculated, amounts to 219,000. (Deportation in 1941: 8,000; forced labour service: 13,000; deportation in 1944: 198,000). As a consequence, the estimated total number of the Hungarian Jewish victims of the Holocaust in the wartime territory of Hungary is 424,000. (See Table 4). With regard to the final statistics, it has to be emphasized that, due to the imprecise detailed figures, the number of those who returned is uncertain and thus the actual figures may diverge by 5,000 to 10,000 from those given here.

The population figures deduced from the losses can, in theory, be measured against the results of a census. When the fighting was over, three attempts were made to register Jews in Hungary's present territory. Fighting was still going on in Transdanubia when, at the time of the census, 25 March 1945, the Municipal Statistical Bureau of Budapest registered 86,910 Jewish survivors.[26]

The Central Bureau of Statistics carried out an instant survey of the general conditions in the provinces in early June, 1945. The reports submitted by the municipalities of

Table 3

THE HYPOTHETICAL NUMBER OF HUNGARIAN JEWS AT LIBERTATION X 1,000

	Buda-pest	Prov-inces (present territory)	Total in pres.	Sub-Carpathian terr. region	Northern Transyl-vania	Northern terri-tories	Southern terri-tories	Total for Hungary
Jewish population after the deportation	217	57	274	19	13	11	4	321
Labour service men lost as POW/Killed in Action, together with those murdered or deported under Szálasi and with all emigrants	67	22	89	2	2	3	1	97
Population at liberation	150	35	185	17	17	8	3	224

the counties and cities establish—in almost perfect keeping with my calculations—the number of deportees at 176,207. The number of those who had returned by the end of July 1945 was 39,729.[27]

The Hungarian Section of the Jewish World Congress carried out its own survey at the end of 1945 and early in 1946. The result, after careful and professional work by a large administrative staff, was 143,624 personal files with the particulars of the same number of Jews.[28]

Of the territories detached from Hungary after the war, it was only in Northern Transylvania and in the Southern Territories (Délvidék) that censuses were held. The Romanian Section of the World Jewish Congress registered 44,706 Jews in 1947. Its findings are corroborated by the Romanian census of 1948 and a survey conducted by the New York-based Institute of Jewish Affairs in December 1948.[29] They registered 3,532[30] survivors in the Southern Territories, but according to an interview given by the president of the local Jewish community, Zoltán Loránt, to *Hatikva*, a Buenos Aires magazine, "the actual number of survivors was certainly higher".[31]

There are several reasons for the considerable difference (approximately 100,000) between my estimate and the census returns showing the number of Jews in the post-war territory of Hungary. Several contemporary publications and leaflets tried to overcome the distrust of the respondents towards the census, and encouraged them to complete the questionnaires; still, even practising Jews often chose to act on a self-defensive impulse and avoided being registered on yet another list by quite simply refraining from supplying information. Taking this circumstance into consideration, the Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the number of survivors (Jews, including baptised Jews) at 260,000.[32]

The relevance of these figures is limited by the fact that they give merely a snapshot of the population in a period which is characterized by the movement of hundreds of thousands in every possible direction.

Approximately 80,000 to 100,000 Jews had left the territory within the 1944 borders by the mid-fifties. Directly after the war, the first stopover of some of the emigrants was at DP (Displaced Persons) camps in Germany and Italy. Reports of the International Refugee Organization list 8,445 Hungarian Jews (30 September 1947), but according to the literature on the subject their number, including refugees from Transylvania and the Sub-Carpathian region, was at least

Table 4

THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF JEWS IN 1945-6 X 1,000

	Total for present day territories	Sub-Carpathian region	North Transyl-vania	Northern territories	Southern territories	Total for wartime Hungary
Number of liberated	185	17	11	8	3	224
Number of returned	85	18	30	7	1.5	141
Total	270	35	41	15	4.5	365

30,000.[33] There is also the fact that in October 1946 the Information Department of the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress registered 51,230 absentees who had sent news of themselves: this figure also includes about 20,000 prisoners in the Soviet Union.[34]

The majority of Hungarian Jews in DP camps were heading for the West. The only precise figure in my possession is for those emigrating to Canada: 1,836.[35] Presuming that the ratio of Hungarian Jews to the entire Jewish emigrant community in the USA is the same as the equivalent ratio in Canada, the number of arrivals in the USA was 8,000 to 10,000. Several thousand settled in Latin America, and 30,000 of the Hungarian Jews in DP camps found their eventual home in Israel. According to the 1961 census taken by the Israeli Bureau of Statistics, the total number of Hungarian Jews involved in the *aliyah* by the mid-fifties was 60,000. Of these, 6,000 came from the Sub-Carpathian region, 25,000 from Transylvania, and 28,000 from present day Hungary.

The rapid emigration of Jews living in the 1944 territories is also reflected to some extent in the census figures of the source countries. The census taken in Hungary in 1948 already registers only 134,000 Jews. In Transylvania, the number of those "of Jewish nationality" was established at 23,000 in 1956, and according to the 1961 census, in the Soviet Union the number of Jews in the Sub-Carpathian region had dwindled to 10,000.

The emigrants found new homes; but the peoples living in the region suffered an irreplaceable loss by losing a large percentage of their Jewish population. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ *American Jewish Yearbook 1947-48.* Vol. 49. The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia. 740 pp.
Proudfoot, Malcolm: *European Refugees 1939-52.* Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1956. 336-337 pp.
Tartakower, Arieh: "The problem of European Jewry (1939-1945)". In: *The Jews: Their History, Culture and Religion.* Ed. by Finkelstein, Louis, New York, 1949. 290 pp.

2 ■ *A magyarországi zsidóság statisztikája településenként* (Settlement Statistics of the Hungarian Jewry). Central Bureau of Statistics, Budapest, 1993.
See also: Dolányi Kovács, Alajos: "A keresztény vallású, de zsidó származású népesség a népszámlálás szerint"
(Census Figures of Jewish Converts to Christianity). *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle*, 1944. No.4-5, pp.95-103.

3 ■ Geyer, Artur: "Az első magyarországi deportálás" (The First Hungarian Deportation). In *Új Élet Naptár* (New Life Calendar). 1960-61. Budapest, 1960, 77 pp.

4 ■ Archives for Military History: HM Vkf. 1946 eln 299 cs.

5 ■ Braham, L. Randolph: *The Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary.* Columbia University Press, Nre York, 1981. Vol. 2, p.21.

6 ■ Vadász, Ferenc: "Nappalok és éjszakák összefolynak" (Days and Nights Merge). In: *Kritika.* January 1988, p. 5.

7 ■ Lévai, Jenő: *Zsidósors Magyarországon* (Jewish Fate in Hungary). Magyar Téka, Budapest. 260 pp.

8 ■ Ránki—Pamlényi—Tilkovszky—Juhász: *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország* (The Wilhelmstrasse and Hungary). Gondolat, Budapest, 1968, 907 pp.

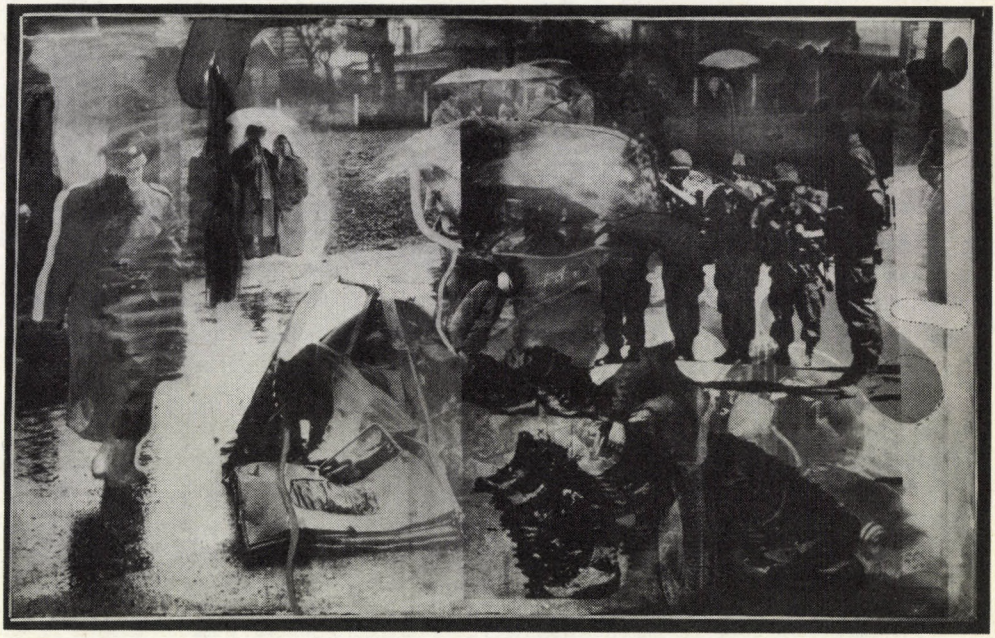
9 ■ See: Lévai, p. 216.

10 ■ Ránki-Pamlényi-Tilkovszky-Juhász. p. 854.

11 ■ NG (Nuremberg Government) - 2059. Cited in: Braham, L. Randolph: *The Hungarian Labor Service System.* New York, 1977. p. 62.

12 ■ Military History Archives. HM 1944 eln.

