

NO.510

"B " FACESHEET AND RATING

SB

p.1

July 1957
London

1. L-10
2. Respondent did not wish to have his name entered.
3. London
4. 43
5. M
6. Hungarian
7. Roman Catholic
8. Roman Catholic
9. M
10. ---
11. Writer
12. Writer and architect
13. ---
14. Father: Working Class
Mother: Lower Middle Class
15. ~~Zaszlos~~ Corporal (1939)
16. Before WW II, Europe, after '39 nowhere.
17. ---
18. ---
19. Diploma of the Budapest Faculty of Technology
20. Budapest
21. Budapest
22. Bekes
23. Social Democrat (Circumstances see in the interview)
24. 23 Dec 56
25. Vienna (2 months), London
26. ---
27. ---
28. New York Psychological Project (?)
29. ---
31. "10"
32. "10"
33. "10"
34. ---

In reply to Interviewer's introductory questions respondent said:

"I am now 43 years old. I was 31 in 1945, when the war ended and I left behind the first ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{phase} of my life.

It was very different from the one that began in 1945.

~~Namely.~~
~~xxxxxx~~ I am now a professional writer, but before the

war I was an architect. I received my architect's diploma

~~drifting.~~
in Budapest. I was ~~xxxxxx~~ However, towards literature.

While ~~xxxxxx~~, as an architect I was writing a lot, although nothing

~~I have written~~
was published ~~xxxxxx~~ until after the war. During the

Second World War, in 1943, I got mixed up in an anti-

Fascist conspiracy. In a box in my apartment the police

found a mimeographing machine. A friend of mine brought

the box to my place. I did not even know what was in the

box. Nevertheless I was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment.

I was locked up in the ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{Satoraljaújhely} ^{There} prison ~~and~~ in

1944, after the German occupation of Hungary in March,

I was a witness of the little known prison riot ~~xxxxxx~~
of Satoraljaújhely. This

~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ /little known incident occurred on

27 March. The Serb prisoners started a riot upon learning

that the Germans had occupied Hungary. They had known

namely that the Germans had liquidated the inmates of

several prisons in occupied Yugoslavia and they were afraid

that they same would happen to them. The majority of the

~~Satoraljaújhely~~
prisoners in ~~xxxxxx~~ were Serbs.

Four hundred of them. In addition there were a few ~~au-~~
thenians and some ^{one} hundred Hungarians. The prison riot was
a terrible affair. The Germans suppressed it.

Shortly thereafter we were transferred to another prison.

During the transfer, however, I succeeded to escape. I
went to Budapest and until the end of the war I was in
hiding. After the war was over in 1945 I got a job at the

UNRRA Mission in Budapest. I had this job until January

1947. My first incident with the new regime in Hungary

occurred in 1945. I attended the so-called INTERPARTY

Conference, open for the public, and spoke up briefly.

The topic of the discussion was the police. I suggested

that in the interest of public security the police should

be under the control of the coalition parties in accordance

with their proportionate strength. My remark was directed,

of course, against the Communist control of the police.

One of the leading Communists present, Mr. Gerö, reacted

very nervously to my proposition. I overheard him asking

"Who is that man?" The Communist-dominated police indubitably
traced

~~XXXXXX~~ down my identity and from then on I was a marked man.

This incident, I am sure, was the reason that I was unable

to get a decent job after January 1947, when my employment

in the UNRRA Mission was terminated. In search of pro-

tection against Communist vengeance, in 1947, I joined the

Social Democratic Party. This Party membership, however,

did not improve my chances to get a job. Unpleasant as this

situation has been, it still was to my advantage, because

it gave me the final push to decide that I should become a
writer.

