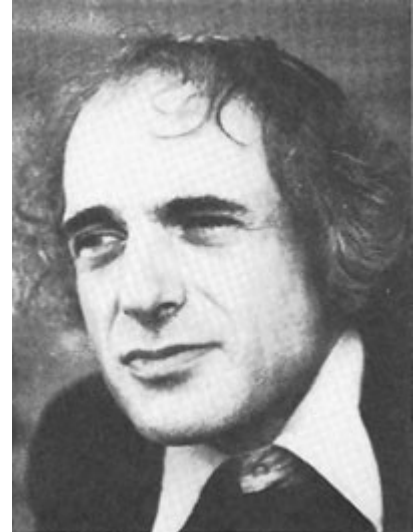


**Interview with Nicolas Krassó**  
**by Peter Gowan, Branka Magas, and**  
**Robin Blackburn.** (early 1980s)



## **Introduction**

Born in 1930, Nicolas Krassó joined the youth group of the Hungarian Communist Party at the age of 15. At the age of 18, he was already collaborating with Lukács on the latter's journal, *Forum*. He was expelled from the university in 1950 as part of the anti-Lukács campaign. He was active in the Petöfi Circle, had articles published in literary journals, and translated Lukács's German works into Hungarian.

He played a significant and interesting part in the 1956 uprising, a fact acknowledged by Bill Lomax in his classic account of the uprising (*Hungary 1956*, p. 151). On 26 October of that year, he attended a public meeting in the Budapest industrial district of Ujpest where he made a speech. He had only been in the district a few times before to watch a film. As a result of his speech, he was elected to the Ujpest Revolutionary Council. At a meeting of the Council after the second Soviet intervention, Krassó drafted a proclamation which proposed the creation of a central Budapest workers council. This idea was accepted and a second meeting was planned for delegates from factories across the city. When Krassó arrived in Ujpest for the meeting, he found that the Ujpest Revolutionary Council leaders had been arrested (they were later hanged) and the building surrounded. So they had to move the meeting to the United Electric factory where about 90 delegates gathered, three from each of the big factories. Without his Ujpest councillors, Krassó was on his own and not known by the rest of the delegates. When asked by the chair, "what factory are you from?" he replied, "None". He was then asked what right he had to be there, to which he replied that he had actually organised the meeting. He was allowed to speak for ten minutes. But his proposal was accepted and the meeting decided to set up the Central Budapest Workers Council.

Part of this story is told in the following interview and in more detail in another interview about 1956 carried out by Peter Gowan and published in *The Stalinist Legacy*, edited by Tariq Ali and published by Penguin in 1984.

After his brother was arrested in November of that year, Nicolas went first to Austria and then to Britain. In Britain, he was to play an important role in the emerging New Left, joining *New Left Review* in 1965. His knowledge of history, literature, and Marxist theory was impressive. As Robin Blackburn wrote in his obituary for Krassó in *NLR* (Jan/Feb 1986), "The breadth of his knowledge and reference was always a source of astonishment. Isaac Deutscher declared that his command of the Marxist classics was unrivalled." The contribution to *NLR* that attracted a lot of attention was his debate with Ernest Mandel on Trotsky's politics ("Trotsky's Marxism, July/Aug 1967). The debate that ensued with Mandel was published in France by Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* in 1969 (No 277/278) and other translations followed. It was published in book form in the US by New Critics Press in 1972 (*Trotsky: The Great Debate Renewed*). Nicolas died in 1986.

The interview that follows was recorded on tape sometime in the early 1980s. The transcript was given to me by Peter Gowan around that time when I met Krassó to discuss the situation in Hungary prior to a visit there for Labour Focus. Although parts of the interview were published in the Tariq Ali collection, the whole interview has not, to the best of my knowledge, ever been published. It is an impressive account of Hungarian history in the years leading up to and including the 1956 uprising, with personal recollections ("I remember Lukács told me in 1955 that at the time he believed Rajk [executed in 1949] was an agent"), interesting assessments of the individuals involved and the currents in the party in 1956 ("the Imre Nagyists had this demagoguery with the posters calling 'Patriots' and this absolute obsession with the peasants as if the workers did not matter"), and a record of an important historical event by an intelligent and sympathetic but critically involved participant.

Gus Fagan  
August 2021

Peter: Could you begin by giving us a sketch of the main classes and class relationships in Hungary at the end of the First World War, or rather of the Austro-Hungarian Empire? And could you also outline the nature of the system of political power in Hungary before the first world war? This could then lead on to a discussion of the Parties and so on.

Yes precisely. After 1867, which was the year of the *ausgleich*, the reconciliation, between Austria and Hungary. In some ways we should start from 1848.

A few days after the revolution in Vienna on the 15th March 1848 there was a revolution in Pest — Budapest was not yet unified — as a response to the revolution in Vienna. As in October 1956 when the news came of Gomulka's rise to power in Poland, so at that time in response to the news from Vienna student demonstrations broke out. The demonstration on the fifteenth of March was led by a very radical group of Jacobins, like Petofi, for example, who came to be seen as the great national poet and who was a strongly Jacobin man with pictures of Marat and Sant Just in his room and so on. These people, called flamingoes because of the feather they wore, were of course completely isolated in a very backward country. In fact the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 is interesting in that it very much anticipates the revolutions in backward countries in our own age: a situation in which you have a very dynamic national movement, which in Hungary started around the 1820s, or even earlier really. There was a Jacobin group of conspirators executed in the 1790s in Hungary, the group of Martinovich who all, of course, came from the gentry. Considering that the official language in Hungary up to 1844 was Latin and all these county and national diets were going on in Latin, they actually translated the songs of the French revolution into Latin! These were all actually disillusioned Josephites, because Joseph II was a progressive absolute monarch who produced a struggle against the Catholic church and particularly against Hungarian feudalism, whose bulwark was the county system. Of course this was greater Hungary of which half was not Hungarian — this was before the national awakening of the peoples there. Actually the Hungarian national awakening itself started after that. So in this greater Hungary the 63 counties were the bulwark of the reaction: it was really the Turkish Pasha system of the feudal nobility. The latter had a fantastic struggle against Joseph II to defend the interests of the Hungarian nation, which meant, of course, the feudal interests. But there was this group of ~~intellectuals~~ progressive intellectuals who were actually strong supporters of Joseph II and were not put off by the national grievances against Joseph II who had made German into the official language of the whole empire, while the Hungarian Feudal interests were defending Latin.

These people, who ~~were~~ started as a literary cultural movement the national awakening — Kosinczy is seen as the founding father of modern Hungarian literature and he spent some 8 or 10 years in Kufstein as a participator in this Martinovich conspiracy. So it all came from Josephites. After Joseph's death, when the reaction set in then Jacobin background, though they all wanted change from above. It probably had some similarities with Dekabristism in Russia. But after the first decade of the 19th century the whole thing developed as a cultural, literary movement. This was the so-called reform age, the Hungarian equivalent of the *Risorgimento* — the 1820s, 1830s, 1840s. This all ended in producing Kossuth who was an extreme nationalist, as opposed to Count Czetsin before him and then his opponent in the 1840s. Czetsin had been the leader in the 1830s and was an anglophile wanting, as he explained to Metternich, to create an oppositional party like the English Whigs — this kind of completely illusionist programme. He believed in the Hungarian aristocracy and gentry and in capitalised land like in England. This anglophilia was a very important thread in subsequent Hungarian history. He was strongly opposed to Hungarian being introduced as the official language, saying that this would be unacceptable to the nationalities and Hungary would be over because if the Hungarians wanted an official language then what about the Slovaks, the Rumanians, the Croats and the Serbs — they would all want their own language. So far him, to save Hungary was actually to stick to Latin. The whole thing was very naive.

But in the 1840s Kossuth came up and he introduced Hungarian as the official language in, I think, 1843. And quite distinct from this there emerged this group of intellectuals like Petofi who were really quite radical. They led the student demonstration in March 1848 and this terrified Vienna so much that they agreed to free elections in Hungary and the formation of an Hungarian government, within the framework of the Hapsburg Empire. Then in summer 1848 a fantastic number of very progressive changes were introduced.

Revai, the later Stalinist ideologist, was to say, somewhat problematically in my view, that it was a bourgeois revolution where the progressive part of the gentry played the role of the bourgeoisie — I suppose (just as he was playing the role of the proletariat! But let us not get~~ting~~x involved in this whole argument about the bourgeois revolution. It started in a very radical way but the radicals were completely isolated in a very backward country. For instance, Petofi was not only defeated in the elections but had to run away from the village where the peasants, urged on by the priest, wanted to kill him. Nevertheless in the summer of 1848 there was a very substantial complex of radical changes: the abolition of serfdom, the abolition of feudal privileges and so on.

This phase ended in late August with the Croatian attack on Hungary which began the war of independence and from this moment onwards the movement could hardly be called a revolution, strictly speaking. But the movement carried on much longer than anywhere else in Europe — up to August 1849. Of course, although it was a war of independence it was part of the whole revolutionary process in Europe, and Marx who was writing his political articles in the Rheinische Zeitung called Kossuth someone who was both the Danton and Carnot of his nation, meaning the revolutionary leader and the military leader. The movement was defeated by the Russian intervention when it was clear that Austria couldn't defeat Hungary. It is also true that the national movements did also play a part, playing a reactionary role against Hungary.

Then in 1867 there was the Ausgleich, the reconciliation. It was based on the following premise: that of all the nationalities.....Actual Kamy, a publicist who was opposed to the revolution and was a reactionary had started to prepare 1867 already in 1850 writing something very much in the style of the Kadar propaganda of 1957. What he explains is that Hungary and Austria must come together again for the simple reason that of all these many nationalities — there were something like 12 in the whole Hapsburg Empire — the Hungarians are the only one who have no outside centre: the Slavs are looking towards Russia, the Rumanians towards Rumania, the Poles also looking outside; Hungary alone does not look outside and moreover, without the Hapsburg framework, the Hungarians cannot keep Hungary, because after all half the population of Hungary isn't Hungarian. (In point of fact, according to the 1910 census, if Croatia is included, 45% of the population of Hungary was Hungarian; and if Croatia is excluded the figure becomes 55%. The others were Slovaks, Ukrainians, Slovenes, Rumanians, Serbs, Croats and of course, Germans.)

The gentry, and even the aristocracy, which still in 1848 produced many progressives, afterwards became more and more reactionary to try to keep what remained of their privileges. But the so-called Back period, which was supposed to have been the period of absolute reaction, and in a sense it was, actually did re-introduce the same reforms which had been put forward in 1848-49. In 1853-54 this Back regime produced the abolition of serfdom and so on.

After the Ausgleich there was an 1848 party and an 1867 party, but it was really so much shadow boxing because they were both fundamentally reactionary parties — the only difference was that the 1848 party wanted more independence for Hungary and the most extreme wing of it even wanted to make the relationship with Austria into a mere personal union. In point of fact the 1867 arrangement was that there was an independent Austrian and an independent Hungarian government, but three ministries were common: the war office, the foreign office, and the Finance ministry. This was also a very clever arrangement also from the point of view of avoiding democracy because the three ministries didn't come under either Parliament but under a so-called delegation elected by both Parliaments, which meant that it could be completely controlled by the dynasty. Of course, there was no universal suffrage in the Empire — the bulk of the people had no right to vote.

So one of the key issues was the whole question of the relationship with Austria, the endless grievances against Austria, as though Hungary was in some way an oppressed nation an idea which the Stalinist historians were later to take over — as though Hungary was not in fact fundamentally a ruling nation. Of course the fact that Austria and Bohemia were more industrialised was to some extent an impediment to the development of Hungarian capitalism because there couldn't be protective tariffs. But still Hungarian capitalism developed reasonably well after 1867, quite speedily.

Peter: were they actually Hungarian capitalists, or German and Jewish?

The whole point is that up to 1867 the few capitalists were usually German, and still in 1867 Pest had a predominantly German population which was very quickly Magyarised after 1867.

But after 1867, and this was to be important in the 20th century, almost the whole of the Hungarian bourgeoisie was Jewish. This was a very special case, not repeated to that extent anywhere else in the world. The Jews also were very quickly Magyarised after 1867, and unlike Poland and Russia they were Hungarian speaking and the haute bourgeoisie were baptised and so on, in the late 19th century. All the leading bankers and industrialists at this time were Jewish, and the 1910 census said that 23.1% of the population of Budapest was Jewish; and since the Jews were predominantly bourgeois and petty bourgeois this means that if you exclude the working class the majority of the population of Budapest was Jewish.

At the same time the gentry, which was quickly losing land and losing ground, built up a fantastic state bureaucracy: they became state bureaucrats. So you had the Jewish bourgeoisie and at the same time what was called at the time of the counter-revolution in 1920 the "Christian National Constructive" middle class, made up almost entirely of the gentry who had lost their lands and who became an extremely reactionary state bureaucracy. While the bulk of the Jewish bourgeoisie was as uncultured and as reactionary as the Hungarian ruling class in general it still produced a small section of progressive intellectuals. This intelligentsia was the basis of the progressive political and cultural movement which came up at the turn of the century. So that in a country where the rural areas were as backward as Turkey, with an extreme 'asiaticness', Budapest was at the same time a European city, with Ferenczy it was the second centre of psychoanalysis and, a great many avant-garde cultural movements, bourgeois radical currents and a social democratic movement. The leaders of the bourgeois radical and social democratic movements were also fundamentally Jews, from the bourgeois and petty bourgeois intelligentsia of Jewish origin. This was of course very much used after the Commune by the counter-revolution.

Count Czetchin's dream that the Hungarian aristocracy and gentry would be capitalised did not happen at all. Something quite different happened.

After 1867 the whole thing was to fetishize the whole situation, posing the problem as being relations with Austria, while at the same time the real problem was the emerging nationalisms of the so-called nationalities; and then the ruling class was using permanently the fact that the 1848 revolution was defeated by the Russians -- an anti-slav thing, saying the whole pan-slav movement was organised from St. Petersburg and so on. And at the same time they had to face a strong agrarian socialist movement which came up strongly in the late 19th century in many parts of the country. The social democrats didn't understand at all the agrarian socialist movement, maintained a very sectarian purely working class orientation and forgot what the nature of the whole country in which they were operating was.

If one reads the articles written in 1911 and 1912 by the Hungarian radicals what comes across is a complete hopelessness. The great poet of the radicals, Avinyan expresses this complete pessimism and hopelessness about everything. And then this radicalism, which saw itself very much in a vacuum, found itself, in 1918, in power.

The leader of the 1848 party, Count Carolyi, who was of course, one of the biggest landlords, and one of the most outstanding members of the feudal aristocracy, had a very strong sympathy for France, was anti-German and was opposed to the war from the beginning. During the war a member of his party shouted to Count ..... , Prime Minister, that we are French friends of the Entente -- the Hungarian feudal aristocracy had such rights; I don't think that in England you would have got away with it at that time: a member of Parliament shouting that he was a friend of the enemy. Then during the war Carolyi got in touch with the leaders of Hungarian radicalism and social democracy. And in October the collapse took place: from the Hungarian point of view it was the collapse of the front against the Italians in the Dolomites; the soldiers just started moving back to Hungary from the front en masse in October 1918. Mass demonstrations and workers strikes took place demanding the end of the war, the end of the dynasty; and then on the 31st of October Carolyi was made Prime Minister and Hungary became a 'Peoples Republic' -- that was the term, a 'Peoples Republic under Count Carolyi. They formed a coalition government of radicals and social democrats. And this brings us to the Communist Party.

There was this man Szabo, whose Marxism was certainly the source of Lukacs's Marxism. He formulated the problem of strategy in a somewhat idealistic, ethical way. While he fought for a bourgeois republic, how to ensure that the Hungarian proletariat does not lose its heroic spirit, its moral spirit? His solution was education. He was really the only one in Hungary who took seriously Marxist theory, though he himself had a very ethical version of it. The Hungarian social democrats were of course supporters of the war. He was

anti-war, on a pacifist basis and he used to get people together once a week at his flat. Then some of these people, like Otto Gery, who came to be head of the Cheka in 1919, and also Lukacs came along. This was one source of the Communist Party: people who came to Marxism fundamentally through their opposition to the war. They were producing anti-war leaflets etc.

Another source was the prisoners of war in Russia. People like Kun and Szamuely, whose basic role was to go from one prisoner of war camp to another recruiting Hungarian prisoners to form detachments in the Red Army. You know it was quite easy in some ways because there were these Czechs there who were on the side of the counter-revolution. They returned in Autumn 1918 and organised the Communist Party. Then these Erno Szabo people who joined, including Lukacs. And then the third component, these left social democrats like Landler also joined.

One of Lukacs's favorite anecdotes was about a meeting in the Zeman cafe where the CP was formed. It was a discussion some time in January 1919 between Bela Kun and Landler. Bela Kun was envisaging how the revolution would take place in Hungary and was thinking about barricades and very heroic battles and so on. And then Landler said, "You don't understand anything about this country. In this country things happen differently. One day, So and So," and he named a <sup>social democratic</sup> member of the Carolyi Government, "will come up to you and say, 'Look, Kun. This time you have a try.'"

In point of fact things turned out in a very similar way. The Communist leaders were put in prison in February 1918 after they had laid siege to the Social Democratic daily building, calling for a revolutionary war against Entente imperialism. And then this so-called ~~note~~ note came through to Carolyi, insisting that the present military boundaries between Hungary and Rumania and Czechoslovakia and so on were to be seen as permanent state frontiers. And then Carolyi replied that if the entente insisted on this he would hand over power to the Communists who wanted a revolutionary war against the entente. I don't suppose they took this threat very seriously, they never believed that he would carry it out. But he actually did resign, saying that after his disillusionment with the west he was entrusting the destiny of Hungary to the international proletariat. The Commune then started on the 22nd March 1919. It lasted 133 days.

They were politically inexperienced people. The situation was obviously very difficult. French troops were in the south and they occupied Seged the moment the revolutionary government was formed. Very soon war developed between the Czechs and the Hungarians; a Red Army was formed and advanced into Slovakia and declared a Slovak Soviet Republic. Then an entente note threatened that unless the Hungarian army withdraws the Rumanian army would start advancing. And instead of starting negotiations, Kun just ordered a complete withdrawal and then of course the Entente did not keep its word that in consequence the Rumanians would stay put.

