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Political Prisoner

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT BY Paul Ignotus

"An eloquent and shocking document of a liberal's encounter with Communism"
—*The New Leader*

PRISONER

With an Epilogue by the Author

Bringing His Story Up to Date

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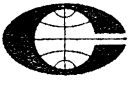
PAUL IGNOTUS

POLITICAL



In prison I often recalled the various romantic descriptions of saints and heroes who would not falter under whips and hot iron: there was, for instance, the excellent and in many ways realistic Italian film, The Open City, *in which the Resistance hero spat in the face of his cruel interrogator, the Gestapo officer. This is just the scene which in such circumstances cannot happen. The Resistance hero, or his opposite number in A.V.H. custody, by the time he faces the demands of his interrogator, is physically unable to show pride. The Gestapo or A.V.H. sees to that. To be proud and dignified while cigarette ends are stamped out on one's skin is surely more difficult than cinema-goers would think. But it can be tried. To be proud and dignified after being forbidden to go to the lavatory for twenty-four hours cannot even be tried.*

—from Chapter 6, "Why Did We All Confess?"

Paul Ignotus, *who came to London as a refugee from the Nazis in 1939, returned there in 1956 after his ordeal in Hungarian prisons was ended. He now lives in "an unluxurious, but comfortable flat, facing Battersea Park, London" with his wife and small son. He has contributed articles to* Encounter, *the* New Statesman, *and other English periodicals.*

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to innumerable friends and acquaintances both for surviving those chapters of my life described in this book, and for being able to describe them. Many helped me with their hospitality in exile, and many with their knowledge of English; many in filling the gaps in my memory while I was putting down my recollections; and many, even from among people whom I had never met, by standing up for me while the Hungarian authorities intended that I should "rot alive" in prison. The list of such friends is too long to be printed. But I ask them all, if they ever come across these pages, to be assured of my profound gratitude.

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Foreword

I should like to think that my narrative speaks for itself. But a word of explanation may be required for what I skipped in it—mainly the detailed background of the Hungarian Revolution of October, 1956, and the reasons for its failure. It was too great a subject to be included, and too recent to be seen with detachment. This anyway, was how I felt while I wrote this book. Now I feel the time approaching when it will be possible to deal with the subject outspokenly and as an eye-witness; and, in fact, I am planning to do this in a future book.

About the spelling of Hungarian Christian names in this book: I have kept to the Hungarian version except for anyone whose name may be familiar in other versions among non-Hungarian readers. But I have kept the Indo-European way of putting the Christian name before the surname; in Hungarian, as in most oriental languages, it is the other way round.

P.I.

Chapter 1

First Time in London

I CAME to England for the first time in the winter of 1938–9, on false pretences. I called myself a journalist. Indeed I had always been a journalist and tried to carry on in London, after taking refuge from the Nazi terror which was beginning to grip Hungary. But in London the terror was a thing to be ignored. My status as a refugee had to be forgotten. A movement to ignore obvious facts was current all over Europe.

The country from which I came, and the one in which I was to settle, and the two which allowed me to cross their territories could all assume that Hungary was an independent and constitutional monarchy, though in fact she was already a German satellite. Her ruling oligarchy was appropriately headed by an admiral of the old Habsburg Monarchy, a handsome old gentleman who spoke several languages but read none. His name was Miklós (Nicholas) vitéz ("the brave") Horthy de Nagybánya. Social snobbery turned his admiration towards the old Hungarian and Austrian aristocracies, and also towards England which had the oldest aristocracy and most powerful navy. But the people he really trusted were small noblemen, the landed gentry and privileged bureaucrats. They disliked and imitated the Nazis. The parliamentary façade of Hungarian life with all its commercial and humanitarian benefits had to be kept up. Except for the Communists, no political party was outlawed. The legal fiction of Hungary left no reason for anyone to leave the country on account of race, creed or political leanings; but the cleavage between law and facts widened day by day. A growing number of refugees left the country, pretending they went for health, business or a holiday. One of the common pretexts was journalism, and I chose that. It was natural for my Government to pretend to believe me.

As a refugee, I had to accept the strange attitudes I

found. In a way it was comfortable. I could call at the Hungarian Legation with the politeness of an accredited newspaper correspondent and share the friendly feeling many of the staff there had towards the West. I was able to maintain regular correspondence with my relatives and friends in Budapest. On the other hand, this meant a lower status than the declared refugees enjoyed. Jews from Germany, democrats from Italy, Republicans from Spain and all the rest had their relief centres. They had a legal right to live as beggars in political exile. Crypto-refugees were merely unauthorized beggars.

The Hungary which I had left behind was a false but enchanting country. Her independence, her Constitution and her tax returns were all false. It was a Paradise for spivs, as they would later have been called in London. But the national genius allowed even decent people to live quite merrily in Hungary. Statisticians might show that a great part of the population, chiefly the landless peasantry, was practically starving. This was roughly true, but they had their own ways of managing. The county magistrates and police, known for their harshness, did not much bother about minor offences so long as their own authority was not challenged. Life was often humiliating rather than unpleasant, and it had a certain bucolic appeal.

The capital, my native city, Budapest, was false on a more splendid and enlightened scale. Its situation, with its fine bridges over the broad River Danube, and the proud Gothic monuments from the end of the last century, made it one of the most spectacular spots of Europe. It was a city which struck every visitor at first as extremely beautiful; but the impression changed after a few days; a more intimate knowledge of its people and surroundings was needed to find that it was permeated with charm. Its cafés, night clubs and restaurants were excellent. Apricot brandy in the restaurants and night clubs was appreciated by the Duke of Windsor, then Prince of Wales. The cafés had different merits. They were the fountain of illicit trading, adultery, puns, gossip and poetry. They were also the origin of Hungarian liberty. In 1848 a group led by the

twenty-six year old poet, Petöfi, set out from the café Pilvax to march against the bastions of absolutism and feudalism and succeeded for a while in overthrowing them. In a less rhetorical way the cafés had been since then the meeting places for the intellectuals and those who opposed oppression. When there was a Free Press they were almost its editorial offices, and when there was no Free Press they made up for it. In the inter-war period, a limited number of Government and Opposition newspapers and magazines could be published. Ten times a year, however, and with various obstacles, magazines without any official backing could also be published. It was a corrupt and happy-go-lucky society, vulgar in some respects, sophisticated, often astoundingly naïve.

In the late thirties, Hungary had become a chaos of ideas and sentiments. Impressed by Mussolini and Hitler, many people became thoroughly reactionary and believed themselves to be revolutionary. On the criss-cross map of muddled slogans and competing trends, any social vision had its proper place. Even Communism, arch-enemy of the existing régime, was allowed among the revolutionary currents in mid-stream. Only one point of view received no sympathy—the "old-fashioned Left-wing." No young man with an eye to his career would hold such out-dated views as the Liberals, Radicals or Social Democrats.

I was an old-fashioned Social Democrat, a liberal and Bourgeois Radical. I was an editor of the unrecognized, unregistered journal *Szép Szó* which had undertaken the impertinent task of opposing the slogans of Nazis and of Horthy's anti-Nazis equally. We kept an old-fashioned Left Wing flag flying, and made our appeal chiefly to the young men. The importance of my position in Hungary was negligible; yet I can boast of having been, for a few months in the late thirties, the most unpopular person in my country. When my name was mentioned at Nazi meetings, it had longer and louder *boos* than any other. The Government's anti-Nazis disliked me no less. I was in their view the Great Nuisance. I had always kept away from Communism, which I truly disliked; and so my person had to be protected, so long as the legal fiction was

preserved. The only thing they could want me to do was disappear from the country.

I enjoyed neither high income nor high social status, but I had a special gift for irritating people. The reader must forgive my conceit, but I have rare ability in making people angry. What Baudelaire called "the aristocratic pleasure of displeasing" had always appealed to me no less than the democratic virtue of standing up for conventional ideals. On top of this, I was of Jewish extraction and therefore an object for "Turanian" as well as "Aryan" racial attacks.

My farewell was typical. I did not travel as a refugee, so there was no trouble in getting a passport and even, as a journalist, a free First Class ticket to the frontier. Except for aristocrats and very wealthy people, only those who had free tickets used to travel First Class: members of Parliament, senior civil servants, and journalists. The guard gave a soldier's salute to First Class passengers when he came into their carriage. As far as the frontier I had noble treatment. At the frontier an official looked at my passport and noticed by my name the symbol marked on the documents of people suspected of Communism or other subversive activities: the year of issue stamped after the name. Everyone knew what that meant, but the police had never explained why this could be found in some passports and not others. The official buffeted me out of the train. In a dark place I was stripped and searched, and all my luggage thrown to pieces. As nothing "illegal" was found, the frustrated guard shouted at me angrily to hurry up . . . I thought it better not to argue. I was glad it was over. It was fortunate that he had not troubled to read my notes. One dependable merit in a police state is that the police hate reading. I had ample opportunity to discover this later, in another and even more stupid police state, as a prisoner of Stalin and Rákosi.

Clearly I had to leave Hungary, but why choose England? I thought of France as my second home and it would have been natural for me to stay there. I knew French fluently and had a number of friends there. It had

always attracted me more than any country except my own; but at that moment this made me the more disappointed with it. Paris seemed to suffer already from a spirit of defeat. All that I admired there seemed to be falling to pieces. I hardly knew a word of English, and no more of England than did any tolerably educated man in my country. I had an admiration for her traditions and social achievements, but no acquaintance with particular qualities I witnessed later. My decision to settle there was partly from a wish to try something of which I knew nothing. For that matter I could have tried the North Pole. A North Pole with central heating would have been perfect, I thought. It did not turn out that way. But for all the strangeness and despite my thoroughly continental taste and character, I found myself at ease among English people.

Even in my humble position it was reassuring to find that people did not tell lies. When I tried to get work as a hotel porter, or an invitation to write a book about Hungary, "I am afraid I can't encourage you" was the unvarying reply. In other countries I would have been rudely turned away or greeted with enthusiasm but no commitment. I found it a blessing to live among people on whose word I could rely. It would not be easy, I felt, to get them to do something; but once they had agreed, they would not abandon me. "There is no need to despair about them," I said to my father, Hugo Ignotus, who was also by then a crypto-refugee in London. Thirty years before, he had been the leading essayist and editor in the Hungarian intellectual renaissance; politically, one would have called him an advanced Liberal. He, too, had felt he could no longer risk living in Hungary. Brought up in the Victorian age, he could not help being more worried about our insecurity than I was. "No doubt the English do not tell you lies," he answered sadly; "they promise nothing but they do keep their promise."

I lived by the Thames in South East London, facing the City, on the ground floor. From my window I saw cranes, boats, lorries, St. Paul's, smoke and sky. Next to me stood

the cottage from which Sir Christopher Wren used to watch the workmen carrying out his plans on the other side of the river. I was surrounded by wharves, breweries, and historical remains. This was Southwark, the most provincial quarter of metropolitan London. It is a working-class district so ancient as to seem exclusive, almost aristocratic. Its intruders, its parvenus, were the handful of gentlefolk, attracted by its romantic atmosphere or proletarian smell, who chose to live there.

I tried to make friends with as many of the indigenous residents as possible, partly in order to learn English. "For Heaven's sake," a friend told me, "don't do that; you'll pick up a Cockney accent and be lost." More lost, I asked, than if I stuck to my Magyar accent? "Far more," my friend replied; "there is nothing wrong in not knowing English in England; but to know it in the way of an English navvy is shocking." I appreciated the wisdom of his advice but trusted the virulence of my Magyar accent. The small boys and girls playing on the embankment knew me, and on fine summer evenings a few would gather under my window. I gave them sweets, which made me more popular than I had hoped; they would talk to me for hours. This was too much of an evening lesson in children's Cockney. "Well, goodbye now, I'll go and have my dinner." They stared at one another; "'e means 'is *supper*," a boy explained. He was right; my meal could not be called a dinner. Except when I was asked out, my rule was never to have a square meal. I lived on scrambled eggs, which I concocted myself, and on mild-and-bitter and cold meat pie. Half consciously I knew I chose this diet because I did like scrambled eggs and found mild-and-bitter with cold pie stylish; three-course hot meals at the A.B.C. might have cost less but I had a happy instinct which stopped me from adding it up.

The little three-storey house in which we lived has since been destroyed by the Blitz. Its arrangements showed a somewhat archaic taste; the bathtub stood in the kitchen, and the lavatory in a tiny courtyard. I found it most attractive. It had fair proportions, and a modest but respectable air. I suspected it had been a brothel or gam-

bling house once; not the actual building perhaps, erected only about one hundred and fifty years before, but its predecessor from which it inherited narrow passages leading from surprising corners in surprising directions. In Puritanical days, Southwark used to be a centre for crime, art and gaiety; the merchants of the City of London used to cross the river, as they would cross the Channel in Victorian decades, to indulge a love for beauty, or for making love, forbidden in their own business and family surroundings. The secret passages served as emergency exits when the houses were raided.

I knew I had hard times to face. I was already 38; it is not easy for a man to start a new life at that age. Besides, I had always been incompetent in money matters and non-technically minded. The only possible prospect was to remain a parasite until I knew English well enough to experiment in journalism.

My only comfort in this gloomy position was the delight of irresponsibility. Since childhood I had wished, at least for a while, to be an orphan or tramp with no commitments. I could never afford that: though a bachelor, I had relatives and felt certain links with respectability. The approaching victory of Nazism had convinced me that in Hungary I could no longer help my family. So a plague had liberated me, but liberty it was and I enjoyed it. My beggar's life was full of illuminating adventures.

These started with the charming people whose hospitality I was enjoying in Southwark. They were an old English upper-middle-class family whose interests lay in business, socialism and books. Many of them married foreign girls, a ravishing Hungarian among them; hence my friendship with her husband. When I had to leave Hungary I asked her in an embarrassed letter whether I could count on their friendship if I were to make an excursion to London. "We cannot offer you much," the reply was, "but if you have use for a little room, empty at the moment, which I should be glad to furnish by the time you move in . . ." Indeed I had use for it.

I was their third lodger. The first floor was inhabited by a slim pretty girl who was always dressed in slacks and

whose enthusiasm was divided among mushrooms, beer and men. In her rooms I first met Mr. Zilliacus, and in her rattling little car I first saw the East End docks. She wanted to show me slums but did not find any. Then we entered a pub where she was sure she would find revolutionaries but there was none of them either. But we found shuv'ha'penny—a great discovery after my limited experience of darts in the *Anchor* on Bankside.

On the second floor, or garret, Michael lived. He was about my age, the brother of my friend who rented the house. Michael was the black sheep of his family, except that it was a family where black sheep were unimaginable, because of their high liberalism under which the blacker a sheep the more sympathetic he might be. The rest had some leanings towards Communism; he was a Communist, very pure and simple. He had fought in the International Brigade. He was anti-*bourgeois,* body and soul. He ran about naked in the house because, "why not?"; he had no prejudices. He liked meat and vegetables for breakfast, always dressed shabbily, and had a boyish face.

"Hello Paul, come and have a pint of mild-and-bitter with me." This was my first invitation from him, as spokesman of the English working-class revolution, to explore proletarian life. It was he who first took me to the *Anchor.* This Public House is now polished and carefully maintained as a historical monument. Then it was more humble, though the proprietor knew its connexions with Dr. Johnson. Young workmen in caps lingered by the bar, talking about football pools, singing occasionally and playing darts. Michael was on Christian-name terms with them. "Why not have a shot at it Paul: great fun," he told me. I tried to throw darts, and was clumsy even for a beginner. Michael's clumsiness was second only to mine but we enjoyed it. "Pleasant fellows, these workmen," I whispered to him, "do you know them well?" He smiled proudly. "Very well indeed. All good comrades." He said good-bye to them with a clenched fist according to Popular Front ritual. They did not seem to mind it; nor did they think of reciprocating it.

I remember only one occasion when Michael talked

politics at the *Anchor*. This was with a good-humoured Merchant Navy seaman, whose racy expressions and sharp features might have qualified him for a part in a film. He turned out to be a staunch Tory. "It's a free country Michael, that's what I say; now have one on me. Mild-and-bitter? And you sir?"

I never concealed from Michael my scepticism about Russian socialism. I agreed we should support the idea of a Popular Front, and an alliance between the Western Powers and the U.S.S.R. This allowed him to treat me too as a good comrade, chiefly because he liked to treat as comrades the people he liked; and he was happier greeting people with clenched fists than arguing with them. What I liked in Michael and his family was their liberalism—a quality which in Russia would have been impossible, and which they were about to bury with shouts of triumph. Knowing I was a progressive writer and a refugee from Fascism they assumed I must share their sympathetic interest for the Russian way of life. Now and then I felt I should say how much I preferred them to their ideals. But I felt it would be too rude and I kept quiet.