13 ■ Military History Archives HM V.k.f. "Special Supplement". The 1944/45 Hungarian Orders of Battle.
14 ■ Military History Archives HM 1945 47. 675.
15 ■ Reitlinger, Gerald: *The Final Solution.* Valentine, London, 1953. pp.504-507.
Gilbert, Martin: *The Atlas of the Holocaust.* New York, 1982. 211 pp.
Macartney, C.A.: *October Fifteenth. History of Modern Hungary.* 1927-1945. Edinburgh, 1961. 450 pp.
16 ■ Budapest Statistical Yearbook. 1948. 32 pp.
17 ■ Varga, László: "A magyarországi zsidóság megsemmisítése" (The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry). *1944-45 MIOK Évkönyv* (1944.45 MIOK Yearbook), 1984. 400 pp.
18 ■ Foreign Minister János Gyöngyösi's statement in: *Szabad Nép,* March 25th, 1945.
19 ■ *Világ.* September 28th, 1945.
20 ■ UMKL box XIX–C — n 8.
21 ■ *Haderech,* April 26th, 1945.
22 ■ *Új Élet.* Október 31st, 1946.
23 ■ *National Jewish Monthly.* February 1953.
24 ■ Military History Archives, KÜM Moscow Embassy box 39.
25 ■ UMKL XXXIII-4.
26 ■ *Városi Szemle* (Budapest). 1945, p. 140.
27 ■ *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle.* 1946, 1-6, pp. 8-16.
28 ■ UMKL XXXIII-3.
29 ■ Central Zionist Archives. Jerusalem, C2 205.
30 ■ Vojvodina Historical Museum and Archives. Novi Sad, AK 23410
31 ■ *Hatikva* (Buenos Aires) August 15th, 1952.
32 ■ *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle.* 1946. Nos. l-6. p. 4. and UMKL box XIX - 3 - l - c 26.
33 ■ Ginesy, Robert: *La seconde guerre mondiale et les deplacements des populations.* Paris, 1948. 68 pp.
34 ■ UMKL XXXIII-3.
35 ■ Finkelstein, Louis: *The Jews.* New York, 1960. 1582 pp.



Wolf Vostell: Car Accident. 1965-76. Silk screen, acryl, glaze, photo, on canvas. 200 x 125 cm.

Donald J. Stoker, Jr.

1956 and U.S. Relations with Hungary

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and the intensity of the violence that followed in its wake, surprised the United States and caught the rest of the world off-guard. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency regarded the initial uprising as a "miracle". Its officials believed a successful revolt in the "face of modern weapons" to be an "utter impossibility".[1] In the end, their analysis proved to be correct, as Soviet tanks pushed into Hungary and ruthlessly crushed the remnants of any dissent.

The revolution and its subsequent collapse forced the United States to re-evaluate its policies toward Hungary. There were several difficulties facing the formulation of a coherent U.S. policy and an analysis of its creation cannot be conducted without consideration of these. Unfortunately, policy toward Hungary was hopelessly intertwined with U.S. relations with the Soviet Union, a relationship further complicated by the continuous tensions of the Cold War. The establishment of a potentially neutral government under Imre Nagy, followed immediately by the potentially hostile Kádár government, was an additional complication.[2] Finally, the British, French, and Israeli intervention over Suez, which occurred during the same period, further increased East-West tensions.[3]

Despite the crises occurring in other areas, U.S. officials showed great concern for the events in Hungary. Proposals and recommendations about what should constitute the U.S. reaction poured in from various government officials and agencies. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles expressed concern that many other nations would receive the impression that the U.S. had been "caught napping" by the Hungarian willingness to fight against the Soviets.[4] Many officials expressed sympathy for the Hungarian cause, the U.S. legation in Hungary requesting the United States Government to issue a statement of support for the revolutionaries and to begin applying diplomatic pressure on the Hungarian and Soviet Governments. They believed such a statement a necessity because of constant and urgent Hungarian pleas for arms and assistance.[5]

The actions of other U.S. diplomatic personnel on the scene in Hungary created additional complications. They issued assurances that the initial revolution had been a complete success, which indeed, it appeared at the time to have been. These

Donald Stoker
is a graduate student at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. He is pursuing a doctoral degree in twentieth century European and American history.

same representatives also insisted that the future role of the United States in Hungary would be much different. They went on to suggest an immediate statement from President Dwight D. Eisenhower, one that included some mention of possible U.S. economic aid to Hungary.[6]

The U.S. considered the suggestion of possible economic aid and Clarence B. Randall, the President's Special Assistant on Foreign Economic Policy,[7] prepared a memorandum on the subject. Randall suggested several options which could also apply to Poland. These included: (l) The sale of agricultural surpluses to Poland and Hungary at world prices for dollars; (2) promoting trade with Hungary and Poland by extending Most Favoured Nation status and relaxing import controls; (3) advocating Hungarian and Polish membership in international agencies such as GATT and the World Bank.[8]

On November 2, Eisenhower issued a statement that authorized an initial allocation of $20 million in food and other relief supplies to Hungary.[9] The crushing of the revolt over the weekend of 4-5 November made the direct shipment of relief supplies into Hungary an impossibility. Nevertheless, the U.S. granted a significant amount of aid for refugees fleeing the conflict, a point which is addressed below.[10]

The President, though, had on October 25 already issued a statement: "The United States considers the development in Hungary as being a renewed expression of the intense desire for freedom long held by the Hungarian people."[11]

Eisenhower went on to say that the United States "deplores" the intervention of Soviet military forces in Hungary as "armed aggression from without" and considers them as an occupying force.[12] This statement laid the groundwork for much of the later U.S. pronouncements.

The United States focused its attention on the Soviet Union and not on the Nagy government. Some U.S. advisors urged that the Hungarian Government should not be an object of attack since knowledge of the true political situation in Hungary was lacking.[13] Initially, the U.S. pursued a policy of fostering an independent Hungary. Eisenhower believed that such a situation would be a great boon to world peace and have a greater effect than any alliance with Hungary.[14] To clarify the U.S. position toward Hungary, and to assuage Soviet fears regarding U.S. intentions in the region, Eisenhower, on October 29, cabled to Khrushchev and others in the Soviet Government:

> The U.S. has no ulterior purpose in desiring the independence of the satellite countries. Our unadulterated wish is that these, from whom so much of our national life derives, should have sovereignty restored to them, and that they should have governments of their own free choosing. We do not look upon these nations as potential military allies. We see them as friends and as part of a new and friendly and no longer divided Europe. We are confident that their independence, if promptly accorded, will contribute immensely to stabilize peace throughout all of Europe, West and East.[15]

Eisenhower repeated the basic tenets of this note in a speech to the American people on October 31.[16] The U.S. also sent a note stating similar goals, parts of which have wording virtually identical to the President's October 31 address, to Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia.[17] The second Soviet intervention in early November 1956 showed all of these actions to have been futile.

The second intervention forced a further re-evaluation of U.S. policy toward Hungary.

The United States at first considered drastic measures, including severing diplomatic ties with Hungary and the Soviet Union, but later though, declined to follow such a radical gambit and opted for attempting to convince some smaller European nations to "withdraw their staffs from Budapest without necessarily formally severing relations."[18] The United States decided not to break relations, at least in the case of Hungary, for three reasons:

A. It would be disadvantageous from an intelligence-gathering point of view;

B. The U.S. may be able to exert some influence on the future course of events by its presence in Budapest;

C. Withdrawal would be interpreted by the Hungarian people as an abandonment of their cause.[19]

Despite apparent dissatisfaction with the new Hungarian regime, the United States remained sympathetic to the plight of the Hungarian people, apparently readopting its pre-revolutionary policy toward Eastern Europe with some modifications. Her initial objectives in the region had been to encourage what were termed "national" communist governments as a first step toward independence. Policy makers believed that such governments, even though they possessed close military and political ties to the Soviet Union, would still be able to exercise more independence in their affairs than if they remained merely puppet regimes.[20] The U.S. believed the movement, begun by the writers and students, to be a national movement and that it had been pushed into revolt by the intervention of Soviet troops called in by the Hungarian government.[21]

With the collapse of the revolt, Hungary became viewed once again as an occupied nation, similar to the other Eastern European states. Eisenhower remarked of these nations that their "enslavement", if accepted by the free world, would be a terrible mistake.[22] Eisenhower went on to state that the United States insisted upon the "right of all people to be free to live under the governments of their own choosing."[23]

The United States soon adopted as its immediate goal the termination of the severe repressive measures taken by the Soviet forces in Hungary. It also resolved to apply as much pressure as possible upon the Soviet Union through the United Nations and conventional diplomatic channels. Meanwhile, the U.S. would reassure the Soviet Union that the United States did not view Hungary, or any of the other Eastern European satellite states, as potential military allies. Additionally, there was hope among American diplomats that UN measures might even include a trade embargo on the Soviet Union and the severance of diplomatic relations. The United States also resolved to supply relief assistance and to continue the policy of granting asylum to Hungarian refugees. Additionally, the exploitation of propaganda opportunities presented by the crisis received high priority.[24] United States Ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge, directed American actions toward Hungary in the United Nations. Initially Cabot Lodge introduced a resolution to the Security Council calling for the Soviets to send no additional troops into Hungary and to withdraw the forces currently there. The Soviet delegate to the UN immediately vetoed the proposal, whereupon Cabot Lodge introduced a motion for an emergency session of the General Assembly under the "Uniting for Peace" procedure. The Soviets could not block this move. On the same day, November 4, the first UN session on the Hungarian crisis convened. The UN passed no less than sixteen resolutions on the situation, condemning Soviet actions and demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The Soviets ignored them all. They called the intervention an internal matter and argued

that the UN had no right to interfere in the internal affairs of Hungary. The Kádár government supported this position and its relations with the United States and the other Western states suffered as a result.[25]

After the Soviet intervention a new representative of Hungary, Dr János Szabó, appeared at the UN. A French representative on the Credentials Committee of the Emergency Session of the General Assembly questioned the credentials of Hungary's new UN representative, charging that the Kádár government was a creation of Soviet military intervention. The Soviets objected in vain, as the Credentials Committee decided to delay any decision regarding Hungarian credentials. The following day the United States introduced a resolution that the Credentials Committee "take no decision" on the credentials of the Hungarian representatives. The Soviets vehemently objected, but the Credentials Committee adopted the American proposal over their objections.[26]

Protests from the Kádár Government followed in the wake of the vote, but did not prevent further U.S. action. At the next session of the UN General Assembly, not held until December 1957, the United States again questioned the validity of the diplomatic status of the Hungarian representatives. As a result, once again the UN made no decision regarding the credentials of the Hungarians. The United States was to pursue this policy of neither rejection nor acceptance for some time to come.[27] Additionally, the United States successfully sponsored a resolution condemning the Kádár regime's repressive measures.[28] Not until 8 January 1963 did the UN finally accept the credentials of the Hungarian representatives.[29]