But these are all details. The main point was that ~~neither~~ the Carolyi government of the radicals and social democrats who were in power from October 1918 to March 1919 did make a land reform but kept on arguing, because the fundamental S-D position was that it would be a reactionary step to make a land reform. And so the land reform was not carried out and the Commune also didn't carry out a land reform; it nationalised the land instead in the spirit of Rosa Luxemburg. ~~So~~ They also obviously alienated a great many sections of the population, like the petty bourgeoisie. They were very much thinking in terms of a kind of instant communism.

Branka: Prior to the Commune what was the CP's base?

It was fundamentally the workers. There was obviously an upsurge of working class support in the winter of 1918-19. But the whole problem was that the Party was new and inexperienced. Nobody would have known the theoretical writings of Lenin the organisation could hardly have been stabilised out of these rather diverse groups. The Party's base somehow very rapidly diminished, not just because of mistakes, but because of the shortage of everything immediately needed by the masses. Of course it would be very philistine journalism to make much of this, but the Commune certainly had an aspect of very great progressive culture; for example Fejting Chair of Psychoanalysis with Ferency and Horkeim making Bela Bartok, the avant-garde musician, Professor at the academy of Music; actually the whole Hungarian intelligentsia was doing fantastically

well, and all these progressive avante guard movements were in; but the whole point is that the workers didn't have enough food. The nationalist spirit was undoubtedly there but it wasn't especially emphasised; proletarian internationalism was correctly stressed. In the countryside the peasants certainly were not supporting the Commune. Both the Carolyi seizure of power and the change over in March 1919 were completely bloodless revolutions. And in spite of later White propaganda there was no red Terror at the start. But when the counter-revolutionary Government of Admiral Horthy was set up in Seged the White Terror seized the countryside. A large number of terrorist commandos were formed killing torturing and castrating Communists, Jews and anybody who had made some subversive remark about the gendarmerie or the landlords; and the agrarian socialists were mass murdered by these white terrorist commandos. Then in the last six weeks of the Commune there was the Red Terror of Tibor Szamuely. Usually called the Lenin Boys in Hungary, they went around hanging the landlords in the main streets of the villages. It was really a desperate attempt to counter the white terror.

In July the Rumanians attacked and the Tizza front completely collapsed. It is relevant for the future history of the Communist Party to recall Bela Kun's last speech in the revolutionary government, made to the revolutionary governing council on the 30th or 31st of July. He announced the defeat of the Commune; the Rumanians are advancing, the Red Army is on the run, and the Rumanians will arrive in Budapest in a day or two. And he says that it would have been much more beautiful to have been able to defend revolutionary Budapest on the barricades, but unfortunately the workers in the factories are saying "Down with the Commune!" It would be only the intellectuals who could die on the barricades. The workers will not follow us. And this Hungarian working class will need the most extreme counter-revolutionary terror in order to become revolutionary.

I think this is very significant, because this idea that the Hungarians were a fundamentally counter-revolutionary people, as a whole truth, rather than in fact only a half truth, was certainly very basic in the Hungarian Communist Party. And Bela Kun permanently held this idea that Fascism is more favourable than bourgeois democracy because it means polarisation — the position of the Comintern in the third period, and perhaps anticipated to some extent in the first period. Bela Kun was the chief representative of this kind of idea. Lenin, you know, always said, "When I hear something really silly being said in a Comintern Congress, I know it is Bela Kun who must be speaking." In the first period of the Comintern Kun was a kind of chief lieutenant of Zinoviev. Then he faded, of course, in the second period, and came really into his own in 1928. And that was the time when Trotsky, in his pamphlet, Who Rules the Communist International? said that the Comintern was actually led by three Hungarian puppets of Stalin — Bela Kun, Eugene Varga, and Pepper: who in 1919 was called Pogany and who organised the CP in the USA and played a very obnoxious role there. Varga was actually the chief economist of the Hungarian Radicals in the early 20th Century, which was the name of their Monthly. He remained a chief economic expert in the Soviet Union until his death. The other two were liquidated in the 1930s. But it is important to remember that the leaders of the Commune played a very ultra-left role in the Comintern. Though Lukacs in theoretical terms and on the international plane represented the ultra left current, in Hungarian politics he represented the right, because in the twenties in Vienna he was in the Landler faction against the Bela Kun faction. The Kun faction had the strategic aim and slogan 'For A Second Soviet Republic' while the Landler faction, under Landler until 1925-26 until his death and then under Lukacs in 1927-28 developed a rightist position, theorised in Lukacs's Blum theses of 1927. These spell out the slogan of a workers and peasants democratic dictatorship. As Lukacs told me the idea came to him from reading Lenin's 1905 writings and while it had been used in the colonial world he was the first to apply it in a European context. Lukacs did pay lip service to the idea of red Trade Unions, but the whole thrust was anti-sectarian. Landler died in 1925. But this was really an isolated Hungarian affair. Lukacs and Reva had no influence in the Comintern, unlike Bela Kun and his supporters who were very influential in the Comintern. So at the 1930 Party Congress in Vienna at the height of Stalinisation and the social fascism slogan it was obvious that the Lukacs faction, to which actually Imre Nagy belonged, had to be defeated. Nagy, like Lukacs, passed self-criticism at that congress. It is interesting that Lukacs told Perry in the interview for NIR that he then decided to concentrate exclusively on theoretical activity after that because he realised that if he represented such an absolutely correct position and yet he suffered such an enormous defeat, then he cannot have a talent for politics. But I must say that to me what shows he has no talent for politics is the fact that he could make such a statement, as though he could conceivably win at such a time; and it is more a Fichtian than an Hegelian idealism, more a subjective than an objective idealism to be

that he could possibly have won just because he represented the correct position.

But the main point is that Kun and his followers were by this time ~~very prominent~~ <sup>flourishing</sup> in the Comintern, and although the bulk of them were liquidated in the purges, some survived to play a very prominent role in Hungary before 1956. Gero is a case in point. He was in Spain, ~~in Exile~~ under the name of Pedro, and played a very sinister role in Barcelona in 1937, using the same provocation tactics as I think he tried in 1956 in Hungary. These people came to be the leaders of the party in Hungary after 1945. Rakosi if he had been out of prison in the 1930s might have survived like Gero; more probably he would have been liquidated, like the bulk of the Kun faction to which he belonged. According to Lukacs, Landler called him the shoe-lace middle man, the shoelace sales man. But he was arrested in 1925 in Hungary and kept in prison for 15 years by Horthy, and was only freed in 1940 at the time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact when Hungary as a satellite of Germany also established some kind of relationship with the Soviet Union. The Russians exchanged the Hungarian National Flags captured in 1949 in return for Rakosi and some other Communists. So Rakosi was able to survive the 1930s safely in Horthy's prison. He then took over the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party.

In 1936 the Hungarian Communist Party had been dissolved -- it was actually one of the most sensational moments in the Petofi circle discussions during 1956 when during the history debate some historian read out the text of the Comintern Resolution which dissolved the Party in 1936. This resolution, which coincided with the downfall of the Bela Kun faction and which followed the Dimitrov turn to the Popular Front in 1935, said that the Hungarian Party was paying lip service to the popular front line, but is at the same time following its old sectarian practices; it has been misleading the Comintern and misleading the Bolshevik Party. This sounded very extraordinary in the summer of 1956, a few months after the 20th Party congress, when Rakosi was evidently only paying lip service to the new line while in fact following the old Stalinist, at that time called sectarian, practices.

In 1937 the Party was re-formed under the leadership of Soltan Szanto who was one of the Lukacs-Landler people. But in 1940 he was replaced by Rakosi. The ideologist of the new Popular Front Party between 1937 and 1940 was Revai, who had been a pupil of Lukacs and who was one of the very few intellectuals who survived into the late Stalinist period and became one of the foursome -- the other three were Rakosi, Gero and Farkas -- actually running the country in the late 1940s and early 1950s. At that later time he was Minister of Culture and Editor of the Party monthly and the Party Daily.



After the troops of the Hungarian Soviet had entered Slovakia very successfully, the Rumanians sent them a note saying that they should withdraw immediately otherwise the Rumanian army would attack. Now of course, they shouldn't have necessarily rejected the note, but in my view they should have said they were prepared to talk about it while they stayed put. But instead they just immediately gave in. And why did they give in? Because they were thinking in this incredibly mechanistic fashion, that they had to follow what happened at Brest Litovsk, because this was the correct policy. So they instantly gave in. This was typical of Bela Kun's idiocy.

Funnily enough there is still in Hungary a fantastic Bela Kun myth. There is this Populist historian under the present regime who writes about how he was invited to a writers' Congress in Moscow in 1934 at which Zdanov and Gorki made big speeches, and this writer says that he was told while ~~in Moscow~~ he was there something which still moves him very much today. Namely, that Bela Kun always stayed up in Moscow till mid-night so that this leader of the Comintern could hear the Hungarian radio play the Hungarian national anthem.

To give you an indication of the situation before the Hungarian Soviet let me recount a story about Count Karolyi. He made this famous visit to Frenche Despere, the Entente Commander in Belgrade. He took his delegation down the Danube on a ship. Baron Hoffman was his sort of secretary -- Hoffman was the Mecenat of Hungarian avant-garde literature. And Karolyi meets Despere and introduces the members of the delegation, "This is the delegate of the Soldiers council, Mon General..." and Despere replies "I did not know that you had fallen so low!" This is after all how a general would obviously respond to the shocking spectacle of a delegate of a Soldiers Council. And poor Karolyi was terribly put out after getting this response from the French Ludendorf, and told Haffman later how he had expected something different from the representative of western Democracy. And he explained later in his speech how after his disillusionment with the West he was turning now to the international proletariat. But Despere did seem to have a better understanding of Hungary in some respects than this old feudal aristocrat Karolyi. Because when they started to argue about Transylvania Karolyi declared it was predominantly Hungarian in population, but Despere pointed out that it was mainly Rumanian and he was absolutely right because Transylvania was only about 30% Hungarian, 14% German and ~~65~~ 56% Rumania. But of course by and large the peasant former serfs were overwhelmingly Rumanian and the landlords overwhelmingly Hungarian. And Karolyi, ~~what~~ who had to be recalled from his regular Autumn hunting ~~in~~ in Transylvania when the revolution wanted him as Prime Minister, Of course simply mixed with the Hungarian element.

When Szamuëli's red terror came they were also executing peasants who wouldn't accept the currency of the Commune -- there was a galloping inflation and they would only accept the pre-1918 gold forints. This was very similar to the Jacobin, Robespierre type of policy. Sant Just has this kind of rhetorical question: "What do they want who want neither terror nor virtue?" This was exactly characteristic of the Kun leadership: this subjective idealism which is very fundamental in all ~~utraleftist~~ infantilism. The Hungarian CP was really so weak in 1919. It had been established for only a few months and after the Commune the leaders all left the country. It was very difficult to establish who was really a party member and who was not and there were a great variety of factions. The Bela Kun line was really the politics of illusion and they really in the twenties, as Lukacs said, never have in mind Hungary, but only Moscow in deciding their line.

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The S-D party had a tradition from the 1890s onwards and had connections with the trade unions and so on. Landler was actually a trade union leader. In the Commune the S-Ds and the CP fused into one party called the Socialist Party. The People's Commissars were

## A

There is this amusing example of the Kun leadership's politics in Lukacs's Political Writings. On the borders of Hungary and Yugoslavia lay Baranya county which was disputed territory between the two countries. News appeared, which later turned out to be false, that a Republic had been set up in the county. The Party had nobody there and quickly learnt that the news about a Republic was false. But they nevertheless produced a resolution on it proclaiming a strongly anti-left line, saying there should be a kind of democratic unity against the fascist forces. And as Lukacs explains in his article ~~it~~ the resolution was not produced to guide anybody's activities in a Baranya Republic; it was written because the Kun leadership had recently been criticised for ultra-leftism in the second period of the Comintern and Kun wanted to prove that he had learned the lesson of the criticism and that he was not really ultra-left. And Lukacs goes on to say that the trouble with these people is that they do not concern themselves with the class struggle in Hungary at all; they only have in mind Moscow. And because that might be a rather scandalous thing to say he adds that what Kun forgets is that the comrades in Moscow are far too intelligent people to fall for such absurdities.

## B

In the mid-twenties there was an official ~~resolution~~ of the Comintern by the Comintern which declared the two errors to have been the unification with the Social Democrats and the failure to carry out a land reform. At the time the radicals were all arguing over the issue of land reform and most thought it would be an economic disaster. ~~That's the supposed Marxist position~~ ~~extremely backward~~. It is true that most of agriculture was ~~of Prince Esterhaszi~~ through which I escaped in 1956. ~~But this was~~ These estates were turned into state farms, on the Sovhoz model after the war and they generally did very well. Nevertheless it was incorrect to oppose land reform, it was a vast underestimation of the peasantry. The radicals worried about how the peasants would start growing sugar beet and this kind of thing. But after the 1945 land reform, to encourage sugar beet production the state issued leaflets about it and offered very advantageous deals for it to the peasants and by 1948-49 there was an overproduction of sugar beet. So the 1945 land reform was certainly not an economic disaster. At the very end of the Karolyi regime there was an attempted land reform but it consisted solely in Karolyi dividing up his own estate — a typical aristocratic gesture. The S-Ds were against it on the grounds of supposed Marxist orthodoxy and Kun also opposed it in the name of statisation of the land. This meant that both the bourgeois democratic phase of Karolyi and the subsequent soviet were ~~doomed~~ really doomed because they lacked any sufficient class base. In the 1930s, Imre Nagy, who was a typical agrarian socialist by make-up, devoted his activity in the 1930s in an institute of agrarian science in Moscow to writing articles arguing for a land reform. Lukacs actually defended against Bela Kun the Bolshevik line of giving land to the peasants on the basis that it wasn't the Bolsheviks who gave the land but the peasants who took it; it was really a peasant revolution so to speak, and as opposed to the Mensheviks the Bolsheviks didn't stand in its way. But in Hungary there was no such upsurge, the peasants didn't take the land. The bulk of the country was just handed over to the counter-revolution.

mostly education the from same important of the Party Daily, who was a very right-wing S-D man in the top leadership. He participated in all these negotiations between the White Government in Szeged, Bethlen in Vienna, and the Entente represented by George Russel Clark the secretary of Lord Curzon. Goromy says ~~that~~ in his memoirs that he went to see Clark and told him ~~that~~ what a militarist and Nationalist Horthy was and how foolish it would be for the Entente to put such a man into power. But very coolly Clark answered: "Horthy is a gentleman." This was in fact the mise en scene for the second world war; for putting such a government into power in Hungary produced a Balkanisation of Eastern Europe and a consequent power vacuum there which could not resist the German state. Hungary was important because it became a centre of disunity between these states. Of course they hoped to produce this anti-Bolshevik cordon sanitaire of Clemenceau but in fact they produced a vacuum which was no cordon against anything. Trianon did obviously go towards recognising the right of self-determination of nations and it was essential to liquidate the so-called 1,000 year old historical Hungary. But Trianon did not produce proper ethnic frontiers, putting large numbers of Hungarians into neighboring states on the basis of so-called economic considerations: namely since Slovakia and Transylvania are predominantly mountainous they should be given some strips of the fertile Hungarian plains. So the Hungarians did have a genuine national grievance there: some 3½ million Hungarians belonged to Rumania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Then the Horthy people who actually came to power thanks to the Rumanian intervention -- it was the Rumanian army which occupied Budapest for 6 weeks before handing it over to Horthy who entered on a white horse and made a speech about "this great sinful city from which his prayers fly to the little Hungarian peasant houses where true Hungarians and Christians remained alive".

So Horthy, who was put there by the entente then based his rule on this irridentist demagogy. According to the Goromy, this right wing social democrat, when the talks were going on Horthy asked: "Why aren't the Rumanians starting the offensive?" And Clark said: "Oh, there are some problems because they would also like another big area around Make and once they get it they will be able to start." Then Horthy replied immediately, "All right, they can have it, they can have it." This was just, of course, a circus!

Then in 1927 Hungary's great breaking out of isolation was ~~Horthy's~~ <sup>the</sup> friendship pact with Mussolini carried out by Count Bethlen, who organised the so-called consolidation between 1922 and 1931. So the whole line of development was a link up first with Mussolini then with Hitler based on this irridentism, supported by Mussolini and in England by Lord Rothermere ~~the~~ the great friend of Hungary, who presented an airplane to Horthy called 'Justice to Hungary' -- this kind of thing.

The Hungarian Party suffered the fate of the other Parties in Europe during the 1920s -- it became a reflection of the inter-Party struggle in Russia. The Comintern of course by the late 1920s just became a kind of special department for Stalinist foreign policy. You know when the third period started Tortsy said, "Now starts the third period of blunders of the Comintern." Whatever they did they did badly. Even when they ended the ultra-leftism of the Third Period they just produced a parody of the united front line with the 'Popular Front'.

In 1922 there came the consolidation in Hungary under Count Bethlen, a very clever reactionary who had been in Vienna during the Commune. This meant that the white commandos were disarmed and liquidated. The title of one of his first speeches, which could also have been the title of a Kadar speech in 1957, was "Against Right-wing and Left-wing Radicalism". Later a very strong ultra-right fascist demagogy came up against Bethlen, stemming from the White Commandos formed during the White terror. They denounced the alliance between landlordism and Jewish capital. Bethlen in 1923 produced a numerus clausus law, probably the first anti-semitic law in Europe, declaring that because the Jews were 5% of the total population they should occupy only 5% of the places in Universities, which would not of course affect the Jewish bourgeoisie.

-ie who always could have sufficient connections to place their children, quite apart from the fact that they could send their children abroad, so 5% was quite enough for them. This was just a demagogic gesture against towards the ultra-right.

The economic slump brought the rising of very big workers struggles in 1932 and the end of Bethlen's consolidation — he resigned in August 1932. And then you had 25 years of 'deconsolidation' in Hungary from 1931 to 1956, 'deconsolidation' in the sense that people never knew when they might be persecuted, even if they were completely non-political, for being of Jewish origin or Kulak origin etc. Consolidation meant an actual depoliticisation, with everyone who was not political being safe. Bethlen's slogan 'work and don't engage in politics' could also have been Kadar's slogan later. So from a purely formal point of view you can see this similarity — of course it would be absurd schematism to take the parallel further.