One night I was struck by Michael's voice as he chatted vigorously with a woman under my window. Later, as my light was still on, he came in, excited as I had seldom seen him. "Good God, Paul, such idiots," he panted, "those chaps in the Foreign Office; imagine *me* having Cassado in this house! That traitor!" I do not know whether the English reader remembers the name. Colonel Cassado was an officer in the Spanish Republican army who contrived, with some support from the British and the French, to turn out Negrin's Popular Front Government towards the end of the Civil War. His aim was a compromise agreement with Franco. The approach was rejected, and Cassado had to go into exile. Now he was in London. I could not understand at first from Michael's excited narrative just what the lady had said, but he repeated it in detail. A woman from the Foreign Office, who knew Michael as a fellow resident in Southwark, had greeted him. "You fought in Spain and you're a good anti-

Fascist, aren't you," she began. She wondered whether a refugee from Franco's Spain could be taken into his house. She had an excellent candidate for it, a Colonel Cassado.

"I hope you weren't rude to that good soul," I told Michael.

"Well, I lost my temper but I don't think I was rude. I just told her there was no question of having a traitor to live among honest people. If there were any genuine Republicans needing to be helped, we would do what we could. Some workers or something of that sort. She understood and didn't seem hurt. She said she would let me know if there were."

About a week later the good comrades arrived, an enchanting couple. The man was Pedro, a tailor whose right hand had been crippled in the fighting. He could not be a tailor again, but would learn English in London and then find work on a farm. He was a short and vivid man, with broad gestures and glittering eyes, a satisfactory socialist for Michael. On May Day when he saw how few London workers marched under the red flag he felt embittered. After a Fascist gathering at the street corner he came home quite pale, unable to understand how British workers could tolerate the impertinence of tyrants. When he found from a newspaper that H.M. Government was about to recognize Franco he cried that life was *merda.* Neither he nor his wife was impressed by freedom in Britain; what is all this freedom worth if you aren't allowed to kill Fascists? I tried cautiously to explain the British way. "Don't you really like anything in this country?" I asked them.

"We do. Chocolate."

Michael was delighted with Pedro. He brushed up his Spanish by congratulating him on his fighting spirit at all times of the day. I joined the discussion with my brand of Spanish, made up from French, Latin and whatever I could glean from their own talk.

Pedro's wife was called Maria. She was a tall, tired-looking woman with beautiful features; a long dark face,

half Madonna, half Gipsy. She sang Spanish songs delightfully, especially Flamenco. In spite of my agnosticism I wanted to hear her sing some religious songs. I was careless enough to suggest this, and to add coyly that Catholicism suited women. I got a sharp protest from the two of them. No such nonsense among Spanish workpeople. Women, Pedro explained, were by nature *materialista,* and religion, which was but a collection of superstitions inherited from the Middle Ages, suited them even less than men. I was out-voted.

They had a room next to mine on the ground floor. There was no difficulty in putting them up; but Maria took the kitchen under her care and it had to be quickly revolutionized, or rather counter-revolutionized. Until then nobody had much cared who might be taking a bath there while someone else was at the stove—"why not," we were untroubled by *bourgeois* prejudices. But some came in with the good comrades from Spain. A curtain was drawn round the bath-tub. While Michael bathed inside, and Maria prepared the meal outside, Pedro would anxiously watch the curtain and pull it now and then, nervous of gaps.

Then we would sit down in the kitchen to our common meal, *tortilla* or something of the kind; the girl from the first floor in slacks, Pedro, Michael and myself. Maria would stand by and wait on us, and eat when we had finished. "Why not join us?" the three of us asked. O no, that was impossible. *Sothialista, materialista,* a decent woman would not sit down with men. Of course, we also continued our excursions to the *Anchor.* Maria came with us as far as the threshold and then ran home. We could never persuade her to enter.

Co-existence based upon charity is likely to be irritating. We could not but feel aware that the lady on the first floor, and Michael in the garret, were our aristocrats. Not that they stuck together, far from it. Two aristocrats were too many for such a small community. Irritable scenes would break out between them, and I tried occasionally to make peace; then they both started disliking me. In the

end, despite ignorance of the language, the Spanish couple and I discovered that we were linked more intimately to each other than to our hosts.

In our Southwark Spanish we could talk, though more with our hands than our tongues. I would sit and chat with Pedro in the kitchen, Maria standing next to his chair, through evenings when the others were out. On one occasion I happened to mention Cassado as a traitor. Pedro pressed my hand and asked in a tone of serious intimacy, "Pablo, truly why do you think Cassado is a traitor?" I had never thought carefully about it; it seemed to be assumed among Republicans. "Listen, at a time when everything was lost he tried to save lives. Is that treachery?" Maria joined in, leaning over her husband's shoulder. She described, or rather recalled by acting, what the end of the Civil War had been like. *Boom-boom,* she said, bombs had been falling everywhere. "Negrin?" With her slim fingers she showed on the table how he had run away. "Del Vayo?" The same performance with her fingers on the table. "Pasionara?" Again, the same. *"Pedro y io?"* She showed with gestures how helplessly she and her husband had just stared up at the sky. Cassado had not managed to save much but still a handful of people owed their lives to him. Maria and Pedro were among them. Was it wicked to be grateful for it? I agreed it was not.

Pedro had been advised to say he was a Communist in this house. Pedro had tried to explain to the Foreign Office people that he was *sothialista* but no *communista.* The answer was he must not be so fussy. Was there really much difference between the two?

I was sorry my vocabulary in Southwark Spanish was not rich enough to let me tell Pedro and Maria what I felt. Despite differences of social background and nationality, and also of approach, I felt they were really my best comrades.

By the outbreak of the war Pedro and Maria had already got their permanent abode on a farm, and the lady

in slacks from the first floor and Michael from the garret had also moved elsewhere. The lease of the house was nearly at an end but I stayed on there for a while. I could not afford labour to black out the windows, and was incompetent to do the job myself; so I spent some of the autumn evenings strolling in the streets, or trying to read in the pubs, or sitting and staring from the window of my unlighted room. A lady who lived near discovered my loneliness and invited me to tea. I gladly accepted and we became good friends. She was a middle-aged spinster, with a pleasant house on the embankment and a factory job which she liked. She was an old Southwark resident and knew much about the people round about. Her middle-class pride was fascinating. She held strong opinions and would add, "everybody thinks so: thinking people, I mean, not working people, of course." She was very frank. "Your friends . . ." and she shook her head, "playing the fighters for freedom and then letting you down like that. Shocking." "But why do you say they let me down?" I asked. "They were very kind to me while they were living here, and I am grateful. Why should it be their duty to look after me when they are busy somewhere else?" I was unable to convince her. She also confessed that she had viewed me at first with suspicion for being mixed up with them, but had later discovered that I was not so bad after all. A foreigner, no doubt; but at least one of the thinking people, and a decent fellow as far as she could see. Again, I intervened on behalf of my vanished friends. Weren't they decent English people? She jumped. "Those, *English?* Those, *decent?* My God, their behaviour. A woman running about in slacks. A man calling everybody by his Christian name after seeing him for no more than a minute. Everybody was shocked."

"The thinking people, you mean? Not the working people?"

"O, they didn't differ about *that.* Charwomen and all would complain about them. No one could understand what made them think of coming to this district. They should go to Bloomsbury with those habits. But behave

like that here! The workmen and their wives were simply disgusted. Thank God we've got rid of them. Now at last we feel we are among ourselves."

Amongst working people, she meant, as well as thinking people.

Chapter 2

At Home in the British Isles

I TRIED to volunteer for the forces but had no qualification as an officer and was not allowed to serve in the ranks. In the early spring of 1940 I was given work with the B.B.C., where I stayed until the autumn of 1947; first as a translator-typist, later as Hungarian Intelligence Assistant, and after the war as a Hungarian Programme Assistant.

I look back on this time in the B.B.C. quite affectionately, though much of my energy was wasted in criticizing the programmes which were broadcast to Hungary. The European Intelligence Department, directed by Jonathan Griffin, was an interesting miscellany of people of various nationalities, concerned to form a picture of the reactions of the audience. We relied mainly on letters from listeners, and later also, after the collapse of France, on hostile comments and hidden compliments in the continental Press and radio services.

I am much indebted to the B.B.C., and not least for having had Miss Margaret Lambert, at that time South-East Europe Intelligence Officer, as my chief. She shared much of my political concern and suggested I should talk with one or two political writers or members of Parliament. "Why not talk to Professor Seton-Watson?" And she rang him. "I wonder whether I could ask you to see my Hungarian assistant, Paul Ignotus . . ."—"I shall be delighted," the late Professor replied; "I know his father who is a very distinguished writer." Miss Lambert was impressed. Shortly afterwards, when I was with her in Oxford, she rang

Mr. Wickham Steed who had his country house in the vicinity. "I wonder whether I could come and see you and bring with me my Hungarian assistant, Paul Ignotus? You may know his father . . ." "His father?" Wickham Steed exclaimed. "His *grandfather*!* He wrote the most beautiful German." Miss Lambert, again, was most impressed and amused. In her approach she was, if she will forgive me, a pugnacious and revolutionary Whig; combining a passion for the rights of every human with a playful belief in tribal heredity. She is the daughter of Lord Lambert, at that time the *doyen* of the Commons, the last remnant of the guard once referred to as "Mr. Gladstone's young men." Her confidence in me was enhanced by an assumption that I too had acquired a sense of politics and liberal tradition in the nursery.

Professor Seton-Watson and Mr. Wickham Steed were fine men but I cannot say that my acquaintance with them took me very far. They were the Great Friends of Czechoslovakia. Thanks to the Masaryk heritage, this implied a more liberal approach to human problems than the conventional sort of sympathy at that time for my own country. But it was outdated liberalism; they were almost as easily ready to condone Little Entente nationalism as the Great Friends of Hungary were to exonerate Hungarian nationalists.

Through Miss Lambert I got in touch with the *New Statesman* circle and the Union of Democratic Control. She was far from seeing eye to eye with them about everything. As a Whig, of course, she could not. "But you see," she would say, "they are still the ones who understand most of what it is about. You must talk to them." I started contributing to the *New Statesman*, first with short anonymous notes, during the war. In the series of documents published by the U.D.C. on various foreign policy subjects, the Hungarian one was based on my draft. In my eagerness to put my sentences in good English I called the *Cordon Sanitaire*, in my original manuscript, "Sanitary Belt." This was received with cheers by the Committee discussing my sug-

* My grandfather, Leo Veigelsberg, who died in 1908, was editor and leader writer of *Pester Lloyd*.

gestions but deleted from the final version, along with some other East-European mental sparks of mine which were not reckoned suitable for the purpose.

In this way I first met Kingsley Martin, Richard Crossman, John Freeman, Norman Mackenzie, Dorothy Woodman who was then the Secretary of the U.D.C., and dear old Mr. Brailsford and others whose friendship I have had every reason to cherish—though I have often felt that in its policies the *New Statesman* can be oddly adolescent.

Among all my *New Stateman* friends it is with Kingsley that I felt the most long-lasting and most inarticulate link. Really it was he who, probably without realizing it, set me rolling on the tracks of English journalistic and literary life. I felt he was full of understanding and sympathy for me; but not for my point of view, particularly in the course of personal talks. I had and have a tremendous admiration for him but could chat with most of his associates and lieutenants more easily than with him. I often wondered why. I suspect that for all his passionate internationalism and his willingness to criticize his own country he is more English than anyone I knew, not only in Bloomsbury but even in Yorkshire or Somerset. His approach is insular and global. He is interested in his garden, and the people in the local pub, and the misery-stricken areas in India and Congo, and the survival of the human race. I do not think he is much interested in Europe. He is a good European only because he writes well. It struck me as typical that those of his writings which impressed me most deeply were obituaries on personalities almost as thoroughly English as himself—Mrs. Webb and Mr. Chamberlain. With tact and grace and tender irony, he depicted on such occasions the genius and idiosyncrasies of what was perhaps most overwhelmingly British in Britain, the Victorian English upper middle-classes. When I congratulated him on this he made me think I had not properly understood his writings, and he may have been right. But this did not prevent us from being friends and working from time to time together. And with his introduction I first approached the *Manchester Guardian* to which I have several times contributed since the war.

Miss Lambert's associations were not confined to the Left. We sometimes had lunch with the most passionate spokesman of anti-Russian suspicions at that time, Mr. Voigt, editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, a man of deep intellect and deep bias who very much intrigued me. He struck me as Kingsley Martin's opposite: by conviction a passionate British nationalist, and by character Continental, even Teutonic.

Miss Lambert was very friendly with Veronica Wedgwood and introduced me to her house; Miss Wedgwood was also a Whig, but of a less aggressive kind. I had known her as an eminent historian and was fascinated by her as a person. As a Left wing Hungarian I felt I owed much to her name. It was the Committee led by her uncle, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, which had issued the most brilliant (and depressing) document ever put out on the Hungarian White Terror in 1919–20, and on the shocking attitude taken at that time by the official British representatives in Budapest.

Hungarians in war-time Britain had their own public life which hardly penetrated either to the British or to the Hungarian public. There were various "Free Hungarian Movements," now competing and quarrelling, now uniting in a Front, and then splitting again. I made a solemn pledge not to be involved, a pledge which I myself did not take seriously. It could not be helped. Emigré politics may more often than not be waste of time, but to shirk one's responsibility in them may amount to treason.

The most outstanding personality among the Free Hungarians was Count Michael Károlyi, President of the short-lived Hungarian Republic of 1918. He had arrived in England with his wife on the eve of the war, and they went to live in a modest room in Oxford.

I first saw him there, at the time of the phoney War, when I was spending a few days with the writer Baron Lajos Hatvany, who had also crossed the Channel on the eve of the war and withdrawn to a boarding house in Wellington Square. On a sunny morning he was shouting, in his usual bantering way, through the window of his

ground floor sitting-room: "This is how I have to see my President." Károlyi was just pushing a barrow loaded with suitcases and odd little pieces of furniture. He was moving from his room to another room. He was already in his sixties and impeded in his walk by a limp, the result of a cycling accident years before. Yet he performed the job in a cheerful spirit. His hat had slipped to his neck in the heat of toil but his eyes were glittering with self-satisfaction through his spectacles. "That's an excellent barrow," he shouted back, "a real treasure."

Before his exile, he had possessed other treasures. He used to be the second richest landlord in Hungary. His wife was also wealthy: she was the niece and foster daughter of the younger Count Jules Andrássy, and the granddaughter of Count Jules Andrássy who was Hungarian Prime Minister after the Compromise of 1867, later Foreign Minister of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and, as such, an associate of Bismarck.

Károlyi was a baldish tall man with expressive features which might equally have been taken as aristocratic or Jewish; he liked to tell stories about occasions when he had been mistaken for a Jew. His wife, much younger than he, had a figure of fair proportions with a noble presence and vivid face, dominated by large green eyes. They were an extremely elegant couple but now they were living in penury, and the first thing which impressed me was the way they accepted it. I never knew the details of their financial position. I could not tell whether some of their privations owed their origin to some strange intention of theirs. The Countess, in particular, felt tempted towards Puritan discipline. She always refused to travel by taxi, and I never knew whether to take this as a gesture against spendthrift *bourgeois* manners or indignation because she had no car of her own. At that time she made a rule to spend no more than (I think) 10*d.* a day, per person, on food. Even if they could have afforded more, they were certainly badly off and took it graciously. Their complaints were exclusively political, so were most of their interests. Madam Károlyi was in love with British institutions. Once I was given two tickets to a meeting of the Oxford Union, and asked the

Count's permission to invite her. "Very kind of you," he answered, "but really . . ." and he held out 1*s.* 2*d.* "Buy her a tin of sardines and tell her it was you who bought it. She loves them. . . ."

One of the Free Hungarian movements, which generally included the old anti-Horthy refugees, was represented by the Károlyis. Another, originally associated with the pro-British wing of the Hungarian Legation, had unofficial backing from the Foreign Office. In my heart I was with the Károlyis, but I saw that they would not be able to achieve anything alone. I thought they ought to combine with the other important Free Hungarian movement. The very idea made the Count angry.

Again and again, he repeated that everyone associated with the Horthy régime was a political whore. Each time I answered that everyone who had lived in Hungary during those years had to some extent been associated with the Horthy régime. It could not have been otherwise. "Believe me," I said, "no one opposed that régime more bitterly than I; but I made use of the tolerance or vanity of its rulers. Without that, I could not have managed even the journalism of opposition. Was I a political whore?"