Cabot Lodge faced another challenge at the United Nations. Many in the body expressed a feeling that, for the last ten years, the U.S. had been inciting the Hungarians to revolt. Many of these UN delegates argued a belief that the U.S. had done this through Voice of America and Radio Free Europe broadcasts, a point addressed below, and had then "turned its back" on the Hungarians. These accusations, according to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, seem to have come largely from French and British representatives. Considered in the light of American criticism of French and British actions in Egypt, these accusations are not too surprising. Cabot Lodge mentioned that the French seemed to be the prime culprits. Somewhat surprisingly, the President concurred with America's critics on this point, but military aid to the Hungarian rebels, and especially intervention on their behalf, could not be contemplated. Several factors precluded intervention. Hungary's geographic position, surrounded by either neutral or communist states, made the movement of American and European forces into Hungary impossible. Eisenhower believed, probably correctly, that moving troops into a neutral or communist state would provoke a general war. There was also the factor that the major American allies, France and Britain, had already committed themselves to a war in Egypt, tying down many of their forces and escalating the level of tension between East and West.[30]

Advanced in the UN, particularly by America's European friends, were allegations that the United States showed more concern over French and British troops in Egypt than over the Hungarian crisis.[31] Vice President Richard M. Nixon seems to have concurred, as he expressed a concern over a tendency in the government to allow events in Egypt to divert attention from the Hungarian crisis.[32] This impression may have arisen because of Eisenhower's much deeper interest in the situation in Egypt, and a greater fear on his part of the consequences of the intervention in Suez. On November 5 Eisenhower issued a statement saying that while the United

States was "vitally concerned with the situation in Egypt, we are equally concerned with the situation in Hungary."[33] At a press conference, on November 14, after the crisis in the Middle East had worsened and after Soviet premier Nikolai Bulganin had issued threats that the Mid-East crisis might lead to World War III, Eisenhower's emphasis changed. The President stated in regard to U.S. actions that "we should first get this Egyptian thing out of the way."[34] It seems that Eisenhower had come to regard the Middle East situation as potentially more dangerous and therefore more important. Other signs of this concern can be gleaned from Eisenhower's memoirs, in which he devoted considerably more space to the Suez Crisis than to the suppression of the Hungarian revolt.[35]

Even though President Eisenhower appeared convinced that American radio broadcasts had encouraged the Hungarians to revolt, others disagreed. The acting director of the Voice of America (VOA) during the crisis, Abbott Washburn, insisted that the "VOA did not incite to revolt nor did it in any way commit the U.S. to any action to restore liberty to the Soviet satellite nations." Washburn went on to state that the VOA neither discouraged or encouraged the Hungarian rebels and even toned down material that it feared to be too inflammatory, such as stories of Soviet atrocities. The VOA even cautioned the Hungarians not to move too quickly. Transcripts of VOA broadcasts transmitted during the crisis period support Washburn's remarks.[36]

Similar accusations, made against Radio Free Europe (RFE), emanated from Germany, particularly from the Free Democratic Party. These charges can be easily refuted. The process of events that led to the revolt clearly demonstrate that it was a spontaneous outburst. Furthermore, RFE never promised assistance in the event of a revolt nor did the broadcasters lecture the Hungarians, or give them advice regarding their situation. Radio Free Europe did broadcast to Hungary news about the disturbances in Poland, information which the Hungarian government did not give their people. RFE representatives admitted that these broadcasts could have encouraged the Hungarians to revolt, but simultaneously insisted that these broadcasts were simple news reporting. Also, government officials could produce three refugees who had been leaders of revolutionary committees along with a Hungarian defector who were "prepared to say that VOA and RFE had not incited revolt."[37]

The Hungarian revolution also provoked an American-Hungarian conflict waged through official diplomatic channels, particularly the diplomatic missions. The last official diplomatic exchange between the two nations for several years occurred on 27 October 1956. The U.S. Department of State received no Hungarian representatives, and U.S. representatives in Hungary could not meet with Hungarian officials. The governments only exchanged protest notes. Additionally, the Hungarians surrounded the U.S. legation in Budapest and checked everyone entering or leaving, in an attempt to lay hands on Cardinal József Mindszenty, who had sought refuge inside the legation compound.[38]

The arrival in Budapest of a new American minister to Hungary generated a unique political opportunity for the United States. Edward Thompson Wailes was appointed as ambassador to Hungary in July 1956. The U.S. Government did not order him to proceed to Hungary until the crisis developed in late October. His superiors instructed him to demonstrate his credentials to the Nagy government, but before he could comply the Soviet intervention of November 4 occurred. Subsequently, the State Department ordered Wailes not to present his credentials to the new regime.[39]

The State Department then instructed Wailes to remain in Hungary as long as possible. They believed that his continued presence granted additional protection to Cardinal Mindszenty and enhanced the morale of the embassy staff.[40] Wailes agreed with this and replied in a sparsely worded telegramme that the individual, "to whom my credentials made out seems to be lost in shuffle but even if he turns up in old position it will be easy enough to stall off presentation, should it be requested." [41]

Wailes successfully pursued this policy until February 1957. On February 22, Spencer N. Barnes, the Counsellor of the Mission in Hungary, received a note from the Hungarian Foreign Office. It accused Wailes of purposefully postponing the presentation of his credentials, (an assertion which was of course true) while still carrying out his official duties. The Hungarian Government also requested that Wailes present his credentials or leave Hungarian territory. The Ambassador's orders prevented compliance with the request and Wailes departed from Hungary on February 27, 1957.[42] Tension between the Hungarian regime and the U.S. Legation eased after his departure and the arrival of a Chargé d'Affaires who, in the eyes of the Kádár Government, was "untainted" because of his lack of personal contact with the revolution.[43]

The Hungarian Government attacked the U.S. Legation in other ways. They began pressing for a one-third reduction in its staff. The Hungarians were particularly eager to be rid of the Marine Guard, whose constant patrolling of the premises made it impossible to install secret listening devices. Hungarian intelligence services opposed the forcing of a decrease in U.S. legation personnel. They believed it would provoke a U.S. retaliation against the Hungarian legation in the United States and therefore hinder Hungarian intelligence-gathering activities. Despite these objections, in May 1957, the U.S. received a note from the Hungarian Government demanding the reduction in personnel. Washington complied.[44] The Hungarian Government also arrested some of the Hungarian nationals employed by the U.S. Legation in Budapest.[45]

Incidents involving the expulsion of members of the diplomatic staff also occurred. On April 3, 1957, the Hungarians arrested Colonel J. C. Todd and Captain Thomas R. Gleason, the U.S. Military Attaché and his assistant, on a public road near a Soviet barracks in Hungary. The Hungarians accused Todd of "open espionage" and ordered him to leave Hungary within 48 hours. Apparently, the powers considered the incident a fairly routine occurrence, particularly the Hungarians. On the same day they presented their expulsion demand, First Lieutenant Károly Mészáros, a member of the Hungarian legation in Washington holding roughly the same position as Todd, received orders from Budapest to make preparations for his departure. The Hungarians fully expected his expulsion in retaliation for their action against Todd. Their expectation was met, for on May 29 the U.S. Government declared Mészáros persona non grata.[46]

On October 23, the first anniversary of the uprising, Eisenhower and Henry Cabot Lodge issued statements commemorating the event. Angry hard-liners in the Hungarian Foreign Ministry considered this an attempt to encourage counter-revolution and argued for the severance of relations. Kádár restrained them. Instead the Hungarians opted for a strong note of protest aimed particularly at the statements issued by President Eisenhower. The Soviets, though, when notified of the intended reply, forced a change in the Hungarian note. The Soviets feared that issuing a statement attacking Eisenhower would hinder their negotiations for a new cultural, educational, and technical

exchange agreement with the United States. The Hungarians accordingly opted to instruct their UN mission in New York to issue a communiqué condemning only the statement issued by Cabot Lodge.[47] Hungarian diplomats in the United States also faired roughly. They suffered constant taunts from hostile Americans who demanded to know why the "Russians had raped Hungary." The Hungarian UN mission in New York endured constant picketing, particularly by Hungarian refugees.[48]

The crushing of the Hungarian revolt spawned a flood of refugees who fled, particularly to Austria. Initially, Eisenhower offered $20 million in relief aid.[49] This funding, coupled with aid from organizations such as the UN and the Red Cross, quickly supplied the materials needed to support the refugee relief operations. Although there was never a problem in procuring sufficient supplies,[50] dealing with the sheer number of refugees presented the biggest obstacle. By November 27 1956, 82,000 had already entered Austria.[51] The scale of the effort needed to deal with them necessitated the establishment of the President's Committee for Hungarian Relief, headed by Tracy S. Voorhees. He coordinated the various American and foreign relief agencies. Voorhees had a liaison officer, William Hallam Tuck, who worked closely with the American Ambassador in Vienna, Lleywellyn E. Thompson, who in turn ran the American relief effort in Austria.[52] Vice President Richard M. Nixon believed that Thompson performed admirably in this role and that only a lack of assistance handicapped his efforts.[53]

The United States immediately adopted a policy of accepting a portion of the Hungarian refugees. Various U.S. government officials made attempts to have American immigration policies altered in order to accept an even larger number.[54] The decision to grant asylum should have been largely based upon humanitarian reasons, but, as in virtually all actions taken by the major powers during the Cold War, there were several political factors driving it too.[55] Nixon stated his belief in the admission of refugees as an important facet of American policy toward communism.[56] Other U.S. officials asserted that the United States commitment to accepting the refugees would favourably affect world opinion and would "further contrast U.S. and Soviet actions with regard to the Hungarian people." Officials also advised that the United States should be particularly interested in allowing the immigration of skilled Hungarians. Some of the Western European states also took actions along this line, prompting American officials to suggest that the U.S. embark upon a similar course.[57] One official wrote that "the addition of these highly desirable Hungarian refugees to the U.S. population would be a net gain to the U.S. and a corresponding loss to the Soviet bloc."[58] As a further political move, U.S. officials held discussions as to the advisability of hiring a Hungarian "displaced person" to work in the White House kitchen or garden.[59]

A final Hungarian-American clash involved Cardinal József Mindszenty. Mindszenty, who had previously been falsely imprisoned by the Hungarian government, was freed by the insurgents, and believed his life to be in danger when the revolt erupted and Soviet tanks poured into the country. He sought asylum at the closest foreign mission, that of the United States, making his way there through rows of Soviet tanks, his cassock concealed beneath his coat. The incensed Hungarian Government attacked the United States, charging that it had given asylum to a "Hungarian criminal".[60] The Cardinal wrote:

