

NO. 503 "B-1" FACESHEET AND RATING SB p. 1

July 1957  
London

1. L-3
2. [REDACTED]
3. London
4. 56
5. M
6. Hungarian
7. Reformed
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9. M
10. O
11. Writer
12. Journalist, press attaché
13. ---
14. Middle class
15. ---
16. Europe
17. No
18. No
19. Matura
20. Budapest
21. Budapest
22. Pest
23. Social Democrat
24. November 27, 1956
25. London
26. ---
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31. "10"
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Interviewer's introductory remarks: Respondent who was the writer Pal Ignatus said during the preliminary conversation that actually what he has to say he has written about extensively. He mentioned in particular the articles he wrote about his personal story in the French magazine Demain, in the Manchester Guardian, for Voice of America, and in a Hungarian magazine entitled Jójjetek, published in the Netherlands. About his prison experiences he referred to his articles written for Manchester Guardian, about interrogations to his article in the Demain, furthermore on problems of literature and politics he referred to his articles in Encounter and in Figaro Litteraire. In Figaro Litteraire he said he dealt also with the Jewish question. On the events leading to the Revolution in particular about the national unity he wrote in the **Preuves** magazine. On the Revolution itself he referred to his articles in the Esprit, France Observateur, and a forthcoming article in the magazine 20th Century. Finally he referred to his contribution in the book edited by Melvin Lasky "The Hungarian Revolution". Interviewer told respondent that in spite of respondent's extensive writing on the subject there may be a few questions which in the course of the interview respondent could further clarify. End of Interviewer's introductory remarks.

(First I have asked respondent to explain why and how did he decide to go back to Hungary in 1949:)

I was appointed press attaché of the Hungarian legation in London in November 1947. To explain my attitude towards the Hungarian regime I would say that I preferred to be the Hungarian regime's propagandist abroad to being in opposition to the regime at home. I was a social democrat and my position became increasingly difficult after the liquidation of the Social Democratic Party. I came under criticism ~~of~~<sup>by</sup> the Hungarian Communist press; the Szabad Nep attacked me several times. However, in spite of the increasing difficulties I was of the opinion that not everything is lost yet. I was trying to save what I thought still could be saved. I represented the regime and defended its actions by taking what I would call a third traveller's position. I was neither a Communist nor an anti-Communist, I was a Socialist and taking this third traveller's road I believed that I was doing a service to my country. I may say today that all this was self-delusion. Before going home in June 1949 I was fully aware of the dangers. As a matter of fact, several of my friends warned me against these dangers. Among them was the minister, the Hungarian minister to London, my friend Janos Eros who was a member of the Communist Party but he was as much a Communist as I have been. He told me once: "You know, who stays abroad is a ~~traitor~~<sup>traitor</sup>, who goes home is a spy." He warned me also by confiding that the Communists

consider me the evil spirit of Michael Karolyi. Another friend of mine Andras Revay told me that Rakosi considers me a British agent. In spite of these warnings and in spite of my own feelings of danger I decided to go home. There were 2 main reasons for this decision: first I still believed that I could ease the situation at home by my presence, in particular I believed that I can be helpful to my friends who have gotten into trouble. Second I went home, because my father was gravely ill and his death was imminent. To show you how much I was aware of the risks involved I could tell you that before leaving London I left a letter for my sister which was to be opened in case I would not return. Among others in this letter to my sister I made the following statement: There is a 50% possibility ~~that I will come back~~ **ten percent** that I will come back, there is a ~~100%~~ possibility that I will be arrested, there is 1% possibility that I will be hanged, and there is 5% possibility that in case I am sentenced to prison I may survive.

(Next I have asked respondent what he thought he could achieve by returning home.)