"I suppose you were," the Countess intervened. She was a fascinating person. At that period she disliked me thoroughly, and made no attempt to conceal it. A man from left-wing literary circles in Hungary, unwilling to give her husband unqualified support—this was blasphemy. When the British declaration of war against Hungary was approaching, she told some of my friends quite openly that she expected Paul Ignotus would be interned as an enemy alien.

A day or two after that declaration of war I happened to enter Miss Lambert's room when she was discussing a subject with Countess Károlyi who had also come to see her. European Intelligence had been bombed out of its first offices and was then housed in Bedford College, Regent's Park. The Countess glared at me. "You—here?" "I am sorry to disappoint you," I said. Fortunately she was used to meeting people she disliked; they were too many to be ignored. After her talk with Miss Lambert she allowed

me to see her out to the gates. It was a mild winter afternoon, the sun shimmering on fallen dry leaves and the melting snow. We walked for about an hour and forgot about Free Hungary. We spoke of our grandfathers and fathers who had worked together, and about mutual friends, the family doctors of the Andrássys and their clever children. In spite of very different social backgrounds, we had many common family recollections. We discussed English novels and Hungarian poets. Many a year has passed, including times when we have certainly not seen eye to eye; but since that day we have succeeded in agreeing at least to disagree.

There was a strictly non-political social gathering of Hungarians and Hungarian Czechs, called the London Hungarian Club. They only wanted, they said, to serve paprika chicken at reasonable prices to Hungarians, tormented by gastronomic nostalgia, and to have musical evenings and literary talks and so forth. After Hitler's attack on Russia they suddenly wanted something else: they wanted Unity. It was to be unity at any price, with everybody, unity to save Hungarian honour, unity to help our admirable British hosts, unity to defeat the Fascist beasts. They sang *God Save the King* and old Hungarian independence marches more enthusiastically, and avoided references to socialist demands more carefully, than any other Movement. They were the Communists.

Towards the end of the war Unity among the three Free Hungarian Movements came about, in the form of a Hungarian Council with Count Károlyi as its President. I was one of its co-opted members. It did not achieve much; but to the credit of those who took part in its work the Free Hungarian community was saved from that torrent of mutual denunciation which so often ruins any kind of émigré politics.

I began to know the British at the moment of their great danger.

"It was magnificent," Mr. Eden reported in a broadcast about what he had seen at Dunkirk. My British left-wing

friends were grimly humorous about his enthusiasm. Even Mr. Churchill thought it right to suggest some reserve about the triumphant mood with which the returning troops were greeted; it was not by evacuations, he emphasized, that wars were won. Military experts can decide how far it was magnificent on the French shores. What I witnessed in the British capital certainly struck me as magnificent.

Magnificence is not necessarily perfection. "The English," Napoleon said, "owe their ultimate triumph over me merely to their stupidity. They did not notice that I had beaten them." He may have been right; apart from his failure to see what great wisdom this kind of stupidity contained. After the collapse of France, this became obvious. The cartoonist, Low, who invented Colonel Blimp, did not mind accepting the sort of single-track rhetoric which any Colonel Blimp would indulge in his patriotic fervour. His cartoon in the *Evening Standard*, luckily devoid of humour at the moment, showed a British Tommy in ragged trousers and with bulging chest. "Well, then alone . . ." was the caption. I listened carefully to the talk in the tube trains. "Finished, you know," one Londoner said to another, gloomily looking up from his paper. "In France, of course," the other nodded, no less unhappily. That it was still going in Britain could not be questioned. It was, at that moment, determination to death. It was the sole thing common sense could suggest.

Common sense is a very misleading word, meaning often the most uncommon of virtues. Surely the British own it to quite a rare extent. But I would not deny that the way in which it rules them is not always reassuring. Unimaginativeness doubtless contributes to it. In people of rare political insight—like Low, for instance—common sense and uncommon awareness may work in harmony. Whether the same could be expected from the average of any nation, I cannot tell. There were aspects of British behaviour in those days which worried and irritated me. Others amused me. Most of them made me admire and love the British.

The wholesale internment of Germans as "enemy aliens" at the time of the Fifth Column scare was idiotic. To take precautions was of course necessary. But to lock up on

these grounds such fighters against Nazism as Rudolf Olden* was obviously a service to Hitler, apart from being unkind.

Ignorance of the issues involved, and courtesy towards the enemy, were the oddest features of the moment. The interned Germans were huddled together in their makeshift barracks, Jews and political refugees, wretched and exhausted, with their worn-out nerves, terrified all the time about the prospects of invasion, haunted by fear of the Gestapo, and anxious about British plans concerning them. In came the Intelligence Officer one day, fresh and smart, greeting them politely. They asked him nervously whether there was any news. "O," he answered genially, "bad news for us, good news for you." What? the refugees inquired. "Paris fallen." It really surprised him to see that his information was not received with relief.

The state of mind of the refugees in this country differed immensely at that time from the British outlook. Their knowledge of what was going on, and capacity to imagine what could be expected, were beyond average British range. But their nerves were wrecked. Their main problem was how to get overseas. The conversations I overheard in foreign languages or in foreign accents were more often than not on such topics as "If you want a visa to Venezuela. . . ."

The British, as far as I could see, simply failed to notice this. Some of my refugee friends bombarded me with questions about "what the English said at the B.B.C." I answered that in our Department we were talking shop, busy establishing the Monitoring Service, discussing the prospect of having more hours on the air, and the like. "But what do the rest say? Please do me this favour, tell me the first spontaneous sentence you hear from an English person at Broadcasting House tomorrow." I promised and then truthfully reported. It was a morning of catastrophic news and bright sunshine. The first words I heard from a British lady at Broadcasting House were "What a lovely day!"

She is unlikely to have been a genius. But she knew the

* The story is related in detail in the Memoirs of Michael Károlyi, *Faith Without Illusion,* Jonathan Cape.

essential thing, which the more experienced and imaginative foreigners did not know—that there was *no alternative.*

It was this attitude which impressed me even more in the Blitz. People are willing to forget what an ordeal it was; I have hardly heard any reference to it since the end of 1956, when I again arrived as a refugee in Britain. We know today that the Blitz was Goering's hysterical gesture to avenge his defeat in the Battle of Britain and that it was ultimately, from a strategic point of view, a failure. But who could have known this at the time? For the people of London it meant damp shelters, improvised bunks in poorly ventilated tube stations, without sanitation at first. It means rushing home at dusk, and finding difficulty in reaching one's place of work as one quarter and another were closed to traffic.

Today the English are willing to belittle this. "We took it—But didn't others take it as well?" I think the answer is that nobody else took it in such circumstances. Many accepted the terror because they knew they would be shot if they opened their mouths to suggest they should do otherwise. Many took it after the great victories of their armies. This was not the case in the 1940 Blitz. The indiscriminate bombing of British cities came at a time when the population had no tangible proof of the ability of its own Forces to hit back. The Battle of Britain had been a victory, but expressed in abstract figures. The only realities had been the humming of enemy planes, the explosions and shakes and the destroyed homes visible after restless nights. I was worried that people less interested in political issues than I was, might say "We have had enough of it."

A woman friend of mine, employed by Mass Observation, sometimes spent a night in the shelters in slum districts. I asked anxiously what people had been saying. "It was awful," she sighed. "They are at the end of their tether." I was terrified to hear the rest. "But, what were their actual words?" I asked. "They said God couldn't tolerate that. It was *too* wicked." I asked whether no one wanted to make peace with the Germans. She was English enough to be quite astonished. "Peace, *now*? After all this? Of course not."

I used to visit Hyde Park. The open air speakers had always interested me; they struck me as an admirable British peculiarity, and it was a long time before I grew tired of watching them. Of course they are not representative of British opinion; any small sect can have its platform there, but probably not the Church of England; and all extreme political movements, but seldom Conservatives, Labour or Liberal. But it was a revealing experience to attend these meetings. I saw how every sort of willingness to give in to the Germans disappeared as the bombing harassed the population. But sense of humour remained, and a feeling of kindness. I remember a speaker—I think, exceptionally, a Government speaker—explaining to the crowd that if they happened to catch a German airman after crash-landing or parachuting, they must not offer him tea until the authorities took charge of him. An old working woman protested strongly: "That's inhuman. My son is in the R.A.F. and I know how *he* would suffer if he weren't given a cup of tea if ever the Jerries brought him down." On this she was adamant. Some in the crowd took her side, and even those contradicting her were kind and laughed a lot.

My happiest surprise was to discover how the feeling against refugees and a suspicion towards anyone whose mother tongue was not English, gradually diminished in those months. The blindness of putting together all "enemy aliens" in one crowd was being cured at the very time when people had to suffer most from enemy attack.

Four years later, when the V1's and the V2's were dropping over London, these British virtues struck me as less conspicuous. No doubt these were also taken courageously and soberly, and with an indispensable sense of humour. Jokes about the "doodlebugs" were circulating; and the Government order to ignore V2's in any expression which might reach the enemy (who was by then unable to carry out ordinary reconnaissance) was observed with perfect discipline. But it was no longer the elevating spirit of the Blitz. It followed D-day, and came as an anticlimax when victory had already been in sight. On the other hand, I found most of the refugees much calmer and braver than

four years before. Partly because they no longer feared the greatest blow, Invasion; and partly because in the course of years they had to some extent become Anglicized. British and non-British had become like one another during the war and rejoiced together round the bonfires when V-day at last arrived.

In the middle of the war—after the Russians had become allies but before their successes made people worry about their glory—I was asked by the Ministry of Information to undertake a lecture tour in Cumberland and to talk about Hungary and the Balkans. I was glad to agree as both the subjects and the journey interested me. But I started the journey with terrible stage-fright. Was it not bound to be a flop? Even in Lodon, where people were used to foreigners of all kinds, my accent struck everybody as strange. How much more might I fear the response of farmers in the furthest North-West of England? But my friends at the Ministry were reassuring and I did not want to fail them.

In Cumberland, a young worker received me and showed me round; he was Information Secretary for the district. He was glad to learn I was a Labour supporter like himself, and advised me to be "cautious." He had difficulties in his factory through urging his fellows to join the Union. I was astonished: was this possible at the time of a National Government with a Labour Deputy Prime Minister? How could a management dare in such times to object to Trade Unionism? I asked my friend. "O no, the management does not mind," he replied, "it's the workers who object."

He warned me not to talk Labour too crudely when meeting the lady to whom he felt he should introduce me; she was, he added, apart from her views, a very nice person, the President of the local Conservative Women's Association. I entered a pleasant and stately country house, and we stayed there for dinner. We could not have shocked the hostess and her family with our party allegiance even if we had wanted to. Her younger daughter, a smart lady married in London but just then at home for a holiday,

turned out to be almost Communist and not even that seemed to shock her Conservative family. My Red friend, however, was a little shocked by her. "Do people like this woman think," he murmured as we left, "that they'll carry on ruling the country under a red flag?"

I was less lucky with the regional Lady Patroness of the Liberals. I happened to express a flippant lack of sympathy with Prohibition, and got a quick rebuke. I did not know she was the great national figure of British temperance. Her son, a member of Parliament, could only drink beer in secret. But even he agreed with his mother on principle. In that district, my worker friend explained, it *was* a matter of principle; teetotallers had voted Liberal, and publicans and their friends Conservative, for generations. Labour was almost non-existent. The bulk of the population were farmers who did not feel strongly against Labour but did not care for Labour. They cared, however, for Russia. The enthusiasm for the Soviet Allies was even higher in Cumberland than in London. I remember talking to a miner's widow who ran a teashop and showed a very lively interest in public affairs. "The party I should like to join if there was one, is Christian Communists," she said. To some extent this was *vox populi.*

My friend thought it right to warn me also before some lectures. "Tomorrow you are going to talk to children in a Quaker School," he said. "Don't talk too much war to them, they don't like that." War propaganda for pacifists was a special problem. But I muddled through.

Altogether my contacts with the audience moved me. I do not claim that the response was a frenzy of enthusiasm but I found my listeners, whether farmers, artisans or school children, very attentive and full of good will. "What could we do after the war to help those peoples in the Balkans?" was the question most frequently asked from me. I blush to add that I was also greeted as a war hero for the simple reason that I had come from London and had a time-bomb near my flat on the eve of my departure for the lecture tour. That Cumberland district had never had an air raid.

My worries about language proved to be unfounded. I

understood the Cumberland (or, for that matter, the Yorkshire) accent much more easily than Cockney. To call a bus a "boos" was only too natural for my East European ears. Nor did my accent very much astonish them. On the contrary. They were used to hearing an English different from their own when addressed by people arriving from London. Whether it was King's English, or Popular English, or my Magyar English, did not make a tremendous difference. "Which part of Britain do you come from, sir?" a farmer asked me before he had been told about my nationality. No such question had ever been put to me in London. At last I felt quite at home in the British Isles.

Chapter 3

Hungary Liberated

FEBRUARY, 1946—at home again in liberated Budapest, my native city, after seven years away. Everything was dazzling: weird shadow creatures with haggard faces, still showing signs of starvation from the siege; dilapidated blocks of houses, with the terrifying marks of bombs, shells, and the looting and wilful destruction of the retreating Germans. Streets and cafés were crowded with people full of hope, ambition and the spirit of enterprise. Budapest had had seven bridges before the siege, some of them very fine; only the wrecks of them could be seen now. The Germans and Hungarian Nazis had blown them up before leaving. Instead, there was just one makeshift bridge in the centre of the city, named after Lajos Kossuth, the only bridge over the Danube at that time on the long stretch from the Black Forest to the Black Sea. Anyway this was the constant proud boast of the inhabitants. They were proud of the efficiency and speed with which it had been built. The Russians, who helped and robbed the Hungarians simultaneously, claimed credit for the bridge —or shared it with the Communist Minister of Transport, Gerö, who was often known as "Moscow's eye."

Hungarians were generally facetious and incredulous about Russian assistance. The Soviet soldiers for them were a horde of savages whose most characteristic deeds of heroism had been to rape seventy-year-old women, to get themselves intoxicated with wine and wristwatches, to defile sofas, to use books for fuel, and to mistake lavatories for washbasins. Hungarians were convinced that the best Russian tanks were of American or British make, and that without Western help the Soviet Army would not have had a chance to resist the Germans, let alone defeat them. This conviction was widespread even among Communist Party members. But even the anti-Communist bulk of the population was willing to join in rejoicing about the Bridge. Whatever lip-service had to be paid to the Glorious Liberators, all could welcome this chance to extol the energy and creative power of the Hungarian people.

The Bridge shook under the masses of cars, lorries and people—chiefly people, of course, old women in ragged skirts among them, carrying bundles of dry sticks on their bent backs. Among the smart cars, many wore the insignia of the Allied Control Commission, then technically still in power, British, American and mainly Russian. There were also the cars of cabinet ministers and other senior officials, black marketeers and other businessmen, various Party chiefs and other political busybodies, with an unconcealed preponderance of Communists. The slogan given by the leader of the Moscow-trained Communists, Vice-Premier Mátyás Rákosi, was Unite All Forces for Reconstruction! Freedom to reconstruct meant freedom to grab. Communists boasted of their liberality in allowing it. To be shocked by blatant differences between rich and poor was "unscientific petty-bourgeois equalitarianism" and thus a crime against the working classes, second only to Trotskyism. The creation of a bourgeois Republic was the rule of the day; Communists promised to protect private property, and in fact protected the racketeers.

Perhaps it was the only possible way at that time. Hidden resources had to be drawn to the surface, absent resources smuggled into the country. The masses of uprooted and impoverished people had to be allowed to pick

what they could from the remains of forsaken buildings. Without corruption, this could hardly have been arranged. The champion of benevolent corruption was Second in Command among the Moscow-trained economists, Zoltán Vas. Unlike most of them, he was really a popular figure. A bespectacled fat Jew, he was liked even by anti-Semites. "Anyway, we have to thank *him* for having potatoes today . . . " Such talk could be heard all the time. He found ways into people's affections through their appetites and a sense of humour. Food and jokes defeat even political animosity. "You know what he said the other day," I heard from a civil servant who helped in his office. "In came a Communist colleague of ours, one morning, fifteen minutes late, shouting the Party greeting very noisily. Vas said, 'Next time just say Good Morning but come in punctually.' "

Corruption was alarming. To some extent it really was democratic; everybody could join in, and indeed few could afford to stay out. To deal in hard currencies was forbidden but no one took this seriously, least of all the National Bank. Occasionally such dealers were raided, and a shop-window trial staged, but everyone concerned took the risk without hesitation. When the National Bank needed more dollar notes or pound notes in a hurry, instructions went to the Economic Police that the black market in foreign currency should on no account be disturbed for the next hour. Thus in 1945 a Hungarian youth delegation arrived in London with forged five-pound notes. It was a nuisance but nobody cared. It was a happy-go-lucky arrangement.