> Minister Edward Thompson Wailes welcomed me cordially as a "symbol of Liberty". After eight years of imprison-

> ment and now shipwrecked after three and a half days of freedom, I clambered aboard the saving deck of the American Legation to escape being carried off to the Soviet Union and to wait for the day that would once more permit me to work on behalf of my native land.[61]

Mindszenty requested asylum, which was quickly granted.[62]

The Cardinal soon began a limited correspondence with President Eisenhower. In an apparent attempt to avoid embarrassing the President on the issue of the Cardinal's officially unacknowledged presence, Eisenhower's advisors decided to stop official correspondence from the President to the persecuted churchman.[63] Mindszenty's presence remained an unresolvable situation for many years to come. He lived in a third floor room in the Embassy until 1971, when the Kádár government and the Vatican reached an accord on the functioning of the Church in Hungary. The Hungarians then allowed him to go into exile.[64]

American reaction to the suppression of the Hungarian revolt involved many spheres: politics, diplomacy, humanitarianism, economics, and even religion. None of the U.S. actions, though, had any significant effect upon the fate of Hungary, which remained a Soviet satellite. Short of armed intervention, Eisenhower had little he could do to aid the Hungarian cause. Airdrops of military supplies to the Hungarian rebels could have been attempted. Indeed, Dulles had suggested in 1952 that such a move would be a likely U.S. reaction to a revolt in the Soviet bloc.[65] However, this seems not to have been considered a viable option—and rightly so. It could easily have led to a violent confrontation with a Soviet Union already rattling its nuclear sabre over the Suez situation. Starting World War III would not have aided the plight of the Hungarians, since they would probably have been completely forgotten on the outbreak of a general war.

American policy accomplished little to benefit the Hungarians, but it is difficult to see any benefits that could have been achieved. The fate of the Hungarians and their revolution lay in the hands of the Soviet Union, a country with no sympathy for either and interested only in maintaining control of its *cordon sanitaire* in Eastern Europe. America could do little to change this and pursued the only available options. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Annadel Wile, ed., *Declassified Documents Quarterly Catalog* (Washington, D.C.: Carrollton Press, 1975-1992). Hereafter cited as DDQC. Vol. 13. series 1987, no. 001654, 1.

2 ■ The British Foreign Office, *The Hungarian Uprising: An Abridgement of the Report of the United Nations Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary, published June 20, 1957* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957), 111-14.

3 ■ David Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 161-162.

4 ■ United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Vol. XXV, Eastern Europe.* Ed. by John P. Glennon (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), 273. Hereafter cited as *USFR.*

5 ■ Ibid., 272.

6 ■ *DDQC*

7 ■ *USFR*, XVI., 1956, series 81, 197d, 1-2.

8 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 80, 326b; *DDQC*, vol. 14, series 1988, 002893. Randall also advised discussion on the adjustment of World War claims against Hungary and Poland.

9 ■ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 84.
10 ■ *DDQC*, Vol. 14, series 1988, 002181, l.
11 ■ Eisenhower, 65.
12 ■ Ibid., 65-66,
13 ■ *USFR*, 324.
14 ■ Ibid., 306-307.
15 ■ Eisenhower, 71.
16 ■ Ibid., 80.
17 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 75, 27c, 1.
18 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 75, 27c, 1.
19 ■ *USFR*, 433.
20 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 81, 344a, 2.
21 ■ Ibid.
22 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 78, 191d, 15.
23 ■ Ibid.
24 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 81, 344a, 4-6.
25 ■ Janos Radvanyi, *Hungary and the Superpowers: The 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1972), 16-17.
26 ■ Ibid., 17-18.
27 ■ Ibid., 18-20; *DDQC*, vol. 13, series 1987, 002877, 7.
28 ■ *DDQC*, vol. 1. series 1987, 002877, 7.
29 ■ Bela K. Kiraly and Paul Jonas eds., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Retrospect.* In East European Monograph Series, no. XL (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1978), 150.
30 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 81, 389a, 4-6; *USFR*, 424-425; Eisenhower, 88-89.
31 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 81, 389a, 5.
32 ■ *USFR*, 421.
33 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 78, 191d, 10.
34 ■ Ibid., 14; Eisenhower, 89.
35 ■ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace.*
36 ■ Robert William Pirsein, *The Voice of America: An History of the International Broadcasting Activities of the United States Government, 1940-1962* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), Dissertation, 364. Pirsein provides a transcript of a typical VOA broadcast to Hungary during the crisis, 364-366.
37 ■ *USFR*, 436-437.
38 ■ Radvanyi, 30.
39 ■ United States Department of State, "Return of Minister Wailes from Budapest," *Department of State Bulletin* 36 (March 1957): 441-442.
40 ■ *USFR*, 433.
41 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 80, 295d.
42 ■ *USFR*, XXI, 583.
43 ■ Ibid., 681.
44 ■ Radvanyi, 50.
45 ■ *DDQC*, vol. 13, series 1987, 002877, 8.
46 ■ Radvanyi, 31-32; *USFR*, 620, 620 fn, 621 fn.
47 ■ Radvanyi, 32-33.
48 ■ Ibid., 30-31.
49 ■ Eisenhower, 65.
50 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 80, 260b, 1; *DDQC*, vol. 16, series 1990, 02206, 1; *DDQC*, vol. 13, series 1987, 001634, 3.
51 ■ Ibid., vol. 16, series 1990, 002206, 1.
52 ■ Ibid.,; *USFR*, 534 fn, XXV.
53 ■ *DDQC*, vol. 16, series 1990, 002207, 1.
54 ■ *DDQC*, vol. 16, series 1990, 002207, l.
55 ■ I have not yet discovered a document citing the reasons for the acceptance of refugees. I believe, though, that the primary goal was humanitarian and that the other nations that admitted Hungarian refugees were also motivated by humanitarian concerns. This, though, is only an assumption and I can offer no conclusive evidence to support this point.
56 ■ *DDQC*, 1958, series 75, 217e.
57 ■ *DDQC*, vol. 16, series 1990, 002207, 2; *DDQC*, 1958, series 75, 217e.
58 ■ *DDQC*, vol. 16, series 1990, 002207, 2.
59 ■ *DDQC*, 1956, series 81, 389a, 4.
60 ■ József, Cardinal Mindszenty, *Memoirs.* Trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), 212. DDQC, 1958, series 75, 114a, 1.
61 ■ Mindszenty, 212.
62 ■ Ibid.
63 ■ *DDQC*, vol. 8, series 1982, 1.
64 ■ Andrew Felkay, *Hungary and the USSR, 1956-1988: Kádár's Political Leadership* (Westport, Conn. Greenwood Press, Inc., 1989), 172; David Irving, *Uprising!* (London: Hodder Stoughton, 1981), 547.
65 ■ *DDQC*, vol. 14, series 1988, 002181, 2.

Mátyás Sárközi

Operetta as Social History

András Batta: *Álom, álom, édes álom...* (Dream, Dream, Sweet Dream...) Corvina, 1992, 135 pp. Illustrated.

Social historians are well aware of the importance of research into the many aspects of the popular theatre. Indeed, a great deal is revealed about the second half of the last century and the first decades of this through the work of those historians of the musical theatre who, instead of simply listing facts on playhouses, plays and performers, examine the relationship between popular demand and the choice offered, or the influence of events on content and style. The subject-matter and treatment of the Gilbert libretti for the Savoy operettas were closely related to the England they were written in, and a book on the subject could very well form part of the country's social history. It is in this same spirit that András Batta sets off to take a very thorough look at two typical products of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: the *népszínmű*, or *Volkstück* theatre, and the operetta. The latter has been, and still is, popular in both countries, and has produced excellent composers of light music in both Austria and in Hungary. The idea of coupling the two genres and following the road from one to the other is highly original, and most of Batta's findings are quite convincing.

What was the *népszínmű*? The word means "folk play", but it has little to do with folklore. These were late 19th century popular plays with incidental songs, favoured by the less sophisticated gentry and the lower-middle classes. If one wishes to be unkind, the truth is that they were nationalist, provincial and mostly shallow. By the turn of the century, the folk play went out of fashion; by that time, rising out of the disreputable orpheum, the operetta was well on its way to triumph.

The musicologist András Batta is not an operetta enthusiast. After he had been commissioned to write on the Austro-Hungarian operetta, he had to find out about the subject bit by bit; he had to discover the whole fascinating range that existed alongside the one operetta he knew well, Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*. His enthusiasm grew as he worked on the book, for he realized that both the folk play and the operetta could be used as a magic looking glass in which the spirit of the age could be captured. Consequently, this book is not the story of the development of the genre from the mid-nineteenth century opera parodies to Lehár and Kálmán, nor does it try to be comprehensive. Indeed, some important

---

Mátyás Sárközi,
a grandson of the playwright Ferenc Molnár, was born in Budapest and has been living in England since 1956, where he now works for BBC World Service Radio. He has published volumes of short stories in Hungarian and is at work on a life of his grandfather.

operetta composers, like Leo Fall and Viktor Jacobi, are left out in order to place the emphasis on social impact.

The story begins with the crude progenitor, the folk play, which used stereotype characters to represent the various elements of society: peasant farmers, Gypsy musicians, hussars, highwaymen, landowners, local administrators, and others. The plays became so popular that in 1875 a new theatre was built in Budapest to show them. Perhaps it is typical of the Hungarian mentality that the folk play provided popular entertainment not by skipping the social issues of the age, in order to take people's minds away from them, but by presenting them on stage, in a poignant black-and-white way, to whip up the audience's emotions. This was the kind of excitement that appealed to the theatre-going lower-middle classes. It took some time for them to tire of this masochistic pleasure and turn to the escapism of dreamland, to the silly, sweet melodic world of the operetta. The process was hastened by the shift in the audience's interest from country matters, with which the folk play dealt, to the cosmopolitan intricacies of the operettas. (There have been experiments lately in Hungary to revive a few traditional folk plays but they have all failed, both as period-pieces and as parodies.)