When Bethlen came to power he made the S-D Party, which was then banned, again legal. The majority of the leaders returned from Vienna and made a deal which was very typical for them, undertaking that in exchange for legality they would regard themselves merely as a party of the industrial working class and would not organise at all among the agrarian population: they thus openly undertook not to become a national party. In the countryside there was to be no secret ballot, but in Budapest and the four or five other main towns there was to be a secret ballot. Women could vote only if they had so many children or alternatively if they had the equivalent of GCE matriculation, and people had to have live for so long ~~xxx~~ in order to vote. But even with this discrimination against the working class they were always a few social democratic members of Parliament up to the German occupation in 1944. A very right-wing S-D party it was, very workerist, permanently saying that the Communists are all bourgeois intellectuals. And there was this leading article in the Party Daily saying that they offered their horny hands to his Excellency the Regent Admiral Horthy. The S-D's most solid base of support was in Budapest amongst the printers and lathe operators and so on — skilled workers as opposed to the unskilled and the huge agrarian proletariat. They were strongly against the nazification of the country in the 30s and 40s and were at least a democratic force. But in Hungary in the 1930s the alternatives appeared to be between an ultra-reactionary semi-fascist conservatism and the ultra-right thoroughly fascist social demagogy which eventually crystallised as the ~~Erocos~~ Party completely modelling themselves on the ~~nazis~~ Nazis with a fundament of anti-Semitic demagogy, along with some anti-landlord demagogy which also attacked the Catholic Church, the biggest landlord in the country. And it was precisely in the ~~xxx~~ areas with many poor peasants where the Erocos Party had a spectacular success in the 1939 elections, bringing 49 members into Parliament. Consequently, with very great social ~~xxx~~ discontent existing in the country and with the CP being banned and not being successful, all the discontent was channeled into the ultra-right. This channelling towards fascism was thus helped by the inadequacy of the radical left and by the very strong nationalism in relation to which the Trianon Treaty was important. Also the white commandos carrying on for years and years with the whole population terrified of them.

Peter: How does the Official CP history present the role of the CP in the inter-war period after the Commune and how does it tackle the disbandment of the Party by the Comintern, which was a very unusual event?

Well, on the disbandment there was a complete silence about it, apart from the revelations during the History debate at the Petofi circle in the summer of 1956. It was in 1936 that the Party leaders were arrested in Russia and purged. The Party ~~xxx~~ itself was suspended for about a year and then reformed on the Popular Front line.

Before I left Hungary in 1956 I didn't read very much on Party History. But there was a very funny thing: they managed to write huge articles on the Commune without mentioning Bela Kun's Name! Rakosi was ~~xxx~~ Deputy People's Commissar for Trade — the Commissar was Landler — and I'm sure that Rakosi's talents were quite up to the job. But he was always emphasised as a leader. Kun was an non-person up to 1956. It was the Kadar regime which published selected writings of Bela Kun, Tibor Szamuely and others. There was a great deal of rhetoric about the heroic struggle of the Party against the Horthy regime and much was made of Szabai and Hurst who were hanged, I think in 1932, and there was a great deal on the Party's activity at the time of the second world war when there was a nominal resistance. The party actually renamed itself the Peace Party in 1943 and produced leaflets for the ending of the war and so on. But it was very much presented as a hero cult. For

example there was Charl Vary who was arrested in 1944 at the time of the German occupation and died resisting the police who came to arrest him. But of course I am not familiar with how these things are presented under the Kadar regime, a 19 year consolidation against left and right radicalism and so on. Some people told me there have been some quite serious and interesting things published on Party history since 1956. There is that Institute for Working Class History which also existed in the Stalin period.

There was quite a strong participation by the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia in the Czechoslovak CP in the inter-war years and the Czechoslovak CP, which was a mass party did recognise the rights of the national minorities in the country, including the Hungarians. So in fact, the publications of the Communist and bourgeois radical emigres in Vienna were very much directed towards the Hungarian Community in Czechoslovakia. But Hungarians in Czechoslovakia would join the Czechoslovak CP not the Hungarian Party.

Adam: I have recently received some books and among them one is by Hernad, who always writes the scripts for Jancso's films. Now at the moment he is dealing with the history of the Communist Party from the thirties onwards. He is not, of course, a professional historian but it is a very interesting book. Actually I know someone who was in agitprop in the thirties and who left Hungary in 1937 and who might be interesting. He joined the Trotskyist movement for a short while.

Peter: Well, shall we go on to the war then? First were there any repercussions of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on the Hungarian Party?

Well, of course, Szanto, who was the Popular Front leader of the Party from 1937 to 1940 was replaced by Rakosi who was exchanged for the flags at this time. The Party's serious work really started after Hungary joined the war a few days after the June 1941 attack on the USSR. The leader of the Party was Rajk inside the country. There were lots of little groups which were all liquidated after the war. They were all called Trotskyist but this does not necessarily mean that they were Trotskyist. For example, what's the name of that fellow? I can't remember but I had friends who were members of his group. It's very funny how between 1945 and 1948 during the coalition period there was a great deal of freedom of expression for the far right -- not the Fascists but Mindsenty and people like him -- not to speak of the liberals and social democrats, yet at the same time all these communist leaders of groups which were active in the 1930s and so on were arrested and given 15 years hard labour and sentences of this sort. They were called, of course, Trotskyists and police agents. But some were taken over and brought into the Party. Rajk, who fought in the Spanish civil war and was then interned by the French before being able to return to Hungary, was the leader of the Party that was recognised as the official group. Kadar was another of the leaders inside the country during the war. The underground Party's true activity during the war consisted of some symbolic sabotage and the distribution of leaflets but nothing much more.

...co-operation with some social democrats ~~and the small holders were cooperating~~ and after liberation the parties that were actually members of this National Democratic front were the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party ~~and~~, the Small Holders Party and the National Peasants Party. The National Peasants Party was a ~~party~~ small party of Hungarian socialist intellectuals, writers and so on. The Small Holders party was a party of peasant base, kulak and middle peasants, an anti-German Party. It was formed in the early 1930s as a small party.

After the liberation in the free elections of Autumn 1945, the absolute majority was won by the small holders party, because the condition of the allied ~~was~~ control commission whose chairman was Marshal Voroshilov that in all these Peoples Democracies..... in only two countries, Czechoslovakia and Hungary there were free elections. ~~In~~ Rumania and Bulgaria were very quickly Stalinised: the elections there were already on a single candidate basis -- this took place in Hungary only in ~~1949~~ May 1949. The reason for this rapid development in Bulgaria and Rumania was the agreement that they would be a Soviet Sphere of influence whereas in Hungary and Yugoslavia, according to these little pieces of paper which Churchill and Stalin exchanged, it was to be 50-50. Of course in Yugoslavia they couldn't intervene at all because it was after all internal forces which decided the thing and not Stalin and Churchill. In Hungary it was 50-50. Of course Czechoslovakia wasn't a defeated country at all so it was different. But as for Rumania and Bulgaria they were to be swallowed up. This was actually the phrase used by Molotov when he was discussing with Tito or Kardelj -- I can't remember which. He said, Albania you can swallow up. And Tito or Kardelj -- who ever it was said 'Comrade Molotov, the liberation was carried out in solidarity with the Albanian Comrades.' And Molotov replied "same thing, isn't it?"

Branka: what resistance there was in Hungary during the war was organised by the CP, was it?

Yes, by the CP, but there was no real resistance. In point of fact among the Slovak partisans in Slovakia,... When I was in the ~~Military~~ army ~~was~~ in the Ministry of Defence as Russian translator there were quite a few officers, several I knew, who were partisans in Slovakia in the Tatra Mountains and so on. But in Hungary ~~the experience is that~~ ~~only a partial explanation~~ there was not even the equivalent of the French or Danish resistance, leave alone the Yugoslav or Albanian,

The fate of Czechoslovakia and Hungary was, in my view left open by the Russians, depending on how the relation with America developed, and it was really contingent on this great power relationship: the Stalinisation of Hungary and Czechoslovakia was only decided by the development of the Cold War: that is to say by American policy because it was clearly mainly responsible for the development ~~of~~ of the Cold War in the way it developed. The fact that there were not free elections in Poland is another question because Poland was a very special case: considering that in Poland, as opposed to Yugoslavia the resistance was fundamentally the right-wing.

But in Hungary the salami tactic which Rakosi spoke about, the gradual liquidation of the coalition partners started only after early 1947, when the Italian and French Communist Parties were excluded from the Governments. But, as I said, the condition of the Control Commission was that the coalition was to be kept up after the elections whatever the results were. The other condition of the Commission was that in the 1945 elections only these resistance, these Popular Front parties could run. As a consequence of this the Small Holders Party, originally a small party which was the most right-wing party in the popular front, got 56% of all votes; the CP got 17%, the S-d got 17% and the National Peasants Party which was mainly agrarian socialists and was a member of the left bloc with the CP and the S-D P got 8%. So the CP and S-d together got 34%. The left bloc was actually formed in 1947.

The CP's policy between 1945 and 1947 was one of complete opposition even to mentioning the word socialism: it was regarded as a left deviation or Trotskyism to mention the word socialism. So funny enough it was a member of the National Peasant Party who was writing and complaining about this, that the word socialism somehow mustn't be mentioned. And the S-D were also ~~talking~~ talking about it. For the CP, -- Revai wrote about this -- People's Democracy was a plebian form of bourgeois democracy. But at the same time one cannot say that there were no anti-capitalist measures, because quite apart from the

fact that very important parts of industry became state owned in 1945 -- through the simple fact, for example, that all German property came to be state owned. The biggest concentration of industry, the Cheppel works, which employed about 30,000 workers, had been handed over to the Germans in 1944. After the German occupation in March 1944 all German property was to be nationalised. And the Germans wanted this Chappel works, which was most important from the point of view of war production to be German owned so they arrested this Carina and offered them the deal that they would fly them to Lisbon if they would sign the works over to the Herman Georing Werke, which they did because as Korin explained it was in Hungarian national interests since they had been assured that the works would be handed over to the best German experts rather than to the Hungarian Fascists and other ~~xxx~~ common Hungarians. So while the mass of Jews were being deported to Germany, these 72 Jewish capitalists were flown by the Germans to Lisbon. And ~~according to~~ <sup>at the back of</sup> a book which was published in the 1960s on Hungary, there is an article by the Lisbon correspondent of the Times which says that the customs officials at Lisbon airport told him that that never in their lives had they seen so much jewellery together. And then of course, the 72 proceeded to the United States afterwards.

So the Cheppel works, the Manfred Weisman works, which was remamed in Stalinist times the Matyas Rakosi works, these works were nationalised property from 1945 onwards. And there was also from 1946 the nationalisation of the big banks and nationalisation of the mines. So certainly in this coalition period when socialism wasn't mentioned one cannot say that some anti-capitalist measures were not taken.

Peter: Well, what about the Salami tactics and the subsequent move towards the purges?

Yes, well the salami tactics were fundamentally the following: the forty five elections produced this huge smallholders party. Before the August 1947 elections there was a policy of permanent pressure on the smallholders to expell its right-wing, and upon the social democrats also to expell their right-wing. Now whenever a new bunch of right-wingers was expelled from these parties they always formed a new party. So consequently there were several right-wing parties formed. These right-wing parties all participated in the 1947 elections. There were thus four or five parties in 1947 which were not part of the popular front, called the independence front. Now in the 1947 elections 40% of the vote went to these right-wing parties and 60 % went to the independence front and the CP then became the biggest party of this 60%: the CP got 22%, the Smallholders Party 15%, and the S-Ds got something like 15%; so the biggest single party came to be the CP.

While nobody ever suggested that there was anything incorrect about the 1945 elections, in 1947 there was some attempt to bring in an element of swindles, if you like, but I don't think it was as significant as it was made out to be. I know because I was myself distributing these papers for the CP to people who went to vote; these were these pieces of paper called popularly 'blue papers' with which somebody who was away from his residence could vote. These were issued by the Ministry of the Interior and Rajk was the Minister of Interior; consequently, in the CP organisation where I was we had a great many of them; and I was only 16 and too young to vote so I spent all the morning just sitting and the comrades came and I was giving them the blue papers and then in the afternoon I was taken down in a chauffeur driven car to these little polling stations, where there was a committee composed of all the parties and in some places they refused to accept the blue cards; and so I and others went round with papers signed by the Minister of the Interior ~~or~~ Rajk telling the committees that it was strictly illegal not to accept the blue papers and that it had come to his notice that in some places there were some problems about it. And then it would be handed over to the President of the Committee and he would read it out and then these members of the right wing parties would say: "Oh! We might as well go home; this is a farce, this is no election. What is this?" And that kind of thing ~~and~~. But of course they didn't go home.

This probably meant a few % difference but not terribly much; ~~the~~ fact the CP got 22% instead of 17% as it got in 1945 was certainly not due to the blue papers, which were not terribly important. It was just a little amusement. Somewhere in the 1950s I read that in fact it was Rajk's subversive activities.

I remember after 1945 I was still at school and the education system was entirely in the hands of the right-wing, so that I was expelled and so on. I remember the CP daily saying that the majority of the Hungarians were religious and the Hungarian Party is the Party of the people so consequently we are friends and not enemies of religion;

CP controlled and later on the AVO became sometime later, in 1949 or 50 a separate organisation when there were 3 armed forces in the country -- the army, the police and the AVO -- the political police. But before the 1947 elections it was just the police department, and through this the 1947 arrests took place. When the 1947 elections were over, then of course, gradually these right-wing ~~forces~~ parties were ~~xxxx~~ liquidated. The most right-wing of them was liquidated instantly. Even though they got something like 13 or 14% of the votes, it was discovered that the whole thing was illegal, because you had to get about 5,000 signatures in order for your party to run and this party, the Hungarian Independence Party was formed~~x~~ at the last minute and it was discovered that some of its five thousand signatures were forged -- non-existent persons: so they were expelled from Parliament in almost no time. The whole thing actually started in early 1947 when a conspiracy was discovered within the right-wing of the Smallholders' Party: it was actually a discussion group and its idea was that after the Russians withdraw from the country the Communists would be thrown out of the coalition-- these were the day-dreams of these people; they of course, as a conspiracy got arrested. And then in the summer of 1947 it came out that the Prime Minister, the leader~~x~~ of the Smallholders' Party was also part of the conspiracy. At that time he was just in Switzerland and Rakosi rang him up and in exchange for him not making any fuss he was sent all his things -- he was a kulak and probably remained as a kulak in the United States. And then ~~in~~ Spring 1948 was a very important turning point of course with the unification of the two parties, the S-Ds and the CP; then in December 1948 there was another turning point with the arrest of Mintsenty, another real reactionary with similar daydreams about throwing out the Communists after a peace treaty was signed allowing for the withdrawal of Russian troops. This was of course day dreaming; while the formal Russian occupation ended in 1947, after that time Soviet troops remained formally in order to maintain links with the Russian troops in the Soviet zone of Austria. When in 1954 or 1955 -- I can't remember the exact date -- the Austrian Treaty was signed, at exactly the same time the Warsaw Pact was signed thus enabling Russian troops to remain in Hungary on the basis of the Warsaw Pact thereafter.

During 1947 and especially 1948 Mintsenty issued a weekly pastoral letter against what became a kind of Kulturkampf -- the nationalisation of church schools: in Hungary more than 50% of schools were church run and 70% of~~x~~ the population was Catholic. The campaign against clerical reaction was ~~xxxx~~ allowed to develop in 1948 and in that year also Minsenty was arrested. Later a Government Yellow Book was published with facsimiles of many of Minsenty's letters, and these show that it was absolutely incorrect to compare his arrest with the later purge trials; because the fundamental feature of the purge trails in Moscow and the later trials of Rajk, Slansky and Kostov was that there was not a single piece of paper evidence: everything~~x~~ was the confession of the accused. But in the case of Minsenty they produced a book with a great many facsimiles which of course did not amount to terribly much, but certainly there were copies of letters, quite amusing things like the letter of the American Ambassador to Minsenty that he very much appreciate and sympathises with Minsenty's fears about Communist domination of Hungary, but unfortunately it is against the principles of United States foreign policy to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries! This is against the tradition and the principle of United States policy~~xx~~! And things like his letter to Cardinal Spellman that he should impress it upon the American Government that the Hungarian Holy culture was still not returned to Hungary. He became Archbishop of Eskergom in September 1945. Actually, I wrote the first attack on him in the press. I was fourteen then. It was in the CP daily and I still call him Bishop of Vesplem, and in the same number there is the news that he is made Archbishop of Eskergom. It was September 1945. He was just protesting at that time about the banning of some Catholic Peasant Youth organisation at that time. He also protested against the land reform. When the Prime Minister sent him his congratulations on becoming Archbishop, and thereby Primate, Minsenty wrote back that the ~~country's first sa....., Grand seigneur with flag, is to serve his country. The feudal barons were called ....., grand seigneur with flag meaning that they had their own flag and army and the country's first grand seigneur with flag was the Primate. And he imagined in September 1945 that he was still in the middle ages and that he was still the first ....., grand seigneur with flag.~~

Branka: When the Russian troops entered Hungary, who among the leaders of the CP was in the country?

Very Few. Rajk, for example, was deported in Germany. He had been arrested. Funnily enough



his brother. Rajk, according to the Rajk trial was a police agent from the very beginning. He was a student when in 1932 he was first arrested; he was then studying French at Budapest University. He was the leader of a group of communist students who were arrested. According to the Rajk trial that is when he signed up. He got away with a very light sentence -- six months or something -- because it was only a student group. He then left for Paris and fought in the civil war in Spain. Then he managed to return in 1940 from France where in 1939 he had been interned after the Spanish collapse. In Hungary in 1940 he became the leader of the underground party and he was then arrested in 1944. Now somehow his brother was a leading Erocas, the Hungarian Nazi Party. After the Germans had occupied the country in March 1944, in the Autumn the Erocas took over and Rajk's brother came to be a deputy Minister in the Erocas Government. And in point of fact it came out in the official rehabilitation of Rajk, which was read out in all party organisations in 1956, though there was nothing at the time in the press about it, that the representatives of the underground parties went to see Rajk's brother and informed him that Rajk had been arrested and appealed to him to save him from execution. This the brother promised to do and in consequence instead of being executed he was just taken to Mauthausen or somewhere, and survived and returned in 1945. He then very soon became Minister of Interior, and maintained this post up till 1948.

To what extent was there any mobilisation of the working class by the CP during 1947-48?

There were big demonstrations and very often they were more radical than the official marshalls wanted; they were going round and saying, "No, Comrades. This is a Trotskyist provocation" and so on. I remember in the 1945 elections when the Smallholders got 56% and we got only 17%, and there was a huge demonstration, very big it was, and we started shouting "We didn't win at the elections; we will win at the barricades!" Then of course immediately these Marshalls rushed around saying "Comrades this is a Trotskyist provocation!" But these were mainly workers chanting the slogans. In point of fact the results of the Greater Budapest elections in 1945 gave an absolute majority for the Communists and Social Democrats, but considerably more social democrats than Communists. Somthing like 30% S-Ds and 23% Communists.