But some were not satisfied with a fair share of the general anarchy. Stories went round about the rackets perpetrated by certain political leaders and their families. It was an inter-party racket. Communists frequently saved their non-Communist colleagues, and even their opponents, from the scandals of corruption; partly because such people could be blackmailed into subservience and partly because they themselves were also involved. Communist leaders had lordly households and indulged in extravagant luxuries—for the Party's sake, they said, since this was supposed to enhance the prestige of a proletarian leader-

ship. "Only Trotskyites and sectarians would object to that."

"Personality cult" had been there from the start. The country was swamped with posters, paintings, photographs of Russian and Hungarian leaders. Next to Stalin, the commonest sight was the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary to the Hungarian Communist Party, Mátyás Rákosi. He could be seen on the walls, in leaflets and in cinemas stroking the hair of a proletarian child; or affectionately fingering an ear of wheat and greeting the leader of the Social Democrats ("Workers' Unity"); or parading with non-Socialist politicians ("National Independence Front"), kissing Russian emissaries ("Our Liberators"), addressing crowds with the gestures of a popular orator and, most remarkably, showing his aptitude for hunting like an aristocrat in a braided fur coat with a rifle on his shoulder.

Rákosi certainly enjoyed seeing images of his face everywhere, which must seem miraculous to anyone who knew the thing itself. Ugliness was of course the smallest of his sins; a plump, short figure, no neck, and greasy bald head —Arsehead, he was generally called. Caring only for power, he was skilful in hiding his feelings and timing his gestures of revenge. The one passion he could not control was vanity. During my first postwar visit to Hungary, he asked my opinion about a Labour member of the House of Commons, John Haire, who had visited Hungary some months before. I told Rákosi that Haire was doing his best to gain sympathy in England for the Hungarian Democratic Coalition Government which had been denounced as a Bolshevik dictatorship by British officials on the spot and also on one occasion by Ernest Bevin. Rákosi shook his head. "Perhaps Haire meant well but during his visit to Budapest he caused enormous damage." I was anxious to hear what it was; did he commit some indiscretion in talking with British diplomats? Nothing like that, was the reply; but when Hungarian right-wing people had complained to him about the campaign to popularize the Workers' Party leaders, pointing out that the faces of Rákosi and Szakasits

(leader of the Social Democrats at that time) were to be seen on every corner, Haire had answered "I don't see why you should be worried about this. In my constituency, if a politician shows his face too much people draw a clown-cap over it and laugh." To give such ideas to the simple people of Hungary! Rákosi was horrified by the story. I was astonished at his childishness, and the oddity that such an astute man should so reveal his vanity.

It was not a Communist dictatorship, but liberal Capitalism in the eighteenth century Wild West style, *laissez-faire* and indeed *laissez voler,* personal freedom with no other limit than fear of the fists and guns of the more powerful; though in fact the wildest West hooligans had come from a Wild East Empire which ran on dialectical materialist lines. Rumour had it that some of the local Communists were zealots of the Leninist revolution—a young man called Rajk, for instance, then Rákosi's lieutenant in the Party; but this was not yet the Party line. At that time Communist storm troops had to restore damaged churches in their spare time.

General suffrage and the secret ballot were introduced, along with radical Land Reforms dividing the big estates among the landless and "dwarf-holding" peasantry; a system of workers' councils was started in the factories, and there was general re-establishment of civic rights. All these reforms were implemented chaotically and corruptly, and with a Party bias, but they were by no means a sham. They were the fulfilment of long overdue promises.

There was freedom of opinion, or anyway freedom to talk. People were not afraid to abuse Russian soldiers openly; they knew indeed that their opinion did not matter either way with the Russians. If the Soviet *patrouille* needed a new war prisoner to replace one who had escaped, they would catch and deport anyone, whatever his political affiliation; when in no need of a victim, their attitude towards any anti-Russian demonstration was "I couldn't care less."

Puns and stories about the Glorious Liberators were a mental opium to compensate for evils endured. Zoltán Vas, needless to say, gladly joined in the fashion. The

greatest teller of stories among the politicians of those days was the Minister of Justice, a Socialist, István Ries. An engaging armchair talker, a friendly fat man, lover of football and books, and in a vague way of a proletarian world revolution, he was the most companionable person I had ever seen in high Government office. "Did you hear the story about the old Jew?" he asked me. "He was found stripped in the Városliget (City Park) at night. The police interrogated him: 'How did it happen?' 'Well,' he answered, 'I was assaulted by two fellows in American uniform . . .' 'Without saying a word?' they asked. 'Well, one of the Americans started by shouting *Davai tchassey* . . .'* 'Really? Must they not have been Russians?' The old Jew lifted his hands in horror: 'I didn't say that, *you* said it.' " Ries told the story with gusto, adding that his own *tchassey* had also been expropriated by a Russian warrior in the dusk. Another story I remember from him was in connexion with the foundation of the Joint Soviet-Hungarian Shipping Company. "You know the agreement came about on a basis of perfect equality," he said. "The Russians have the right to ship up and down the river, and we have the right to ship across it." In 1949, some days before my arrest, I had dinner with him. He was still in office as a Minister of Justice though practically a prisoner, with A.V.O. riflemen at his threshold "protecting his personal safety." In prison, I found printed notices still on the walls signed by him. In 1950, he was arrested and tortured to death.

In 1946, outspokenness almost amounted to honesty. Freedom of the Press was restricted, by Western standards; some subjects, mainly the wrongs done by the Soviet Liberators, were taboo. But under the Horthy régime Hungarians had been used to observing a stricter censorship, so this did not seem unbearable. In broad hints anything could be written.

Information could be obtained from anywhere, but too suddenly to be digested. I was staggered by people's failure

* Meaning in Russian "give me your wristwatch," a phrase widely current in Soviet-occupied countries.

to see either themselves or the world outside in the light of the tremendous changes which had come about. I remember a well-to-do middle-class lady—a new convert to Communist Party membership—who asked me intimately after a splendid lunch in her flat, "Tell me your candid opinion: is it possible to live in this country?" She thought of emigrating to the West. I told her that I had no idea how she would be able to carry on in her usual way, for instance, in Britain. She was used to having two maids which in Britain would be a luxury. She was disappointed. She started complaining about the difficulties of catering. I told her that in England hardly anyone could afford a meal such as the one she had given me: there was still severe rationing of food and clothes. She was amazed. "Is this possible? Rationing in England? Why then did they win the war?" But she knew more than I did about the Royal family and the hits of the London stage.

Communication between Britain and Hungary was still very scanty. I was one of the first London Hungarians to visit Budapest. I had come as a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* and the *New Statesman,* after getting leave for the journey from the B.B.C. So my arrival was a sensation. I was a prey to all sort of people, old companions and new lion-hunters.

Before leaving London I had been full of anxiety about seeing my mother, then over eighty. She had been in hiding under German occupation, and had lived in a cellar during the siege. For months after the retreat of the Germans I could not learn whether she was still alive. What would she be looking like—she and my two sisters, and my brother, and all the rest of my intimate circle who survived? I had been guessing how our meeting would take place. "Well, tell me how it *did* happen," a friend said after my return to England. I could not remember.

Most of my best friends had been murdered or starved to death. Others, who were said to have been killed, turned up like ghosts alive. Many had conspicuously aged but carried on with the very conversation which had been interrupted seven years before. "When shall I see you," an old friend's wife asked me amidst affectionate Hungarian

embraces. I was trying to keep some order in my days. "Look here, tomorrow I shall have tea with your stepdaughter," I answered; "couldn't you join us?" O no, that was impossible; her stepdaughter, she went on, had started an unpleasant rumour about her—and she began to tell me the recent developments of a family squabble which I had witnessed in its embryonic stage before leaving Budapest. Second World War, Nazi occupation, Bolshevik occupation, and a lot of family matters which they had to settle together—nothing could reconcile them.

Budapest life struck me as a tragic operetta, or sad ballet. I recalled, in particular, one ballet which I had seen in my childhood, *The Sleeping Beauty*. The *fiesta* was going on, the smart young man dancing with the smart young lady, the *gourmand* sucking the chicken's bone, the cook boxing the ears of the kitchen boy; and everything stopped for seven years. Then the Beauty woke up, and the smart young man went on dancing with the smart young lady, the *gourmand* went on sucking the chicken's bone, the cook went on boxing the ears of the kitchen boy. Was it not exactly like that in Hungary? More realistically of course, as the smart young people had become wrinkled, the *gourmand* had lost his teeth, the cook's hand had grown shaky, and the kitchen boy had been a storm-trooper for both Nazis and Communists for a while. But this did not keep them from carrying on.

We know today that it was a dance on a volcano. As a matter of fact, we knew it then; but what could have been done about it? To watch it angrily would not have helped. The thing for me to do in 1946 without doubt was go home and see everything with my own eyes, and point out the encouraging features among many depressing and alarming ones. Whether one can do this is a matter of temperament. I feel I could again in similar circumstances. My old friend, Arthur Koestler, was worried about my attitude; in his autobiography* published while I was in prison, he describes it as the gullibility of a naïve liberal. I believe it was chiefly a wish to make the best of things.

* *The Invisible Writing,* Collins with Hamish Hamilton.

I had known Koestler since 1935 when he visited his native city, Budapest. He was at that time a slightly shaken Communist, disturbed by what he had seen in Russia but unable to imagine that the Soviet doctrines would not go down in history as the leading ideas of our time, vindicated by general progress and happiness. After hearing a lecture I gave, he complained that I stuck to an outdated humanism. During the war when I met him in London he warned me about the Bolshevik danger, which he was unable to forget even in the joy we all felt at Russia's strength in resisting the Nazis.

Before my first post-war visit to Hungary, Koestler called on me in my flat. I was trying to cram as much as I could into a suitcase the weight of which was limited by the R.A.F., which still ran the continental services from Britain at that time. "Look here," I told Koestler, "I am going quite mad; people expect me to take parcels to their relatives in Budapest, and the only thing I can do is pick out vitamin pills from the trunks which arrive here. What can I do for you?"

A similar thing but dangerous, Koestler answered; a very great favour he wished me to do for him, and really did not know whether he could bother me with it. "Please tell me." Well, his old mother was living in Budapest, still in a dark room of the ghetto district into which she had been driven by the Nazis. He had not dared to get in touch with her lest the N.K.V.D. should find her. He saw how difficult my luggage problem was; but could I add to my burden a tin of sardines and a bar of chocolate, and take it to her?

"Certainly," I replied. "As soon as I arrive in Budapest I shall send her a postcard and tell her . . ." Koestler was horrified. For Heaven's sake, had I no idea of postal censorship? He was sure the N.K.V.D. would be after me. But I should do him this very great favour—one evening at dusk, if I was sure I was shadowed by no one, I should go and see her in that sordid ghetto block. Really did I not think it was too much to ask? I really did not, and consented.

In Budapest, in the editorial office of the Social Demo-

crat daily, *Népszava,* of which I was correspondent, the assistance of a middle-aged secretary was granted to me. She was a kind and helpful and pathetic personality; I remember noticing a number, tatooed on her arm in Auschwitz where she had escaped extermination only by the skin of her teeth. She helped me in distributing my odd little parcels. I put labels of the addresses on each, and when I came to a tin of sardines and a bar of chocolate I said "kindly put this aside, I shall take these along myself to a friend."

Before having a chance to do so, I gave a lecture at the Anglo-Hungarian Friendship Society. People were even crowding the staircase. The strength of Atomic Britain would be explained, they thought, and the determination of H.M. Government to drive Russians out of Hungary. My lecture was a cold shower. I told them that the idea of Europe divided into spheres of interest was prevalent in Britain and that, within this, Hungary would belong to the Soviet sphere. Exclamations of pain were audible. People did not hide their disillusion. "Preponderance of influence does not mean exclusiveness of influence," I went on: "Hungary is expected to remain a democratic country, broadly speaking, on the present-day line." But these qualifications did not help very much. The horror of becoming a "member state" within the Soviet Empire was haunting their minds. As we know today, it was justified as a fear but inexact as a term.

After my lecture, people from the audience crowded round me. Especially women I had never seen before, asking with disarming straightforwardness "Please take me with you to England, it is surely no trouble for you." In that throng and whirl, while I was out of breath, I suddenly saw an old, slim lady in black in the back row as she lifted her arm and shouted at me "I must talk to you by all means, *Ich bin die Mutter von Arthur Koestler.*"

Heavens, this was the limit. What if the N.K.V.D. overheard it? What would my friend Arthur say? I ran to the old lady and implored her to be quiet, I would go and see her, I had talked to Arthur but I was so busy . . . She said she would come and see me, and could not be dissuaded.

The following afternoon, my provisional secretary at *Népszava* received me by announcing (in the way usual in Hungary, when referring to elderly women with whom one is on familiar terms) "Auntie Koestler was here to see you."

"Mrs. Koestler? Do you know her?"

"Certainly. Who wouldn't?"

"Why, is she such a well-known character?"

"Well, she is known to be the mother of a famous Hungarian writer and she complains everywhere that she cannot get news from her son."

"Everywhere? What do you mean by that?"

"At the Ministries, and the various Party headquarters, and at the Russian *Commandatura. . . .*"

"Indeed, the Commandatura? Not the N.K.V.D.? And what did they answer?"

"They were rather annoyed I think. Through our *liaison* with the Russian Military, the young man you know, they asked us to rid them of the old lady, saying it was our business and none of theirs to look after the mother of a Hungarian-born author."

We had a good laugh at that story in London afterwards. O years of National Independence Front! When Miss Kéthly, the well-known leader of Hungarian Social Democracy, visited London she made the Hungarian Minister invite Koestler to a reception in her honour. He came, rather reluctantly. Even at the party the story went round amidst cheers. One of the guests from Budapest was the editor of *Népszava,* who was reckoned a most active fellow-traveller. I told him privately how Koestler was worried about his mother and that he had asked me to inquire whether there might be a chance of granting her a passport to Britain. After all, an old lady who had never had anything to do with politics . . . "Of course," he smiled; "who would bother about her? Or even about him! He is an author. How hysterical fiction-writers can be."

Koestler had the sense of humour, though mitigated by noticeable nervousness, to join in the amusement my story caused. And here the story could end if there were not a double point to it. The grim epilogue followed years later,

when Mrs. Koestler had already safely arrived and settled in London.

It was the doom of all those involved. Miss Kéthly and the fellow-travelling editor, who were anything but friends, and the young *liaison* with the Russian Military, and I as the *liaison* with the Labour Party, all irrespective of whether we had been regarded as pro- or anti-Communist in preceding years, were jailed and tortured. The middle-aged secretary at *Népszava,* with the Auschwitz tattooing on her arm, was interned. The Communist official, in charge of issuing passports in the Ministry of the Interior, was hanged . . . Of course, all this had nothing to do with Mrs. Koestler's case. It was a matter about which the Russians really did not care, and I can even imagine that she would have been left in peace in the worst years under Stalinist terrorism. But the nervousness with which Koestler had looked upon Western hopes for neighbourly relations with the East was sadly justified. His fears were premature. I should say he was right to warn us about the dangers lurking in Hungary—if he could have told us how to avert them. But neither he nor anybody else could do that.

I witnessed the Hungarian Peace Negotiations in Paris in the summer of 1946. It was a sad farce. Hungarians and Czechs were given the job of staging a cock-fight together. Both were dependent on Russia, but Russia wanted them to be "independent," which meant mutual squabbling. The Communists on both sides were chief spokesmen for old imperialist claims and grievances. Really it was the Czechs, belonging to the victorious group of nations, who were persecuting Hungarians. But the way Hungary's sufferings were used by Hungarian propagandists was also nauseating. "It is quite heart-rending," my old friend Count Michael Károlyi said. In a semi-official way he was also attached to the Hungarian Peace Delegation. He wondered whether a compromise with Czechoslovakia on the basis of a moderate territorial adjustment could be reached. During the war he had received encouragement in this direction from leading Czech refugees;

and now he asked me confidentially to explore with the Czech Foreign Minister, Jan Masaryk, the possibility of such an understanding. I did so in a Paris Hotel—and Masaryk agreed. But the Russians did not. They forced the Prague and Budapest Governments to carry on with their propaganda-fight. Some years later they ordered them both to forget about mutual grievances overnight and to be comrades in the defence of Communist World Peace.