Unable to get a job in my field of an architect, I decided to devote my time entirely to writing. Already in 1947 I wrote a major novel entitled "Heliane". It was published by the Magyar ~~Könyv~~^{Teka.} The novel was a symbolic story and strongly against the regime. It was a ~~satire~~^{totalitarian} on the ~~totalitarian~~ Rakosi regime then in the making. The novel was published in 1949. The Communists understood very well what I meant and one of the Communist critics, Istvan Kiraly, wrote in the magazine "Csillag": "We call the attention of the police not merely to the author, but also to the publishers!"

Needless to say that this novel did not endear me to the regime, nor did my earlier literary associations improve my standing with the regime. I was a member of the so-called "Eur^aopi Iskola", the European School. It was a Western oriented group of artists and writers, headed by the writer Lajos K^aossak. Among the writers Sandor Moeress, Szentkuty, Bela Hamvas belonged to the group. We had a club room, a permanent exhibition and we held literary evenings and published a four-page sheet called "Index", in which we wrote about literary and artistic events of the West. The group incidentally, was suppressed towards the end of 1948."

Next, Interviewer asked respondent how he made his living:

"Well, I had the following sources of income. To begin with, my mother had a grocery store; then I had some savings, also I was doing rather well as a translator. I was making money also with my writing. I was painting also and my pictures were very popular, I sold a great number of them. Then my wife, who was a pharmacist, was earning too. From 1945 to 1947 some of these sources ~~was~~ ^{listed had tried} ~~up~~ and my main source of ^{I made} /income were from translations/ from Russian into Hungarian.

This was a good source of income. In 1949 I was making about 8,000 - 10,000 ft. a month, but although I was doing well I got fed up with the regime and decided to leave Hungary. Also, I hated myself for making translations from Russian into Hungarian, often such translations which I thought should never appear in Hungarian. My disgust towards the regime and towards myself was heightened when I overheard a remark to the effect that by using me as a translator, the regime knows how to make use of its enemies. A remark about myself that I have overheard was: "We should make the enemy translate for us." At Christmas time in 1949 I tried to escape from Hungary. My attempt was a failure. I was intercepted at the Austrian border, arrested, put on trial and sentenced to prison. I served two years, from 1950 to 1952. After my release I succeeded to get a job in the fall of 1952. I was employed by the State owned Industrial Building Designing Office as a designer-architect. I have held this job from the fall of 1952 til the fall of 1953.

In 1953 conditions improved in Hungary. It was the time when Imre Nagy came to power. My friends in the Writers Association gave me translation jobs. So I returned to my favorite occupation, literature, and I was doing quite well. I was making an average of 6,000 - 7,000 ft. a month. How well I was doing during the subsequent years can be best illustrated by the fact that different state owned publishing houses owe me today about 60,000 - 70,000 ft. Although I was doing well, ~~xxxxxxx~~ this was nothing in comparison with how much some of the favorite writers or artists of the regime were making. Such people, for instance, like Gyula Illyes, who made about 80,000 - 100,000 ft. per month, or the composer ^{Zoltan} ~~Gyula~~ Kodaly, who made atleast 150,000 ft. per month."

Interviewer asked respondent how he explained the position of the favorites:

"By calling them favorites of the regime I did not mean to say that they necessarily were fond of the regime. Kodaly, ~~xxxxxx~~ for instance, sometimes was unusually outspoken in his criticism against the regime. As for Gyula Illyes, he is an unusually cunning person, an ambivalent individual. He was writing for the regime and yet he was capable of hiding so many subversive ideas in his writings, that even the reactionaries applauded him. Incidentally, in my opinion, Illyes, although a great artist, will not leave a great oeuvre behind.

He **is** a great man, but as a poet I think he is only secondary."