I have requested the government to go home for reporting. What I wanted to achieve was this: First I wanted to see clearly how far I could go in my role as a third traveller in representing and defending the regime abroad. Second I had the intention also to tell the government that unless they allow me certain lati-

tude in my activities abroad it is impossible to speak on ~~the~~<sup>be</sup> half of the regime or even remain on speaking terms with the West. Everything worked out, however, differently than I have anticipated. After my return home I was not even able to speak to the government leaders I have wanted. When I expressed my desire to return to my post in London there was procrastination. Neither did they tell me that they will not let me to go back, nor did they allow me to go. I received a ~~sundry~~ jobs in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs but no decision on my return to London had been made. In the meantime my father died and a few days after his funeral I was arrested on September 5th, 1949. The accusation against me was that ~~I was~~ I was a spy in the services of the British Intelligence. I was charged also by forwarding instructions from the British Labor Party. Spy instructions, that is to **Árpád Szakasits**, the former leader of the Social Democratic Party. The charges against me were evidently serving the purpose to discredit the Social Democratic Party in Hungary which was one of their chief ~~objectives~~<sup>objectives</sup> at that time.

(Next I asked respondent to what extent did he change his opinions on the Hungarian regime at the time of his arrest.)

Even ~~if~~ had they let me return to London I could not have continued my earlier activities as a third traveller

in defending the regime. Until then, I maintained the position which I have described a little while ago, ~~namely~~ <sup>that I preferred</sup> ~~to be the propagandist of the Hungarian regime abroad, to being in opposition to the regime at home.~~ Had They let me return to my post, I could not and would not have continued in this role. I would have opposed the regime I would have defied it. Very soon after my return I have realized that the situation at home has changed radically, since my last visit to Hungary. This was ~~the~~ <sup>now</sup> the beginning of the terror and how far this terror had gone I became aware of it very soon, whereas in 1948 when I last visited Hungary people were anxious to meet me and they were anxious in general to meet people coming from the West. Now they avoided meeting me, they turned away with horror from me and from everyone else who came from the West. They were afraid ~~to~~ <sup>of</sup> talking to people coming from the West. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs whenever I said something which was not in line with the Party instructions for the day, people turned away from me in silence and evident fear.

(Next I have asked respondent what change<sup>s</sup> did his opinions undergo during his arrest and trial and imprisonment.)

Actually no basic changes have undergone. I have changed, I wish to/ <sup>stress,</sup> my opinions before my arrest.

(Next I have asked respondent about his experiences following his release from prison in 1956.)

When I was released in the spring of 1956 the situation in Hungary was very different from what I have known at the time of my arrest in 1949. There was a great change in the mood of the country. People were talking freely and expecting a radical change. They were expecting above all the return of Nagy to power. I remember talking to peasants in the summer of 1956. They repeatedly asked me when will Imre Nagy return to power. I had the feeling that they were not actually national Communists, but they laid great trust in Imre Nagy. As for my position following my release I did not take active part in public life, I was watching the events rather than taking part in them. On the basis of my observations I am of the view/<sup>that</sup> until October 23rd the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian people would have excepted a solution along the lines which Poland had achieved under Gomulka. There was a great nostalgia among the people to return to some traditional forms of Hungarian life. In particular I think there was a longing for returning to Parliamentarism and to small-scale capitalism. But I felt no desire on the part of the people to return to the system of big estates, of big industry, big banking or for that matter, I did not feel that the people would like to see the kingdom ~~restored~~<sup>restored</sup> in Hungary. I felt that the People are realistic enough to know what kind of

system would be feasible, possible under the circumstances. The system they thought possible was a kind of middle road solution. Had free elections been held this mood of the country would have expressed itself by supporting the middle road parties, in particular the Smallholders and the Social Democrats.

(Next I have asked respondent what kind of government in his opinion would have been formed in Hungary in case the Revolution would have stabilized itself.)

I think it would have been a coalition government, composed chiefly of the Smallholders Party and the Social Democrats. Also a strong Catholic Party would have been in the coalition, although I anticipated in such a situation a split within the Catholic party. A split between the followers of Mindszenty and the democratic republican minded Catholics. There would have been also a peasant party and a liberal bourgeois radical party. All these parties I have mentioned probably would have participated in the coalition. As for the Communists Imre Nagy probably would have remained the leader of a small Communist Party, an anti-Stalinist-Communist Party, that is had the old Stalinists tried to bolt the Communist Party, they could not have gained more followers than ~~maximally Mosley~~ <sup>Mosley</sup> in England. Finally there would have been a sort of Neo-Fascist Party with strong nationalistic and **revisionistic** tendencies. But I don't think that it would have gain-



ed much support among the Hungarians.