On my first post-war visit to Hungary, Social Democrat leaders asked me to take over the job of Press Attaché in London. It was not a very high position but it attracted me: I thought that I could carry on successfully as a *liaison,* as I had been before, between Republican Hungary and Labour Britain. No formal objection was made by any of the Hungarian authorities, but there was a lot of hesitation and delay. However, in November 1947, I was offered and accepted this appointment.

My active service with the Hungarian Legation did not last longer than a year and a half. During that short period I witnessed the resignations of two successive Ministers to the Court of St. James's.

At first I enjoyed my job with the Legation. I had to grope my way towards knowing the people it was my duty to handle in this fairly precarious position, but I found it interesting to see diplomatic machinery from the inside, however false it was bound to be in those circumstances. Our Reports to the Government were not sincere, and could not be; we knew they were to reach Moscow. But we had to pretend in addressing the Government, and even one another, that we were the representatives of an independent country. We did our best to be so but it was hopeless. To meet British people and then boast of having met and won them over (whatever that meant) for the Hungarian cause was our main diplomatic activity. It was a difficult position for the whole staff and the only possible way for them was to take it easy. I congratulate them retrospectively for doing that most ably. The wives of our diplomats were charming, and our receptions as a rule successful. Too successful now and then. Some of the Great

Friends of Hungary, used to the entertainments of Horthy's Kingdom, and intoxicated now by memories of them at these parties, trod the toes of the ladies with enthusiasm in the heat of their scholarly dancing, and it was no easy job to manoeuvre them away late at night.

But the approaching liquidation of Social Democracy was bound to affect us all. Clashes within the Legation precipitated the resignation of the Hungarian Minister, Bede. Since the late summer of 1947 a young Secretary had been working on his staff, an over-zealous convert to Communism, Gábor Pulay. His appearance, manners, and political outlook made a caricature of what Hungary looked like at that time. A handsome youth with a twirled moustache, and with the characteristic manner of a heel-clicking provincial, he drank and swore and poured out dialectical materialism all the time. His devotion to the Cause knew no bounds, nor did his loyalty to leaders. I remember that once he arrived back from Budapest and unfolded with great satisfaction a poster which he had received personally from Rákosi. The poster contained no less a thing than portraits of Rákosi himself, at seven or eight different stages of his life. It started with baby-Rákosi, and ended with leader-Rákosi. Pulay tenderly pointed to eight-year-old Rákosi, a plump child with fleshy nose and centrifugal ears, quite nice, as all children are quite nice so long as one does not guess what they are going to become, but not such a portrait as hopeful mothers would dream about. "Look, what a *beautiful* child he was," Pulay said with tears which I saw then in his eyes for the first and last time. Power makes you beautiful, even retrospectively. I was opportunist enough to give a solemn nod.

Pulay did not waste his time; in fact, he worked twice as much as anyone else. He never stopped snooping. If I wanted him to know something without telling him about it, I had only to leave it on my desk. Though one-sided and hot-headed he was neither a fool nor uneducated. Between two glasses of whisky he would study Lenin's works, and then dash into the room of a colleague, tell him about this or that, and watch his reactions.

He quickly came to the conclusion that the evil spirit of our staff was another Secretary of Legation, Géza Luby, the most intimate colleague of the Minister. He reported to the Chief of the Political Department of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, (now a refugee), György Heltai: "I suspect Luby is in touch with refugee Hungarian diplomats and has got letters from them." The answer was: "If so, get hold of those documents." Pulay decided for *action directe*. One night he stayed late in his office, and with an expert knowledge the origin of which I have never been able to trace, forced Luby's safe. Having calmed his Leninist-Stalinist conscience, he left and had a good sleep. The following morning, the housekeeper was horrified to find that the safe had been forced. Knowing nothing of diplomatic privilege, according to which the head of a Legation alone is authorized to apply for non-Hungarian assistance in the building, he asked the London police to enter. The scandal could hardly be hushed up.

Within the Legation it broke loose. There were unfriendly exchanges between the Minister and Pulay, of which a female member of the staff took minutes. Then the Minister rushed to Budapest to complain and, feeling he was complaining in vain, rushed back to London as fast as possible. Luby had meanwhile been sacked by the Ministry. Pulay rushed to Budapest after the Minister and by the time he was back in London the Minister had resigned and been followed by several members of his staff.

At his farewell I shook his hand amicably, but decided to stay. I did so for roughly the same reasons as in joining the Legation originally. My position had got more uncomfortable, but I still kept some of my *liaison* hopes, and my people were still in Budapest. . . .

The new Chargé d'Affaires of the London Legation was a former Counsellor of the Paris Legation (under Count Károlyi), János Erös. I had known him as a young journalist and scholar from pre-war Budapest. He arrived with the grace of a peace-maker. His first great deed of diplomacy was to reconcile me with Pulay as we had not hit it off very well before. Having agreed to stay, I played

the game. Erös then asked me to put him in touch as much as possible with my Labour and Liberal friends. He himself did not conceal a scepticism about Communist Party doctrines and slogans. In 1948 such scepticism was still not sacrilege. It was already "People's Democracy performing the function of a Dictatorship of the Proletariate without Soviet form"—an authoritarian régime, but of a mild kind.

In the summer of that year I visited Budapest. The Three Year Plan for Reconstruction was declared at an end, and the Socialist Five Year Plan had started on its lamentable career. The first popular reaction to it was a story about the enthusiastic Communist who said:

"Do you know that we are ahead of schedule in fulfilling the Five Year Plan?"

"Are we?"

"O yes. Today we are already as badly off as we are supposed to be next year."

In the window of a leading bookshop I noticed *Darkness at Noon;* I presume the owner had no idea what it was about, but even an oversight like that could not happen at a time when it might have grave consequences. The masters of Hungary were still keen to keep friendly links with the West and to show that freedom of opinion existed in their country. "Decadent" or "bourgeois" art and letters, and jokes at the expense of the régime, were still tolerated. *Szabad Száj* (Free Tongue) the authorized Opposition satirical weekly, snapping alternately at the régime and its opponents, was still published.

When senior members of the Foreign Ministry asked me how Erös was getting on in London, I mentioned to his credit that he was behaving soberly and moderately. This was still acknowledged as a merit. Shortly afterwards, he was promoted to be Minister. I had a long talk with the ideological leader, and chief adviser on foreign policy, József Révai. He received me cordially as a fellow-writer —he had started as an *avant-garde* poet, a very bad one, and later published some historical and literary essays, which were rather better. I told him sincerely but cautiously what impressed me badly in Hungary. He took it

with a smile, and asked me whether I did not consider staying at home: "After all, you are a writer . . ." I answered: "I would rather be a propagandist for our Government abroad, than its opponent at home." Again he smiled, and wished me good luck.

But this good-natured version of dictatorship had gone by 1949. It ended at the time of the Mindszenty trial and mass-arrests, first of Catholic, then of Lutheran, Calvinist and Jewish clergymen. A taste for the art or ideas of the West changed from a weakness to a crime. People began to disappear in the A.V.O. headquarters at 60 Andrássy Avenue, and no information about their whereabouts was given. Society was hypnotized by fear. In London, though appalled by much that happened, I was unable to realize the extent of the change.

The trend of events, of course, was clear; so was the growing British suspicion towards everything connected with the régime. The dwindling fortunes of the British Communist Party and its fellow-travellers were very noticeable; but how could this be reported to Budapest? My advice, naïve enough as I see it today, was to report sincerely. Erös disagreed with me: "Don't you see that they want to be fooled?" One day, he told me we were ordered to write a Report on British reactions to the "Peace Movement." I suggested we should answer there was no reaction. "Impossible, impossible," Erös insisted. So we invented some reactions.

Since the order was that we should maintain social contacts with as many important people as possible, irrespective of their reactionary leanings, he was keen to give frequent invitations to Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley Martin, for instance, and to meet Harold Laski. Our few encounters with Laski were particularly amusing. He was very enjoyable company, and though he must have struck every Continental as thoroughly British in his approach, he was really created more for Continental than British taste. Tiny, wiry, loud and over-clever, he was considered by many a British apostle of racial tolerance as too much of a Jew. His countrymen liked and respected him but not without

reserve. When I first had a chance to talk at length with him, he was scathing about many of his left-wing comrades, and equally critical about Bevin and others from the right wing of the Labour party too. Despite his aggressive irony, he was generous in praising people with whom he disagreed especially, I should add, if they had happened to pay some attention to him. He praised Churchill, and Acheson, and Mountbatten, and of course many of his fellow-Socialists, and also Stalin who, he said, had shown some evidence of a sense of humour when they had met in Moscow.

I put my own problems to him frankly. "Do as I do," he answered, "administer your indiscretion."

"My dear Professor," I sighed, "it is not so easy to do that as a Socialist in a People's Republic, as it is in your hereditary Kingdom."

Laski thought he could help to bring about an East-West settlement. He broached the idea of a visit to Budapest to see things with his own eyes. Erös and I, after entertaining him to a long lunch in a Greek restaurant, reported his suggestion to the Foreign Ministry. The lunch was delightful but the answer from Budapest was less so. We got an indignant refusal and rebuke.

Amongst the many things which had changed in Budapest, was the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry. Its chief, György Heltai, was no longer regarded as a staunch Communist and Janos Beck succeeded him. Beck was a very staunch Communist, who had once been an officer in the Political Police. I myself got on quite well with Beck on his subsequent visits to London. His mind moved like a locomotive along certain tracks but he was not without ability. He had a gift for languages, a taste for engineering, and an observant eye for the differences between Woolworth articles in London and their opposite numbers in other countries. He could have been almost anything but a diplomat. His main task was to make the behaviour of Hungarian legations in the West as provocative as possible, and their reports as misleading as possible. At that moment, he was the right man in the right place. This had become the Line to follow. In Budapest he had

been shocked by the un-Bolshevik tone and defeatist remarks in the Reports which came from the Minister in London. The most shocking were those I had succeeded in putting through, though in very mild form and against the Minister's judgement.

Beck had come to London personally to find out if we had been infected with Imperialism. A nervous swarming started at the Legation. One morning Erös asked me to come to a deserted store-room with him, and said: "I wish to tell you that some rumours about you are circulating in Budapest. For instance, Madame Károlyi and you are supposed to be the evil spirits of Michael Károlyi, I mean, the anti-Russian influences with him. I felt I should warn you in case you were planning to return. . . ."

"I can't help it," I answered; "I am in their hands, and I have got my people there." This was indeed how I felt. My eighty-year-old father was lying on his deathbed in Budapest. I was determined to go and see him as well as other near relatives and friends. Erös made a faint gesture of despair, and then bade me farewell for a while. His wife was pregnant, and he was due to go on leave. I just carried on talking to Beck about Spanish dialects and Woolworths. Some days later, Pulay rang me and in a dramatic voice read out the announcement from Budapest radio about Minister Erös's resignation. The reason, not made clear by the official announcement, was that Beck had insisted in his visiting Budapest at once, and he had refused to do so.

. . . These were the two ministerial resignations I witnessed in 1948–9. Their background stories I only learned much later—in the privacy of a prison-cell, talking amicably with the two embittered rival Communists, both former Directors of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry, György Heltai and Janos Beck, who had both been jailed, as I had, in the summer of 1949.

Chapter 4

In Slavery at Large

IN BUDAPEST, June, 1949. The *communiqué* had just been issued about the arrest of three senior officials of the People's Republic; among them the Foreign Minister and Deputy to the First Secretary of the Communist Party, László Rajk. The *communiqué* described them as spies and made it clear that a considerable number of others had been arrested meanwhile. Everyone knew that. For some weeks, important Communists had been disappearing overnight. The Western Press and radio had reported the rumours; everybody in Budapest was nervous and uncertain.

What was it all about? The *communiqué* was too brief and hidden in Party jargon for us to judge. The one thing it made clear was that some of the living idols would henceforth be called traitors, Fascist beasts, enemies of the people, hirelings of the imperialists, and saboteurs. The posters with Rajk's portraits were speedily removed from hoardings. Newspapers published letters from readers who had always known that Rajk was a traitor and were relieved to find justice prevailing at last. All this was frightening and, in a grim way, amusing: *sic transit gloria mundi* . . . Among the reactionaries, malicious pleasure was more evident than panic. Jokes about Rajk spread like fire; in denigrating him, the anti-Government majority was at one with the pro-Government minority—all agreed that it served him right.

It seemed likely that a faction of the Party was being liquidated, but which faction? Some of the arrested, known to have belonged to competing groups, were now lumped together as the agents of a Truman-Bevin-Tito-Vatican-Francoist-Hitlerist-Zionist-Nationalist-Cosmopolitan-Trotskyite-Capitalist world conspiracy. That meant, in terms of Party jargon, "Right wing deviation" or "opportunism." But Rajk was a fanatic Communist. Was it

not possible, some were wondering, that Rákosi had simply chosen a pretext, formulated in the Kremlin way, for getting rid of his extremists?

Ever since his return to Hungary in the wake of the Russian Army, Rákosi had posed as Wise Moderator among the Communists. He ordered secretly that the adjective Wise should only be applied to him. "We can't split up wisdom," he explained. With his appearance, the manner and voice of a bright horse-dealer, he could easily persuade people that he disliked violence and rigidity. He exploited this faculty to blacken the reputation of his likely rivals. He complained to many that Gerö was too rigid, and Rajk too violent; and he succeeded in building a reputation for himself on this foundation, among anti-Communists at home and abroad. Behind the dutiful posture of a Jacobin orator, some paternal and patriotic sentiment was supposed to linger.

People were fooled by him, and so was I though I had never liked him personally. He was quick-witted, an amusing talker, and his grasp of practical matters was impressive. But this was the mental quality one knew well from many lively East European businessmen. Mixed with ambition to shape the future of a country it became rather repulsive. When I read in the anti-Communist Western press, about his "intellect," I was flabbergasted. It was only vulgar cleverness.

I disliked him for being a snob, which is not rare among Communists or other revolutionaries. The son of a well-to-do country grocer, he must have suffered from his social background which was not high or low enough to be impressive. He must have suffered even more from being a Jew, and from his coarse appearance. This is why he was jealous of Rajk, a good-looking young man and the most important gentile among the Communist leaders at that time. For the same reason, he made a point of establishing himself on friendly terms with people who were known to be anti-Semitic. When Stalin turned against the Jews, in the frame of a campaign against Zionism, Rákosi eagerly joined it. This on the whole did not surprise me; but I did not think he was fond of carnage for

its own sake. In the light of later events we learned that he was, along with glory and power. In his character, the quick-witted commercial agent was joined with a Himmler.

Today it is not difficult to realize how, in 1949, the torture and massacre of masses of Hungarians started. Indeed it started with the victimization of Communists. To gauge the proportion of victims who simply had bad luck, as against those who had really shown some spark of patriotism or humane feeling, would be difficult. In general, those who survived the purge unharmed were probably more sycophantic and barbarous than others who were murdered, imprisoned or at least pushed aside until Stalin's death. But some of the executed were chiefly sorry for not being among the executioners. The selection of criminals was based quite openly on assumptions about potential deviation, rather than upon anything they had actually said or done.

Rajk himself was a telling example. I knew him personally. He was not a particularly bright man—quite intelligent, fairly well read, leaving an impression of youthful sincerity. Away from the field of battle he had calm and charming manners. When he was trying to analyse a problem I found him rather vague and inarticulate. I knew from friends that he had often had doubts about one or another Party directive, but the refrain with which he had concluded was always "One must have a compass, and my compass is the Soviet Union." After the war he carried out orders from Moscow in his important position as Minister of the Interior and in other senior offices. There were certainly some clashes between him and the head of the Political Police, Lieutenant General Gábor Péter. But as Péter was a ferocious megalomaniac, Rajk's disapproval did not necessarily mean disagreement about policy. He would not have enjoyed cruelties and encouraged corruption as Rákosi or Péter did, but the "compass" was too holy to be disregarded for the sake of such trivialities.

After the rupture between the Cominform and Jugoslavia, Rákosi pushed Hungary to the front of the anti-Jugoslav campaign. His reason for this was simple: he

knew that Russia wanted it, and felt convinced that for years to come Russia would remain the master of Hungary. "I don't want to become a refugee again," he answered half-humorously when something was suggested which might have displeased Stalin. It seems likely that Rajk once warned him against running too fast in the anti-Jugoslav campaign; but he was told to shut up and did shut up.

