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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE PROBLEM OF HUNGARY

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE TWENTIETH MEETING (CLOSED)

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 20 February 1957, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. Alsing ANDERSEN

(Denmark)

57-14305

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The CHAIRMAN: The twentieth meeting of the Committee is called to order.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Witness E took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I welcome the witness, whose desire for anonymity will be respected. I request him to begin his statement concerning facts of which he has personal knowledge.

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): I should like to thank you for your words of welcome. I am very grateful for this opportunity to be useful to my country and to tell you of events that really concern a breach of international law.

On 25 October 1956, around 11 o'clock, I started from the Astoria Hotel in Budapest with the crowd that seized four Soviet tanks and two Soviet armoured cars. This crowd was composed of unarmed people, and its aim was to go in front of Parliament in order to ask for the dismissal of all Stalinists. I myself happened to be in that crowd, because people were looking for interpreters who could speak Russian in order to be able to start these Soviet vehicles. During my five and a half years in a Russian prison, I had learned the Russian language well, and furthermore I knew how to drive Russian vehicles. I myself sat next to the driver of the first Russian armoured car and showed the way to Parliament. Before starting, we removed the ammunition from the heavy and light weapons that we found on these tanks. When this demonstration reached the Ministry of Agriculture, on the right-hand side of the square in front of Parliament, the AVH and Soviet soldiers stationed on the rooftops of the surrounding buildings opened fire with machine-guns and automatic pistols on the crowd standing there composed mostly of women and children. Some of the Russian armoured cars that arrived at the square at the same time as myself, upon the prompting of the Hungarians who sat in these tanks and armoured cars, shot into and forced open the door of the Ministry of Agriculture and one of the entrances of Parliament, so that the people could take cover. The AVH and Soviet soldiers stationed on the rooftops opened fire on the rescue teams that were coming to the square in order to help the

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(Witness E)

wounded, and before my eyes they shot a woman doctor and two nurses who wanted to rescue the wounded. For about an hour it was impossible to get near the victims, and even afterwards the rescue work could be carried out only at the risk of one's life.

Now I am going to speak about another fact. On 8 November 1956, late in the afternoon, in front of the Duna Hotel at Budapest where foreign correspondents lived during the revolution, a passenger car covered with the American flag came out of a garage from the opposite side. I myself live in the house next door so I saw what happened from close by. From a point approximately 100 or 150 metres from the entrance of the garage a Soviet tank opened heavy artillery fire on the car covered with the American flag. One of the two men sitting in the car was wounded and the other one jumped out of the car and ran back into the hotel. The wounded man was pushed out of the car by the Russian soldiers and they drove away in the car. The inhabitants of the house, and myself, rushed to the rescue of the wounded man and later I took him to the United States Legation. Two journalists, one of whom gave me his card, was a reporter of Life magazine called Rougier, and the other one was a journalist for Paris-Match, were there. We took down the registration number of the tank and thus, upon the intervention of the Legation, the Soviets had to return the car the next day.

Another fact: on 15 November 1956, one of the directors of the Ministry of Communications informed me that on the previous night, at Zahony, which is on the Hungarian border to Russia, a train had passed through carrying young Hungarian men and women into the Soviet Union. Together with friends of mine I drove to Zahony in my own car where I spoke with people released from the second train who had been able to escape due to the fact that the Hungarian railroad workers had removed the rails and then stormed the stopped waggons and released the persons inside. Subsequently, the Russian deportations were carried out in lorries towards Komarom (Czechoslovakia) and it was only there that people were put into railroad waggons. I know this trick personally, as in 1945 it was in this exact same way that I, together with many hundreds and thousands of Hungarians, was taken to the Soviet Union as prisoner of war. On the same day, namely on 15 November, at the museum circle in front of the university, around 12 o'clock noon, soldiers jumping off from an open Russian armoured car kidnapped five boys and three girls.

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(Witness E)

I had the occasion, several times, to talk with Soviet soldiers who were under the impression that they were in Berlin and were fighting against fascists, having been told that by higher-ranking Soviet officers. Several asked me how they could get to the famous Brandenburg Gate.