Next, interviewer asked respondent what he thought of the activities of the writers in the Petöfi Circle:

"It is entirely wrong to view those writers as if they have been champions of freedom in the Western sense of the word. This they could not have even done. They did not speak like the liberals of 1848, or the way the Western liberals are speaking about freedom. They were Marxists and they were speaking the language of the Marxists, and I should stress again that there was no other possibility to discuss ^{public affairs.} ~~the problem~~. Those writers who attacked the Rakosi regime based their attacks on the contention that Rakosi is not a good Marxist. The writers considered themselves better and more true Marxists. These writers were following the example of the Polish writers, but the Polish **example** was not their sole source of inspiration. The first great ^{thaw} ~~power~~ in Hungary was during the Imre Nagy regime, in 1953, and in spite of Nagy's ^{failure} ~~error~~ he remained an important, behind-the-scene factor. Speaking about Imre Nagy, I have seen him very often on the street. He is a very small almost gnome-like man and I often thought: "My God, is this the man in whom Hungary places **her** hopes?"

Interviewer next asked respondent to **elaborate** more fully his views on the role of the writers in the fermentation preceding the Revolution:

"There was a longing among the writers of the regime to recover their lost honor. Take for instance the example ^{the enemies of the} regime of Gyula Hay. He was one of the chief denunciators of / ^{during} the Stalin era, and he became also the standard bearer of the writers' movement for freedom. Now, to proceed more systematically¹ in discussing the role of the writers I would like to set up several categories. First, let us take up the former Stalinist writers who, as I have described, lost their honor and were anxious to recover it. They were disillusioned by the bankruptcy of the State. This bankruptcy was evident to anyone who had a chance to go around in the country and these writers, privileged writers of the Stalinist era, had the opportunity to travel in the country. They saw the situation, they saw ^{And} the complete bankruptcy of the Communist regime. ~~xxxx~~ they were the ones who started the writers' movement. Among them, however, I would distinguish between two groups. One group consisted of those Stalinist writers who honestly believed in the Stalinist course. These honest writers were those who were longing to recover their purity, the honesty of the writer. I would cite ^{Zoltan Zolk,} here the following writers: Tibor Dery, ~~xxxxxx~~ ^a Gyula ^d Hay, Tibor Tar^dpos.

The other group consisted of opportunists. Here I would cite the following writers: Tamas Aczel, Tibor Meray, Sandor Lukacsy. These opportunists were not honest.

They were just thinking of the approaching change and they did not want to miss the bus. To give you an illustration of how cynical these opportunist writers had been, I can tell you a story about Tibor Meray. I have met him shortly before the Revolution in the house of the Creative Artists at Visegrad. I was staying there for about six weeks. Once, when I met Meray I asked him: "Now what was the truth about that germ warfare in Korea?" He replied: "Well, this was the ^{sort of a} ~~thought of that~~ sin one commits in younger years."

So this was one category of writers, the Stalinists. Now, the second category of writers who took part in the fermentation preceding the Revolution were the silenced writers of the Stalinist era. They played no important role in the Writers Association or in the Petöfi Circle, but they had a very important impact on public opinion. They were allowed to write and the State publishing houses began to publish their books. As a matter of fact, the State publishing houses were happy to publish their books now, because it was good business. Now here among the silenced writers who were not allowed to write, I would distinguish three groups. First, the writers whom I would call conservative. Of course I am using this term within the framework of the then prevailing circumstances. These were the writers whose literary ethics did not conflict with the Communist Party's social policy. Such were, for instance, Jozsi Jenö Tersanszky. ~~Jozsi Jenö Tersanszky~~

Sandor Patai, György Szanto.

Then, there was a second group among the silenced writers who were now allowed to write. These were the stars of the past, such as Milan Fust, Endre Illes.

And, finally there were the moderns, such as Sandor Woeress, and I would count myself ^(Gyozolatár) among those. "

Interviewer asked respondent to look back at the Stalinist era and to tell how did a writer get his work then published:

"Well, first, you had to submit the resumé of your manuscript to one of the State-owned publishing houses. There, a lector read your manuscript and after a while he told you what should happen with the persons in your story. He was in particular anxious to point out what should happen to the so-called positive figures in your story. After that you wrote the next 60 pages or so and submitted it again to the lector. After a while you received further instructions and it went on like that. Sometimes it was necessary to re-write passages or whole chapters five, ~~six~~ times. I coined a word for this system. I called it "lectorocracy". But don't make any mistake. This system did not die away so fast. Even during the period of relaxation this practice was changing only gradually. Even then you had to go thru this procedure. The difference was that now the lector became more polite. He said now "Look, comrade, perhaps you could do this and that." In other words, the tone of the lectorocracy has changed.

