

Oct. 24, 1957

WEST'S ATMOSPHERE SILENT RETURNÉES

Budapest, in Hungarian to Hungarians in West Europe, Oct. 23, 1957,
1900 (221-1)

(Anonymous Commentary)

(Text) A year ago today, on Oct. 23, 1956, our "Fatherland" transmission was on the air at the usual time. The correspondent, as you will probably remember, said that there had been demonstrations in Budapest that afternoon. Not long after the end of the program, the first shots were fired at the radio building by snipers. The next day at the usual time our listeners of long standing tried in vain to tune in, the well-known voice was off the air. On that day and for many weeks afterward the "Fatherland" voice was silent, or more accurately, it had been silenced.

After this, Hungarians abroad heard increasingly alarming news. Foreign radio stations blared instructions in Hungarian for days from the West. Western papers carried articles on Hungary, their news items and articles mislead the people. Our compatriots abroad were unable to understand exactly what was happening in Hungary, and their hearts were full of anxiety and fear.

Unfortunately, on Oct. 23, this year, the number of those who sit beside their radios each evening in foreign countries, waiting for the "Fatherland" program to start, is much larger. They wait for it with beating hearts, and, as many of our returned compatriots have said, with tearful eyes. Alas, the ranks of our listeners have become much bigger, and we receive a bulky mailbag daily. Many, very many people, wait for news from us these days to know: what is life like at home, what is happening, should we come home, what lies in store for those who decide to return.

We have had repatriated people or visitors speaking on our programs almost daily who could relate in their own words what was happening in Hungary. You must surely remember, compatriots, that you have heard speaking to you young workers, who in spite of their youth have become experienced and well-traveled. You have heard elderly intellectuals and artisans, whom the attractions of a world of free competition failed to retain abroad. You have heard returned priests of the Catholic Church, students, simple women, and finally mothers and fathers who would give their lives to serve their children's interest.

Many of them have spoken to you and they have spoken in different ways. All of them related in their own fashion what brought them home and what their life is like at present. Their ideology varies, too. Some of them have become convinced communists while abroad, and others have been, and remain, deeply religious.

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Some of them were forced to come home by financial difficulties and some others returned in spite of having obtained better living conditions abroad. Some found they were unable to live any longer without their families or friends, and you also heard a father who came home with his wife and four children because he could no longer bear the suffocating atmosphere abroad.

They spoke to you in their different ways, and you, dear compatriots, were able to follow by their stories the difficult year full of work and fighting which now lies behind us. They told you they had been surprised finding hardly any trace on their return of the havoc wrought by the counterrevolution. The houses had been rebuilt, factories were producing more than in previous years. Most of them were taken back into their old employment and their wages--as those of all Hungarian workers--were higher than last year.

They told you that the new leadership has resolved many burning questions, that the system of compulsory deliveries and the tax on childless couples has been abolished. They said that factories are distributing shares of the profits to their workers and that family houses are being given back to their owners. They said that shops are better stocked than ever before, and there are more shoppers, that there is still a queue for theater and cinema tickets, that it is still hard to find a table in the cafes, as they are always full, and that there is no event which is not followed in half an hour by a joke--the product of the perennial humor of Budapest.

People still hang on to straps on streetcars on the boulevards, as our transport still has not improved adequately. But as of January, social supervisors--simple people--will check up on the allocation of apartments, because in spite of increased building it is still hard to get an apartment.

However, the repatriates also spoke about things that are sad. Nearly all of them said the same thing, whether or not things had gone well with them abroad: that they could no longer suffer the humiliation abroad, because wherever they were, people kept pointing to them and looking down on them. They were not regarded as human beings, but as tools for making profits, money, and most often as political tools. Many, particularly the young ones, were often shy at the microphone, they were ashamed of having been duped, having been flatteringly called freedom fighters. They learned at their own heavy cost that they had been merely the victims of the basest machinations against the country and the people.

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Our compatriots came to appreciate what it is like abroad and told us here at home about it, that our system of socialist construction--in spite of all the mistakes that still exist--offers the people a more humane and secure, a happier future. This means more than anything else; the motor bicycles, cars, the promises of a glamorous future. Many of them had been afraid that there would be discrimination against them at home, because although they had not committed any crimes, they had been disloyal and deserted their country in the most difficult situation. Perhaps they would even have considered it fair.

They were mistaken, however. The Hungarian people's state has such strength that it has been able to forgive its returning disloyal sons. There is no discrimination against them whatever. Such were the things you heard from your repatriated compatriots.

We wanted to trace through their words the road which we have traveled here at home. Many of you ask, how did it happen that this small country which last year presented a panorama of destruction, could have made such tremendous progress in a year. Janos Kadar answered this question at yesterday's PPF national council debate. If the people, the working class, had not rallied to the government and the party, if they had not felt that the government and party were serving their interests, it would not have been possible to achieve these results.