The folk play had enormously successful stars. Most pieces contained a scene in an inn where, to the sounds of a Gypsy band, the actors sang and danced, so the genre had both music and spectacle. However, by the end of the 1880s, the genre was dead. It died because the mood of the nation had changed, a bitter and crude patriotism had given way to a certain amount of confidence in the new order, with its promise of prosperity.

The transition from folk play to operetta is identified in the book: it was a musical play, which contained elements of both, a pleasantly melodic and wittily constructed piece, *János vitéz* (John the Hero) by Pongrác Kacsóh, based on an epic poem by Sándor Petőfi. Answering the popular mood of the *fin de siècle*, the folk play elements of this musical were toned down to please, one could say, in the spirit of the new artistic style, *Sezession* or *art nouveau*; it pictured Hungarian peasant life in a rather idyllic way, to enable the piece to become, as Batta phrases it, "an apotheosis as well as a swan-song of the folk play."

And thus we arrive at the age of the operetta. Despite the opposition of the traditionalists, including the nation's great romantic novelist, Mór Jókai, who found this fancy new French entertainment frivolous and too piquant, operetta soon became widely popular, proving that Hungarians, after all, do not mind being titillated. They flocked to see some silly play simply because it finished with a wild cancan. It took some time to break away from the Offenbach type of French operetta and to develop Austria-Hungary's own style. For that Johann Strauss, Ferenc Lehár and Emmerich Kálmán had to be born. Apart from *Die Fledermaus*, Lehár's *The Merry Widow* or *Gypsy Love*, and Kálmán's *Countess Maritza* or *The Gypsy Princess* are the best examples of the new genre, which uses puppet-like characters who live in a land of make-believe, where all that goes wrong eventually comes to a happy end. In real life, most things began to go from bad to worse after the outbreak of the Great War, and the years of sweet dreaming culminated in a tragic finale.

Batta's beautifully designed and lavishly produced book is an obvious choice for German translation but it contains some remarkable passages for all who wish to gain insight to the Hungarian or Austrian character and into the general taste, mentality, or the spirit of the age. There is an interesting study on the way Gypsies were featured in operettas, and Batta puts the cherry on the cake when, in a short essay, he contemplates the significance of the difference that exists between Hungarian csárdás-sentiment and Austrian waltz-attitude. ❧

András Gervai

Márta Mészáros—Fighting Collective Amnesia

Catherine Portuges: *The Hungarian Cinema of Márta Mészáros.* Screen Memories Series. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1993. 190 pp.

A prophet is without honour in his (or in this case, her) own country, the saying goes, and the career of Márta Mészáros, the reception of her work, seems to illustrate the old maxim. Because of their taboo subjects and unusual approach, most of her films have been unfavourably received by the Hungarian public and critics alike. Labelled as documentary and feminist, they were accordingly dismissed, misinterpreted, belittled, and occasionally treated as scandalous. Yet her work was understood and appreciated in the West. She became a star of film festivals, her work is cited by feminists and the subject of a host of studies and essays. Given the great difference between her reputation in Hungary and abroad (a difference that is incomprehensible only apparently and at first sight), it is not unsurprising that the first comprehensive book on her work has been written not by a Hungarian but by an American (although partly of Hungarian descent), Catherine Portuges, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Massachusetts, the head of the university's Film Department. Her interest in the work of Márta Mészáros dates back to 1983 when she visited Hungary, (which her father had left in 1936) at the invitation of the Janus Pannonius University of Pécs, to lecture at a conference on psychoanalysis. At the time, in the early 1980s, Professor Portuges was studying the relationship between fiction and autobiography in the work of contemporary French women writers, and the portrayal of the problems of gender in the films of the French *nouvelle vague*. Her line of investigation and her interests so to speak predestined her to discover Mészáros for herself, whom she sees as unique in her own kind and domain, and whose career she regards, in many respects, as a model.

Portuges approaches the Márta Mészáros phenomenon, and the films themselves, in an unusually complex manner, rare in cinema literature and, indeed, in specialist literature in general, putting them in the broadest historical, social and artistic context. The films and the oeuvre of the director are investigated from a variety of directions, which include the cinematic and aesthetic but also those of politics, history, ideology, sociology, and psychology (or psychoanalysis, to be more exact). To carry this out, she draws on an abundance of sources, material and information. She has a comprehensive

András Gervai
is a journalist and film critic, on the staff of Magyar Hírlap, *a national daily appearing in Budapest. He has recently published a collection of interviews.*

knowledge of both Mészáros's work and the contemporary East European cinema. She is familiar with the life of Mészáros down to the smallest detail (though not, of course, at the level of gossip). She met her several times during the years she worked on her book, was present at the shooting of some of her films and interviewed her five times thoroughly and at length. These interviews are included and are frequently quoted from to complete and counterpoint her own views.

However, Portuges's exhaustive knowledge of contemporary cinema is complemented by a striking grasp of the major events, directions and key figures in the twentieth century history, politics and art of Hungary. She understands the mechanisms of Kádárism, its internal movements, problems, the evolution and function of its peculiar doublethink. She is familiar with the entire "who was who" of Hungarian public life in the recent past. She knows who said what and when, and comprehends the nature of forces and interests in the background of events and things. She is also well informed on Hungary after the change of the political system and on the recession in the cinema. She is even aware of subtleties, minor to her but important to us Hungarians, such as our liking to speak of our region and country as a part of Central Europe, and not of Eastern Europe. Her references and footnotes show that she has read or knows everyone who said anything relevant about any issue remotely relevant to her subject. The authors she refers to include every major Hungarian writer on the cinema (from Béla Balázs to Yvette Bíró and István Nemeskürty) as well as foreign authorities such as André Basin, or Graham Petrie, the author of the most important book on the Hungarian cinema to appear abroad thus far (*History Must Answer to Man: The Contemporary Hungarian Cinema*). The press notices she cites range from those in the world's major film magazines to Czech, Dutch, Polish, and Swiss papers. The Hungarian press is represented by three dailies, two periodicals, and by every cinematic journal that exists or has existed until recently. The philosophers, psychologists and writers quoted or referred to include Hannah Arendt, Bruno Bettelheim, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Freud, Vaclav Havel, Milan Kundera, D.W. Winnicott, as well as George Konrád, György Lukács, Ágnes Heller, Sándor Ferenczi and Géza Roheim (both Freud's disciples), the Hungarian-American professors Charles Gati and Stephen Borsody. This list in itself indicates Portuges's impressive erudition and her extremely broad field of investigation. But she has also relied on a great deal of oral history, interviewing and consulting Hungarian film directors, Hungarian literary historians (or those of Hungarian descent), political scientists, and psychoanalysts.

Mészáros's portrait is drawn by tracing the birth of her films and the various stages of her career. A period of documentary-making between 1957 and 1967 was followed, between 1968 and 1975, by what Portuges calls a "family romances" period in her chapter title (*The Girl, Binding Sentiments, Don't Cry Pretty Girls, At the Lőrinc Spinnery, Riddance).*

These films portray conflicts between lovers and workers, the family and cultural institutions, young and old. Mészáros shows what her fellow film-makers do not, the sexuality inseparable from the social reality, the bitter consequences of the inequality between the sexes, the painful, oppressive moments of ordinary days. The protagonists are driven to a restless search for companionship by alcoholism, infidelity, lonely childhoods or unfulfilling or non-existent relationships with their parents. While sexual antagonisms become permanent, class solidarity and female bonding survive. In the

films of the next period, between 1975 and 1978—*Adoption, Nine Months, The Two of Them, Just Like at Home*—Mészáros creates new paradigms of female solidarity and communication. Her topics are motherhood, economic and sexual subjection, love, aging, and power (in the context of class and sexual relationships). Her heroines, unlike their counterparts in western movies, are portrayed without idealization; they share the same lot, regardless of temperament, social background and sensitivity; in "socialist" Hungary they live in an almost fenced-off world. Yet their inner universe remains intact despite the suffocating circumstances, and so does their faith in themselves and others. Neither heroes nor victims, they actively shape their own fate. Through spiritual resistance they triumph over the main cause of their suffering, namely male sexuality, but they cannot and will not condemn and reject men, the subject of their affection and source of their pain. Up to the end of this period, Portuges notes, Mészáros tried to portray the struggle by working women and men to create a new society in defiance of the political, social and economic realities of the post-1968 era. Her chapter "Between Worlds" discusses the films made between 1979 and 1981: *The Heiresses* and *Anna*, both co-productions.The main themes of these transitional films, as the author terms them, are the agonizing choice between emigration or remaining, and some of the unresolved issues in Hungary and the other East and Central European societies: the meaning of family, marriage, the experience of the Second World War, and Jewish identity. Mészáros is the only film director in Hungary to examine anti-Semitism through a man-and-woman relationship. (*Anna*).

The "Diary" trilogy (*Diary for My Children*, 1982; *Diary for My Loves*, 1987; *Diary for My Father and Mother*, 1990) is Mészáros's most complex and most ambitious endeavour, and opened a new chapter in the genre of narrative film memoirs while providing on outline of the history of East and Central Europe during the crucial period of the 1980s. The three films are a recreation of historical events, an interpretation of history so very different from the official version. This period is characterized by three narrative and visual structures, all familiar from Mészáros's previous films. History is reinterpreted through autobiography, the story is narrated from the viewpoint of a child, an orphaned girl, narrative fiction is interspersed with documentary footage and clips from other feature films.