Peter: Was there a great ferment in the working class in Budapest, a revolutionary atmosphere at this time?

Yes, I remember after the 1947 elections there was a meeting in one of the working class districts of Budapest, there were 22 districts altogether in the city. And in this district Revai was to speak so I went there. And everybody was very downcast because the ultra-right parties had done very well and the Communists had got only 22%. And I remember how Revai came and said they were excellent results; the Communists were now the biggest single party and the reactionaries were fragmented.

But yes there was a ferment, but everything nevertheless was bureaucratically controlled from above. The demonstrations were a very significant background to events but in point of fact the pace and course of events was decided from above. There was this completely sudden change from a very right-wing line to a so-called very left-wing one. I remember I was always having arguments when I was writing for the Party daily -- I was always called a deviationist -- and everything had to be toned down in the early period. Then everything was completely reversed overnight. The working class basis was obviously completely eroded in 1950. **Actually this**

coincided with my being drafted into the army a few weeks after the first norm alteration. The production norms were altered periodically. No enemy of socialism could have invented the procedure in a more perfect manner. The Hungarian working class had the best living standards it had ever had in 1948-49 and it was never better afterwards at least until 1956. Then in 1950 it started with Rakosi's article, declaring that we must not ~~kill~~ the hen which lays the golden eggs; and we must not eat up our future. Then the attack on living standards started in the Autumn of 1950 with an immense number of so-called workers' letters being published in the Party Daily. These declared that, what with technological advance, <sup>and everything</sup> our norms are ridiculously low, and we workers and immensely dissatisfied with this and we demand higher piece-work norms! Are present norms do not correspond to reality any longer, ~~waxhaxzxbaxomaxzaxzstix~~ they have become unrealistic! And after these weeks and weeks of working class letters demanding lower living standards, the Party leadership graciously satisfied their demands!

Actually I went into the army just a few weeks after this and the unit to which I was attached was ~~the~~ 90% made up of workers from Chepell, the working class district par excellence. All who were not of Chepell were Communist Party members -- it was a kind of special unit. Two things were important at this time: first this attack on the living standards and secondly simultaneously the Korean War. And so people believed, -- I never believed it myself but people did believe -- that the third world war was imminent. We had to go about 100 kilometres from Budapest and it took about 8 or 10 hours to get there. And in the meantime people spoke. Up till then I had of course been among working class communists, but these were twenty year old working class boys, and the whole thing was a complete demoralisation. It is obvious that if they had attacked the living standards of the workers in a <sup>straightforward</sup> way it would have been very much resented by the workers but I am positive that it was much more resented for having been done in that particular manner. Simultaneously there was the Korean war and the very great stepping up of the anti-Yugoslav campaign. Still in 1949 I remember the first polemics written by Revai were called 'answer to Comrade Djilas'. But with the Rajk trial and 1950 the Yugoslavs were the chained dog of imperialism: the cartoons were of Tito as a dog held on a chain by Uncle Sam. Tito was the vanguard, the spearhead of the imperialists.

Branka: Can we go back to 1945 and look at the composition of the cadres of the Party at that time?

Well, I always think that Lukacs's position on the resistance was the correct one: that it didn't really exist. Apart from the pop leaders, the Party's primitive accumulation of functionaries took place in 1945. For example the people now coming to the top of the party in the recent changes came in in 1945. Ascal as a matter of fact did have a little bit of a connection with the resistance Party. He was acting I think in the Goldmark Hall. Jews, with the exception of Mikhail Sekai who was the greatest Hungarian singer, were ousted from the Opera House in 1941 or 1942. So they organised a Jewish theatre called the Goldmark Hall, because there was a Jewish composer called Goldmark

and so Acsel may have had some connection with the underground party. But most of the people in the top leadership today, if you look at the Hungarian Who's Who you will see that it says they were proletarians, or agrarian proletarians who joined the Party in 1945. And then they will have spent 20 years, from about 48-49 as local county Party secretaries, Turkish county pashas as there have been for centuries; actually I believe there is even hunting which is not a kind of must for these functionaries and it became the task of these local functionaries to completely take upon themselves the role of the gentry. The actual top leadership came from Moscow: Rakosi, Gero, Farkas, Imre Nagy, Revai, Lukacs, Santo and many writers and all those who had survived the purges of the 30s. The liberation of Hungary took place between October 1944 and the 4th April 1945, which is now a National Holiday. October 15th Horthy made his radio speech offering unconditional surrender. The whole army leadership were German stooges, very strongly fascist and despite Horthy's illusions they were not at all loyal to him; they were loyal to the Germans and just frantically anti-Communist. The fantastically efficient organiser who had rescued Mussolini in Italy and who later organised the manoeuvre in the Ardennes, with German tanks disguised as American tanks -- he was set to Budapest to organise the anti-Horthy coup and on the 15th October the Erocas Party came into power and Horthy was taken to Germany. And in late December 1944 a Provisional<sup>democratic</sup> Government was set up<sup>Debercen</sup> in the liberated area in Eastern Hungary. The Prime Minister was a fraak General who did actually follow Horthy's instructions: his troops were at the front so he just took them over to the other side and linked up with the Russians. The Provisional government declared war on Germany. The four Parties in the Front were represented in the Government and in December-January the majority of the Communists returned from Moscow. In the first government Imre Nagy was minister for Agrarian Affairs. He had spent the thirties writing about the problem of land reform; many of the other had been Comintern Agents, like Farkas and so on. Rajk returned later, from German deportation in Spring 1945 or Summer 1945. Where Kadar was at that time I don't know. The leadership did not give many jobs to the underground party leaders: it was quite clearly the Moscow leadership in command. Kadar was actually for some years after liberation the Party secretary for Budapest; Rajk was between 1946 and 1948 Minister of the Interior; then in 1948, as a first step towards his liquidation he was made foreign minister, until his arrest in the summer of 1949. Then in 1948 Kadar succeeded Rajk as Minister of Interior and he was the one who apparently talked to Rajk in prison.

In the 50s when the special commission was formed to investigate the Rajk affair, in order to compromise Kadar, Rakaosi ordered these tapes to be played in front of the commission: in them Kadar visits Rajk in prison and tells him that in the event that he confesses he will be taken to Russia and given some job there and the trial would be just a formality.

I suppose the AVO people must have learnt from Koestler, because I doubt that in Russia they had these kinds of methods. They explained that he wouldn't actually be executed, but he owed this to the party because of the errors he made. It's true that he was head of the Hungarian-Yugoslav Friendship Association; already as leader of the resistance he had some connections, because in point of fact some contact did exist between Tito and the Hungarian resistance: messages were sent to and from about Hungarian army movements and troop movements generally and so on, so Rajk did have connections with the Yugoslavs.

Also there were these people's colleges which were formed already in the Second World War, which were of a kind of populist, Narodnik type -- mostly students of peasant origin. Even though there might have been some slight right-wing narodnik element in them, after 1945 the people's colleges became really a mass movement on a left-wing populist basis and with Marxists already in these too. And Rajk was regularly visiting these people's colleges. In point of fact he was a very popular figure: his whole style was more to the liking of these radicals and People's colleges youth: he was not a kind of bureaucratic type of leader.

The Moscow emigration came to be a very efficient mutual protection group, because obviously if anybody of the Moscow emigration had been arrested that could have led to the arrest of others. Now obviously these purges were forced on the Hungarian Party by the MVD, the Russians. The aim was to organise these Anti-Tito trials so as to kill, even before it could come about, the germ of any potentiality of national communism. So they had to choose a victim.

Now some say that they had Revai in mind -- he was after all the ideologist of People's Democracy and so on. And then there was Imre Nagy who very courageously in 1949 when the Politburo decided on collectivisation, which was to be a forced collectivisation, he actually did make a speech against it. He said that the peasants were only beginning to learn how to manage the land and in such circumstances collectivisation should be a very slow process, and moreover not necessarily collective farms but different forms of co-operatives and experimental groupings. Not only was he not arrested, but he was merely ousted from the Party leadership and was given a figurehead job: the Presidency of Parliament. Then in 1953 summer he was made Prime Minister precisely on the basis of his 49 opposition to collectivisation.

But at the same time all the leaders of the underground party were arrested. The first one was Rajk, with Kadar becoming Minister of the Interior, then he was arrested. Then his follower was again a former underground Communist and before he was arrested he shot his whole family and himself. So there was a particularly large % among those arrested of people from the underground leadership and also from those who were in Spain. But I don't know of any significant case of anybody from the Moscow emigration being arrested.

So it was partly to suppress any potential nationalist mood but it was also to produce a terror atmosphere in the country and particularly in the Party, and to produce an international propaganda too. For after all just as in the Moscow trials it was always emphasised that the true culprit, the true criminal was of course Trotsky. So in the Kostov trial in Bulgaria and the Rajk trial it was always emphasised that the true criminal was Tito, the Gestapo agent.

BRANKA: Rajk was a party leader from 1919?

No he was much younger than that. He was an undergraduate in 1931 or 1932 when he was arrested. He was the leader of a Communist student group. He was much younger than all the rest. The others had been hard-boiled Comintern agents for a very long time. Actually, Lukacs told me a story on Farkas, for example, when there was the evacuation from Moscow when the Germans were approaching during the war. Well, Lukacs and Johannes Erbecker, a German writer, were getting on the train of the German writers. But by mistake they got on the Comintern train, where the person in charge was Farkas. He immediately started to scream and go hysterical and threw them off the train, horrified that persons who did not belong to the Comintern centre should get on the Comintern train.

Branka: But were there any signs of pro-Titoist currents at the end of the war?

Well, of course, it would have been logical for such currents to arise in the late forties. Also there was a kind of cultural nationalism at the end of the war, which ironically contributed to 1956. Just as Russian history was re-written, with everything appearing to be progressive and so on, so just in the same way Hungarian history was re-written and it was really carried out in a very nationalist spirit.

I think one important thing to remember is that if you have such a statist so-called socialism, then what other ideology could it logically have but nationalism? You know the 'All people's state' at the 21st Congress, the last Congress in Stalin's life-time, it was actually officially declared that it was not any longer the dictatorship of the proletariat but a 'people's state'. And one can very well see that where a Communist Party came to form a government through a development of internal forces, as China, Yugoslavia and Albania, they very soon came into conflict with Russia: the Russian nationalism being countered by an anti-Russian nationalism.

Peter: Could I just return to the trials: I would have thought that the trials were a political necessity for Moscow, not so much in relation to Hungary, but to first of all the world communist movement, and secondly in relation to a country like Czechoslovakia and possibly also Poland. In Czechoslovakia, for example, you did not have hordes of Comintern agents running the Party. Gottwald did show, I would have thought, much more of an inclination towards Titoism; and there was also much more of a move in that direction in Poland with ~~Stalin~~ Gomulka, who, I would have thought, posed a very dangerous problem for Moscow in the late forties.

Yes, you are right there. Of course, Slansky was a bit different in that it was later and it wasn't so much aimed at Yugoslavia. But it was obviously a warning in general, and also a kind of terror internally, declaring the nationalist deviations as the main danger. Of course, it might have been that Rakosi anticipated Moscow, it would have been quite ~~shrewd~~ of him to have done so, but of course there was also the Kostov trial and the others followed soon later.

Peter: Yes and also with Czechoslovakia we know that it was both Rakosi and the Russians who pushed Gottwald into the trials; they were both providing lists of people who should be dealt with.

Actually Bela <sup>Szász</sup> ~~Horák~~, who was one of the people actually accused in the Rajk trial, explains in his book that what they did was that they arrested Communist intellectuals who had been

in the West during the second world war, like Bela ~~Rost~~<sup>Szász</sup> (?) who was in Argentina and these wretches like .....that social democrat who was in London in the BBC, and this sort of thing. And they were to be witnesses: their role in the trial was to be the agents maintaining the connections between British intelligence and Rajk and the French Deuxieme Bureau and so forth. And he explains in his book how the whole trial was organised by a leading Russian MVD man -- he himself spoke to him -- who was present and behind the whole thing. But at the same time it would have been a very important thing for Rakosi to have it happen under his own auspices, so as to ensure for example that the Moscow emigration was saved.

But I think fundamentally that what you said was quite correct, that it was inevitable, that it was a political necessity, because these were required to produce a mis en scene of a terror atmosphere.

Adam: the decline in living standards was another thing wasn't it: the decline in living standards could be explained in a way by the trials, using them to provide a scapegoat.

There was an actually argument in the leadership. This is shown for example by the fact that in 1953 Imre Nagy's speech against the collectivisation campaign was printed. And it is again supposed to be a fact that, for example, Revai voted against the execution of Rajk -- the politburo took a vote on the question.

It is interesting to note how exactly they copied the Moscow trials. For example, according to the Moscow trials the Trotsky-Bukharin group in 1918 in the Brest ~~era wanted to kill~~ ~~Lenin~~ period when they wanted to arrest Lenin, they wanted to kill Lenin, Sverdlov and Stalin, these three people. So it is significant that Lenin, Sverdlov and Stalin were to be killed. Now according to the Rajk trial, Rakosi, Gero and Farkas were to be killed. Now knowing the Short Course myself in 1949 and knowing therefore about the three who were to have been killed, I immediately noticed that Revai was not among the three -- so these three were clearly singled out as the top leaders. Perhaps Revai was being punished for voting against Rajk's execution.

Peter: can I just go back and ask one question about the kind of atmosphere in the Hungarian Party emigration in Moscow during the 1930s -- I don't know if you got a flavour of this from Lukacs.

At the time of the purges there were very few people who were never arrested. Lukacs, for example was arrested for a short time. I mean Ruden<sup>as</sup> attacked him in the 1920s and again in 1950, actually this is something which is very important from the point of view of the Stalinisation of culture. So a great many people were arrested for a short period. Lukacs was arrested, then the German Communist writers intervened with Dimitrov, Dimitrov intervened with Stalin and that's how he was freed. And a great many people were also arrested for a short time; and there was hardly anybody who didn't have friends and contacts who were arrested, or relatives who were arrested. And the terror atmosphere was obviously felt very intensively. But, you know, the question was: to what extent they believed, or convinced themselves that they believed that these were just sort of excesses engineered by enemy agents. As you know there was this Spring 1939 18th Party Congress, when Zhdanov denounced Yezhov and the purges and they discussed actually how the purges happened. They explained how these covert enemy agents arrest first one then another honest bolshevik, and then all the other honest Bolsheviki who were walking with them down the street. This was all said at the Spring 1939 Party congress by Zhdanov. And a Hungarian Communist who was in a concentration camp from 1936 to 54 -- 18 years -- told me he was a young boy at the time of the Commune and then he went to Russia and worked in the Commissariat of Education till he was arrested. Well, he told me that when they heard Zhdanov's speech on the radio in the concentration camp they thought that in a few weeks they would all be free. Lukacs told me that the Short Course had a first edition in 1938 and it had Yezhov in it, referred to as 'our Marat' -- presumably Stalin was Robespierre!

So at this time there was a great amount of fear and demoralisation. What else could happen? I remember Lukacs told me in 1955 that at that time he believed that Rajk was an agent. I

think that what he must have meant was that in 1949 he somehow believed I don't know exactly what about Rajk, but he believed in the Rajk trial. Perhaps he believed not that Rajk was an agent but that he was genuinely a Titoist. And of course he believed that the basic criterion of Communism was the relationship with the USSR -- that this was a necessity because of the danger from the imperialist effort.

A very important background to 1956 was the permanent parallel business going on: on the one hand the Party press permanently repeating the same cliché, that the imperialist camp was ready to jump in at the first opportunity to produce a world war and crush the socialist countries; and at the same time the BBC and Voice of America and Radio Free Europe permanently speaking of liberty and the liberation of the enslaved peoples. So consequently the population, which got information only through these two sources, so they got the same story from diametrically opposed viewpoints. In 1956 this was an important factor, by the way: there was this genuine feeling that America would help.

Although of course, America had been the primary factor in starting the cold war, at the same time it was very consciously used by the Stalinist leadership to reconsolidate Stalinism after the second world war; and just as the anti-communist campaign in the west was used to externalise the internal contradictions by pointing to the threat of world communism trying to swallow up the free world; at the same time the same thing was done there by pointing to the imperialist menace, and to very much exaggerate the danger of war. And this is what Lukacs himself obviously believed -- the very great danger of war and the consequent need to liquidate any potential fifth column.

There is obviously now a contradiction about the liquidation of the cold war,

I think that the real problem lies with the left, because obviously Russia is trying to shift the thing more and more against China and China more and more against Russia. But as far as the different systems are concerned, for many reasons, economic reasons, trade and so on they want a thaw. But that leads to the problem: where is the enemy? If the cold war disintegrates, where can we find the enemy to hold the whole thing together? More particularly with the Vietnam war ending this poses a very real problem about where is the enemy par excellence. It is not enough to have this or that threat. This is what Karl Schmidt, the chief legal ideologist of Nazism, explains in his book of 1939 in which he says that (the book is called the Division of the World into Spheres of Influence), by forbidding intervention to the powers alien to the 'life-space'; the most important thing for any state is to have an existential enemy, and it is a liberal misconception to believe that a mere economic crisis will do the trick, for people cannot be expected to die for mere economic reasons; it's important that the enemy be an existential enemy. And from a Nazi point of view this existential enemy was first of all the Jews and then secondly the Slavs; and Schmidt also explains how it must be simple. Now I think it's obvious that China and Russia are very much interested in making each other into the existential enemy as such. And I think that for the advanced capitalist countries it's a real problem, how to find such a simple, existential enemy. Communism has been this. It cannot be simply terrorism: it's not as serious as that.

Branka: the Arabs?

No, no: they have to be integrated: the oil-rich countries obviously have to be integrated into the system.