(Next I have asked respondent about his opinions on anti-Semitism in Hungary.)

During the Rakosi era anti-Semitism in Hungary was very strong. The people regarded the Communist dictatorship as a Jewish dictatorship and in view of the great number of Jews in leading positions, this point of view was, to a certain extent, justifiable. The regime of Rakosi strengthened anti-Semitism in 2 ways. First, by putting their picture in the show-window, as I like to speak of it jokingly, second, by fostering anti-Semitism and this second point I am going to explain in detail. The regime was aware of existing anti-Semitism and was anxious to take advantage of it by promoting its own ends. The way the regime was trying to manipulate with anti-Semitism was this: They were anxious to divert anti-Semitism directed against the regime by turning it against the Jewish enemies of the regime. They have fostered anti-Semitism against the Jewish capitalists, against Zionists, against Jewish bourgeois cosmopolitan elements. For instance, the general practice of the regime in fostering this anti-Semitism against the so-called enemies of the people was that whenever a Jew was sentenced for crimes against the regime his former name was displayed as an indication of his Jewish origin. In brief, they thought they can steal the thunder

of anti-Semitism. The reaction of the public to this policy was not what the regime had expected, the anti-Semitic hatred against the regime did not subside. Rather, the people thought that the Jewish leaders of the regime are mad at those Jews who are not like the Jews supporting the regime. This was the same reaction the people had to the trials of some Communists. They believed namely that the Communists are mad at those Communists who are not willing to follow blindly the Communist dictatorship which meant the Dictatorship of the Soviets. I can illustrate by a little story how far the Hungarians identified the Communist regime with the rule of the Jews. This is the story of Mr. Szaboky, a Smallholder member of the Parliament who was arrested and sentenced to life in 1949. After his and mine release in 1956 I had a revealing conversation with him. He told me how he defended himself against the charges that he was an enemy of the people. He simply defended himself by saying that he was not and never has been an anti-Semite. To prove this he argued that already in 1919 during the first Communist dictatorship in Hungary he saved the treasury of the Alliance Israel. But this was of no avail, he commented, and he concluded if a Jew was not enough of a Jew for the regime, then what on earth could I have done. Now this little story I believe illustrates very well, how the Hungarians even liberal-minded Hungarians like Mr. Szaboky thought

of the regime. A very important aspect of the regime's anti-Semitic policy was that they employed a great number of former Fascists in the AVO. They let these Fascists rage against the Jewish opponents of the regime. This was a classical example of the regime's intentions to steal the thunder of anti-Semitism.

I would like to stress, however, emphatically that during the Revolution there were no anti-Semitic excesses worth mentioning.

~~xxxxxxxx~~ I have heard about sporadic anti-Semitic excesses in the countryside, but in Budapest during the entire period of the Revolution there were no such acts at all.

~~xxxxxxxx~~ The reasons for that I could sum up as follows:

First it is important to keep in mind that the majority of the writers who supported Imre Nagy were Jews.

Second the Jews behaved well during the Revolution. Third there was a great awareness of the adverse reactions any sign of anti-Semitism may have in the West, especially in the United States. Now I would like to conclude

this subject by saying a few words about the state of anti-Semitism under the present regime of Kadar. No doubt there is great anti-Semitism today in Hungary.

The Kadar regime is not continuing the former anti-Semitic policy of the Rakosi regime, which I have described earlier. On the other hand, it is true, that the public at large is anti-Semitic. The reasons for that I could sum up in the following points: First, the moral purity of the Revolution which prevented the outburst of Anti-Semitism is not working anymore. Second, although

among the top leaders are no Jews today, in the middle and lower leading positions the overwhelming Jewish dominance continues. Third, there is and always has been a counter-revolutionary anti-Semitic element in the Hungarian society. It was temporarily only, that the Revolution has silenced these elements. Incidentally to what I have said about the Kadar regime's policy towards the Jews I would like to add this. It is true, that they are not continuing the anti-Semitic policy of the Rakosi regime. Nevertheless there are signs that they are indulging in some sort of anti-Semitism. For instance, Mr. Marosan repeatedly expressed the opinion that among the sectarians whom the Communists hold ~~xx~~ partly responsible for the Revolution, <sup>t</sup> these sectarians, Marosan repeatedly said, were mostly Jews. As for Kadar's regime I would like to repeat what I have said so often: Rakosi had the mass support of the Sadists whereas Kadar has no support at all.