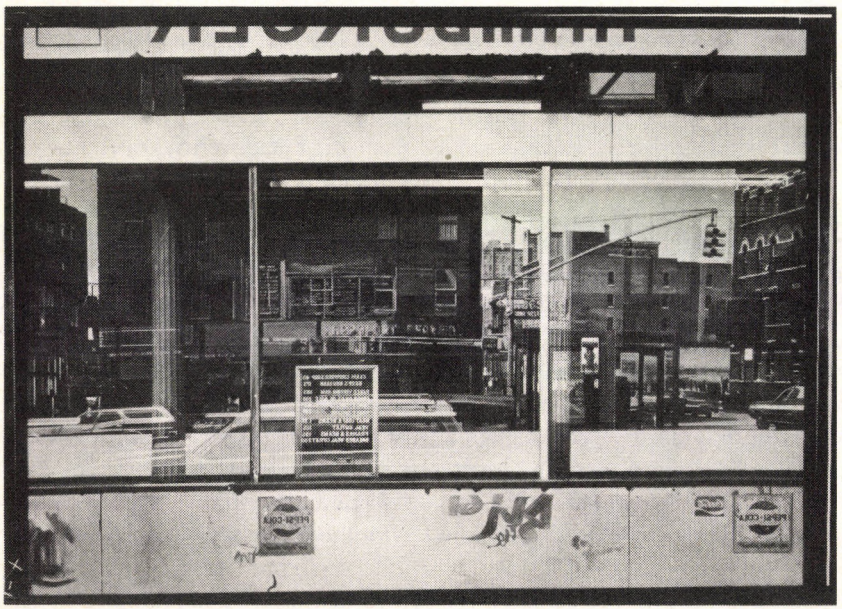
Portuges finally devotes a separate chapter to *Bye-Bye Little Red Riding Hood* (1989), of which she remarks that like most fairy-tales, it reflects the neuroses, fantasies and popular mythology of the given society. The director's interpretation derives from the same psychological configurations (a yearning for the cherished absent father) as in her earlier work. Her heroine, unlike in other treatments of the same motif, becomes an active character once again. Portuges's interesting and somewhat surprising conclusion is that *Bye-Bye-Little Red Riding Hood* shows that East and West are now closer to each other than even quite recently, and that the film anticipates the dramatic changes that have taken place in Europe since. It is also a reminder that a child's inner world deserves at least as much respect as small nations do, and that the future of humankind is inseparable from living in harmony with animals and the natural environment. From the aspect of form, Portuges considers increasingly deepening and intensifying narrative introspection, autobiographical sources and narrative viewpoint, together with the blending of fiction, document and autobiography, as the characteristics of Mészáros's art and method. In subject-matter, the characteristic of her work is that

problems of gender and sexuality and male-female relationships are always portrayed as inseparable from social conflicts, from their historical, political and economic contests. Her films are both historical documents and self-analysis. In their centre is the adults' duty and ambition to discover their identity by ruthlessly examining their memories, through facing up to their childhood selves and to the decisive moments of their lives. The protagonists, as so often in the East and Central European cinema, have a kind of split personality: an external persona directed at the outside world and an internal, suppressed self. In exploring their own past, their roots and reminiscences, they map out the traumas of their national self-esteem and the neuralgic points of their collective memory.

To better understand Mészáros's attempts at narrative retrospection and her constant inquiry into the past, Portuges turns to the psychological literature on mourning and melancholy, especially to the work of Freud. The consensus in this literature is that a failure to mourn what has been lost, or to mourn it insufficiently, may prevent an acceptance of the present.

In Portuges's view, Mészáros uses film to reinterpret history, to counteract collective amnesia. Her heroes, portrayed by their social habits and characteristics, highlight the larger problem: the ego in a society giving primacy to group identity over that of the individual.

The erudition of Portuges, her impartiality, the novelty and complexity of her approach (she transcends the narrow professional, cinematic and aesthetic confines of Hungarian criticism) make this book a major achievement. Her introduction expresses the hope that her father would have been happy about this symbolic return home. One may hope that the non-Hungarian reader will find this book an important source of information, not only on the stages and accomplishments of the career of a major film-maker, but also on the historical and social realities of a small Central European nation's recent past. ❧



Richard Estes: Rappaport Pharmacy. 1976. Oil on canvas. 100 x 125 cm.

Paul Merrick

Ferenc Erkel (1810–1893)

Centenary Exhibition in the National Széchényi Library June–November 1993

The music of Erkel is hardly known outside Hungary, but he is one of the nation's frequently performed and loved composers. This sometimes upsets Hungarians who travel abroad only to find that nobody has heard of their favourite composer. Of course, it is not the professional musicians who discover this, but ordinary music lovers, who thought that all opera houses performed Erkel and Verdi on alternate nights, and not just the Budapest opera houses. The centenary of Erkel's death, therefore, is an event unlikely to clash noticeably with the worldwide commemoration of the death of Tchaikovsky in the same year.

Even so, the disappointment of those Hungarian music lovers stranded abroad is justified; although not a genius, Erkel was a fine composer, and many visitors to the opera houses of Budapest have expressed their delight in discovering Erkel's music, most of them asking the same question: why is this music not known outside Hungary? One suspects that part of the answer is that no serious efforts have been made to export him, as he is felt to be too "Hungarian", much of his appeal being to patriotism.

Fortunately for the visitor interested in Erkel, the National Széchényi Library is housed in the Royal Castle in Buda affording the most splendid views over the Danube to Pest. Entrance to the exhibition leads up a grand marble staircase to a spacious lobby with large leather chairs and glass-topped tables. Doors lead off into archives and reading rooms. A pair of heavy ornate double doors carry posters of the exhibition, and outside are two guards, one armed, who survey the visitor inquisitively. After establishing the innocent purpose of my presence in the building, they wave to a colleague who brings a key, one of the grand doors is opened, and I find myself in a room full of glass cases and pictures on the walls. Music from Erkel's operas begins to sound, presumably activated by the custodian of the key. The door closes, and I am left alone.

Having lapsed into the first person, let me declare my real affection for Erkel's music, and my great admiration for two of his works, namely the opera *Bánk Bán* and the national anthem, which in my opinion is musically the best of all national anthems, combining dignity with a deep quiet patriotic feeling. In his operas Erkel used two basic styles, that of Italian opera, and the so-called Hungarian *verbunkos* style. Large tracts could be written

---

Paul Merrick

is an English Liszt scholar and music historian living in Hungary. He has written Revolution and Religion in the Music of Liszt *(Cambridge University Press, 1987).*

about the latter, but most people know it through Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies and pieces like the Brahms Hungarian Dances. In the nineteenth century this style, which dates from a hundred years before, was seen by artists of the Romantic movement—poets as well as musicians —as an expression of the real and ancient Hungarian musical culture. In other words, it was mythologized. Thus Erkel, along with others, chose medieval subjects for his operas, usually episodes from history involving real historical figures, and endeavoured to express the patriotic element using this style. All the subjects chosen have a political content, the most evident ingredient being Hungary's oppression or unjust treatment by rulers, usually foreign. Anyone with only a vague knowledge of Hungary's history can name more than one revolutionary episode, usually those of this century and the last. The coincidence of politics, patriotism and music in Erkel lies in the fact that he grew up in the period before 1848, and became Hungary's most popular composer in the period after it. His music articulates the emotions of the time, to an extent that a march from his opera *Hunyadi László* was sung and played in the streets during the revolutionary period. Such feelings are evergreen, regardless of the actual political outcome, but there was a time when the opera house could be a dangerous place, and this air of excitement still surrounds the figure of Erkel and his music.

The pictures on the wall are a mixture of portraits of the composer, singers and so on, as well as posters advertising concerts and opera performances. The glass cases contain manuscripts and first editions, together with documents such as letters, and first editions of books and literature connected to the librettos of the operas. The wealth of material makes selection difficult, so I shall follow the method of nineteenth century diarists, and devote some space to "Detached Thoughts".

Erkel's earliest surviving work, dating from 1837, entitled *Duo brillant en forme de fantaisie sur des airs hongrois* is displayed in the first case. Next to it is music by Antal Csermák (1774–1822), one of whose airs figures in the work. Csermák was a violinist and composer of *verbunkos* music, for a time the leader of the first Hungarian national theatre company's orchestra, but who for most of his career led a nomadic life moving from one country estate to another. Music by him can be found in Liszt's fourth Hungarian Rhapsody. Csermák was a friend of János Bihari (1764–1827), also a violinist and composer, but of Gypsy descent, and who never learned to read and write music. In 1801 he appeared in Pest with his own band, consisting of 4 violinists and a cimbalom, and gained nationwide celebrity for his virtuoso playing, particularly of *verbunkos* music. His many compositions, mostly dances, were notated by others and later published. In around 1810 he began to perform the *Rákóczy Nóta* (associated with the 18th century Prince Ferenc II. Rákóczi who led the struggle for independence from the Habsburgs) with his own *verbunkos* additions, and has ever since been credited with the composition of the famous *Rákóczy March.* Erkel composed arrangements of both the *nóta* and the march, and an exhibit marks this fact. The first was a work for piano and orchestra—now lost—entitled *Phantasia és változatok Rákóczinak erdélyies nótájára* (Fantasy and Variations on the Transylvanian Rákóczy Song) dating from 1838, the second was *Emlékül Liszt Ferenczre, Rákóczy indulója* (Souvenir for Liszt: Rákóczi's March) composed in 1840. Both the *nóta* and Erkel's piano arrangement of the march can be found in Szabolcsi's *Concise History of Hungarian Music* (musical examples XI, 2 a,b,c, pp. 168-175). Liszt gave concerts in Pest in 1839-40, and the exhibits case also includes a page of Liszt's piano arrangement

of the march, plus a letter to Erkel from Berlioz dated January 25th 1860. Berlioz was in Pest-Buda in February 1846, during which visit Erkel introduced him to the Rákóczi March, which Berlioz the same year arranged for orchestra. A page from Berlioz's manuscript of the orchestration is displayed. The 1860 letter informs Erkel that he has included this orchestration in his *Damnation of Faust,* and he would like to send a copy to Hungary, but fears the score will not get past the Austrian police. He refers to a packet of music from Erkel which has similarly not arrived in France.

Erkel composed the Hungarian national anthem (*Magyar Hymnus*) in 1844, and the same year it formed the winning entry of a nationwide competition to set to music the poem by Ferenc Kölcsey. First sung on the occasion of the launching of a steamship in August 1844, it quickly became popular, being sung in the theatres—an interesting parallel with the spread of the popularity of God Save the King in England exactly a hundred years earlier, which also took place in the theatres. One of the exhibits relates how Erkel's anthem was included in the second act of his opera *Erzsébet* in 1857, which was performed before the Emperor Franz Joseph and his young wife Elizabeth. The subject of the opera is the same as Liszt's oratorio, *The Legend of St Elizabeth*, and the exhibit includes a copy of the first edition of the score.