In 1949, the order came from Moscow that "Hungarian Titoists must be liquidated." To liquidate them, one had to produce them. The A.V.O. had provided the N.K.V.D. with a long list of suspected Hungarian Titoists. The most dangerous of them, according to the A.V.O. chief, was the head of the rival Security organization, the Communist Military Political Police, Major-General Pálffy-Oesterreicher, a former officer of the Horthy Army. There was no evidence against him but the treachery of a man in his position and with his background could be "assumed." Similarly assumed was the culpability of the Chief of the "Cadre Centre," for the simple reason that he had spent the war years in Switzerland and on Communist instructions had got in touch wtih Allen Dulles, the emissary of American Intelligence. Masses of people were liquidated together with them; but who would be the chief figure, or symbolic head of the group?

Rákosi hesitated between two possibilities—László Rajk and Imre Nagy. Nagy was the only man in the Party who really had contradicted him. He too had spent years in Moscow in the inter-war period and had been helped to return to his own country by the Liberators. As a farmer's son, mainly interested in agricultural matters and knowing the ways of the peasants, he was appointed Minister of Agriculture in the first post-war Government and was thus instrumental in carrying out the Land Reform. Later, when "liquidation of the *Kulaks* as a class" and the campaign for compulsory collectivization started, he condemned these Government measures. Rákosi, in the Central Committee of the Party (the body to which the Politbureau was technically responsible), indignantly rebuked him for doing so. He accused Nagy of "Buckarin-

ism" (a crime second only to Trotskyism-Titoism) and demanded that Nagy should make "self-criticism." Nagy temporized: he asked again and again for an extension of the time granted to him for examining the question and drafting his statement; and did not, ultimately, make any self-criticizing statement at all.*

By that time he had already left the Ministry of Agriculture and been elected President of the National Assembly. It was a decorative position but no one took it seriously, as everyone knew that the Party Politbureau decided about policy and not the Government or, for that matter, the nominal legislative body. There was but one man who took Nagy's position seriously, and that was Nagy himself. A senior economist of the Party and Government once rang and told him as a matter of routine to undertake some measure which Comrade Gerö had ordered. Nagy answered with the calm of political innocence that if so, Gerö should first get permission from the Council of Ministers—the proper and constitutional procedure. The economist thought Nagy had gone mad. When he reported Nagy's reply to his leaders they simply shrugged their shoulders. In the subsequent years of integral Stalinism, Nagy was pushed aside and kept in an unimportant position but no harm was done to him. The choice for martyrdom fell on Rajk, not on him.

The reason lay in the Communist mind. Assumable and potential deeds were more important than those which had been committed. Personal jealousy was weightier than political disagreement. Nagy had friends in Moscow; his imprisonment or execution might have caused bad feeling there. Besides, Rákosi did not fear Nagy as a rival at that time. Nagy was little known among the general public and his popularity on account of the Land Reform was set off by the fact that he too had come from Moscow. Rajk, apart from fighting in the Spanish Civil War, had no political past outside his own country. As a potential rallying point of resistance in the Party he was doomed.

* I got this story from a former Communist high official in prison, and it rings quite true. But on other occasions, Nagy, too, had to "confess to error of judgment," both before and after his return from the U.S.S.R.

Most of the former members of the International Brigade were imprisoned together with him. My friend Michael, from the Southwark days, would certainly not have escaped this if he had lived in the world which he thought Paradise. Janos Beck, the staunchest of all Communists, did not escape it either. He was so constant as to insist even in prison that Rajk, who had been his chief and comrade-in-arms, must have been guilty. "I suspected him because of his negligence in office."

Most Communists imprisoned under Stalin have been released since that time; some of them are in high positions today. In the present-day Communist Party jargon, they had been victims of "dogmatism." This explanation is completely false. Rákosi was not only undogmatic but completely unprincipled; lust for power, vanity, and personal revenge was his sole detectable impulse. Led by it, he wished to reassure the Kremlin and eliminate whomever he disliked. These tasks could easily be co-ordinated.

Hungary had to be Russified. Her soldiers received uniforms modelled on the Russian (indeed, on the old Tzarist) pattern. Russian became the second compulsory language to be taught in schools. The streets of the city were renamed after Russian heroes—and bus conductors had much trouble pronouncing them. Leaflets explained that Russian science, art and military strategy had always been the best in the world; that some of the Russian Tzars and generals, known hitherto as tyrants or mass-murderers, had really been fighters for progress. The West had simply stolen and expropriated the inventions of the Russian people.

The response from the Budapest storymongers was quick. "Do you know who invented the wireless?" they would ask.

"Popov, of course," the reply was.

"Who discovered the permanence of matter?"

"Lomonosov."

"Who was the first man?"

"Adamov."

"Who created him?"

"Jehov."

Hungary had to be restratified. She must have a clear hierarchy of ruling and subject classes. This would be led by the members of the Politbureau and their families, and followed by others of steadily diminishing importance. The broadest level of society, praised in words but cruelly exploited in other ways and deprived of any civic rights, would be crowded with workers and working peasants. Last of all came the outcasts—those who had once been landlords, aristocrats, capitalists, senior officials, army officers and clergymen—and the kulaks; unless subservience to the régime or some other special reason induced the Party to forgive their past lives. Otherwise they and also their children were to be expelled from offices and schools, and dumped in concentration camps. The Communists felt they must distrust them regardless of Party allegiance. Relying upon mass sadism, they comforted common people for their sufferings by publicizing the predicament of their former overlords. In the event, this campaign only produced sympathy for its victims.

The economic and political privileges of our Soviet guests and the Party oligarchy were not concealed; in fact, they were stressed in order to increase the authority of the rulers. Special shops, special schools, rows of luxurious villas, special bathing resorts fenced with barbed wire were reserved for them and their children. "The New Class," or the new caste system, was a tangible reality.

So were the new "Führerprinzip" and Gestapo rule. Today, they are retrospectively condemned by the Communist parties as personality cult and lawlessness. Such descriptions are correct, but give no idea of what was going on. It was a Party order that at meetings whenever there was mention of the Soviet Union or Stalin or Rákosi, the audience must spring to its feet and clap rhythmically. If somebody clapped out of time he got into trouble. I am sure that from St. Stephen, the founder of the Hungarian Kingdom, to Szálasi, the local Hitler, nobody in the history of my country had expected or received half so many expressions of humility and obedience as the Communist dictator imposed upon us by Russia. Next in organizing self-glory was the Minister of Defense, General Mihály

Farkas, most wretched thug of all. His troops had to sing a march starting "I am the soldier of Mihály Farkas. . . ."

The new secret police, which had swallowed all its rival bodies, was called A.V.H.; which stood for the Hungarian words meaning State Security Authority (though most people continued by habit to call it A.V.O. which had stood for State Security Department). Terror grew into a national nightmare. A.V.H. officers and men, in ordinary clothes or their ill-famed uniforms with blue lapels, supervised cabinet ministers along with ordinary citizens, made concierges report on the private lives of tenants, and carried out surprise raids all over the country. Their arrogance and cruelty were indescribable. Their venality was well known—indeed the only comfort for many a possible victim. They issued passports in exchange for flats and furniture and jewellery, though more often than not they took their loot and gave nothing in return. Just one group could not manage to bribe them—those who had been picked by Rákosi and his followers as "spies" and "traitors." In Budapest, people were guessing and fearing and making grim jokes day and night: who would come next?

This was the atmosphere in the Foreign Ministry to the staff of which I belonged. No one knew who had been denouncing somebody, nobody dared repeat more than the slogans of the day, just spiced a little with the facetious accent of the Budapest vernacular lest it might sound too solemn to be genuine. It took some days for me to find out that the chief of the Political Department who had summoned me to Budapest had since been arrested. I saw the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gyula Kállai; he was so embarrassed that I had to address him as a tutor to his pupil. I saw the Chief of the Press Department, Boldizsár; he praised Rákosi nervously, and told stories even more nervously. I learned from him that my old friend, Francois Fejtö, had resigned his Hungarian Government post in Paris. He learned from me that Zoltán Horváth, an architect of the Party merger, and then editor of the Trade Union journal, had been arrested. "Impossible," Boldizsár said and looked at the last copy of the paper; Horváth's name had disappeared from it. Boldizsár went pale

and smiled. "You know," I told him, "Oscar Wilde said: 'Awful this uncertainty; I hope it will last.' "

I saw the real head of the Foreign Ministry, acting as Under-Secretary of State, Andor Berei. He was quite polite in his own repellent way. He explained to me that the resignation of the Minister in London, Erös, must have been the result of a manoeuvre by the British Secret Intelligence. They had got hold of him through the psychoanalysts who were in fact political agents of the imperialists. "Do you know a psychoanalyst called Michael Bálint?" he asked me. "I met him once or twice," I answered; I had in fact known him well, and had introduced him to Erös.

Berei asked me about developments in England. I told him what I new—though not everything I knew—and pointed out that Labour was losing some ground. "Of course, polarization," Berei said; "both the great capitalists and the Communists are getting stronger." I told him he was wrong; it was a general slide towards the Right, not a Fascist right but rather neo-Conservative, and that the Communists were likely to lose even their two seats in Parliament, as the Foreign Editor of the *Daily Worker* had admitted to me. "All this is very interesting," Berei said; "would you make a summary in writing of all you have told me?" He said he would like me to return to my post in London, but that I should first spend some time in Budapest to get familiar with current ideas. I had established myself for the time being in a fairly expensive hotel on Margaret Island, and told him I wished to look for a cheaper place. "By no means," he answered; "it is important that you should live in comfort and at a place where you can meet foreigners and entertain them. The Ministry will cover your expenses."

At the request of Berei and Boldizsár I gave a talk to the youths who had been trained to act as tourist guides. I did my best to be People's-Democratic. I did not succeed at all. I gave the audience such advice as "Do not obtrusively impose your own opinions on our British visitors; do not talk to them about starvation in England, for they know that is nonsense; do not praise too eagerly such wel-

fare arrangements as we have got, for they might think you have never heard of the welfare institutions which started in England earlier than anywhere on the Continent. Just let them discover with their own eyes the marvellous achievement of our People's Democracy." The response was perfectly frigid. Many of the audience clapped because they did not discover that that was an exceptional occasion when they ought not to have done so. The Foreign Ministry officials on the spot said nothing. Nor did Berei a few days later—except that a World Youth Congress was shortly to be held in Budapest, and that he would like me to stay a little longer and assist the gatherings.

My father was near his death. His cruel illness, Parkinson's disease, kills gradually. It atrophies the nerve system, starting with the limbs, ending at the brain. My father's brain was already affected; his wit still shimmering from time to time, but memory failing. "I think it was a very clever thing for you to come home because . . . what did I say?" Physical pains tormented him in spite of morphia. Why should I disturb him in his optimism about me, the one comforting thought he had at that time? Once, when he mentioned political developments and noticed that I shut the door before replying, he asked, "Well, has fear come to that?" I was glad that the next moment he forgot what he had been saying.

I lived as happily as anyone can who knows he may be hanged at any moment. I visited the beach on Margaret Island, and Lake Balaton with friends who took me in their car; I strolled over the city with my friend Bernard, who had arrived from England for the International Youth Congress. Bernard was an extremely intelligent man but as adolescent in his zeal as many a middle-aged Westerner who gets fascinated by the revolutionary spirit of young people further east. Why disappoint him? We had had long theoretical arguments in England; but as I had chosen to return to Hungary I simply said, "I see that to save peace and the Socialist achievements of the present régime, we must co-operate with the Communists, whether we agree with them or not"; and this satisfied him, the

more so as he was fascinated by the cream and wine of Budapest, and by some girls who were with me, no less than by the current ideology. "Did you tell Bernard that . . ." one of the girls started to ask; "I did not tell him anything," I interrupted her.

Try and escape from Hungary? I was haunted by the idea but could not even decide to take it seriously. What would happen to my relatives? And how could I risk shattering anyone's feeling of security by approaching him about this? One Hungarian visitor from the West, in a rather similar position to mine, had got another member of the Congress to give him his passport, and had left the country with it. The other man could easily say he had lost his passport, as so many people really do. Should I ask Bernard? Whether he consented or not he would for ever be tormented by his conscience, either as a bad friend or a traitor to the Cause.

At the beginning of September I heard of more arrests. Almost all Communists who had held leading positions in the London Hungarian Club had been arrested. "Stalin's eyes," as Károlyi used to call them, all under lock and key now. "God, what about you?" a friend could not help asking; "didn't you work with them in London?" "Why should I bother?" I said feebly; "I have never been a Communist. You know, in Hungary it was always very dangerous to be a Communist, and apparently we are just keeping the tradition."

My father meanwhile had died. At his funeral an Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education made a speech, stressing the fact that he was speaking as a writers' representative. The State already kept apart. The obituaries were restrained in tone. The time when "bourgeois progressive authors" could be appreciated had passed. Not only Communists were in danger.

Before coming to Budapest, in May, I had left a letter for my sister in London in case I might be unable to return. I had asked her to look after my belongings and not come to Hungary, whatever happened to me. The only point on which I could congratulate myself now was that I had taken this precaution.

I remember my last talk with Count Károlyi on the 2nd or 3rd of September. He had come home to wind up his affairs before going on long sick-leave with his wife; and he also hoped to intervene in favour of Rajk and his associates. On the way into his room I bumped into one of his relatives, a princess who was just leaving. Distaste for their aristocratic connexions had forsaken the Károlyi couple when they found themselves in plebeian Hungary; now they wished to preserve the cousins and sisters-in-law from Bolshevik persecution. The princess who was visiting him had been received into the Communist party with enthusiasm in 1945; then it was "National Independence Front." But in 1949 her comrades discovered she was "class-alien," pushed her aside, and expelled her son from the Party.

"She complained to me but what can I do about it?" Károlyi said. He was very depressed. "There are more important things than that, and I am helpless." He had seen Rákosi about Rajk, and told him he could not believe in the "spy" charges, and they had had a very disagreeable discussion. He had seen others about complaints against the A.V.H.; on behalf of people beaten half dead merely for being caught trying to cross the frontier . . . "But what can we do? We are a 'member-state.' What do you think of the new crest?" The new draft Constitution had overnight introduced a variation of the Soviet star and hammer as the symbol of the Hungarian People's Republic, declaring that the old one had stood for class oppression. Károlyi made a gesture of despair.

On September 4th, late at night, after a cheerful dinner with intimate friends, I was walking home to my hotel room on Margaret Island. Though rain was spitting I strolled in shirt-sleeves, my jacket on my arm. It was a stuffy late-summer night, in which life and nature seemed to join in frightening harmony. I had not written poetry for twenty-five years, but now a poem was shaping itself in my mind. It was about futility and time passing, the passage of years, clouds and lives through a universe in which one still remained afraid. "Like hare hypnotized by snake . . ." I was muttering a verse under the long shadows

of the chestnut trees, on the island, when a friend came up to me: "Paul, are you still here? They haven't sent you back? Terrible." I found it depressing that he said what I knew anyway. "Don't worry," I answered and said good-bye. When I entered the hotel, wet from rain and sweat, and asked the porter as I usually did whether there was some message for me, he avoided looking into my face but with a stern expression pointed with his head at two men standing next to him. One of them turned up his lapel to show the symbol of the A.V.H.

Chapter 5

Why Did I Confess?

"How strange that I don't feel any fear," I thought as, crammed between the two A.V.H. agents who pressed their thighs to mine and never stopped watching me, I was driven towards 60 Andrássy ut. I presume exhaustion was responsible for my calm. I simply did not care about anything, and if at the next moment I had been led before a firing-squad I should have thought it quite a good solution. At number 60, I was led to a small room where an officer searched me. He took my wallet and wrist-watch and all other unnecessary objects from me. He put them into an envelope and carefully sealed it up. All this has of course disappeared for good as have all my belongings at the hotel room. Indeed more valuable objects than these have been Communized by the A.V.H.; I am only sorry for some books, inscribed by the authors who are dead, which I shall never be able to replace.

They buffeted me into a neighbouring room, with men and women sitting round, all facing the wall and forbidden to turn their heads. I got the same order. My socks, braces and tie were taken, and the clasps torn off my sandals.

Then I entered my first prison cell. Its length was some three metres, its breadth some one and a half metres, its

height two metres. A wooden bunk was fastened to its stone floor. Being situated in the cellar, there was no window; only a tiny vent-hole letting in more dust than fresh air from a courtyard. The soft and mouldy walls were full of scribbles, left as souvenirs by my predecessors. From above the iron door, an electric bulb was throwing light at the bunk all the time. "My crypt," I felt; "that's the end of the journey." The gaoler gave me a dirty rag and told me I might lie down but that I must turn my face towards the light and hold my hands outside the rag. Precautions against suicide. I asked him how I could let my relatives know. "Your interrogator will tell you," he answered; which was the reply from him and all his colleagues, whatever question I asked. After seeing me to the lavatory, in which a couple of rats were expecting me, he escorted me back and looked through the spy-hole to see whether I followed his orders. I did. I was sure I would not get a moment's sleep that night. In five minutes' time I was fast asleep.