Fundamentally what prepared this 1956 uprising in Hungary was the three year period from 1953 to 1956. During this period there were these permanent ups and downs in Hungary -- far more than anywhere else in Eastern Europe: Hungary was at one moment the vanguard of destalinisation, and at another moment the bulwark of Stalinism. And from this point of view, what I was talking about before is relevant, namely the double origin of the Hungarian Communist Party, very schematically speaking. On the one hand, far more than any of the other East European Parties its leaders were Comintern apparatchiki par excellence. I think I mentioned before that Trotsky in 1929 said that it was three Hungarian puppets of Stalin who were leading the Comintern. And on the other hand, Hungary was the only party -- I asked Lukacs about it and he agreed that this was so at least as far as non-third world parties was concerned -- which on the basis of Lenin's 1905 articles on the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants, put forward

the slogan of ~~an~~ workers and peasants revolutionary government, that is to say transitional demands against ~~Hor~~thy fascism against the line of the second soviet republic which insisted on the historical inevitability of polarisation between socialism and fascism, and which regarded this both as inevitable and desirable. In 1936 the Hungarian party was actually disbanded by the comintern and for about a year it didn't exist at all. Then the popular front line, which came to be represented strongly by theoreticians like Lukacs and Revai more than anyone else. This tension was clearly there very strongly in 1949 when the decision was made for collectivisation, Imre Nagy did make a speech in the Central Committee.

The other problem was that this/<sup>dogmatic</sup>insistence upon imitating the Soviet <sup>development</sup>~~idea~~ in every respect was particularly unsuitable for Hungarian conditions. Consider for example that Hungary has very little good quality coal; there is only one mine around Pec which produces black coal, otherwise the coal is second rate. And iron ore is non-existent in present Hungary. So the idea for example of Stalinvarosz, which Gero said wasn't just a city but a symbol of I almost said sublimation, of the socialist formation; and it was to work with coal and iron ore imported from Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany by rail; and considering that this was to be a city producing steel out of iron ore, this was not going to be a very economic proposition. People generally thought that it would be a permanent deficit. And party functionaries usually spoke about it arguing on a purely dogmatic basis. Of course, originally when they first planned it they thought that the raw materials would come by boat from Yugoslavia up the river -- Stalinvarosz was on the Danube -- but because of the split with Tito this wasn't possible. There is no point ~~in~~ in going into the details, like the Budapest metro. The idea was to produce a metro, which now, by the way, two or three years ago was actually completed, and this metro was to be like the Moscow metro. And according to the gossip in Budapest at the time, it was to have been a simple under-pavement metro like the first lines in London or the Paris and Berlin ones; and some said that those experts were silenced who explained the simple fact that they would have to freeze the water when they made the tube under the Danube and Budapest is full of very hot springs -- since the Turks there had been Turkish baths -- and it would be more expensive to freeze this than cold water. But these are all just insignificant details to give you a flavour of things.

Anyway, in 1953 Stalinvarosz was stopped. The metro was stopped. Many people had thought that the five year plan was not realistic, but in 1952 they had raised it further, on the basis of the growing tension between the camp of peace and imperialism, and in particular Hungary versus Yugoslavia and so on. So these fantastic campaigns were organised. And a very disastrous fall in living standards and shortages ensued.

This Hungarian Comintern apparatchiki leadership had a kind of Great Hungarian conception: Hungary as a model of this kind of development, also possibly to save themselves from any possible purges to overdo the Moscow directives. Also the anti-Tito campaign was probably more mad in Hungary than anywhere else. It would take too much time to go right into it, but let me just give a hint of it. For example I was in the army, and the army daily for about two years carried a so-called humorous column, with a supposedly humorous telephone conversation between Truman and Tito. The kind of level was this: Truman says to Tito "By the way, I've just read a book, which, I mean, you would find very useful. Its written by a certain Adolf Hitler, and its called Mein Kampf." And then Tito says: "What do you mean? It's my bed-side reading!". This was the kind of level.

After the East German Rising of June 1953, it was quite logical that Hungary was made into an experimental country, because the mad way in which the ultra-industrialisation policy was carried out was particularly disastrous there. After the Berlin rising they wouldn't have thought of carrying the attack on living standards further. So they just stopped Stalinvarosz. Of course, absolutely nothing was published about it. All these things were kept secret from the masses. In party organisations texts about these things were belatedly read out. But this happened only at party meetings and they came very late, so within the party there were all the time rumours: that the Yugoslavs are, after all, not fascists, this sort of stuff. Also the rehabilitation of Rajk dragged on fantastically long.

A few weeks after the East Berlin rising the Hungarian Party leadership was summoned to Moscow. Malenkov and Krushchev dealt with them, and the Party leadership was pressurised to produce a so-called June Resolution which condemned this whole development from 1948-49 onwards. The Russian demand was that Imre Nagy be made prime minister -- the only person who in 1949 did oppose the forced collectivisation.



There was this June resolution passed. I wace say a copy of it, as it was circulating in the party, but it was never published. It was always refered to during all the ups and down of the period from 1953 to 56 as the fundamental policy document. Leading articles in the Party daily permanently paid lip sefvce to it. But still, it was never published. Imre Nagy's speech as Prime Minister in July, outlining the new Government Programme to Parliament was published, but not the June resolution on which it was based. Later Imre Nagy was to be accused of having distorted and exaggerated the June resolution. But still they never published it; they never showed how he had exaggerated it. And in point of fact Nagy outlined a policy which was actually milder than the June resolution.

Imre Nagy was, as I said, agrarian socialist in background; he participated in the civil war in Russia; he belonged to the Landler-Lukacs faction; he also had to make a self-criticis in 1930; in the 1930s he just spent his time in this agrarian institute in Russia, arguing for both the economic and political feasibility and desirxability of a radical land reform. The latter had traditionally been opposed not only by the Hungarian reactionaries, but also by the Social Democratic Party and by the Bela Kun CP as a step that would ruin Hungarian agriculture. But he certainly had no political experience, unlike Rakosi and Gero -- these people were extremely acute in political intrigues etc. In this respect Nagy was naive.

So Nagy outlined this new Government Programme based on the June resolution and a week later there was a meeting of Budapest Party functionaries, of the Party 'activa', because all the functionaries were confused, they didn't know what was going on. So Rakosi made a speech which in fact went quite against Nagy's new polity; he said it was of course correct, but at the same time one had to remember that a kulak remains a kulak, and so on. So there was a kind of duality of power-centres: Nagy was prime minister, but at the same ti the party apparatus, the state apparatus and the police apparatus were all following Rakosi. Imre Nagy devoted himself to the ludicrous task of building up this patriotic people's front as it was called, which had existed between 1945 and 1948 and which had never been officiall abolished. It was revived after 1953 and these ludicrous posters were put out with Imre Nagy's signature, starting off with the word:"Patriots" -- you know, a kind of language from the 1940s really. It sounded very odd in the Hungary of the mid-twentyeth century. Literally, 'sons of the country' -- this was the kind of style Imre Nagy was trying to perpetuate. Nagy's who emphasis was towards the peasants, while the whole burden was very much on the working class. He declared this New Deal for the peasants, stopping forced collectivisation and giving them concessions. In fact the peasants had many ways of hiding things, and there was a considerable private sector still, while the workers were completely at the mercy of the state. Imre Nagy presented the view that the peasants had been the only victims, and not the working classx par excellence.

Every summer I used to go and stay in the countryside in peasant houses, and the peasants used to asked me whether I thought Imre Nagy was really on their side or that it was just a trick of the Russians. Should we really have confidence in him or not -- this was very much a problem: is she really our man or not?

But the ups and downs were really extraordinary. The whole compromise was an absurdity. Imre Nagy was Prime Minister and head of the Popular Front and there was this cultural new course also; but at the same time the Party and State apparatuses were permanently thinking that all this needn't be taken seriously. By analogy their attitude was parallel to the line of Revai against Lukacs in an article during the Lukacs debate of 1950. Revai said that Lukacs's fundamental mistake was that he absolutised, fetishized the Popular Front line, which was really a tactical, roundabout path forced on us by Hitler. Of course, Revai himself more than Lukacs had absolutised and fetishised it, speaking about People's Democracy still in 1947 as a plebeian form of bourgeois democracy, a radical, plebeian, Jacabin type of bourgeois democracy.

These were the ups and downs going on between the summer of 1953 and the Autumn of 1954 when their was a victory for the Imre Nagy line in the central committee.

Seeing what was going on in Russia, the journalists and Party intellectuals thought that this would be the general line of development in Eastern Europe. So the most extreme Stalinists in the journalists association and the writers association suddenly came out for the Imre Nagy line, producing a majority in the central committee. But this lasted only a

few weeks for in the meantime the French national assembly ratified German re-armament and an article was written in Pravda by Shepilov which was re-printed in the Party Daily just 6 weeks after Nagy had been victorious on the Central Committee. The Malenkov line had failed, and very soon afterwards Imre Nagy resigned for 'health reasons'. In Budapest the joke was that his disease was 'Malenkolia'. Then after this disease of Nagy's had made him resign as Prime Minister there was a March 1955 resolution which expelled him from the Party, although formally the June 1954 resolution was still in force.

Shepilov's article spelt out again the priority of heavy industry. The Malenkov plan had been that by withdrawing from Austria there would be a precedent for the neutralisation of Germany. In January 1955 at the Berlin conference Molotov proposed free elections in all Germany with the great powers guaranteeing German neutrality, according to the Austrian model. This policy failed with West German re-armament and in turn it spelt the failure of Malenkov's politics. Very soon after that there was the announcement that Imre Nagy resigned.

So from 1955, March onwards Hungary became a bulwark of Stalinism again. Purges returned with people being thrown out of the Party Daily and with mass expulsions from the university. Actually the Petofi circle was something which had started before this in late 1954, before Malenkov's fall, when it seemed that destalinisation was going on with great elan. I went to a meeting of the circle at that time; there were 15 or twenty people -- a very small thing, and it was ended of course in 1955.

To leave out minor ups and downs, the next major event was the 20th Party Congress, which meant that this simply couldn't carry on. So immediately, for example, the Petofi circle was revived. Imre Nagy was not, of course, re-admitted to the Party, but the Petofi circle immediately started having meetings on history, economics and so on. The press debate was the peak of it, in the summer of 1956 and by that time there were already about 6 thousand people, listening through loud speakers in other halls and on the street.

So as far as the Stalinist leadership was concerned things got completely out of hand. There was the gradual rehabilitation of Rajk, which was originally just read out in Party organisations, explaining that Rajk was not after all an enemy agent although he did commit the errors. So again it was only a half-way thing, saying that he did commit the nationalist errors.

This kind of thing, and the reporting of Khrushchev's visit to Belgrade in the summer of 1956, where he declared it was a great slav city -- you know this sort of thing was an amazement for the people. But it was not very prominently printed and I don't think the broad masses really took it in at this point.

About three weeks before the press debate we had a conversation which might be of some interest. The literary monthly produced jointly by the writers' Association and the Hungarian Komsomol had to be censored; each copy had to be sent the Komsomol Centre where there was this fellow called Ervin Holosc who was mainly responsible for the censorship; he was a member of the C.C. and first secretary of DISZ - the Hungarian Komsomol. Anyway, a meeting was organised between 3 or 4 of the editors of the journal and Holosc and another fellow who was the 1st secretary of the DISZ Budapest organisation. Holosc was a kind of Farkas man, one of his closest men. (In september, by the way, Farkas was made into a scapegoat and sensationally arrested as the person responsible for the violation of socialist legality). I was also invited to attend by the editors of the journal. The conversation, which was originally about the censorship of the magazine, cleared up that question in about 10 minutes, and we continued talking for 7 or 8 hours, until well after midnight. Holosc had just said that of course we didn't need to send him the proofs any more.

So Holosc then began by asking what I was doing there since I was not one of the editors. So one fellow said that I was the ideologist. I supposed they wanted to know who was behind the thing and he then became terribly interested in me and spent most of the time talking to me. You have to understand that the Party leaders were always looking for the people who were 'really behind things'. Hegedus, who had become Prime Minister after Nagy in 1955, had at about the same time been visited by some young writers. He was a figurehead but he was following the line of the real leaders, Rakosi and Gero. Anyway what he wanted to find out from them was how everybody had copies of a speech made by Kardejs in Oslo -- it was a kind

of Titoist-Kardeljian criticism of Stalinism, and Hegedus wanted to know who was behind its circulation. Well, actually, I was the one who went to the Yugoslav Consulate and got first a French copy which I gave to Lukacs and immediately Gertrude, his wife, started to translate it into Hungarian and thought it was fantastically exiting; and then I went in again and got Hungarian language copies which had been produce for the Hungarian minority and distributed about 30 copies.

So anyway, three weeks before this press debate, Holosz was saying to me: well, of course, he doesn't agree, absolutely; but, perhaps, for the sake of argument, lets say that cde Rakosi, should retire. Now, lets be clear, he's not saying he should, but supposing he really were to retire; this would be a possibility, obviously. What do I think, should be; who, do I think, should take over?

Then we all said: Imre Nagy.

So he said: this would, of course, be an absurdity. But; what do you think about.....Kadar? So this typical representative of the apparatus was, at this time, already thinking about Kadar. I replied that it was obviously a disgraceful thing that cde Kadar who had violated socialist legality, was imprisoned for it, then released and made secretary of the Party in one of the districts of Budapest, had not been given a more leading job; its disgraceful that his rehabilitation didn't go with a more important function; but I wonder whether Kadar actually has the caliber to be the leader.

Holosz replied that we should remember that the Party had, after all, an ideologist; remember after all what he meant to us in 1945,46,47, 48; because of course he knew him at that time.

Then of course, everybody in the room protested against Revai. So his idea was Kadar as leader with Revai behind him.

I dont know if I mentioned the story about a spring resort in May 1953 two months after Stalin's death. At this time there was what seemed to us at the time as an amazing article in Pravda which was just theoretical, quoting Plekhanov and Lenin and so on to demonstrate the thesis that the cult of personality was an ideology alien to Marxism-Leninism. It was just theoretical but its significance was obvious. Lukacs told me afterwards that after breakfast there in the holiday resort in the Bolgup in the restaurant Revai asked him: did you read this leading article in Pravda? Lukacs said: of course. And Revai replied I suppose you were happy. And Lukacs said 'Yes, I was.' And Revai said, 'Of course, after all you have always been a rightist.' He said this, naturally in a, joking manner.

The press debate was really the culmination of all the other debates: on history, where the spectacular thing was the reading out of the Comintern resolution disbanding the Party-- it said that the Party leadership had been misleading the Comintern for a whole year, telling the Comintern that the Popular Front line was being followed when in point of fact they were on the old sectarian pre-1935 third period line; this seem very actual. The analogy was obviously that the Rakosi leadership was paying lip service to the 20th Congress but in fact was carrying on the pre-20th Congress line. The debate on philosophy was quite interesting because Lukacs was the main speaker. This was where he said that at least, in the Horthy period, though a great part of the Hungarian intelligentsia hated Marxism, at least they feared Marxism and respected Marxism ~~as a religion~~. This was actually quite true. In the Budapest library Das Kapital could be read but one had to enter one's name in a book so that immediately the police were very interested in the person. So it was very delicate for militants to go and read it. It wasn't as in the Stalinist period when you needed special permission from the Party Centre or the Academy of Sciences to read forbidden books. Anyway Marxism had certainly been a very much feared and respected ideology in the eyes of the reactionary intelligentsia on the Horthy period. And as Lukacs said, what the course from 1948-49 had done was to make people just laugh at Marxism, treat it as ludicrous. Lukacs was actually very good at these improvised speeches, just as in private conversation -- a quite different style from what one has in his writings. He really had a great effect on the audience. For example when he said that he had reliable information that Rakosi had declared "It is important to us to see who comes forward"; by the way the same thing th. Mao also said when later the Hundred Flowers thing was scrapped: that we wanted to flowers to come out so that we could see what kind of flowers they were. When Lukacs said this

you can imagine what kind of demonstration there was from the audience -- there was fantastic outrage. One wonders whether Lukacs quite realised what an incendiary effect this would have on the people.

Then there was the press debate. The speeches varied in importance. One was that of Fejto Ferenc, though it was not the most important, Francois Fejto, a former social democrat who just happened to have been writing a book on the development of the Hungarian People's Democracy at the time of the uprising and it was more or less the first book that came out -- he added a last chapter to it called ~~the~~ "La Revolution D'Uranium" which is just a typical journalistic trick of Fejto, because it is ridiculous to call it by that name. But Janaszi, Lukacs's step son ~~and~~ who was the Director of the Institute of Physics did reveal that uranium ore had been found in Hungary, about a year after they had started to work on it. The Russians were working on it. And the fact was that this news did create great bitterness and one of the slogans on the student demonstration which started the uprising was "Hungarian Uranium should stay at home". People suddenly imagined, wrongly, that Hungary had suddenly become a fanastically important country with great rich uranium reserves. But such ideas were entirely justified given that there was total press secrecy about the whole thing.

The real riot at the press debate started with Tibor Dery's speech. It was quite pathetic in a way, because he was referring to the fact that some people would like Revai back. He actually spoke with some respect for Revai, but said that we do not want to replace lame horses with ~~donkeys~~ lame donkeys; the stage was passed for all these people. This was a reference to Holosz's ideas; remember that the Petofi circle was the Petofi circle of the Disz, for the intellectuals of the Budapest youth organisation. So Holosz was chairman and he started the riot by banging his fist on the table and saying "Don't dare to slander the Party!" Then for ten minutes there were all kinds of chaotic interruptions.

In one of the Budapest Party district organisations there was an incident. There was a fellow called Lipmann there, who had been a leading youth functionary in 1948-49 and very Stalinist at that time -- I had a lot of trouble with him at the University then; well he came up to Rakosi at this meeting of the party active and asked him to resign. And Rakosi replied that he wouldn't mind resigning at all, he didn't care about his person; but if he resigned it would be the end, I mean it would all collapse, everything.

Anyway, after the press debate, Rakosi decided that there was only one way to handle the situation: to arrest a few hundred intellectuals. I know this is reliable because I got it from this fellow Tansisz who was the head of the Petofi circle, and I am sure an AVH agent -- the whole Petofi circle really started as an AVH thing.

The problem for Rakosi was that the Writers' Association and the Journalists' Association were now on the move against his and various student organisations that had existed from 1946-48 were being revived. There was a tremendous amount of demagoguery coming from some of the Stalinist apparatchiki in these fields. For example, Voldisar, who has now been head of the Institute of External Cultural relations since about 1957 and is one of the pillars of the Kadar regime and who had played the Stalinist game previously, he was making a ~~big~~ speech in a ~~big~~ journalists' association meeting in a demagogic style, saying, "We have been lying and lying and lying, and the point is to tell the truth, the truth, the truth" and so on. So it was often a very demagogic style, but this is not the main point, of course.