At the first performance of Erkel's first opera, *Bátori Mária*, in 1840, the Pesti Magyar Színház (Hungarian Theatre of Pest) was for the first time called the Hungarian National Theatre (Magyar Nemzeti Színház). The work itself had a moderate success, but it was *Hunyadi László* in 1844 which really established Erkel's career as an opera composer, showing for the first time how the verbunkos style could be used to create genuine opera. This use of the style, however, is at its most effective in the opera *Bánk Bán,* premiered in 1861, composed to a libretto based on a censored play—1861 being six years before the Compromise when Franz Joseph became the Hungarian monarch at a separate coronation ceremony, Hungary at the time being still under the repressive regime that followed the 1848 revolution. The plot concerns a 13th century revolt against the queen's hated foreign court. The queen is Gertrude, whose nephew Otto tries to compromise Bánk's wife Melinda—the image of foreigners raping the country occurs more than once in the libretto. One of the best scenes in the opera—and one of the memorable scenes in all opera to my mind—is where Bánk confronts the queen alone in the royal castle at Visegrád (whose ruins still exist), demanding she atone for her nephew's behaviour. The queen becomes increasingly haughty and irate, the phrase "illik-e ez?" (is it right?) being tossed back and forth to an ominous triplet figure. The music is a succession of arias and duets in various tempos, a crescendo and an accelerando combined, well-timed and expertly delineating the two characers. At the end, Bánk murders the queen. In a later scene Melinda wanders with her child by the river Tisza; as a storm heightens in intensity the music turns into a wild csárdás, which forms the setting for her suicide in the river. These scenes are by a real master of the operatic genre. József Katona's censored manuscript play is on display together with set designs and costumes for the premiere of the opera.

Erkel was also a fine pianist, beginning his career in Buda in 1835 both as an opera conductor and playing the solo part of Chopin's Piano Concerto in E minor, the first performance in Hungary of the work. In 1853, at Liszt's instigation, he founded the Philharmonic Society, conducting them sixty-one times over the next decades. In 1875 he became director of the new Academy of Music

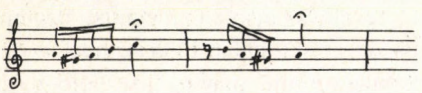
with Liszt as its head. An exhibit shows a timetable from the 1870's with the names of Liszt (advanced piano), Erkel (piano), Robert Volkmann (composition), Emil Ábrányi (aesthetics) and Sándor Nikolits (history and orchestration). The building in which they taught still stands, and today houses the Liszt Museum and Research Centre, as well as containing rooms where music students are still taught. Not infrequently opera singers are heard practicing Erkel while next door a piano student practices Liszt.

Towards the end of the eighties of the last century the writer Géza Gárdonyi wrote of a conversation he had with Erkel, who described a holiday visit home during his student years. A peasant took him in his cart down across the great plain of Hungary.

How did I become a musician? That I can't say. I began when I was very young. But how I became a Hungarian musician, that I do remember... We had an unusual servant. I really loved this fellow. In the evenings, whenever I could, I escaped to the kitchen and hung on his every word. Sometimes he told stories, sometimes jokes, whatever—to me he was the most interesting person in the world.

In the evening he would sit by the fire, dreamily smoking his pipe. Actually he wasn't really smoking, he just had his pipe in his mouth.

And as he sat there nodding by the hearth, I could hear that he was humming something. Something like this:



He would be quiet for a moment, then repeat it.

Again he stopped, and again he hummed a bit. The melody either rose or fell, but at any time he hummed just as much as he had enough breath for.

I listened entranced. I was fascinated by the tune's charm and fragmented character. I couldn't get over how it was that the pauses, far from spoiling the unity of the melody, instead somehow reinforced it. As I say, he hummed quietly under his moustache to himself, like a cat purring, for he was half asleep.

Afterwards I went to bed, but I never forgot that evening. Later, when I became a musician, I thought about it a lot. From it I learned what rubato is. What then should a Hungarian musician do with the metronome, the measured beat? Throw it on the floor.

That uneducated peasant servant, he's the one who has been my guide thorughout my career.

The snippet of music Erkel quoted apears almost note for note many times in the Tisza scene of *Bánk Bán*. It shows that the composer's love of his native musical tradition was more deeply rooted than the fashionable mythologizing *verbunkos* of his day—his instincts pointed ahead to the path travelled by his great countryman Béla Bartók, who was only a boy when the above conversation took place. ❧

Zoltán Kocsis

Distancing from Bartók?

Béla Bartók: *Cantata Profana* Sz 94, *The Wooden Prince*, op. 13. Sz. 60. Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Chorus, conducted by Pierre Boulez. John Aler (Tenor), John Tomlinson (baritone). DG 435 863-2.

The release of a Pierre Boulez record is almost always looked forward to with keen expectation. The significance of Boulez the composer, an epoch-making personality, is beyond all question; as a conductor, his productions bring a more than customary harmony of precision, sensitive ear, taste, and interpretation. This holds true for most of his recordings, though, unfortunately, there are some painful exceptions. His latest CD, perhaps the most avidly awaited, with two Bartók works, *Cantata Profana* and the ballet, *The Wooden Prince*, unhappily falls into this latter category. After some more or less unsuccessful experiments, all those who have been waiting for many years to experience a true revelation while listening to these gems and to add to their collection recordings of a real yardstick value, must be profoundly disappointed.

Yet the record offers an all-star cast. I myself could not think of a more suitable ensemble and a more competent conductor for these works, which are far from free of problems and which, presumably because of their special difficulties in interpretation, have been given a less than just treatment. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, playing excellently even more than thirty years after the death of Fritz Reiner, does its utmost to allow the conductor's ideas to fully prevail; the Chicago Symphony Chorus, led by Margaret Hillis, sings clearly, almost faultlessly, and their Hungarian pronunciation deserves full credit, which can also be said of the two soloists, John Aler (tenor) and John Tomlinson (baritone). Technically too, the record leaves nothing to be desired, something due at least as much to the legendary acoustics of the Orchestra Hall in Chicago as it does to the discrete handling of microphones by the recording engineers, whose goal was balance. So the disappointment felt while listening to the production this time derives from the combination of the conductor's interpretation of the score and his ideas on performance and approach.

This reviewer would like to believe that, for Boulez, good and repeated performances of these works are at least as much a labour of love, as his efforts to emphasize the role of Liszt's work in anticipating the music of the 20th century during his first years with the New York Philharmonic. Or, to stay with Bartók, to the same extent as when he once insisted on making *The Miraculous Mandarin* the first recording with himself and the orchestra, giving it priority over everything

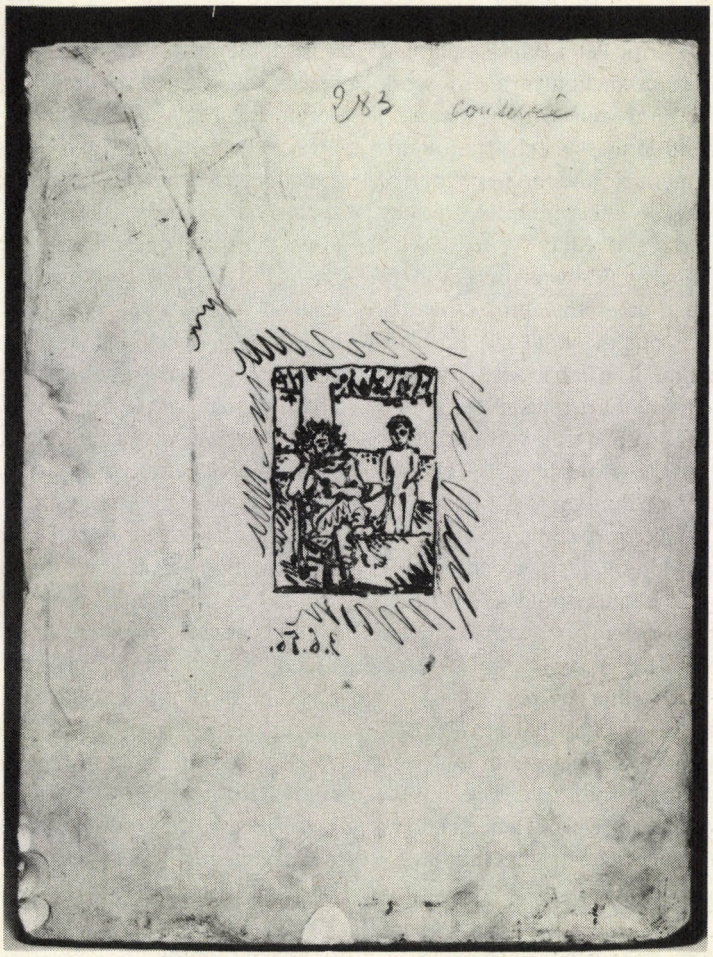
Zoltán Kocsis
is an internationally acknowledged concert pianist. He teaches at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest.

else and taking a major step ahead in the performing tradition of the pantomime. Listening to *Cantata Profana*, one feels this might in fact have been achieved, as this work seems particularly suitable for a purist approach to Bartók, or, if you please, the "purifying" approach cultivated by Boulez. Nevertheless, an observant listener may well ask himself already at this stage why he does not feel overwhelmed by the music, in which even the words are so gripping. (There is a recording of it in Béla Bartók's slightly nasal voice.) This question may turn into annoyance while listening to the introduction of *The Wooden Prince*, this marvellous nature-music, when all one hears is an orchestral performance lacking all signs of inspiration, over-scrupulous in its observance of proportions, or to put it with a modicum of malice, the notes of the work played in proper order—instead of *the work*. The effort for precision is spurious, spontaneity in performance is merely pretended, tedium spouts abundantly from ever so many sources. This prevails through the whole piece. Getting up from the armchair, one feels like the princess in the ballet when she did not even manage to pass through the forest.

The lack of inspiration, the absence of the freshness of a real encounter, in themselves suffice to call the value of a recording in question. It would be tempting to speculate here on the future of canned music, indeed of performance as such, the relationship of twenty-first century man to music—but it would also be futile. After all, how should one know what man will be like? How long would he require valuable music to be heard in his home as well, or indeed, solely in his home? What defensive mechanisms will be able to prevent mass production, the proliferation of mediocrity, of musical Benettons, Coca-Colas, Playboys? Will there be sober people of healthy taste who will find no difficulty in discriminating between what is truly valuable and the less worthy? No one can tell.