Of course, there were certain writers who were given greater latitude during the period of relaxation. For instance, such stars of the past like the before mentioned ^{Jozsi Jenö} ~~Jozsik~~ Tersanszky could write whatever he wanted. Now, this was the situation on the eve of the ^{ure} Revolution. Perhaps at this junct~~ion~~ I should say a few words about the writers who did not take part in the so-called fermentation, nor did they join the Revolution, nor did they, for that matter, oppose it. This is a third category of writers and these are those who now are supporting the Kadar regime. Here I would distinguish between three groups. First, the Moscovites, such as Sandor Gergely, Bela Illyes, György ^B Doloni. Then, the second group of the phony peasants. Those faithful fellow travellers who emulated the idiom of Zsigmond Moricz. But while emulating the idiom of Zsigmond Moricz, they were actually following through thick and thin the Party directives. Such are for instance Pal Szabo, Sandor ^a Re~~vey~~, Ernö Urban. and finally, the wounded. Here is where ^{Jozsef} ~~Jozsef~~ Fodor belongs. A writer, who after a long, honest silence became a champion of the Kadar regime. He is the type of writer who could not stand anymore not to be successful. He is past 50 and deeply wounded. He wants to have success before he passes away."

Next, Interviewer asked respondent to go back to the pre-revolutionary period and to sum up the impact of the writers:

"The impact of the writers was especially strong on the youth. They could communicate with the younger generations because they were speaking the same language, the Marxist language. But while speaking the language of Marx, they added something new, the spirit of freedom. Thus I would sum up their impact in these words: Marxism plus freedom."

Interviewer asked respondent to sum up his views on how the Revolution had actually broken out:

"The regime had to choose between two alternatives. Either to tighten the control or to let the reins loose. They probably could have done either of the two, but they did neither the one nor the other. They hesitated and vacillated. Thus the regime fell between two stools and thus a situation developed which made the Revolution possible. Now to speak in more concrete terms, the decisive event of the Revolution took place on the night of October 23rd. Gerö delivered his radio speech full of provocation and the AVO began the shooting. This was the turning point. In response to the provocation the irritated masses were welded together by an almost primitive feeling of solidarity, in defense of each other. One for all, all for one! Nothing could break this solidarity of the nation. The Revolution was on."

Interviewer asked respondent what did he do during the Revolution:

"I did not have any particular role in the Revolution. I was on October 23rd in Visegrad at the Creative Artists' house, as I have already said. After learning from the radio what was happening in Budapest, I hurried to the capital. I was present at the moving scene when the crowd pulled down the Stalin statue and in other places. On October 25th I have joined the staff of the radio station, which operated at that time in the Parliament Building. Together with Miklos Hubay we were working in the news service. I was busy at the literary end of the work."

Finally, Interviewer asked respondent what did he do after the Russian attack on November 4th:

"I was at home on Nov 4th, in my apartment across the New York Palace, and from the windows of my apartment I could witness the battle scenes. Under the rule of terror that followed the defeat of the Revolution, there was no alternative left for me but to leave the country. It was not an easy decision. I had to leave behind my 78 years old father, and my 70 years old mother. Nonetheless I made the decision early in December, when during my absence from home, three AVO men were looking for me. Following that I did not sleep at home and on December 23rd, with my wife, I crossed the border into Austria. I did not want to leave, but I did not want to experience once again prison."

And then too, what could I have done at home? What could one do more than we did? A nation cannot do more than we did."

INTERVIEWER'S RATING: Rapport, frankness, cooperativeness, were excellent. No sign of compliance or flattery.