So Rakosi gave the order to Pirasz, the Minister of the Interior, to just arrest a few hundred intellectuals and end the whole thing. But already the previous head of the Political Police, Gabor Peter, was under arrest for the violation of socialist legality. So Pirasz got worried that he might follow in the footsteps of his predecessor for doing such a thing a few months after the 20th congress. So he apparently contacted the Russian ambassador to ask if Rakosi's orders were the genuine wish of the Russians. And they apparently weren't -- the Russians didn't even know anything about it. And that was when, in great speed, in July 1956 Mikoyan and Suslov arrived in Budapest and took Rakosi to Russia. Rakosi apparently didn't believe the two of them and insisted on speaking to Krushchev on the telephone but Krushchev told him that he must go to Moscow..

But then what do they do? They put Gero in his place, just Rakosi's alter ego. I think the Russian idea was exactly the stupid idea: that they wanted a transition instead of making a really radical change which could have saved the situation, or of relying on a Rakosi terror -- though from the point of view of the international development the Rakosi option

would have been absurd. So the sensible thing would have been Nagy as PM and Kadar as Party secretary; then there would have been no uprising. Revai had initially proposed Nagy, but the Russians were being cautious, and this was precisely the most dangerous course, from their point of view. So Gero was put in, though undoubtedly as a transitional figure, and the Petofi circle was banned though the mass arrests did not take place.

Then the Petofi circle was allowed to revive but the Party Daily insisted there should be no return to demagogy. And the other thing was the rapprochement with Yugoslavia. But before going on to that let me say something about the football business which was a picturesque and characteristic event. You see in the Stalinist period in order to have some common platform between the Party and Government on the one hand and the masses on the other, and to give some substance to the things that is fundamental to all Stalinism -- I mean nationalism, which in Hungary was a contradiction in terms because the country was under Russian occupation and the Stalinist leadership were Russian puppets. Nationalism is fundamental to Stalinism. I don't want to go into the thing theoretically, but obviously an ideological nationalism is fundamental because etatism needs it: if the state becomes the church, then like the church it needs an ideology and the religion of the state, since it can't be internationalism, must be nationalism. In all Stalinist and quasi-Stalinist states, in fact in all etatistic states with so-called socialism, nationalism comes up very strongly; hence the very strong conflict between Stalinist and quasi-Stalinist countries, apart from those where the system has just been introduced by Russian occupation from outside and from above. Where it was an internal movement, as in China or Yugoslavia or Albania, nationalism is bound to be strongly present. So in Hungary in the early 1950s there was this ludicrous thing over football with headlines in the Party Daily about this miracle team of Hungary; they were hoping to channel this nationalism in that particular way. Special postage stamps were issued when England was beaten 6-3 in Wembley. As Eyzs Nasens said then, it is as if the Danube flotilla had defeated the British navy -- this was the kind of thing. It was certainly both official politics and a spontaneous mass thing. And then in the 1954 world cup the miracle team lost to West Germany. What happened was that in the first stage of the Cup Hungary actually defeated West Germany 6-1, or something like that. The West German team was playing the thing in a clever way, you see: because they didn't exert themselves they got into the weak group where they had a very easy time, whereas Hungary, in order to get into the finals had to defeat Uruguay and Brazil and so on; so that by the time the miracle team got into the finals they were already cripples, especially after the Uruguayans had had their turn. 3 or 4 players had had to be replaced by the reserves, though Puskas the captain insisted on playing though he was particularly badly injured, and according to the people he was included, although in their view he shouldn't have been included; and again according to the people, the 3 or 4 who were replaced were changed in a wrong manner. And the sport Commissar called Sebes, who had been an underground Communist, was regarded as someone who tried to deliberately sabotage the whole thing. And when the finals came Germany got this 3-2 victory and there was an atmosphere of complete mourning. In Budapest there were immediately demonstrations, which went to the Radio building like the demonstrations which started the uprising; and there were anti-Communist and anti-Semitic slogans, Sebes being a Communist and supposedly Jewish. And these demonstrations and rioting went on for two or three days. This was the summer of 1954 during the new course when all the great projects had been abandoned and mass sentiment found its outlet in this way. So from that moment onwards, after a defeat by West Germany of all places, the Government dropped the football line, it was very much played down, because ~~the whole thing was rearranged~~ I was immensely happy that Hungary had been defeated, because this disgusting unprincipled bloc between the government and the people had completely boomeranged.

R: What was the impact on the masses of the Petofi circle, the press debate and the fall of Rakosi?

This is very important. The newspapers informed them in a very funny manner. There were 6 or 7 thousand people at this press debate. After it the Petofi circle was banned. The people at the Petofi circle were not workers. They were all intellectuals, students and other intellectuals. I remember I was actually with Mezasos in Budapest when I met a fellow who was with me in the army. He was a working class boy who worked in a factory. And this was a few weeks after the press debate and the banning of the Petofi circle. The big articles in the papers did not say what it actually was -- you know how these articles are. And this young working class boy told me, "We all in the factory have a very great sympathy for the Petofi circle" and so on. And then I asked him if he knew what, exactly, the Petofi circle was. And he said, "Of course! Its an anti-Russian conspiracy of intellectuals!"

was non-plused when I said to him that there were 6 thousand people at the meeting -- he had thought the whole thing was completely clandestine. And he said what I was to hear again and again during the uprising: "don't believe," he told me, "don't believe the newspapers which say that the working class is against the intellectuals: the working class, we are all in sympathy. Tell your friends." They saw it as a very important point to emphasise, that this trick to separate the intellectuals from the workers was not going to work and didn't have any basis.

Peter: Could I just ask another question before you get on to the uprising itself? The question is about what was happening inside the Party amongst the Party membership: was there any serious organising being done of a Nagy faction inside the Party?

That is precisely the point: there wasn't. This is precisely the point which I thought was completely ludicrous: there wasn't. What was really being organised was this popular front and this petofi circle and so on. Policy was fundamentally directed towards the peasants -- that was the main pre-occupation of Imre Nagy. Whenever I mentioned workers then people always said "Oh, this is an impossibility, we can't get into the factories; the party organisations are guarding that." But within the Party it was one thing to be linked with the party intellectuals, the people on the Party Daily and so on; but the actual party apparatus, which is after all fundamental, as I wrote in my articles on the 1920s about the importance for the opposition to have had forces in the apparatus itself; and the apparatus could not have been completely monolithic, there would have been possibilities.

For example, when the press debate took place I arrived late, and I didn't get to the place where my friends were but had to go to the balcony which happened to be full of functionaries -- mainly AVH men who were specially planted there. So when the uproar started after Dery's speech, when Holosz shouted at everybody, I was shouting anti-Stalinist things. The people around me were all threatening to throw me out of the window, and ordering me to shut up. They said, to which group should the power go? and I said, "To ~~no~~ group." So they said, "Oh! You're an anarchist!" So I shouted "Power to the working class!" So they said "Oh, yes, working class!" and pointed to this french girl I was with who wore western-type make-up and so on, looking rather bourgeois. "This is the working class, is it? You are a true member of the working class, we can see it immediately." And then I said, "Look, I have been for years a member of the Party, before you were mass produced on production lines." And then one of them asked me if I had been to a youth Party school in Antanopine in 1947, and I said yes. So he said, "Why don't we have a chat in the corridor?" And he was obviously in the AVH but he wasn't as unreasonable as you might expect. We spoke for about 30 minutes. He did think that what people like myself were doing was just catastrophic, that it would lead to some kind of counter-revolutionary rising, a very irresponsible dodgy thing. But he was far more critical of the set up when he realised that I was in the movement in 1947. He gave me his phone number to contact him afterwards.

The bureaucracy was not at all a monolithic mass. The whole line that Mezaros represented for example. When Marton Horvath, chief stalinist ~~was~~ reading that press debate, did speak out against Stalinism he was obviously an opportunist; he was clearly indicating that he was prepared to switch over. Then it was Mezaros who shouted, and it was a very successful intervention, "Should bath-horses be carrying the Virgin Mary flag?" I supposed it must have happened in some church processions that the bath horse was carrying the Virgin Mary's flag. So Mezaros's line was to go very much against them as individuals, these bureaucrats. But the real matter was not whether one can trust them, but ~~whether~~ wether one can use them, and for example that Hegedus-Andras case shows what I actually thought at that time, even when I was speaking to that Holosz, who was really a wretch, Farkas man, who became one of the Political police chiefs after the Uprising in 1957-58. These people were actually terrified, they were literally terrified. When I went into the Party house at the time of the uprising to speak to Lukacs and Santo, that Holos was standing out in the corridor with a real hysteria and terror, as one could imagine ~~xxx~~ a member of the ancien regime. He just grabbed me, got hold of me, calling me 'Miklos', my first name. "Miklos," he said, in "Tatabein they are castrating the comrades; the comrades are being castrated. I mean this is really fully fledged white terror. You can't want that?" And I said to him that one cannot necessarily believe every rumour -- its just hysteria. And I added "Its certainly not I but you who has produced this situation." This terror can be imagined in another way be remembering that in September Farkas had been arrested and so Gero himself must have feared that he would be next in line for arrest.

It's not like a bourgeois country where a political leader like Macmillan can resign, and still his status and financial situation and life style needn't change. There the bulk of their income is fringe benefits ~~fringe benefits~~ and if there are out they are out with a great loss of privileges. An example was when I met a fellow whom I had known from the 1945 period and who had later got into the AVO. I met him in summer 1956 and he complained to me that AVH people were being dismissed and sent back to factories to work. ~~There~~ They were originally workers and now after years in the AVH they were back having to work in factories again. And then I said "What's wrong with this? I mean Lenin in "The State and Revolution" says that there shouldn't be permanent functionaries; workers should work as functionaries for a period and then go back to the factories." His reply was "This is ~~xxxx~~ all right in theory, but in practice it is just inhuman. We have children who have all started a certain type of education. You ~~are~~ are just adopting the same inhumanity in your outlook as there was in the Stalin period." This was actually a fellow thrown out of the AVH in 1950 and then taken back in about 1955. "You must see it as a human problem," he said. "It's all right in theory," he said, "if you read State and Revolution, but after all we are not to be book-worms, but creative Marxists and think in human terms." But then I thought, however ludicrous what he said what purpose does it serve to terrorise these people. After all, it wasn't on the cards that the State and Revolution programme could be put into practice. What was on the cards was to throw out a certain lot of people and to put in a new lot of people. And this new lot wouldn't necessarily have been qualitatively better in any way. After all it is not a class like the bourgeoisie which is forced by economic laws to accumulate. You or I or anybody, if we were to invest a certain amount of money, it would have ~~to~~ to be invested according to the laws of profitability. But with the bureaucracy it's a different matter, because they are carrying out a certain party line, which can be the priority of heavy industry or of consumer goods -- it can be different things. There is no law which forces them to carry out a particular line and even their privileges were fundamentally fringe benefits. The very top leaders, ~~naturally~~ obviously had just an unlimited account with the national bank. But the living standards of these bureaucrats would have been like that of managers in a bourgeois society, not like that of really rich rentiers. The privileges, however much they went against Marxist-Leninist principles, grew out of the fact when people had to queue for sugar and bread for a great number of hours in Russia, they wanted to relieve the political and cultural cadres; so they produced special shops for them and so on. But in such an extreme scarcity situation, even if the reason for it is bad organisation, I think it is inevitable that this should develop in conditions of scarcity.

But to get back to the events leading up to the uprising: in July Gero came to be the leader. Nothing happened for about 6 weeks -- it was August holidays: intellectuals were not in Budapest. In September, the Petofi circle, the Writers', Journalists' and Students' Associations re-started. Then, as a fantastic shock there came this insistence of the Russians that Gero visit Tito. His week-long visit took place exactly a week before the rising. Gero returned to Budapest the day of the Uprising, 23rd October, having left on the 17th. He spent one week on the isle of Brionni. As the rapprochement with Tito earlier hadn't been much publicised, this visit came as a fantastic thing. And Tito's condition of this meeting was the complete re-habilitation of Rajk. So on 6th October -- which is a national holiday on mourning because that was the day in 1849 when the ~~the~~ top generals of the war of Independence were hanged by the Hapsburgs -- this day was chosen as the day for the burial of Rajk and the others accused in the Rajk trial. The newspapers had practically nothing but that -- you know, the martyrs of the working class movement. This event and the announcement of Gero's visit to Tito made an enormous impact in terms of mass psychology.

At this time lots of slogans began to appear in toilets and places like that. I remember a popular working class eating place, a very huge one in Marx Square, and in the toilet there two poems had been written. One said: "Gero or Tito? The answer cannot be in doubt: Gero is slavery Tito is liberation!" Then as an answer there was another poem which said: "Here lies Rajk Laslo, on whose kneck the red flag was screwed around. The Hungarian people would be grateful if Gero and the rest were rotting next to him." These showed two different attitudes, the second one being clearly anti-Communist. After the uprising it was very obvious this anti-Communism. I remember, between the two Russian interventions when there was this seeming victory of the uprising, I asked a worker what he thought were the chances of the new, re-formed Communist Party of Imre Nagy-Kadar. And he said, "Oh, nil; they might get four or five percent, anybody who was part of the Communist apparatus has no chance, even if he is Imre Nagy -- he's still a communist and what chance have communists in Hungary?" So then I asked what party he thought would be needed. And he said, "A completely new Hungarian Workers' Party." And then, just to find out how he would react, I asked, "You wouldn't want a united workers and peasants party?" And he replied, "Oh, no. It's only in fully fledged communism that the interests ~~of the interests~~ of the workers and the peasants would fully coincide and these two separate classes would disappear."

This type of thing was quite common: people expressing anti-communist attitudes, and at the same time having internalised, taking quite for granted ideas about how there will be a communist society.

The burial of Rajk almost could have been the beginning of the uprising, but it was a very cold rainy day, as opposed to the weather on the 23rd of October when it was beautiful and sunny. Everybody obviously just wanted to get home from the burial, they were shivering with cold on the 6th October.

On the 14th or 15th October Imre Nagy re-entered the Party -- there was a small item in the newspaper. Two or three days later Gero set off on his visit to Tito. I wrote an article in March, just after the twentieth congress for the Popular Front Daily. To my fantastic surprise they printed it on the fifteenth of October, in an abridged form which makes it very uninteresting -- actually Temps Modern published it later in their special number. The points don't emerged very clearly, but the main point I made was connected to something which has some relevance now. After the 20th Congress various ideas were coming up about some kind of workers' representation on the management, to some extent already according to a Yugoslav pattern. And I said that this thing by itself is very meaningless because. Of course, fair enough workers want better showers and this kind of thing and such representation might be able to take this up, but whenever it came to a really fundamental need then the answer could always be: well this is all very nice but we don't have the money available. So consequently the problem is the priorities in the economy as a whole, the allocation of resources as a whole. And one cannot speak about proletarian democracy on the basis of workers' representation in the management. The allocation of resources is to become the political problem par excellence and this can be discussed only at an all-country level, because there are no resources for local demands. Added to this there is a Lenin quotation from the trade union debate, where Lenin says against Bukharin that politics is a priority vis a vis economics and whoever does realise this does not understand the ABC of Marxism. Lenin also says that politics is concentrated economics, and whoever ~~think~~ forgets that it is concentrated economics and thinks it is just economics, so that they treat workers self-management as politics, is forgetting politics itself. What makes politics politics is that it is not simply economics but concentrated economics, and the allocation of resources. ~~And the system, the~~ My whole point was that the system, by demanding the politicisation of everything was actually depoliticising everything, because the very concept of politics disappeared in that way. The idea was 'elections for some management council in a factory is taking place in an enthusiastic atmosphere', and I said that 'atmosphere' is something that the managers of American bars and nightclubs should be concerned with. We should be concerned with political ~~xxxxx~~ awareness, knowledge, responsibility and an election is something which needs the faculties of rational thought and not 'enthusiasm'. So I was insisting not liberalisation but democratisation, that we must realise that the fundamental critique of bourgeois democracy is that it is deficient as democracy and socialist democracy is to be consistent democracy, not merely as bourgeois democracy did quite largely get rid of



the medieval idea of the secrecy of politics, never fully but by providing publicity and the free press and so on. But this did not mean that politics really came to be formed by the masses, or a dynamic taking place leading towards that. Lenin's idea of soviets and so on was to produce a dynamic in this direction; when he was talking about the formation of local soviets, it was fundamentally, or partly an idea of educating the people towards politics, and an idea of politics not merely being freed of the principle of secrecy but being done by the masses.

But to get back to the story. First of all Yugoslavia was accepted as a country developing towards socialism, even though it was not a member of the Soviet Alliance. And in 1955 the Austrian state treaty was made and Austrian neutrality accepted; and then suddenly the coming to power of Gomulka in Poland. So it seemed in Hungary that all the countries surrounding it -- Yugoslavia, Austria, and as it seemed Poland -- were taking a neutralist position. It was very fundamental this neutralism business. And we Hungarians are again, just as we were the last Satellite of Hitler, missing the bus. It was a very strong feeling. And the actual demonstration on the 23rd of October, the day Gero returned from Tito, was to be a student demonstration for Polish-Hungarian friendship. That very day the newspapers were full of the Gomulka speech and everybody was carrying these newspapers.

But the question was: to what extent was the whole thing a police provocation? Because one needn't think that it was just idiocy. The demonstration had been decided two or three days earlier in the student organisation. The engineering students worked out these 12 points. As Marx says about bourgeois revolutions, everything is dressed up in the traditions of the past. So on March 15th 1848 the masses seized the printing presses and printed 12 points of the students -- it was also really a student demonstration. So again now there were some 12 points.

Well, the demonstration was banned a day or two before it took place. Then it was to be held early in the afternoon. And at half past eleven or mid-day, the radio announced that Pirosz the Minister of the Interior lifted the ban. The demonstration could take place after all. So Budapest radio publicised a demonstration for that afternoon! Otherwise it would have been really an intellectual affair. The radio announcement meant that workers actually did stop working in the factories and just streamed into the centre of the town and the student demonstration came to be a demonstration of hundreds of thousands of people, with workers pouring in from the suburbs.

The official slogans worked out by the students before hand included "Soldiers of all countries go home!" But this very quickly changed over to the slogan "Russki Haza!" , that is "Russians go home!" Another ~~spontaneous~~ <sup>official</sup> slogan was "The Stalin statue into the Danube; Nagy into the government!" , but this quickly changed into "Gero into the Danube; Nagy into the Government!" Lots of new slogans started to come up. About 2 and a half hours after the start of the demonstration where I was people were shouting "More Parties!" A student by me told me that my article was already a thing of the past, it belonged to a past phase with its quotations from Marx and Lenin and so on.