One thing, however, is certain: it would have been better for this record never to have been made. It can be presumed that everyone responsible for the quality of a release from such a long-established record company has done his or her duty. In this case, however, it is inexplicable how the master tape could include faults which are not typical either of DG records or earlier recordings of Boulez's. Here are just a few examples of negligence: at the retardation before rehearsal number 22 of the ballet, it escaped the attention of Boulez, or the recording producer—possibly of both—that the first and second trombones are playing in tenor clef according to the faulty instruction of the score (it should be the bass clef); it is baffling how the second bar after rehearsal number 120 can include a wrong chord from the previous bar—they ought to have noticed it, if not earlier, at least during the subsequent play-back. The performance is dotted with meaningless pauses, while at the same time Boulez—or perhaps the editor—has left certain, dramatically important, fermatas out of consideration. And, what is perhaps the most inexplicable and the most saddening of all, is the almost complete disregard for the tempi and tempo proportions (not to mention the characters) prescribed by the composer. Of course nobody would expect a close adherence to Bartók's metronome marks, particularly in the case of an orchestral work whose orchestration is by no means a mature work resting on wide experience, but the result of momentary inspiration. But the difference between the directions in the score and Boulez's performance is so marked that it cannot be left unmentioned. We hear a slow, deliberate performance with artificially created, stilted peaks instead of the natural peaks with their source in the music, in a basically didactic approach in which the

intention to explain the music is only surpassed by the failure to do so. The record will be a double disappointment for those who happen to be familiar with Boulez's earlier recording of the ballet, when still with the New York Philharmonic, although already there one might have harboured a suspicion that Bartók's Romantic period may perhaps still not be close to the heart of a musician who is thinking and acting in typically Expressionistic terms. The reviewer is bound to take out that long outdated recording conducted by Walter Süsskind, which was released by Bartók Records way back in 1954. It will become clear in an instant that affection and minute care can work miracles. Is it perhaps because that record is closer to Béla Bartók in time? I would like to believe that Bartók's work transcends the passage of time and will always remain topical, and that it can be approached by anybody. Provided, of course, they want to. ❧



Pablo Picasso: The Faun and the Child. 1956. Lithograph stone. 43,7 x 33 x 4 cm.

Gergely Bikácsy

Spectacle and Stammer

András Jeles: *Párhuzamos életrajzok* (Parallel Biographes)

András Jeles's new film has excited keen expectation. In a comment written before its opening, the critic Péter Balassa pointed to a singular contradiction in Jeles's work between the imprecise and imperfect, occasionally stuttering speech, that stammering of the ineffable and the perfection of the visual imagery with which Jeles points beyond the surface of reality.

Parallel Biographies was expected to feature at the Hungarian Film Festival in February 1993, but the final cut was not completed in time. The film is set at the time of the persecution of the Jews in the spring and summer of 1944, and follows the fictitious diary of a thirteen-year-old girl. The title refers to the fact that the girl's favourite book, *David Copperfield,* comes to life in the film: young Copperfield, tormented and harrassed by cruel and stupid adults, joins her and the two of them freely wander in and out of each other's story, passing all bounderies in time and space.

Jeles's is a weighty film, hard to absorb if only because of its subject. In an interview the director himself said: "We have not left Auschwitz behind, and will not leave it behind either. We are in Auschwitz, it is impossible to extricate ourselves from it. This came as a revelation to me as I woke up one fine day. It was frightening to recognize that *this* is the real problem. It is this burden ... that the period carries." (*Filmvilág*, May 1993)

Auschwitz today is still one of the great questions. A true artist can, perhaps, not speak of anything else—take the example of János Pilinszky, one of the major Hungarian poets of the post-1945 period (known in English from translations by Ted Hughes and others). Auschwitz, as a phenomenon, as a concept, is regrettably more than—and not identical with—the fact of what took place there: Auschwitz and the Gulag throw sharp light not only on "fascism, the Hitlerite and Stalinist dictatorships" (as we once so naively believed), but, with a tragic inexorability, on human existence as such. This is what the novelist Imre Kertész speaks of in his novel, *Sorstalanság* (Fatelessness) based on autobiographical motifs, which has achieved great success in several languages.

"The immutability of the concentration camps" torments Jeles, who was born in 1947. It is the subject of a play of his, which was premiered almost simultaneously with his new film, *Szerbusz, Tolsztoj* (Hello, Tolstoy) and which was one of the highlights of recent months.

Jeles, in fact, has turned to the stage, and

Gergely Bikácsy
is the regular film reviewer of this journal.

has made no films for several years. Both his cinema and stage work are marked by an experimenting spirit and exploratory flair in formal idiom. He frequently turns to popular literary works. These have included a 19th century Hungarian classic, *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man), a philosophical verse-drama by Imre Madách (1823-1864) which recently came out again in English in new translations by George Szirtes and Iain McLeod, and which he adapted to the screen, and a parody musical out of a hack work about 1956 written by a communist party apologist of slender talent.

In Jeles's case, "parody" is an inaccurate expression: he re-interpreted Madách's classical work in the same iconoclastic manner (all the parts are played by ten to twelve year old children) that turns the communist propaganda piece absolutely upside-down. Didacticism and the drawing of clear lessons are alien to him and his work is hard to interpret. His subject obviously has the message of "the muteness of God" and the tragedy of the world and of man, whom God has forsaken and can no longer redeem even through his suffering. His formal idiom is an unusual and bizarre combination of Expressionism and Surrealism with an almost mannerist, sometimes even close to Classical, treatment.

Jeles breaks up and disperses the spoken language in all his work. His first film, of decisive influence on recent Hungarian cinema, *A kis Valentino* (The Little Valentino) follows a day in the life of a naive young thief, in which unexpected and unusual settings and meaningless fragments of dialogue stress deeper projections of a bizarre and inconclusive adventure, and in so doing lift a tragicomic crime out of the contingency of a news bulletin. Firmly outlined documentary authenticity is placed against a background of more personal, more abstract and more profoundly tragic (and comic) perspectives.

Jeles in his latest stage work lays special stress on the idea of "God's clown" connected with Nijinsky, the great dancer who escaped into insanity (or perhaps was forced into insanity, or simply branded as insane). So too his films forcefully flash the unbearable tragicomedy of existence, the true depths of which can only be felt and conveyed by holy fools or children, or, possibly, by crazy outcasts. In Hungary, Jeles's work is followed with extraordinary attention by his peers. Unfortunately, his films, despite always being screened for foreign critics at the annual Hungarian film festival, have so far met with a lack of understanding by non-Hungarians. One reason for this incomprehension is obviously the complicated mesh of Hungarian cultural, historical and literary references. There may be another reason as well. Jeles's films are saturated with convulsive tension, while his whimsically alienating images create a strange, sometimes embarrassing, coldness. In breaking up language, he tacitly assumes that the shards of the shattered language will still mean something to the viewer and listener. They will construe or counterpoint, as it were, the whimsicality of the images. However, he cannot, or can only partially, count on this in the case of foreign viewers.

Jeles's new film is related to his previous ones only in its subject and the extraordinary weight and responsibility of the undertaking. In other aspects, it is more traditional than his earlier works. It brings few novelties, few uncommon solutions in the formal idiom. In this sense it has been a disappointment for those who admire Jeles precisely because of a tone that differs from that of all the others.

As I mentioned, David Copperfield, another victim of humiliation and persecution, comes to life in the imagination of a girl who is finally dragged off to Auschwitz. This parallel is not turned into something qualitatively different, but remains at the

level of an idea. One does see parallel biographies, but their intertwining, their superposition brings nothing artistically new or surprising that is not in a sentimental picture book.

Although imagination enters his work, Jeles has this time made a traditional, pseudo-realistic film in a conservative idiom, something that has been seen a thousand times. Indeed, somehow or other, he seems not to have felt (what the viewer soon feels) how alien this conservative, academic style is to him and how little he can do with it.

Some rough and shocking scenes make the best parts of the film. This is particularly true of how he portrays the anxiety that distorts the day to day life of a provincial petty-bourgeois family. The most clear-cut character is the girl's grandmother, who goes slowly mad from all the hatred and jealousy. Also worthy of mention is the deaf and dumb servant maid in the film. Hers is the dreadful, inarticulate moan that accompanies the family's transportation off to Auschwitz. This inarticulateness conveys a deeper, more secret content than most of the conventional scenes of the film. The main line of the film is unable to shake off a viewer's sense of platitudes and illustrations. Of course, the portrayal of great collective tragedies and cold-blooded crimes is surpassingly difficult. Even Andrzey Wajda and Krzystof Zanussi, two Polish directors with a keen sense of form and force, failed in recent years when they turned to Auschwitz as a theme.

Just as Wajda did in his film, Jeles inserts newsreel footage on the entrainment and torturing of children. The dreadful impact of these scenes almost wipes out fiction—everything becomes unequivocal. Quite simply, there are murderers and there are victims. The "tyrannical objectivity" of the motion picture is at its most powerful in documentary sequences, no fiction can vie with this. The subtler, deeper, revealing character of fiction, which conveys, or at least explores mental processes, is scarcely visible in Jeles's conservative presentation, one that merely illustrates the documentaries. ❧

Flour-moths are fluttering in the flat. It turns out that they have come from the flour we bought for a wartime iron reserve. I'm sieving the flour into a huge plastic tub, the warning that one should store flour properly because who knows when one will have need of it is ringing in my ears. They say that in Sarajevo many died just because they lacked a supply of flour, and they set out to look for bread for sale. My arms are getting tired and the sweat is pouring off me in the heatwave. I switch on the radio and listen to the news about the uncheckable cancer of the Bosnian war from Belgrade, Budapest, Zagreb, and Újvidék. One suppresses this aspect, the other another, so in the end I plump for the BBC, I recognize it as the voice of objectivity, perhaps it's only there they know why I'm sitting at the table sieving flour, nailed to one place like a Sisyphus whose sandhill was swept away by the wind and whose rock was stolen. I am left alone with the flour and the canned food. I snatch angrily at the flying moths. Is it worth the effort? My solitude has become permanent, in other words, I'm getting used to the war.

From: *Balkan Testament*, Part 2
by László Végel, p. 3.

132

33

9 770028 539004

250,-Ft