

CURT-ON PURGE OF (A) STALINISTS

FROM THE EVALUATION AND RESEARCH SECTION

BACKGROUND REPORT

(Hungarian Research)

12 October 1956

THE QUESTION OF THE PURGE OF STALINIST FUNCTIONARIES IN HUNGARY

On October 5, four officers of the State Security Authority were arrested: Colonel Vladimir FARKAS, former deputy of Gabor PETER, Ervin FALUDI, Gyorgy SZENDI and Gyorgy SZANTO, State Security officers. Since the Twentieth Moscow Congress these are the first arrests in Hungary. The question is, will the purge of the Stalinist law violators and extremists be terminated by the arrest of the four State Security officers and their conviction in an open court, or can this case mean the beginning of a purge on a large scale?

RAKOSI and GERO agreed in that both wanted to realize the new policy without the removal and purging of the old cadres and leading functionaries. But closer inspection of the manifestation of more and more determined demands indicates that the removal of the compromised and the punishing of the offenders will reach greater dimensions than before.

The aim of this summary is to present, on the basis of the Budapest press, the debate which started round the replacement of the Stalinist functionaries and the punishment of the responsible elements.

LOSONCZY Demands Removal of the "Sectarians" (Stalinists)

In August the Central Committee brought a resolution on improvement of the situation of intellectuals. The rehabilitated Geza LOSONCZY, who spent several years in prison, was the first to demand the removal of the "sectarians" in leading positions in his article in Muvelt Nep, September 2 issue, commenting the resolution.

"In the interest of the success of the present resolution the necessary conclusions should be drawn as regards those persons in the capital and in the provinces who have, in the past, by far fulfilled the often considerably grave political crimes condemned by the resolution. With their sectarian infatuation, impatience and stubborn inhumanity, they inflicted innumerable badly healing wounds, yet still hold leading positions. The necessary conclusions should, in particular, be drawn in connection with those who

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crowned their crimes by refusing to fundamentally change their attitude after the 20th Congress."

Geza LOSONCZY: an outstanding member of the Hungarian Communist intelligentsia. Was not in emigration in MOSCOW. After 1945, became a member of the Central Committee, later Under Secretary of State. In summer 1951, arrested and imprisoned without trial. Other Hungarian Communists arrested at the time included Gyula KALLAI, Foreign Minister, Janos KADAR, now secretary of the Party, and Sandro HARASZTI, who died in prison. LOSONCZY was released in 1954, during the premiership of Imre NAGY. He is now chief correspondent of Magyar Nemzet, but up to the present wrote only reports. This is his first political success. He took part in the debate of the Petofi Circle. He was rehabilitated in July 1956. The Muvelt Nep, weekly of the Ministry of Culture, completely joined line with the Irodalmi Ujsag in the vanguard of liberalization.

LOSONCZY Answered by FRISS

Istvan FRISS, member of the Central Committee, one of the leading economic experts of the Party, answers LOSONCZY's article in the Szabad Nep of September 16. He disapproved of removals and punishment, because in his view this would start a whole avalanche.

"And if we would punish for sectarian mistakes, why should we give safe conduct for those who commit opportunist mistakes? No, this would not be the way to defend Party unity, to strengthen it. This -- obviously not in accord with the intention of comrade LOSONCZY, but in spite of his best intentions -- would be the start of a persecution of the Party and state functionaries, the start of a new witch-hunt which would bring confusion and discord to the Party, and lead to a general confusion, disarranging our ranks. And would it be right to use administrative measures against those who committed sectarian mistakes at the time when the Party -- just on the basis of the July resolution -- cancelled many such administrative measures which were used earlier against those who committed mistakes of other kinds? This would obviously not be right."

Istvan FRISS condemned every kind of punishment and removal and called to the attention of the opportunists that after the purging of the sectarians it would be their turn. This was a very clever move, because today the opportunists all belong without exception in the camp of the "thaw." FRISS' article otherwise adheres totally to the political line of GERO-HEGEDUS, which

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opposed the personnel changes and punishment. This policy was clearly stated in the editorial article of the September issue of Tarsadalmi Szemle:

"Certain individuals do not understand it, and their opinion is often expressed in the press, that the policy of a "new thaw" means, among other things, that we wish to put into effect the July resolutions together with those functionaries who in the past, owing to a mistaken line of policy, committed errors, employed wrong methods, but always stood up for the Party's policy, for the policy of building Socialism. Those who expect the upswing of the Party from some sort of "changing of the guard" are seriously mistaken..."

FRISS' article was published one day before the general meeting of the Hungarian Writers' Union. But its content did not influence the speakers, who now demanded more determinedly the removal of the sectarians and the punishment of the law violators.