I was woken up by a broom pressed into my hands: I must sweep the cell. Half an hour later I was ordered to have my wash. As prisoners in police custody were not allowed to see one another, this had to be done in great haste, over a sink in running cold water. And this was all right. But to wipe myself I was given a big towel, used apparently by dozens before me, wet, muddy, blood-stained, and of an awful stench. An hour or so later my breakfast came: at that moment I could hardly touch it but, on the basis of later experiences when I grew less fussy, I should say it was quite good: caraway-seed soup with bread. Altogether, I hasten to point out, food at the A.V.H. headquarters at that particular period was quite decent and sufficient. At midday, we had soup and vegetable or the sort of sweet noodles which Hungarians are very fond of; in the evening, vegetable again; and also, two or three times a week, meat and a handful of plums or grapes. Before that period, food had consisted of thin soup and a piece of bread; and afterwards it deteriorated again, as I have learned from other prisoners. Allegedly, the reason for this generous treatment concerning food,

along with the greatest cruelty in every other field, was that the crushing and brain-washing of the "Rajkists" was on the agenda; the A.V.H. liked to apply carrots and whips simultaneously.

On the first day of my imprisonment, my fingerprints were taken and nothing else happened to me.

At night, already half asleep, I was woken by a harsh voice: "Come out at once." Two gaolers grasped my hands and led me at last to see my Interrogator. He was sitting at a desk, in a dark room, and received me with great solemnity. I was certainly in no laughing mood myself, yet I could hardly suppress a laugh when he suddenly turned on to my face the spotlight that I had read about in *Darkness at Noon.* He began to question me, and after the personal details asked dramatically: "Why are you here?" "That is the very thing I should have liked to ask you, sir," I answered. He said I knew the reason very well myself. Everyone, he added, started by denying and finished by confessing; I had better confess at once. They would help me as much as they could if I were co-operative; if not, I might endanger not only myself but also my relatives—my half-brother, for instance, a doctor then in his sixties, who had been a Social Democrat party member and a Budapest town councillor. "We know," he told me, "that you received certain information from him when you were on the staff of the B.B.C. We don't care about the old fool for a moment, but if you obstruct our efforts you may well meet him here one of these days." He ordered me to sit down and write a true "autobiography." Some hours later he perused it and tore it to pieces. "You know very well this contains nothing of interest," he added.

The following night, another interrogator dealt with me. He said I must confess plainly that I had been "organized in." To be organized in is a solecism in Hungarian no less than in English but the Stalinists loved it. It means that one was recruited for the Secret Service. "Who do you think should have organized me in?" I asked. The answer was *Ee-ash.* I must admit that I really had no idea what he meant. "Ee-ash you say, sir? Who is he?" The Interro-

gator winced as though showing his impatience. "Don't try to fool me by pretending you don't know what *Ee-ash* is. It was they who sent you to Hungary." After a while I guessed it. "Ee-ash" is the Magyar pronunciation of the letters "I.S.," standing for Intelligence Service, which according to what I should have known, is the authority in control of the British spy agencies. The A.V.H. officers used this abbreviation with the pride of the initiated. I overheard them later whispering to each other, "Is this I.S. or Deuxième Bureau? Or maybe C.I.C.?"—the latter pronounced by them *Tseets,* and standing for the American Counter-Intelligence Corps. They seemed really sure of knowing the secrets about world political developments by getting familiar with such magic words.

I was naïve. My arrest had not surprised me; my fairly outspoken talks both with Englishmen in London and Hungarians at home could well have provided sufficient reason to inculpate me. But one thing I had never done was work for any branch of the "I.S." In the war years I was allowed to deal with secret material at the B.B.C. but so were many people known as Stalinists. Since the beginning of the cold war between East and West, and mainly since my employment with the Hungarian Legation, I had been careful never to disclose any internal detail of Government or diplomatic machinery, however frankly I gave my opinion of political developments or personalities to many a friend. In fact, I had no idea of how either Secret Intelligence or Counter-Intelligence was working in Britain; my main information of them came from cartoons making fun of M.I.5. In spite of the widespread enthusiasm for creating spies, this accusation at the first moment staggered me.

"Don't try to fool me!" the second Interrogator shouted at me. "Do you deny having served on the staff of the B.B.C.?" I admitted having done so. "Well, everybody knows that the B.B.C. is but a covering organization of I.S." Again, I was naïve enough to argue with him. I told the Interrogator it was none of my business to defend the B.B.C. with which I had parted in a fairly strained atmosphere, but that it was an organization with more than ten

thousand people on its staff, broadcasting round the clock in some forty languages; was it possible to imagine that all this should only happen to cover spies and counter-spies? The Interrogator shook his head. He was shocked to think I was "trying to defend the B.B.C., even now." His fondness for the phrase *covering organization* equalled the obsession about *organizing in.* I was told to disclose all secrets of that covering organization, or else they would teach me a lesson.

From then onwards, for about eight days, the two alternately interrogated me. I had again and again to rewrite autobiographies; to make notes about everybody known to me in Britain and Hungary; to describe the links between "I.S." and Hungarian Social Democracy; and so on. The interrogations became increasingly violent. I was often ordered to stand for half an hour without moving, my face turned to the wall; or to do physical jerks, squatting and standing up rhythmically. I began quite ambitiously, so that a friend of one of the Interrogators, attending the performance, exclaimed: "Cheers, he does it quite well." But at the end I collapsed.

Then I was deprived of sleep for three days. The method was to question me all night and then tell me that "in daytime sleeping is not allowed except by special permission of the interrogator." Such a privilege had to be "earned."

I do not know what would have happened to me if these orders had been carried out strictly. In the cell, every third minute when I was caught shutting my eyes, someone banged on the door to wake me up. There was one guard who, when nobody was watching, let me alone to sleep surreptitiously for about half an hour. And I fell asleep even when standing on my feet, turned to the wall. Whether it can truly be called sleep or not, is hard to judge: my eyes were shut, and nightmare pictures chased one another in my mind until I fell and the kick of a guard helped me to stand up again. I had an overwhelming sense of panic and apathy: panic of nerves rather than thoughts. A constant shudder ran through my veins but I did not fear anything, because I could not care any more.

Holding out against these tortures was less a mattter of strength than of absence of interest in my own fate. The one problem which I consciously kept in mind was how to save my relatives from A.V.H. acts of revenge. But, by then, I could not help feeling fatalistic even about that.

My first Interrogator sometimes fell short of his duty of torturing me. He had once been a turner, and kept a suppressed admiration—mingled with hatred and suspicion—for men of letters. His very brutality gave him away: "Now you crouch and stand up," he shouted at me, "once anyway in your life you'll do some proper work instead of scribbling nonsense as you have always done!" Sitting by as I performed my jerks, now and then he pretended to drop off. Once he pretended so well that he dozed, and snored as rhythmically as I should have squatted. *If* I knew ju-jitsu, or *if* I trusted my strength enough to knock him out, I wondered, and *if* I were clever enough quickly to slip into his uniform, and *if* I knew the password to leave the building . . . But it was hopeless with so many ifs. The only thing I ventured to do was open a drawer to see whether there might be a knife or anything like that with which I could slit my veins.

In the intervals between tortures, I had some curious conversations with that Interrogator. He was interested in me and in my stories, even encouraging me to tell him how I felt. "I could give you an instance," I said; "well known but you may not have heard of it. In 1919, after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, when the White Detachments overran the country, they arrived at a big estate owned by an industrialist, a nobleman but of Jewish origin. He was relieved, like all titled people, industrialists and landlords, to see the uniforms of the Whites. But as the White terrorists learned that he was a Jew, they arrested him and without inquiry hanged him. He was so astonished that under the gallows he could only say 'But that it should be the Whites. . . .' These were his last words. If you hang me, my last words may be 'But that it should be the Reds. . . .' "

"Petty bourgeois way of looking at it," he answered scathingly. "If ever I was ordered to leave this post and

go back to the bench, I would do so with no word of complaint."

"So would I if I were ordered to go back to my desk instead of dwelling here."

"Now you have chatted enough, start squatting." Sounds were faintly audible from the neighbouring room: another Interrogator in the vicinity. On such occasions mine would start to shout savagely "Wildboar, wildboar!" I could hardly suppress a smile: it is an abuse fairly unusual in Hungarian, as well as in English, and was certainly meant to impress his colleagues. This Interrogator would also constantly kick at the heel of my sandals but, again, mainly to calm his own conscience. At dawn, when I was already prostrate on the floor I said to him: "Anyway, sir, you could give me a cigarette." "What, you would take my last cigarette, you dirty swine!" He showed me his case in which there was indeed only one. Then he put it in my mouth and lit it.

Several times in the course of these hearings I expressed my willingness to "confess" if they wanted to try me; but this did not satisfy them. They wanted to get "facts," especially about the Socialist I.S. spy-ring and the rest. Who had been Miss Kéthly's contacts in Britain? I told them what was well known, that she had come as a guest of the Labour Party, but I could not of course supply any spy-stories about her. My pigheadedness on this and similar matters, they told me, made my case hopeless. They would like to have helped me but now they would simply allow me to rot alive in the cellar.

They allowed this for about three weeks. By day I walked up and down the cell, day-dreaming or making up poetry. I began a prison diary in verse. A volume of it has since been published. I also started a history, in the manner of sixteenth century Hungarian bards, of the last twenty-five years of my own country, including my own misfortunes. It was quite a fruitful short period. "Shall I try and commit suicide?" It was partly these verses which made me decide against it. I never did and do not today think much of myself as a poet. It seemed then to be worthwhile writing verses—in strict traditional metres and

full assonances—just in order to remember the facts they testified. Out of prison, I thought, my memory will give its biased version of what happened, however much I try to be honest. But the verse would preserve something authentic. To give some account of what was happening to me, however small the chance of being released—that was indeed the force which kept me alive for approximately seven years which I was to spend in prison.

One night I was taken before a colonel. He said he would give me now a last great chance to save myself. "We know much about you," he went on, "far more than you think we know. But we shall give you an opportunity to show goodwill by telling us frankly about your dealings and about those of your accomplices. We know, for instance, that you acted as a messenger between the British Labour Party, which you very well know is just a covering organization for I.S., and their agent, Arpád Szakasits."

Szakasits was at that time nominal head of the Hungarian State, "President of the Presidential Council." He formally appointed high officials, received diplomatic representatives, granted audiences and paraded as a leading symbol of national sovereignty. Once a leading figure —though not the Leader—in the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, he had after 1945 come to loggerheads with most of his former comrades just because of his moderation towards the Communists. In 1948, this turned into subservience combined with the posture of a proletarian king. After the compulsory union of Socialists and Communists, he became nominally second-in-command of the United Workers' Party, the first being Rákosi himself. My contacts with him had been very scanty since then. When visiting Budapest, in 1948 and 1949, I had made courtesy calls on him lest he should be offended with me for ignoring his position. Both times he just repeated the current slogans which sounded particularly painful in 1949 when he added excuses for the imprisonment of some of his near associates. The Hungarian Social Democrats despised him. The British Labour Party held him in contempt. Even if he had had the courage to act as a

British spy, no agency of that mythical I.S. would have bothered to ask for his services. The colonel's allegation was a self-parody of the People's Democracy.

But then, I wondered, was it my task to prevent our Communists from making fools of themselves and martyrs of their puppets? If they wished to do so, and to reward me for letting them do so, why should I object? I could well imagine Szakasits in his fools' paradise telling a courtesy-caller, as he had told me some months before about others, "O he committed very serious crimes but they cannot yet be disclosed." I assured the colonel of my willingness to co-operate. He wanted to hear "facts."

Now, where should I take these from? I had heard a lot of gossip about Szakasits, particularly from his former comrades; but one thing which he had never been accused of was intrigue against the People's Democracy, either as a British agent or in any other capacity. The colonel, however, insisted on such "facts." When in the heat of argument, I asked him, "Do you really think Szakasits so brave as that?," he lost his temper. "I am not interested in your witticism. Apparently you don't know where you are . . ." Threats and expletives followed, and then he calmed down: "Now look here, let us talk business. We two belong to similar worlds; mine is the A.V.H., yours the I.S. You know you are in our hands, so why this fuss? Would you like Wienerschnitzel for dinner?" He ordered me one and gave me English cigarettes.

In spite of the honour of being addressed as a colleague by an A.V.H. colonel and of the Epicurian delights granted to me, I felt rather miserable. The colonel apparently wanted me to invent "facts" about the "I.S." activities of Szakasits without allowing me to make a distinction between truth and fiction. I visualized the short and inflated figure of poor Szakasits. He was not really a bad man; vain and weak, no doubt, to an extent which is criminal in a politician, but quite an amiable fellow and good-hearted whenever he could easily afford to be so. I knew he had no power. In some weeks' time, on the basis of the facts invented by me, he might be taken to the A.V.H. cellar and tortured for not confessing to my fabrications

which he could never guess. I felt it was something I could not take on my conscience. After many an hour, many a night of fruitless arguments and torments, I frankly told the colonel "It would be foolish of me to get myself beaten to death, or let my relatives be imprisoned or tortured, for the sake of Arpád Szakasits. I know I am in your hands, sir, and accept the view that for higher reasons which I cannot judge I must make a confession against Szakasits. But there is one thing I cannot do, and that is to invent matters which he does not even know about and which he may later be tortured for not confessing. I am willing to draft a confession against him, but must make it clear to you that the facts contained in it are not true, lest you should later try and torture him into confirming them."

The colonel indignantly rejected my offer as "an impudent provocation"; he said he wanted "the truth." He took me to the chief of the A.V.H., Lieutenant-General Gábor Péter, whose study, if so it may be called, was a huge wood-panelled chamber. He sat by a vast writing-desk. Everything connected with him was on a big scale, except himself. He was a short man with rodent eyes and a Hitler moustache. I was interested to see him face to face; he had acquired the reputation of an evil demon by then. Evil demons in human skin usually turn out to be dull creatures when they open their mouths. He was surely a fairly unimaginative Sadist. He could be rude and cruel and liked, as I know from others, personally to attend scenes of physical torture. He did not do this in my case, but received me with patronizing and sardonic courtesy. I was shivering from cold in the linen suit in which I had been arrested and which had got ragged since. "Comrade Colonel," he started, "let us give that man a decent suit." "He does not deserve it, Comrade Lieutenant-General," was the stern reply. "We shall see," Comrade Lieutenant-General nodded. "Would you please kindly take a seat? Care for a cigarette? Please."

He had been a tailor's assistant, and his taste for good tailoring had never gone. He was in an impeccable grey suit, with a silk tie which went with it perfectly. He fin-

gered the tie all the time. "Look here, it is up to you to decide about your fate. Do understand us. We are not interested in"—an ironical bow—"Paul Ignotus. We are interested in Arpád Szakasits. You tell us all you know about him. If you do, I shall not worry about what you want to do." Now a smile: "You may go back to England if you like. I shall see to that. It is up to you. . . ."

I repeated apologetically that I had already declared everything I knew. But before I had finished either my sentence or his cigarette he lifted his hand and, with the gesture of a sovereign putting an end to an audience, said, "Well, I was prepared to spare these few minutes . . ." The colonel led me away and asked his assistant, called Fonyó, to take me to the place where "they will talk differently to you."

This meant the office of expert torturers. What I had received till then had been merely preparatory work, more or less of an amateur character. The chief of the beating-up squad—who was also supervisor of the gaolers in the cellar—was a Major, later Lieutenant-Colonel, Gyula Princz, a former coal-man. Before the decline of Nazism he had belonged to the Arrow-Cross Fascists—allegedly carrying out underground Communist orders, and allegedly suffering from the hands of the gendarmes who had caught him. Who could check all these allegations? Underground heroes of Communism grew like mushrooms after 1945, particularly amongst the rabble taken over by the A.V.H. from the Nazi side. My impression of Princz was that if he had a political opinion at all it must have been Communazi all the time. "Do you know what it means to be beaten up?" he asked me. "When were you last beaten up?" "Some fifteen years ago, by the Fascists," I answered—hinting at a scrap in which I had got involved. He had a good laugh. "Served you right. You will get the same from us. Not the same but worse. You will be electrified as I was by the gendarmes. If repeated for a week regularly, I can assure you it will drive you mad."

