

NEUE ZÜRCHER ZEITUNG (October 6, 1957)

Dr. Viktor Meier who was in Budapest during the revolution as a correspondent of the NZZ, returned now to Budapest and now reports:

... In Budapest on the surface a normal life is going on. The tramways, the trolley-cars and autobuses are running regularly and quite often. The shop windows, considering the socialist structure of society, are quite well equipped. Everybody in Budapest says that the supply of food and recently of textiles is better than before the revolution. One can see only on rare occasions lines before some stores. But the wounds caused to the city during the fight last Fall, are still very evident. The whole Rakoczi Street up to the Eastern Railroad Station, the Jozsef Boulevard and Uelloei Street look like a big single building yard. It is difficult to find one's way on the pavement covered with bricks and building materials. Some façades are already newly painted but at some places, where heavy fighting was going on, the ruins have only recently been cleared. The Kilian Barracks are empty and burned out; according to present plans they are to be converted into a tourist hotel. In spite of the many scaffolds one does not have the impression that a general reconstruction work is going on. Although the regime makes every effort to remove the traces of the revolution, the work progresses only slowly because it places a heavy burden on the State finances.

Apart from the new and shiny red stars, visible on all factories and public buildings, nobody would realize at first sight that he is in a Communist state. The ostentatious neon lights, such as those in Prague, which remind you at every step about the "happiness in the socialist state", are not to be found in Budapest. Only a few faded propaganda slogans on the walls call on you to "trust the Revolutionary Worker Peasant Government", and give three cheers for Kadar; most of them have been there since November-December of last year.

Politics are banned not only from the appearance of the town but also from the conversations of the people. Nobody is talking about politics and nobody seems to be interested in discussing politics. The Hungarians care for the political development of their country less than ever before. One can hear all the time the same stereotype sentence: "What is going on in our country is absolutely of no importance". The long discussions in the official Party paper "Nepszabadsag" about building the new party or about "the fight against deviations to the right and left" are not read. Rumours about differences in the Communist Party hierarchy are spread only because people get malicious pleasure out of this, but not because they expect a change in the regime. The shock of Soviet intervention and the non-arrival of the expected help from the West made the Hungarians, especially the people of Budapest, to become apathetic. Most people restrict themselves to overcoming the difficulties of daily living. The public houses, beginning with the small expressos and coffee-houses to the modern night clubs, are all overcrowded. Everywhere you hear music and the alcohol flows richly. It is striking to see so many young people sitting in the smoke-filled rooms. They have no illusions nor faith.



The Communist Party does not come to the fore in daily living. One must talk to many people before one can meet somebody who would openly admit being a Communist, and even among the Communists one seldom finds a convinced party member. Barely a quarter of the members of the old "Workers' Party" have joined the now "Socialist Workers' Party". Nobody dares to wear the party badge openly. Only recently, and after great efforts, has the regime succeeded in reorganizing the party calls and in re-establishing the ill-famed personnel departments in the factories.

The police is everywhere visible in Budapest. It seems that it has regained the same independent status in the country as the old AVH had during the Rakosi regime. Their methods have not changed much either. In the prisons the captives are beaten and tortured as before. The situation in the concentration camps, in which thousands of Hungarians are kept for indefinite periods without trial or sentence, is beyond belief. Everyone tries to avoid, as much as he can, to come in contact with policemen who already by their rough and brutal looks fill everyone with fear. And should somebody unfortunately come into the clutches of the police, there is hardly a way to help him. It is even not advisable to go near the red-house on Foe Street, a building converted into a prison in which all prominent political prisoners, including Pal Maleter, are kept. At all four corners AVH people are standing with submachine guns in readiness and others are walking around the building in the company of bloodhounds. During my visit a German newspaper-man tried to take a picture of the building from a distance of about a hundred meters. Immediately a group of policemen ran out from the building, jumped on the man, wrenched the camera from his hands, and took him away. It took several hours before he was released. When he demanded satisfaction in the Foreign Ministry, the people in the Ministry were afraid of talking up the matter with the police.

There is an important difference between the old AVH and the new police: Kadar's police is no more the instrument of an inner-party terror but its principal task is to persecute the so-called "class-enemies", this means the freedom fighters, the representatives of the bourgeois classes, the Social Democrats and the other enemies of the regime. Of course, there are many former Communists among the prisoners, mostly followers of Imre Nagy.

The Soviet troops are not much visible in the city of Budapest. They are in barracks on the outskirts of the city. But on the Citadelle of the Gellert Hill there is still a Soviet occupation unit. One can see Russian officers leaning against the low parapet of the old fortress enjoying the sight of Budapest and the Danube. An officer of the new Hungarian army is explaining the panorama to his Soviet "Comrades".

At this point we remembered those days of last November when sitting below in the Gellert Hotel we heard the artillery shells whizzing through the air and reducing the town to ruins. One cannot visit Budapest today without remembering again and again the horrible pictures of last year's revolution.