Demands at Writers' Congress

Poet Lajos KONAY, member of the Union's presidium, said:

"I am much troubled that even within the carrying out of the right measures, there is still much delay -- bureaucratic, sectarian, dogmatic resistance... I still have my doubts on the consolidation of lawfulness, on the consistency of deeds and not only words, as long as the highest forum of legality, the highest prosecutor, will not officially accuse all those who took the lives and liberty of many innocent people and tortured them... No small part of the leading and executive organs of various territories consider this policy to be some kind of liberalism, concessions or often simple tactics, and cannot get rid of Stalinist working methods by which they increase the already existing distrust, and might frustrate the work of leaders seeking for new methods showing results."

Gyula FEKETE, a young writer, formerly belonging to the Peasant Party, demanded the removal of sectarians in leading positions. He was the first to say clearly enough that the renewed differences between the Party and the writers are over the fact that the Party does not want to remove the sectarians in key-positions.

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"There are controversies between us and the Party with regard to the judgment of this numerically small but very powerful group, which during the period mentioned above have proved without doubt their wish to restore the conditions of 1949-52. Some are of the opinion that these stubborn "restorers" ought to stay on in their high positions, in order to be able to start experimenting again when opportunity arises. I, besides many others, think that these men should not remain in their high positions, in which there would be a chance for them to experiment..."

Another writer, Istvan MARKUS, who wrote a violent criticism in the September issue of Csillag on collectivization before 1953 and after 1955, asserted that the present Party leading groups are not suited to carry out the new policy:

"The question is, is someone able or not to carry out this new policy which has to develop in Hungary? Because it is clear that the apparatus which came into being under the rule of the personality cult, and the rule of one-man leadership, chose the majority of its own men for responsible key-positions through a certain selection process."

In these speeches the writers attacked by name only Jozsef DARVAS, Minister of Education. From the published parts of speeches made at the general meeting it cannot be ascertained to what other persons in key-positions they mean to refer by name. In any case Istvan MARKUS calls for the replacement of a "significant part" of those who are in key-positions and this demand is hardly satisfied by the arrest of four State Security officers.

The articles of Istvan FRISS and of the Tarsadalmi Szemle added fuel to the fire and intensified the debate. Up to the end of September it was more a question of the removal only of the sectarians, just the same as RAKOSI's departure, and there were few who raised the question of purges. Under the influence of the TITO-GERO meeting, which was followed by the ceremonial burial of RAJK and his companions, the question of purges came more and more into the foreground.

ACZEL and HORVATH Attack FRISS

Poet Tamas ACZEL, whose recently published poem "Ode to Europe" caused a stir, ranks Istvan FRISS, in the September 23 issue of Muvelt Nep, among the Stalinists. This article represents the "backward pulling forces" he states, and then declares explicitly:

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"We wish to call to account those leading and also the less important Party functionaries who during the period prior to July rendered development difficult through their bad work... Why does comrade FRISS defend those who committed these mistakes? To talk about a witch-hunt when the point at issue is a lawful calling to account -- and I cannot emphasize too much that I do not have arrests and executions in mind, we had enough of those! -- is nothing else but obstructing progress."

In Istvan FRISS' article the main thesis was that purges endanger Party unity. ACZEL calls this a very dangerous argument:

"The person who, in the interest of Party unity, wishes to pardon those responsible, to a smaller or larger extent, for the mistakes, follows a dangerous path."

One week later, on September 30, the rehabilitated and reinstated editor-in-chief of Nepszava, Zoltan HORVATH, attacks in a long article the statements of Tarsadalmi Szemle, the Party's ideological periodical. HORVATH emphasizes that the "new leaf" does not mean oblivion, and that no one is tabu:

"The "new leaf" however, does not mean that everyone is an inaccessible tabu only because he erred without criticism and self-criticism before July."

Zoltan HORVATH then counter-attacks and accuses Istvan FRISS that his article is in contradiction to the July Party resolution:

"This article practically glorifies those who erred, or did not want to admit their errors in time; in fact they do not want to do this even now, although the Party's top management did this in the July resolution with ruthless frankness and constructive force."

Demands Stronger After RAJK Burial

The demand for purges manifested itself even more strongly at the ceremonial burial of RAJK and his companions on October 6. The Party leadership broke from the old thesis established by RAKOSI, according to which they condemned those who executed Laszlo RAJK and his companions. Antal APRO, Deputy Prime Minister and president of the Patriotic People's Front, stated: "We punished those responsible, and will punish them." It was the first time that

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a person in a key-position has declared that there are still responsible persons awaiting punishment.