Then these hundreds of thousands of people got in front of the Parliament and they all wanted to hear Imre Nagy. People kept on going to fetch him and he didn't want to come, because he had just been readmitted into the Party nine days earlier and obviously he thought now that everything was going alright and he would be Prime Minister in no time. He told some friends of mine that the main thing was not to allow a provocation; in point of fact just to wait until things come down from Moscow. And what he and everybody ignored was the point I kept making, that of course a provocation was to be avoided, but what if one does take place? One still has to have some contingency plans for what one does in that situation; there could be a Poznan in Hungary and what was to be done in those circumstances? And after hours and hours of waiting, with the crowd already growing impatient, people began to shout at the actors reciting Petofi poems that they had had enough stuff recited to them already .

So to recapitulate, one does not have to search for some mysterious organisation which launched the uprising: it was organised by the radio, publicising the demonstration. Secondly in all revolutions speeches have a great significance. But in Hungary their significance was only a negative one, for there was no Danton or Kossuth or Trotsky around at all. The Imre Nagy speech was very significant from this point of view. When he eventually arrived he was very down-cast because his whole idea was a kind of Kutuzov tactics, you know, not to do anything; as in Hungarian we would say, the roasted pigeon would fly into our mouth

coming from Moscow -- something like that. He did see that the only way Gero could make himself a permanent fixture was by provoking a rising. So Nagy's speech started badly. He shouted 'Comrades' and people shouted "No Comrades!" Then he corrected himself: "Friends!" and then there was applause. Then he said that there is really a changed line and the Party and the government is putting things right. If we just remain calm, if we just don't allow any provokation and remain peaceful everything will be alright. He promises that everybody can trust him and tells everybody to go home after the singing of the national anthem. A more incendiary speech couldn't have been made, ~~that~~ this kind of thing trying to cool it, because all the people who really trusted him went home; and then the best who thought Imre Nagy was just an anti-climax decided that they would have to act. They immediately broke into groups and one went off to the Stalin Statue to pull it down; another group went to the radio building. Nagy could only ~~xxx~~ have actually cooled it by doing exactly the opposite and making a revolutionary speech\* to the masses.

So then you had all these groups of demonstrators moving around in different parts of the city and becoming very 'radicalised', calling for multiparty system and neutrality and so on. Then suddenly people were running and shouting "there is bloodshed in front of the radio building!" Then I went there and discovered that shooting had already taken place: the crowd had tried to enter the building to have the 12 points read out and the AVH guard had been shooting\* at the crowd. When I arrived AVH re-enforcements were coming and the crowd was turning the AVH cars upside down and setting them alight. Two were burning when I arrived. Then an army unit came and stood by, not participating. Everybody shouted "long live the Hungarian Army!" and some soldiers handed over guns to people who were queuing up for weapons. Buses were stopped and driven to armaments factories and barracks to get guns. Then the buses began arriving back and teenagers again queued for guns: the fighting was on them. It was between the AVH on one hand and the young people on the other though some soldiers went over to the masses, including even the odd officer. But it was still fundamentally teenagers, very young boys of 18 or 19 -- students but obviously also quite a few workers and indeed it was fundamentally working class youth, for whom it was a fantastic thing: they thought that by seizing the radio station they would have liberation, although when the building was taken after a days fighting they discovered that just by turning a switch the whole thing could be transferred to another building for continuing the radio broadcasts of the government. The fighting at the radio station started at about 8pm. At about 10pm, after a couple of hours running around blocks when the AVH cars came along shooting, I went to Lukacs and told him there was a revolution in Budapest.

Meanwhile the dismantling of the Stalin statue took some hours. They had to get these flamethrowers from the factories to burn the metal above the boots: the boots remained there all along -- they didn't care for them. Then sometime before dawn it was pulled by some lorry into the centre of the town in front of the National Theatre, which was the main centre of the events through all the fighting. And then they started chopping the Stalin statue into bits and teenagers were queuing for hours to get a bit, shouting in a quite freuding way, "We also want a bit of our father!" "A bit of our father!" And all kinds of slogans were written on it: I remember one which was the chant of the scrap-metal collect. "Collect you iron and old metal-- you are defending the peace by doing this", and "Dava! Chasyi" the Russian phrase meaning "give your watch" -- the remark made over and over by soldiers of the Red Army in Hungary at the time of the liberation when they used to take people's watches. There was this infantile festical aspect to the events. For example the next day in the opposite\* corner to the Stalin statue there was this huge emblem of the peoples republic and written out above it was "spitting target", and teenagers were queuing to spit at the centre of the coat of arms. All revolutions have this quality, as though history is a tunnel and then one is suddenly out in the free, and then just enjoying it for its own sake. It is an extraordinary thing when one walks down a boulevard and starts talking with one person and after about ten minutes one finds one is addressing a huge crowd.

Anyway, when I got to Lukacs at 10pm that evening he told me about the Gero speech. Two speeches were crucial: the Nagy speech and the Gero speech. Lukacs heard the Gero speech on the radio, when I was on the streets. In fact what Gero said was that whatever their subjective intentions these students are misguided and are playing an objectively counter-revolutionary role with this demonstration. Interestingly, afterwards, people remembered him ~~as~~ as calling it a fascist mob, though he didn't actually use those words. So anyway, his speech, like Nagy's earlier speech just poured oil on the fire.

Then Lukacs told me there was a central committee meeting going on. When I asked him what he thought it might lead to he replied that if they were intelligent people he might try to put himself in their shoes, but they are such idiots that you cannot expect me to work out what people like Bela Veg ( and other Stalinists) might think. In fact the outcome was that Imre Nagy was made Prime Minister, Gero remained as first Secretary of the Party -- something that was already in July a disaster. Then people like Lukacs became members of the Politburo, also Szoltan Santo. And from the next morning onwards there was this permanent meeting of the central committee, so from then on Lukacs was most of the time in the Party House. The other thing Lukacs told me that night was that he always knew that Gero was an excellent Comintern Apparatchik but he was politically illiterate. But I thought that it was not necessarily political illiteracy but a conscious provocation, particularly as Lukacs told me that in the afternoon there was an appeal for Russian troops to enter Budapest. And it was actually two o'clock in the morning when I saw the first Russian tanks entering Budapest. People were occupying the printing presses and starting to print leaflets and so on. Lukacs wondered who was leading the movement, but my idea was that it wasn't led at all. Workers councils were immediately formed in factories completely spontaneously and the general strike immediately began. These two things were very important. This meant that the national bank had its own revolutionary council and so when the general strike was on the workers were still paid. And there was absolutely no problem with telephones or gas or electricity or bread and peasants were coming in and everywhere there were improvised markets and food selling in amazing amounts. While the young people were fighting in various parts of the city, the adults were organising the workers councils and the general strike.

The next morning when I went to the writers' union, all along the boulevards there were Russian tanks; they were not doing anything, just standing by, making a demonstration. The Russian soldiers didn't know anything about anything and they were quite interested when I talked to them. Of course it was rubbish to say that they thought they were in Su or something like that: they knew perfectly well where they were. There were just told there was a riot and didn't know what it was about. When I told them that ~~the~~ what we wanted was that American soldiers should be in America and Russian soldiers should be in Russia they said, "Khorosho, Khorosho," and so on: that is, good, good. And when we said we are not against Russians we are against Stalinism, they immediately said, "what is Stalinism and what was wrong with Stalin?"

And when I entered the Writers' Association, the writers, like Dery and so on, were just sitting there. Just sitting as though in mourning, their heads were hanging and they were becoming very poetic. One said to me that he would just like to sit, and how really nice it would be to just let his tears flow and flow and flow. And I said to Dery that surely the writers were at least partly responsible for what had happened and shouldn't they consider what should be done. And he replied, "Why? We are writers and we just told the truth. We are not politicians, we were just telling the truth." They really felt everything was lost actually. This completely contrasted with the total optimism of the teenagers who were making the uprising.

It is true that the AVH cars had entered the small streets shooting; but it is a myth that there was real fighting between the Russians and the youth at this time. For one the Russian tanks were too big even to enter these small streets. Occasionally the freedom fighters would run out with Molotov Cocktails and blow up some Russian tank. And as a consequence other Russian tanks ran up and down the boulevards firing at the houses, which had nothing to do with the uprising. And then very soon lots of Russian tanks put up the Hungarian flag and people were saying that they had come over to our side, but when one talked to the Russians it became clear that they had put up the Hungarian flag because they didn't want to be blown up. But the Russians didn't have orders to fight in this first intervention. It is true that they surrounded public buildings like the Party House and the Parliament. But nothing more.

On the 24th when I asked people what was needed they would say that Gero should go, Hungary should be neutral, should withdraw from the Warsaw Pact: that was a fundamental point. When I told Lukacs this he said, "If only we could hide the Russian troops; after all this is an absurdity, because what is involved is the whole European balance of power. And I said quite true, but this is universal and there is no leadership; whoever would go against this would automatically be called a Russian agent. In fact there was one

occasion when they wanted to Lynch me for that. There was a fantastic number of demonstrations taking place and they all had some kind of aim; and there was one going along and I went to the people who were leading it and I asked them what they were up to. And they said they were going in front of the American embassy and from its balcony they would announce that United Nations troops had started to move into Hungary. They had got this idea quite naturally because the Party press had been saying for years that the imperialists were just ready to jump in and put an end to the socialist achievements while the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe were putting the Dulles line about Liberation. Hence the idea that the Americans would quickly come in. And when I said this was rubbish and asked where they got the idea from they immediately shouted "AVH agent!" So I had to make a very nationalist speech about how 1,000 years of history teaches us that we have been always alone and have to fight alone and so on -- I was worried that I would get knocked down and then I would be finished off. Actually Trotsky has a fantastic description of the same kind of thing when they went to save some Menshevik in 1917

Of course, it wasn't Imre Nagy's aim to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact -- but he couldn't resist it. The radio was going on all the time saying that those who started the uprising were great heroes in our history, patriotic fighters for socialist democracy, but those who are continuing to fight now are already counter-revolutionary thugs. Then on Thursday Morning 25th of October, Suslov and Mikoyan again came to Budapest as they had done in July; this time they dismissed Gero and made Kadar first secretary. Then Kadar made a speech hailing the great patriotic revolution for socialist democracy, but saying that those who continued the fighting now that Gero was dismissed were counter-revolutionaries. As always a bit late with everything. My private view is that the uprising could have been put down by Russian infantry in three hours. I was telling Lukacs and Santo, who was talking to Suslov and Mikoyan, that the thing to do was to somehow recognise the uprising allowing the keeping of arms and so on. But the whole thing was really tricky because of the Warsaw Pact, and the complete incompetence and lack of leadership. All kinds of silly things that should have been stopped were not stopped: for example demolishing Russian monuments built in 1945. In the Public square, which is a very lumpen area, with brothels, cheap prostitutes, the junk market the Budapest Party centre was. The Budapest secretary was Imre Meso, who would have been a very chief functionary of the Kadar regime if he had survived -- he actually gave a talk to the Petofi circle and was for the resignation of Rakosi. He along with the Political Police was defending this building for 3 or 4 days from the crowds, who thought there were torture chambers under the building. Then Imre Meso came out with a white flag and was shot and then the AVH men were lynched this was the one big atrocity of the uprising. But that the mutilated bodies of the AVH men could be allowed to hang there for days without the army being sent to take them down was extraordinary incompetence on the part of the leadership.

As for the Hungarian army, you have to remember that in 1945 the bourgeois state machine didn't have to be smashed: it collapsed, with the Horthy officers and state functionaries and fascists fleeing en masse to West Germany. And the Hungarian army had to be built almost from scratch after 1949 with crash courses for new officers and so on. Actually Pal Maleter had been a very junior officer in the Horthy army, and he went over to the Russians in 1944 thus becoming a Colonel in the New army. He then declared himself leader of the army of the Revolution, after he had been sent to put down some freedom fighters and had gone over to their side. And his diletantism was shown when the second and real Russian intervention came for he went off to the Russian Headquarters as a General and Minister of Defence to negotiate and was arrested.

The real nub of everything was the problem of the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.

Peter: Could you say exactly what current you yourself belonged to? You have mentioned meetings with Lukacs and Szanto and in the official party history a distinction is made between the Nagyists and on the other side Lukacs Kadar Szanto.

This is not quite correct because Lukacs very much wanted the re-establishment of Nagy. He fully agreed with Nagy. They had no personal connection. Lukacs was one of the very few high party functionaries whose name was still in the telephone directory -- he was very proud of that -- and he said that if Nagy wants to contact him he can phone him up.

Peter: so there weren't any clear cut groupings inside the party leadership?

The whole thing was that there was no organisation at all. Just like my relations with Lukacs so Imre Nagy had his court where these awful former stalinist hacks who became then anti-Stalinists and then professional anti-communists after 1956 collected. Tibor Meray and Aczel and these people, were crowding round him, and partly the populists who were formerly in the national peasants party and then cabinet ministers in the Stalinist period. Nagy was also connected with Ferenc Se...? who was the leader of the Western Hungarian revolutionary council and was a leading populist and member of the national peasant party. I had a friend who acted a secretary to this man. But Nagy was much more orienting to these former Stalinist hacks who became the bath-whores carrying the flag. Now that's O.K. I'm not against accepting them but it was them and the populists who were around him.

Peter: So you were taking your distance to some extent from Nagy?

Well, you see it was a very false situation. You know Deutscher in his article in the first No. of Universities and Left Review does say that in Hungary there was Thermidor coming up. You know, Bukharinism he called it. You see Revai had this very fanatical hatred of Imre Nagy, while Lukacs had a great appreciation of him. My attitude was that there was simply nobody who represented the line I wanted followed, but still my line was to support these Bukharinists, if you like: that they should form a government but that there should be some kind of opposition to them. ~~Thazkukaszgron~~ But then there was a complete vacuum, because the Lukacs group was a completely apolitical group. I mean Agnes Heller and these people did not even have that kind of Party past which I had, having joined in 1945 when I was fourteen. They became Communists through Lukacs; I didn't become a Communist through Lukacs; I didn't even know much more than his name when I became a Communist. They had this cultural and to my mind apolitical line, while the Imre Nagyists had this demagogy with the posters calling "Patriots" and this absolute obsession with the peasants as if the workers did not matter. For example in his government programme speech in July 1953, which was of course, a great experience to hear, denouncing the previous years for the police terror and everything but when it came to culture his view was that Jorkay, the Hungarian Stankiewicz, a national writer of historical novels in Victorian times who wrote about a hundred volumes: they kept on publishing it in the Stalinist period, they did not neglect him; but Nagy's only point about culture was that so little Jorkay was published. He was an obviously honest Communist of a more or less Kulak type, but that doesn't matter so much because after all Mao would have something of a similar make-up -- a well-to-do peasant and agrarian socialist background which was very important because after all the Hungarian S-Ds and sectarian Communists quite neglected the peasant problem even though Hungary was still predominantly a peasant country. His whole idea was that we must not use the same dirty ways of intriguing as Rakosi used: this idea of purity. The book of his brought out in the West by Meray was really a memorandum to the central committee. Its full of moralisation. Now moralisation is OK it has its justification against the police terror and so on, but he was very much centred on this moralisation and really completely impotent during the xx crisis. After he made his speech he was just in the Party house when the central committee was permanently sitting. On Thursday 25th Suslov and Mikoyan took Gero to Moscow and Kadar was made first secretary with Imre Nagy as Prime Minister. Then on the 29th October the Russians withdrew from Budapest. And then seven hundred parties were formed in the country, as somebody in the radio told me, but the fundamental idea was to re-establish the coalition which had existed between 1945 and 1948. The leader of the smallholders was even speaking out to keep the collective farms even though the peasants were dismantling all the collective farms. Not until the early 60s was there a fully fledged collectivisation in Hungary. The period when the revolution had appeared to triumph was from Monday the 29th up to the dawn of Nov.4th when the second Russian intervention took place. In the meantime the workers councils and revolutionary committees were formed and all kinds of organisations were coming up.

The fact that he equivocated during those crucial days meant that the trust in him very much declined.

Of course, you have these anarchistic pamphlets like that solidarity pamphlet by Andy Anderson which portrays the things as a kind of pure mass revolution, calling everybody bureaucrats. Of course, Nagy and people were bureaucrats with the project of setting up the coalition again. You had on the one hand this philistine bureaucratism and on the other the gigantic mass pressure and since the masses had no leaders whom they could trust and respect, all their aspirations were completely unconditional. The general strike was of course on and was fully fledged. I thought that if I wrote on 1956 I would make my motto the Stalin cantata which was one of the main songs in the Stalin period. It says, "One will, the will of great Stalin, has made our people heroic". There was no king or Marie Antoinette to be the focus of the mass's anger, so consequently the Stalin statue became the focus of the thing. At the 19th Party Congress in 1952, the main reports were made by Malenkov and Khrushchev and Stalin kept silent throughout the Congress till the very end when he made a short speech which covers only about two and a half printed pages. It was at this congress that the word politburo was changed to Presidium and the word Bolshevik was removed from the name of the Party. And Stalin said that there were two banners which the progressive bourgeoisie had been carrying and had thrown away, and these are the banners of democracy and national independence. Since the bourgeoisie had thrown away these banners, he said, it was the job of us Communists to raise them high. Now certainly nobody could doubt that in 1956 the Hungarian masses would raise these two banners high.

The factory councils were at first improvised. To start with they would not let the party secretary into the factory premises and then they set up the councils to run things. But of course it wasn't management over production because the whole task was to push forward the general strike. The councils' fundamental functions apart from organising meetings and framing demands was to keep up the general strike, and to organise the weekly distribution of the wages. But there was not at all the slogan "All Power to the Workers' Councils", or at least I didn't come across it. To have a central workers council was my idea and I didn't hear about it from anybody else. They were strictly workers councils of factories and workers councils of districts. It was extraordinary, when one heard the demands of the workers councils, how more or less identical they were. But at the same time it was equally striking that nowhere did the workers show clear ideas as to how to achieve these demands. There is, of course, nothing remarkable about this, except to those who are submerged in a workerist mysticism. The demands came out: freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of trade unions, the right to strike, freedom for parties to operate, neutrality, withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, withdrawal of Russian troops from the country. At the first meeting of the central workers council all these demands came forwards from the different factories in almost identical fashion with only a very occasional deviation to the right or the left. Left deviations would include demands like freedom not for all parties but only for those adhering to socialism and the public ownership of the means of production: this demand came from several factories and was significant. Then there was the occasional right-wing point, like the rather silly introduction of the teaching of religion in the schools.