On 21 November 1956 I was at the headquarters of the Russian command of Budapest at Ajtosi-Dürer/Sor 21, where I wanted to obtain a permit to circulate in my car. At the MVD section I saw among the Hungarians who were arrested Erzsebet Andics and Vladimir Farkas, the latter being the famous AVH man, who, the Kadar Government has said, would be held responsible for his misdeeds. They were both working there and interrogating the prisoners. The same afternoon, in the centre of the city, together with a friend of mine called Laszlo Erdos, I went to fetch some milk for our children. We carried two empty bottles. My friend was not careful enough and made no attempt to conceal the bottle he was carrying, and this cost him his life. The Russian armoured car that was turning into our street from a side street shot him because he was holding a bottle in his hand.

I could mention several other instances. In general, one has to note that the misdeeds that occurred in the city mostly without reason can be attributed to the cowardice of the Russian soldiers, who, when they were fired upon with a gun from a house, did not enter the house in order to find the culprit but chose the simpler way of shooting at the building with cannon. Nor is it true to say that the revolution was started by counter-revolutionary elements as, should this have been the case, the AVH and the police would have intervened as early as 23 October since the arrest of counter-revolutionaries would have been a feather in their cap from that day. They were unable to intervene at that time because their own people had started the revolution, the workers and youths they had educated.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. At the beginning of your statement you talked about four Soviet tanks which were seized by the crowd in front of the Astoria Hotel. Does that mean that the Russian soldiers did not shoot at the crowd?

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): In this particular instance they did not shoot on the crowd because, in the first place, those Russian troops which were in Budapest before 4 November were reluctant to use their weapons unless ordered to do so by their superiors.

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Mr. SHANN (Australia): When did you leave Hungary?

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): On 26 November 1956.

Mr. SHANN (Australia): Could you tell me why you left Hungary?

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): On 26 November I was a member of the Revolutionary Council of my own profession, and furthermore I participated in appropriating the "cadre" material that was in the Ministry of Agriculture. Furthermore, I had already spent five and a half years in Soviet prisons as a war prisoner and I had no intention of repeating that experience.

Mr. SHANN (Australia): Do you have any idea why so many Hungarians -- I understand the reasons why you left -- why so many Hungarians, who were perhaps not directly involved in the fighting and had no reason to fear for the future, left Hungary, instead of staying there and carrying on, in whatever way they could, secretly probably, their fight for the success of the Hungarian revolution?

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): This is a complicated question to which one cannot give a brief reply. In my view, there are several categories of people among those who came out. One category had for years been wanting to leave Hungary; they had families or relatives or friends outside Hungary and they were dissatisfied with the regime at home. They could now leave the country more easily and at less risk. Many of the younger ones, in my opinion, left for the sake of adventure; and there is also a very large segment which, even though it was not directly involved, was nonetheless fearful of unjustified retaliation. Everyone felt that it was hopeless to continue the fight without help from the outside.

Mr. SHANN (Australia): Were you ever a member of the Communist Party?

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): I was never a member of the Communist Party nor of any other party.

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Mr. SHANN (Australia): Why were you imprisoned in Russia for five years?

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): On 30 November 1944, fifty kilometres away from Budapest, I became a prisoner of war.

The CHAIRMAN: I understood that you personally had seen a train with prisoners at Zahony, the border station to Russia, so that you personally can testify that trains with prisoners from Budapest and elsewhere were going into Russia?

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): I did not see the train cross the border because trains have to be changed there in view of the different gauge used. In Hungary we do not use the wide gauge. The first train, according to a hundred eye-witnesses who were railroad workers, went through the border during the night. I arrived when the second train was there. It was unable to cross the border because the rails had already been removed on the Hungarian side of the border. When somebody is taken in a sealed car to Zahony you can be sure that they do not want to take him to London.

The CHAIRMAN: I have no more questions. As there are no further questions, we thank you for your statement.

WITNESS E (Interpretation from Hungarian): Thank you for having heard me.

Witness E withdrew.

The meeting rose at 3.55 p.m.