The commentaries of the papers and the speeches made at the funeral were extremely violent. Szabad Ifjusag speaks of the purging of the "chief criminals," but does not mention any names:

"Our consciousness and condemnation of guilt cannot wipe out the responsibility of the chief criminal."

Szabad Ifjusag connects RAJK's execution with the personality cult, which is linked with Matyas RAKOSI:

"The RAJK case was the immediate consequence of the violation of law and the personal cult, which in the international workers' movement as well as in Hungary blindfolded people and gave rise to the application of criminal measures. How can we be satisfied with our initial results when we want to cover the whole field? Don't we have to keep an eye on those who are unable to walk over their own shadows and jump out of their sectarian skins?"

Ferenc MUNNICH, Minister to Belgrade, also attributes the death of RAJK and his companions to the consequences of the personality cult:

"He (RAJK) too was destroyed by the sadistic criminals who crept to light from the morass of the personality cult."

Another speaker, Bela SZASZ, demands the settling of accounts with the Hungarian disciples of the personality cult:

"Because when the hundred thousands file before the coffins it is their passionate wish, their unchangeable determination, to render harmless the Hungarian disciples of the law of the strongest, the personality cult."

Some of the papers make very extreme remarks. Nepszava emphasizes that "those who misled the people have reasons to be afraid." Szabad Ifjusag writes, in commenting the speeches made at the funeral:

"Many of the funeral orations are sentences. The

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most avenging, the most accusing sentence hangs over the perpetrators of the horrors created by the personality cult."

Position of RAKOSI

Since the speakers and the papers pointed to the connection between the execution of RAJK and his companions and the personality cult, it is worth recalling RAKOSI's self-criticism on May 18 in connection with the personality cult:

"It is a fact that I myself tolerated this personality cult, even supported it more than once. This has to be plainly stated, even more so because otherwise it might cause the feeling in the comrades that we avoid this matter and beat about the bush. The situation is similar in the question of unlawfulness connected with the personality cult. We have to state openly and sincerely that I am also guilty that such grave violations could happen with us, I, who stood at the most important post in the Party -- but the Party's management at the time is also guilty to a certain extent."

Partial admittance of guilt therefore was already made by RAKOSI. On May 18 he read the report of the Political Committee. This is important to stress, because now, after the event, its wording is very interesting. Although RAKOSI admits that he is responsible for the personality cult and the violations of law, he adds that the Party "management" of the time is also guilty to a certain extent. Why the management? RAKOSI obviously wanted to share the responsibility with others, but these refused. This is the reason the directorate turned into "management," for at the time of the personality cult the Party directorate consisted of several persons, but the "management" of the Party was the personal matter of RAKOSI.

The removal of the Stalinist leaders and the condemnation of the culpable was started from the writers' camp, and spread through the ceremonial funeral of RAJK and his companions to his former associates, the organization of the old illegal Communists. In the partisan section of the MOHOSZ (Hungarian para-military organization) there are those Hungarian Communists who participated in the Spanish civil war and in the Hungarian partisan movement of World War II. These did not emigrate to MOSCOW. Among these many were in prison during the past years and many of their companions were executed. On October 8 the partisan section held a meeting. Reporting on the meeting, Magyar Nemzet writes:

"The speakers passionately denounced every kind of violation of law and demanded that the violators

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should answer for their deeds before the courts."

These quotations show that between the beginning of September and October the question of the removal of the Stalinists and punishment of the criminals took a sharper and more concrete form. The leading article of Esti Budapest on October 8 already pointed to a connection between RAKOSI and the execution of RAJK. The paper writes, under the heading "Memento":

"The projection of Stalinism in Hungary, the regime of RAKOSI's personality cult, put into this terrible machinery, as an important part, the hideous RAJK trial. This is the reason that October 6, the date of national mourning, was also the date of a silent revolution. We irrevocably buried an era, -- the era of the personality cult and personal despotism. Those who had to suffer so much, and had to perish in unmarked graves, did not receive a "salvus conductus" either from the Party, the Hungarian people, or from history."

The question of responsibility already arose in connection with the dimensions which could be filled by the arrest and sentence of the four State Security officers. The conflict between the Party and public opinion is unfolding on the following three points:

1. Public opinion and its advocates demand the removal of the Stalinists in key-positions.
2. Public opinion and its advocates demand the punishment of the persons responsible for the violation of law. (Such violators can be found in every village and town.)
3. The greatest responsibility centers on the person of RAKOSI. The press attacks turn from the personality cult toward the cult of RAKOSI.

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