

NO HUNGARIAN WILL BE HAPPY ABROAD -
CONVERSATIONS IN BUDAPEST - THE
TRAGEDY OF A PEOPLE. (By Emil Hoffmann)

(Note: The author was on a private visit to Hungary and had a chance to speak to "the man on the street" and to gain some information about the present mood of the people)

"I am not interested in politics at all. I want to buy something for my so-hard-earned money and find my family a decent place to live", a worker of the Csepel Works told me. One hears the same opinion everywhere. It is a sign of the anxiety and annoyance still existing widely among the Hungarian workers. This, irrespective of the fact that the Government states time and time again that in comparison with old times the workers now have a much better income, old-age protection, better health protection, better educational facilities for their children and many other improvements. But prices and wages in Hungary are more important than basic political problems.

This theory was followed by Janos Kadar in his policy towards the Hungarian peasants. He abolished the compulsory delivery system and introduced new and much higher market prices. The reaction of the peasants was amazing. They delivered more than the Government expected. This measure also politically had the desired effect. The peasants today are the best backers of the Government while among the workers, who by propaganda were always mentioned as the social layer upon which the state is built, new class-warfare ideas are appearing against the peasants.

In conversations with adherents of Imre Nagy, I had the same experience. In their present state between fear and disappointment, all those who only last summer were swept off their feet by the heat of freedom and who placed all their hopes in foreign countries, hoping to build a state on the Austrian pattern with their help, are making no secret of their wish that the West should finally stop showing "interest" in them. I was told by one of those persons who even today does not want to give up his conviction and get a good job by becoming an opportunist, that "the dream is over. We must see how we live if we want to survive. It is the tragedy of our nation that we try once in every hundred years to gain our freedom and with all those efforts we have never succeeded".

After such disappointment in the West and after the bad experience at home, is there still a chance that the Hungarians might soon live in another Hungary? Nobody who knows the present mood of the population can answer this question in the affirmative. Some Hungarians see a glimmer of hope in an easing of tension between U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. and in withdrawal of all occupation forces from Europe. "But do not believe that we have any

intention to copy the past or to return to it! It might humanly be comprehensible that emigrants, after waiting for more than a decade and failing in their hopes, will want to return under the label of a revolution. But today there is no more place for old Hungarian romanticism, for feudalism and disputes between the town and village, between the white collared man and worker, between the middle class and the intelligentsia." This was told to me not by a Communist functionary but by a writer, who since November 1956 has stuck to his resolve of non-cooperation with the regime. "I warn you therefore from viewing our country with your own conceptions!" said the writer. "In your country, in Germany, the social emancipation has already reached the borders of the bourgeoisie. In our country, the freedom of the individual is measured by a different standard. The expansion of personality and civil liberty are in the middle of your conceptions. Our Hungarian nation lived for centuries in foreign servitude, in geographical tightness, in economic feudalism and in social neglect. Only a small part of our nation could establish connexion with your view of life and your manner of life. We understand that all those who once belonged to those circles would like to see better days once again. But it would be foolish to close your eyes to the fact that the masses will stick to their demand for a real socialist development in Hungary".

When in a crowded coffee shop I asked some students with whom I was talking and who spoke in a critical way about the present situation, why they didn't leave the country as the 7% of their co-nationals did, they retorted: "Such a solution is no solution. No Hungarian will be happy abroad for ever should he not be able to return home".