It was a very funny, comic thing, the way people had these different ideas of legitimacy. You had three different editorial boards all claiming to be the true editorial board of the newspaper, Magyar..... It had been a bourgeois anti-German paper during the war, and curiously enough it was able to continue to come out until 1944. Then it became the paper of the Smallholders Party from 1945 to 1948 and then it had become the paper of the Popular Front; and you had all three editorial boards from the different periods claiming to be the legitimate editorial board. But in the end all three teams worked together to bring the paper out. It was rather crowded but it managed to work.

This quarrel over legitimacy was very important: some saying it was 1945 others that it was 1948. It was an example of the fact that there was really a vacuum of power: no organisation. Some said there was no vacuum because Imre Nagy was there but this was nonsense.

The Writer's building was only three blocks away from the headquarters of the Russian troops so there were tanks everywhere, and everybody in the building thought it was the end of everything. Although nobody actually bothered us.

Robin: You said that events exposed everybody's political naivete including your own. What then was your political project at this time.

Well, Marx says in an early article criticism and self-criticism must be one vast confession, everybody making one immense confession. When I re-read it recently I associated it with Freud who produced case histories of all kinds of people without producing his own case history. And I thought it was somehow immoral that he reveals all these intimate details about other people but doesn't reveal his own case history which is obviously very relevant. But then self-analysis can be produced only through a dialogue....

The problem can be said to be that of ~~optimism~~ pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will -- this very wretched bourgeois decadent slogan which Gramsci picked up. The optimism of the will was expressed by them sitting together writing some huge memorandum to Mao-Tse-Tung, in a whining tone. This was because on the 30th October, at the end of the first Russian intervention, the Chinese had issued a communique denouncing Great Russian Chauvinism; then a few days later they changed their line and they later claimed that it was they who pressurised the Russians to intervene although this is obviously rubbish. But in any case that communique made some impression on these Communist writers.

On the dawn of the 4th November there was this broadcast at three or 4 in the morning, which I then telephoned to my friend, because I am the one who was generally up at that time of the night. <sup>Nagy</sup> ~~It~~ said that Russian troops had launched an attack on the capital city with the obvious intention of overthrowing the legitimate Hungarian government. And he added that he wanted this to be known by the Hungarian people and by the people of the whole world. Nagy did protest to the Soviet Ambassador and to the United Nations that Soviet troops were moving in vast numbers into Budapest and the rest of the country. Suez occurred on November 2nd and you know that it wasn't a mere coincidence: the British and French had planned it for mid December but they brought it forward when the Hungarian crisis exploded.

It is difficult to see how the Russians could swallow the leaving of the Warsaw Pact. And there was the whole question of how things would affect Poland. And of course after the invasion things developed quite differently in Poland. You know the Polish joke at the time: that the Hungarians behaved like Poles, the Poles behaved like Czechs and the Czechs behaved like pigs. So the invasion did make the Poles "see sense" as some would say.

You must remember the atmosphere at that time. I never believed it by the whole idea of the start of the Third World War was ~~was~~ very much in the air: people believed it. And Dulles's babble about liberation and so on was actually believed. The fundamental Stalinist dogma was that the imperialists want a world war.

The intellectuals had this tendency towards pessimism; the workers towards optimism. They felt their strength at that moment and they didn't realise the limits of their strength. They believed that the general strike would solve everything: the Russians will not be able to stabilise because the workers will not start working. This is, of course, true but things become more complicated. The strike may go on but the mass of workers are sitting at home and the force of inertia sets in, and it won't be possible to get the money every week from the national bank and the children will begin to starve. And of course it's true that you had the active ~~the~~ minority and they could be the decisive force, leaning on the passive support of the great mass, but then you had this reaction against Stalinism, against a situation where every meeting was manipulated; people were reacting very strongly against that, and it was my mistake also. Because although manipulated meetings are obnoxious that does not mean you can leave things without some pre-arrangement, leaving everything to spontaneity. But there was this ideology: that the intellectuals' role is to get things started and then leave it to the workers to carry it out. This is in fact completely alien to Marxism, to Lenin's outlook; this notion that the intellectuals get them together and then the workers ~~will~~ intrinsic virtues would sort things out. The workers' virtues are very great but not of that kind, not of the kind of being clear about the realities of the situation.

My real view was that it was all over after the intervention on the 4th November. There

was a few days fighting but I didn't believe in it. It was not the south east Asian jungle--- there was a completely different situation and popular psychology. There were sections which could not be persuaded to engage in any compromises and there were also these wretched social-democratic compromise-mongers -- some revolutionary councils were full of them.

Nagy ended his radio broadcast by saying that the government was at its post and its troops were fighting. This wasn't true. There were isolated armed groups fighting and the government entered the Yugoslav embassy in no time; about 50 or 60 people: Imre Nagy, Szanto, Lukacs, Lozsency, the whole lotx went into the yugglsav Embassy. They stayed there till the 27th November, about a week after I left Hungary. On the 18th November Tito made this Pula speech in which he was very sarcastic. He had obviously got frightened about the consequences. He played on Hungarian irridenta but it wasn't true: he was frightened about his own internal situation.

I'm not saying that I was altogether happy about what had been going on between the Monday and the Sunday, November 4th. There was the great cry for ~~the~~ freedom for Mindsenty. I was not like Deutcher who say this as very sinister and proof of its fascist nature. This was not nonsense. The problem was that there was such a tremendous popular unity, you might almost say too much unity!

It is interesting, the way in which the masses misquoted the important speeches such as that of Gero in October 23rd, but at the same time, in misquoting they get to the essence of the matter. Another example was the speech of Cardinal Mindsenty. He was always equivocating, like a Cardinal does. The stupid fool he was too! He kept on speaking about the Soviet Union as "The Great Russian Empire" with whom we want to live in peace. And then ~~hexsziz~~ in 1945 he had protested against the land reform because the catholic church was the biggest landowner in the country. But this time he said only that some kind of justice should be done for former owners of property which had been seized: some kind of compensation should be given. But he didn't ~~axuzlysz~~ actually say that the landreform was to be overturned. Of course the Kadar propaganda that there would have been an end of the land reform was absurd: the peasants would have resisted very strongly. There would have been fascism ~~is~~ if the lands had been handed back to the church and Prince Esterhazy and so on but there was certainly no danger of that. But when I was leaving the country through Western Hungary which is the really Roman Catholic part of the country -- Eastern Hungary is more protestant -- the peasants all said on the train how much they were attached to Mindsenty; after all he was the only really courageous man who stood up against the Communists; and what a disappointment it was for us that he demanded in his speech that the land be returned to the landlords. Actually he hadn't said it but I was very happy to hear that the peasants had misunderstood it in exactly the right way. They grasped what Mindsenty's real intention was. So to believe a la Sidney Silverman or Isaac Deutscher that he....

I remember that after his speech a populist poet, Chory, rang me up on about the first of November and said "we should organise the assassination of Mindsenty, he must be killed!" This was typical. And I said, "For heaven's sake, I mean, the very contrary. He's such an idiot that he will alienate the whole population. The only danger is that the Vatican will push him aside and put in more clever priests who would take a line that fooled the people. If Mindsenty remains he will make anti-clerical propaganda much more effectively than us."

But I thought that the danger from the right really came from people calling themselves anti-communist socialists. But these ancien regime reactionaries were completely out of touch. You must remember that Stalinism had completely transformed the country, first through the revolutionary changes from above in the society, and secondly through the impact of the state coming down on the people.

I was elected a member of the ulpest workers council, which was the biggest industrial area after Chepell. I went out there on the Friday 26th of October and there was a public meeting and I made a speech in front of a big crowd. And I can speak well, so they then elected me a member of the Ulpest revolutionary council, just like that. I had never been there in my life before except to go to watch the odd film. The head of the council was a carpenter.



So anyway, I thought the whole thing was really over and I told my brother to leave with me -- that was his downfall, he spent ~~xxx~~<sup>almost</sup> 7 years in prison for that -- and he agreed to leave with me on the 10th or 11th November. Then I thought that I would say goodbye to these Ulpest people -- that was my brothers' downfall. I had only spent three days there before, from the Friday to the Sunday. So I thought I might as well see what ~~xx~~ was going on with them because I knew that the council was still operating. So I went to the Ulpest town hall and there were the two councils operating in separate rooms: the Stalinist council and the revolutionary workers council. And actually they were having a joint meeting: this was so typical; they kept on arguing with the Stalinists and I thought what's the point? But anyway that's what they were doing. And I was terribly bored, and in my boredom I came to the idea of having a central Budapest workers' council. But of course one cannot just put it forward like that. One has to talk to workers, go to factories and find the people who can stand up and put it forward. But of course I did it in an idiotic way. After the meeting there was a separate meeting on the revolutionary workers' council and I stood up and read out a proclamation which I had already drafted. It simply said that at the moment there is a dual power in the country; the Kadar government is just there on paper, its none existent. There are only two powers; one power is the Russian armed forces and the other is the Hungarian people and in the first place the Budapest working class. One of these two powers is organised -- the Russian army -- but the other is still unorganised; so we must organise it. We must create a central workers council. The Russians are talking about law and order and we agree; we also want law and order but we want it to be the law and order of the proletariat and the people as a whole.

Anyway they accepted it; my brother duplicated it and then I handed it over to the student's revolutionary council to distribute it. I also went to the factories and saw friends of my brother and made phone calls so it was public knowledge. So I thought that I would sit as part of the Presidium of the Ulpest workers council and speak to the meeting presenting my ideas. Because otherwise people would say who is this adventurer? What does he represent? So the chairman of the council, this carpenter agreed. I am obviously not a worker and though I can get on OK with them individually it is a different matter if one is in front of a big workers' meeting. Of course it had been OK at the Ulpest meeting but this meeting of the central workers' council was a different thing. I felt I had to have some backing.

I was trying to say that a compromise is necessary under the circumstances: the Russians should be allowed to keep bases in Hungary; Hungary should remain in the Warsaw Pact. What was important was to have nothing to do with the Kadar regime and to have the internal democratisation. The central workers' council should be organised. A newspaper should be started, which I would edit. Then we should enter into negotiations with the Russians, on a compromise basis. And then Hungary should pioneer the urging of the great powers to come ~~together~~ mutual disengagement -- this later came up with the Radecky plan. But what really matters is what happens inside the country: the workers' councils to be made into a real force internal democratisation to go ahead and let us not think that the crucial question was foreign policy: after all whether the Hungarian delegate at the United Nations votes on the Russian side or the other side is not really the problem of the country.

When we arrived on the basis of this proclamation about 80 or 90 delegates had arrived from different factories, about 3 from each factory: not as many as we had expected, but still about 30 big factories were represented. The building was surrounded by Russian tanks and apparently the previous night the members of the Ulpest revolutionary council had been arrested: they were all later hanged, as I was to learn about 10 years later.

The workers council movement continued seriously into December but to some extent even into January 1957. Now as we couldn't enter the town hall because it was surrounded by the Russians and we had heard that the Ulpest revolutionary council had been arrested the idea was to go to United Electric, a big factory of electrical appliances, highly sophisticated electrical work like radios and so on which consequently had a very social democratic revolutionary workers council -- precisely the kind of people I could have talked to on the lines on which I was thinking. So they formed the Presidium and there were about 80 or 90 people there. Then people from each delegation representing a factory stood up and read their points, one two three four five. They were really amazingly identical: democratic demands and demands for national sovereignty and neutrality and so on, and the right to strike was always very prominent. Then when it came to me it was really a comic, grotesque situation: they said what factory are you from? And I said, "none." And they asked, what right had I to

be there. And I said that I had organised the actual meeting. And then the chairman, this elderly social democrat said: "This is untrue. This meeting is an historical inevitability." So I thought I should be demagogic in return and said "These kind of philosophical points~~xxx~~ which you have probably read from brochures should be discussed after the revolutionary events are over. At the moment we have more urgent matters to tackle." Then it was put to a vote and the majority voted to hear me. And then I made worst speech I have every made, because I had been confused by this thing. I wasn't speaking from the platform but just speaking more or less as an intruder. The Chairman said, "Allr right, speak for ten minutes," and he was ostentatiously looking at his watch. So I tried to say that the Kadar regime was irrelevant and that there were these two p and the main thing was to organise and in a few weeks to become a really strong, unifi organisation as a Budapest workers' council. And then the Russians will feel the need negotiate with us. Because they will realise that they cannot stabilise without us and then we will have to talk to the Russians. But there's no point in talking to their se when the masters are here. But at the moment we shouldn't talk to anybody but keep up general strike only in a more organised fashion. But actually I dont think I said it even as articulately as now, because there were some unpleasant noises after I mention the word 'compromise'. In fact I started with it, saying that it is very impressive th all these demands are almost identical, but politics is not demands, but how to get to them and so far nobody here has said a single word as to how to get to them. Ideal demands are not enough. And in this situation the maximum that we can reach is a compr

But anyway, the speech didn't make any difference. The only decision they made was dially opposite to my conception, namely that a delegation was to be elected to go and niate with Kadar. And when I asked a friend of mine who was there representing the stud revolutionary council, Paul Szado, who had gddé been allowed to go to the meeting with as an observer -- I had suggested the idea to him to asked the workers if he could go; said that he thought Kadar had been unexpectedly skilfull. Of course he had been a memt the underground party since about 1931.

They said to him that they didn't recognise him and that they wanted Imre Nagy as Prime Minister. So Kadar explained to them: perhaps you don't know, but Embassies are foreign territory and ~~that~~ Imre Nagy left Hungary when he went into the Yugoslav Embassy; and he Kadar would be overjoyed to talk to him, because he wouldn't mind to get him into things; but unfortunately as he is abroad he can't do that. And he went on that he fully agreed with the workers, he wholeheartedly agreed that there should be the right to strike; but this particular strike must end; after all, we workers know that there can be no life without production and the strike will ruin Hungary, there will be starvation and so on. He also agreed with them that the Russian troops should withdraw, and immediately after law and order was re-established he would start negotiations with them to that effect. He really agreed with everything, but he just wanted to ~~make~~ them to end the strike. He knew what he wanted. But he didn't achieve it you see.

I had nothing to do with it after this first meeting; but afterwards there were workers who were leaders who went on with the strike and had a second meeting when I was still there. It was actually an engineer who was one of the leaders.

It was the universal pattern after a revolution: gaining time, negotiating and ~~then~~ hoping something might come out of it; but when it became clear that they couldn't get anything, because it's clear that they couldn't end the general strike through the workers' council -- their demands were always such that Kadar couldn't meet them. The whole problem was of course, seemingly, what comes first? There was seemingly an agreement about principles but the problem was whether the demands were met first or whether the workers stopped the strike first. The thing went on until they first arrested some and then they mass arrested the whole lot, the leadership of this workers' council. I read a document of the <sup>Csepel</sup> workers council which says: we don't want to deceive the working class any longer by our resistance which is just a sham resistance; so in order to be true to the class we have decided to declare our dissolution. And that was the end, in January, of the workers' council movement.

There were some promises of integration from Kadar, but the thing became much worse of course with the abduction on the 26th and 27th of November. There was this Yugoslav-Soviet agreement that these people leave the Embassy, and they could go home and would have a safe conduct. It was actually an agreement between Kadar and the Embassy but the Russians just stopped the bus after it left the Embassy and took the lot to Rumania. Actually Lukacs, who left the Embassy about three days earlier, apparently, was arrested at home with his wife and taken with them; and then they were in a villa in Rumania ~~until~~ until the Spring when some of them were freed with no consequences, like Lukacs and <sup>Ervin Szanto</sup> Soitan Santo, which by the way was the doing of <sup>Revai</sup> Revai; so a great many were freed absolutely and Lukacs was even wooed to join the thing, which he refused, but there were a few scapegoats. For example Maleter, who was arrested separately on Nov. 5th, dawn when he was at the Russian headquarters negotiat-

the anti-Party group of Molotov and Kaganovich, and in order to balance this move against the Stalinists, also with Chinese pressure, there was the campaign against the 'modern Revisionists' and they decided to liquidate the modern revisionist par excellence, Imre Nagy. It again shows the small calibre of Kadar because I am shre he could have stopped it.

It was an interesting change. You see the Kadar line until December was that this was a revolution, a popular revolution; the workers and peasants government was an outcome of the revolution -- that was the original position; and then of course this revolution came to be distorted into a counter-revolution by certain elements and that's why this government had to come out; and Imre Nagy was not firm, he was weak -- which is actually true ~~\*\*~~. But then there was this amazing December resolution which for years then was always quoted as the basis of Party policy; of course, by 1957 this resolution seemed extremely mild and weak and the line had in actual practice gone far from it, but it was still always refered to, though like the 1953 resolution it was by then never quoted, as the basis of party policy. Anyway, the December resolution still said that the reform movement before the revolution was correct, a correct anti-dogmatic and anti-sectarian thing, but the trouble come when they brought this programme to the streets, which is a funny persiflage because the model that they were following was the Stalin line that the Trotskyists had stopped being a working class tendency and had become an agency of imperialism by taking their programme to the streets; now with this Stalin line there was the idea that an incorrect trend was taken to the streets. But to say actually that it was counter-revolutionary to take a correct programme to the streets was a funny persiflage of the Stalin position of 1927; I mean the very fact that you take it to ~~the~~ streets, to the masses, is already counter-revolution; this was the essence of the December revolution. But otherwise the line was always that of a two-faced struggle all the time between dogmatism on the one hand and revisionism on the other, to keep the balance between the left wing and the right wing~~x~~ deviations. And of course it was also mentioned in the December resolution, and this was maintained that the Rakosi-Gero clique had responsibility for the uprising, and in the December resolution this was said to have been the main responsibility; later ~~it~~ came to be just part of the story.

And the Kadar consolidation was produced, with a great deal of Soviet aid, a definite rise of the living standards already in 1957-58, going over to consumer goods and producing the ideology which Aczel expressed until his fall in 1974. He made this speech which indicated the cultural end of this new economic mechanism, in which he ~~said~~ declared 'New Leftism' the main danger: it was the agency of the CIA to keep away the youth from the CPs. And there ~~was~~ his main argument against the Hungarian so-called 'New Left' was that they were opposed to this marvellous development which meant that in 1970 more people had automobiles than in 1960 had latrines -- you know, that funny kind of argument.

So I have more or less finished this part of the story.