(Next I have asked respondent to elaborate a little more in detail his views on the present situation.)

It is an accomplished fact that the most active part of the population behind the iron curtain had been brought up under Communist education. This does not mean necessarily that these people are fond of Communism. On the other hand it is true that Communism for them is something natural. Even though they are against Communism, in a certain sense, they

are Communists. This is why a Polish-like, Gomulka-like solution in Hungary would have a genuine support, not to speak about the fact that under the given circumstances in my opinion a sort of national Communism is the most natural solution for the countries in the Soviet orbit. The Parliamentary system is no doubt the best, but for the time being it is hard to see how anything else or more could be achieved than what the Poles have achieved for themselves. As for myself, if I were a Pole, I would be supporting Gomulka through thick and thin. And I think many Hungarians feel the same way as I do. What is the next step from a Gomulka type national Communism in the Soviet orbit this is another question. If the iron curtain would cease to exist, a new situation would arise in the countries now in the Soviet orbit behind the iron curtain.

last thought This is what he/

(Continuing <sup>e</sup> this ~~kind of plot~~ I ~~have~~ asked respondent.   
~~xxxxxxx~~ about the future.)

said

As far as I can see, there is a willingness in Russia to create a situation in Eastern Europe which would be acceptable both to the West and to the people themselves in the countries of Eastern Europe. Such a settlement of the East European question could be attained however, only on <sup>a</sup> doubtless basis. I think something could have been achieved on this doubtless basis. Already during

the period of Destalinization I think it was a great mistake that the West did not appreciate this new course of Soviet policy. But in essence the situation is no different today from what it was before.

A do ut des situation still exists and on this basis something could be achieved. The West above all has to abandon the idea of transforming Hungary or any other country of the present Soviet orbit into a NATO country. If East and West could agree on some sort of security system in Europe, I believe the Russians would be willing to make concessions in Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. In Hungary perhaps they would be in particular willing to make concessions because as things stand now Hungary is economically a burden for the Soviet Union. It is for the first time perhaps that the Hungarians succeed in exploiting the Russians economically. Of course, politically too Hungary is a great burden for the Russians. It is a constant source of irritation and uneasiness ~~of~~ <sup>for</sup> the Russians. Now if an East-West settlement within ~~the~~ <sup>the framework</sup> of an European security system could be ~~achieved~~ <sup>achieved</sup>, I anticipate the following Russian concessions: First, that ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> they would give amnesty to all arrested/sentenced. Second, that they would accept the system of workers' councils. Third, free elections and governments formed on the basis of such elections. Fourth, the recognition <sup>of the</sup> of the Social Democratic Party which I believe is one/

hardest things for the Russians to do because the Socialist are the chief rivals of the Communists. It is ~~xxxx~~ easier for the Communists to acknowledge the existence of a peasant or even bourgeois-liberal Party, than the existence of a Social Democratic Party. In brief, I envisage any solution of the East European question within the framework of a coexistence pattern. After all the alternative is world war III. Of course, I would not exclude the possibility of such upheavals in Russia and this I am saying especially in view of the current events in Russia which would create an entirely new situation. A new situation in which Russia would ~~get~~ <sup>get</sup> a new leader in the person of a military figure, a Buonaparte Napoleon. Now this military figure may resemble in many respects to a Western military figure, except that he may be least willing to make concessions the West is anxious to see Russia to make in Eastern Europe, namely territorial concessions; concessions that would give up Russian military control over the East European territories.

(Interviewer's note: In conclusion respondent referred repeatedly to his articles written on the subject which he has already at the beginning listed of the interview.)

Interviewer's rating: Rapport, frankness, cooperativeness was excellent. No sign of compliance or flattery.

Respondent throughout the interview was evidently of the view that he has written so much that there is hardly anything he would like or would be willing to say on these questions. Nevertheless, it is my feeling that in the course of this interview perhaps respondent elaborated on a few aspects and threw some light on some details which his articles do not cover and that therefore the interview was worth making.