He was a stout man with an inflated face, apparently a drunkard. When sober, he got drunk with the delights of his job. He loved it. He seasoned it with humorous per-

formances. He was sitting on a writing-desk and talking to a girl typist, playing with his rubber truncheon, when I was led to him. He winked at the girl as he ushered me to his own study. Inside, surrounded by four or five junior experts, including the colonel's assistant, Fonyó, he started gabbling a speech which he had obviously made a hundred times. "Now you see, this is the place for people unwilling to tell the truth. . . You will get your portion three times a day, at eleven a.m., at six p.m., and at three a.m. as I suffer from insomnia." He looked round to see the effect of the joke. "Now show me your palms." He hit my left palm with the truncheon; the right one had to be saved in case I changed my mind and was willing to write "the truth." Then he took a pencil: "Now look here, you stand on your toes and clasp your hands behind you and press the pencil with your forehead to the wall. But don't dare to drop it for I am very patricular about my pencil!" As the pencil was of course dropped eventually, he exclaimed with facetious amazement: "You dare to break my pencil!" The fists and rubber turncheons showered on my head, my shoulders, I was thrown to the floor and kicked about. After a while, the colonel's assistant, Fonyó, said: "Now, you piece of dirt, I hope you've had enough of it. Let's go back to the colonel." The colonel asked me: "Well, has your memory at last been refreshed?" I repeated again and again that I had told him everything I knew.

I cannot tell just how often similar scenes were repeated through the following days. All my body was swollen with purple bruises, a couple of teeth kicked out, my ragged shirt sticking to my wounds. It was extremely painful and, indeed, I think if I had had a chance to kill myself on the way to Major Princz's study I would have done so. But being trapped as I was I just let myself be dragged about. My behaviour was not virile. On the first occasion I did not wail—simply because it is not my instinctive reaction to do so when I feel pain. But I found out that until I did so they would not stop. After that I screamed as much as I could.

One night the colonel suddenly asked me: "Why don't

you use some writer's imagination for your confessions?" "That's just what I offered to do, sir, but you rejected it as a provocation." A lengthy explanation followed on his side: the essence of it was that I must not write absurd things but credible lies only. I agreed. He ordered me a good supper, with plenty of black coffee and cigarettes, and I sat down to write for him "the truth that need not correspond with facts."

I had been ordered to reveal the names of our "spy-contacts"; and to comfort myself I named one of the I.S. directors who organized me in, General B.L.O. Odylie, and the other Sir Fai Rytale. Similar names could be discovered, as I later found out, in other depositions made to the A.V.H. The journalist and broadcaster, Géza Rubleczky, confessed to having been organized in by the Directors of the Deuxième Bureaux, Gay-Lussac and Boyle-Marriotte and was sentenced on these grounds as a French spy. He died in prison.

Otherwise, I was indeed careful to avoid, so far as possible, "provocative" absurdities. The colonel said my account was "something, though not enough." For the time being, however, he assured me they would leave me in peace. I was ordered to get six cigarettes a day in my cell —which the gaolers either gave me or not. I resumed my day-dreams and poems to fill in the time.

One day, I heard knocking on the wall of my cell: the messages of life from a fellow sufferer. This is a time-honoured way of communicating between prisoners. Clever and well-versed prisoners do it in morse; others use simply the prisoners' alphabet, under which one knock means "a," two knocks "b," three knocks "c," and so forth. There are various ways of abbreviating it but this is its essence. The father of Hungarian letters, Kazinczy, described in his memoirs how he used it in the dungeons of Kufstein after being imprisoned for his share in a Jacobin conspiracy at the end of the eighteenth century; and the English reader may be familiar with the method from *Darkness at Noon*. I was glad to find a talking partner, however dangerous and tiresome it was to talk to him. I reciprocated the knocks, and asked him who he was. But

he turned out to have no idea of the system: he merely vented his longing for company. I was disappointed and stopped knocking. Some days later, I got knocks from an apparently new prisoner. "Surely another fool," I thought, and hesitated to reply, but I could not resist the temptation. He turned out to know the prisoners' alphabet. And he turned out to be a friend. Peeping through the keyhole he had recognized me when I was led to the lavatory. It was no easy job to get used to such talk, always fearing the sounds of gaolers' boots—the more so as I have always been very absent-minded by nature. But as we had plenty of time, we managed somehow.

He had been arrested some time after me. I learned from him of the sentences passed in the Rajk trial—five men hanged after the first round. We exchanged mutual A.V.H. experiences and worked out a system of abbreviations. He was on the point of telling me about his interrogations when the gaoler suddenly opened the door and ordered me to take my rag and move into another cell. For two days, I lived in terror: did the gaoler discover us and interrogate my friend while keeping me waiting deliberately? Later I was amused by these anxieties. An A.V.H. gaoler would never take such care in catching someone; he would either strike at once or if in a good mood just make a row and forget about it. I always made the mistake of thinking people more subtle than they were.

About another year passed before my trial. I spent it shuttling about between the cellar of No. 60 and the comparatively civilized, pre-war prison of Markó-utca. Food in the latter for those awaiting trial was even better than at No. 60. I had a toothbrush and some books to read: mainly Soviet novels and Leninist pamphlets but also what had been left behind, after some perfunctory expurgation, of the old prison library, including many of the classics. It was delicious to reread them; when could I spare time for such pleasures while at large?

My final deposition before trial was taken at the end of summer, 1950. An A.V.H. lieutenant took me at night to his office at No. 60; he was to dictate my confession. I did

not know at first whether I ought to contradict him as it was so strikingly absurd; but I quickly decided that the more absurd the better. Now I discovered why my lies had not after all been "enough." Again I had overestimated them in thinking I should take care lest my allegations might "provocatively" sound absurd. I could certainly not have invented anything more provocative than what my torturers invented for me.

I confessed to having spent my life in a sinister campaign against the working class. I had been organized in as early as the beginning of 1939 by British and Hungarian I.S. agents in order to prevent Communism from spreading in Hungary after the collapse of Nazism. The list of I.S. agents who had commissioned me to do various tasks included the names of Denis Healey, Richard Crossman, Kingsley Martin and Zilliacus, besides, of course, Odylie and Rytale. My most important chief, however, was Mr. Morgan Philips, who in 1949, before my last return to Budapest, had ordered me to order Szakasits to send him more detailed espionage reports.

When our trial was approaching, my new Interrogator, A.V.H. Lieutenant Ervin Faludi, made it clear to me that it would be a mere formality. In case I hoped to achieve anything by retracting my confession before the jury, he told me in advance what my sentence, as well as those of my fellow-defendants, would be. These sentences, however, were also "mere formalities," necessitated by the interests of the party; if we gave proof of a "co-operative" spirit now, we would be sent to a special place with all facilities for intellectual work, would be boarded as in a first-class hotel, and would be released in one or two years' time—that is soon after public interest in the vanished Social Democrats had died down. I did not, of course, believe those promises, but I felt that unless the trial were held in public it would be simply ludicrous to contradict the A.V.H. and the judges under their control.

The Trial was held, as foreseen, *in camera,* at the end of October, 1950. The room where it took place was packed with A.V.H. officers and in charge of maintaining order was the very Major Princz whom I had known as

team-leader of the beaters-up. When the trial had already started my Interrogator took me along to my "lawyer": I was to tell the latter, in the presence of the police officer, that I regretted my past crimes and thought the only thing to be said in my favour was that I had made my confession freely and that I had an old mother to support. My "lawyer" in the course of the trial added as a third mitigating circumstance that his client had "lived for a long time in London, the capital of imperialism, and so been very much exposed to evil temptations."

Some of my fellow-defendants were people whom I had never heard of before. The first defendant was Arpád Szakasits—sentenced, as predicted by my Interrogator, to hard labour for life: the second, George Marosán—today a Minister in the Russian appointed Hungarian Government—received, as also predicted, a death sentence "which will not be carried out." All of us recited our lessons according to the texts put down in our last depositions. Our Interrogators had carefully coached us in them, with the typewritten pages in their hands.

I was sentenced to fifteen years' hard labour. When the president of the Court asked us whether we wished to appeal, I whispered to my Interrogator, the A.V.H. lieutenant who sat behind me, that I did not see any point in doing so. "Oh, yes, you must appeal," he answered, "otherwise it wouldn't sound natural."

Chapter 6

Why Did We All Confess?

WHY DID WE all "confess," almost without exception, at the Stalinist political police and afterwards in their Courts? For myself, I wanted to live in spite of despair and exhaustion from beatings, compulsory sleeplessness and other tortures, and despite my anxiety about the fate of my relatives. Moreover, it seemed that the more absurd the confession I had to make, the more obviously false it

would appear to everyone. And apart from this, my trial was held *in camera.* I felt it would be pointless to perform heroically when nobody was about except those who would beat me to death afterwards. Whether I would have "confessed" in an open trial I simply cannot tell; I do not know myself enough to judge.

Some months after my trial I was taken back to the Budapest A.V.H. headquarters from my prison cell in the country town of Vác. A.V.H. Lieutenant Colonel Márton Károlyi* received me very cordially. "How are you getting on in Vác?" I told him frankly that life was hell there; I had not expected that it would be such a "sanatorium" as had been promised by my Interrogator before trial "but I should not have expected it to be so abominable as it is, sir. If an American reporter could ever take pictures of us there, they would make more powerful imperialist propaganda than anything your enemies could invent." The lieutenant-colonel did not seem to be hurt. He was one of the few A.V.H. officers who enjoyed my stories. "What I like about you," he said, "is that we need not trouble to ask anyone to report on your opinions. You save us the bother. I know you dislike us. But you would like to live in tolerable conditions, wouldn't you?"

"That's right, sir," I answered and did not contradict his allegations about my political hostility. Was this sincerity on my part? It may have been. But I had come to the conclusion that A.V.H. officers were most irritated by the prisoners who were, or pretended to be, their comrades. For spying on other prisoners or the like, they would accept their services and reward them. But if someone hesitated about going to any lengths, he only angered them by insisting on his faithfulness to the Idea. Faithful Communists in Communist prisons—that was a thing which should be ignored, even if it happened. I felt I should play the opposite rôle, of the honest opponent. I stood before the lieutenant-colonel simply as a man seeking his own interests. It should be a clear give and take.

"Now listen," the lieutenant-colonel went on. "We want to make a series of open trials, to inculpate Social Democ-

* No relative of Michael Károlyi.

racy. Some of you who I think are sensible enough to know what it is about—Zoltán Horváth, Sándor Szalai, George Pálóczi-Horváth and yourself—you would be the defendants in the first Social Democratic trial, and from your confessions the rest would follow. The verdicts of your secret trials would of course have to be quashed on some formal grounds, you needn't bother about that . . . If you help us to do this, we shall consider it a great service. However disappointed you are with the conditions you found in Vác, I hope you see that I wish you well. I promise you will have better treatment, and plenty of food and cigarettes, and congenial work—translations for instance, if you like—and that you get wages to support your mother, and even permission to write to her, though you know political prisoners are not really allowed to do so. Would you like to write her a letter at once? . . . Well go back to your cell and think it over, and give your answer tomorrow."

In my cell, I got decent food and cigarettes and books—none of which I had known in Vác—and the following day at an interview with Lieutenant Colonel Károlyi I said I consented. I felt that to refuse his offer would be suicide or worse. But I made up my mind to break my promise to him and to reveal everything I knew of the A.V.H. tortures and the fake trials when I got a chance to talk in public.

Every day either Lieutenant-Colonel Károlyi or his assistant, Lieutenant Szántó, spoke to me about the deposition which I was to make for the open trial. I pretended incessantly. I talked over with them carefully whether this or that statement about Anna Kéthly or Szakasits might be believed or not. I soon found that although they had decided now to concentrate on "credibility," they were as keen as before to include obvious absurdities. "So much the better," I thought and made cheerful use of the good books and decent food.

By then any pretence on their part that our statements must be true had gone. They would never have said that we should tell lies. But the ways of compiling the truth became quite farcical. I remember Lieutenant Szántó act-

ing as messenger between Pálóczi-Horváth and myself, only concerned with fitting together the tales we were both concocting but never inquiring about their foundation in fact. "Pálóczi tells me we can't say he gave his spy reports to Macdonald at the B.B.C., since everyone knows they were hardly on speaking terms." "Well let us say that he handed them to Macdonald through Tarján," I suggested. That settled it. By the way, Pálóczi-Horváth had never been a Social Democrat but a Communist who had worked for a while on the staff of the B.B.C. The reason for including him in a so-called Social Democrat trial was that before the war, in the service of a British agency in Budapest, he had been in touch with Arpád Szakasits, as he had with a great number of people of most different political denominations, united in resistance against the Nazis.

Simultaneously, I was working out my own plan. If the president of the Court asked about my proceedings in Britain, I would start to quote one or another of my spy-contacts in English, and say: "Everything we say here is a foolish lie. This is a framed trial as were all those staged by this régime. We were beaten to shreds and threatened that our relatives would be arrested and tortured if we were not to consent . . ." And so on and so forth. I hoped that by the time someone had checked and silenced me it would already be too late: the scandal could no longer be hushed up. I knew Hell would be Heaven compared with what would happen to me, and perhaps also to my mother and sister and brother in Budapest. But there must be one man, I felt, to tell the truth to the world.

Would I have done this had the trial been held? I cannot vouch for it. But I knew that when Lieutenant Szántó came to tell me that "we have decided for the time being no open trial will be held" a great stone rolled off my chest. My impression was that our depositions had been shown to Rákosi who had not found them "credible" enough to be aired. But whatever the reason, I was very glad to be released from this rôle of hero and martyr which I had meted out to myself.

What was the reason for the confession of others? No answer can be given which applies to us all. The accusa-

tions made by the A.V.H. were fairly uniform—spying in the service of imperialists, conspiracy to oppress the working class, and so forth—and very few if any had committed what they were sentenced for. But their cases were very different both politically and psychologically.

The position of those who had committed approximately what they were accused of was easiest. In the Vác prison hospital I spent some weeks in the company of a former Member of Parliament, the Very Reverend Father Bozsik. After the imprisonment of Cardinal Mindszenty, he had really acted as the President of a Shadow Cabinet "in case the régime changes," and had negotiated with American diplomatic representatives. In a democratic country, of course, there is nothing wrong in heading a shadow cabinet and talking to the diplomats of any foreign power with which one's own country is not at war. But to confess as much as that was enough for the A.V.H. to draw up the rest. Bozsik told me he had known about a "military line leading to Americans" but he himself had not been concerned with it. The A.V.H. simply accepted his admission, linking it with the "military line" and with the murder of two or three Soviet soldiers which had happened years before and had nothing to do with Bozsik's activities. Bozsik was harshly treated, like everybody else, under police arrest and afterwards in prison; in addition, he could expect kicks from young armed ruffians whenever his occupation was asked and he answered "priest." But he did not suffer any special torture. Having agreed to confess to the truth and not to contradict the "completion" of his admissions, he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment—substantially less than myself.

This does not mean that all Right-wing people got away so easily. The most notable case is that of Cardinal Mindszenty of which I learned some details in prison and afterwards—from my first Interrogator, and some Communist officials who were later imprisoned, and from other sources.

How much of the charges against the Cardinal was true? He was doubtless a frantic opponent of Communism and of the Republican régime established after the war, and of

many a social reform it had introduced. To be against the régime was by no means illegal. Did he then conspire with the representatives of foreign powers? This depends on how one defines conspiracy. He certainly advised the Americans not to return the Crown of St. Stephen to Budapest but to deposit it at the Vatican. He was also accused of illicit dealings in foreign currency through his co-defendant, Prince Esterházy. Whether this was true is of no interest; currency regulations, as I pointed out above, were not meant to be kept in Hungary, and everybody broke them with the blessing of the Government except when a scapegoat was required.

Surely it was not single acts like these which turned the fury of the Government machinery against him. It was his general attitude from 1945 onwards. It is an open secret that many of his senior priests objected to his rigidity; so did some leading Jesuits. These same Jesuits were imprisoned a year or two later. The Rákosi régime persecuted religion. According to some, the Cardinal's attitude was thus vindicated. Others take an opposite view and think that it was much cleverer to be flexible and so demonstrate the impossibility of coming to terms with the Rákosi Government, than to allow them to persecute religion on the pretext of "fighting Reaction."

It is also true that the Cardinal buried in his grounds a tube which contained his secret notes. It was a great triumph for the A.V.H. to discover it. But the secrecy of those notes was their single interesting characteristic. When they were made public one merely wondered why they had ever to be secret.

The Cardinal had an unflinching faith in his own status, dignity and vocation. On the question of education, but also in other matters, he was unwilling to yield to government pressure; though he was often approached by Catholics of high standing who wanted him to be more conciliatory. At the end of 1948 he made small gestures in the direction of compromise—presumably when he realized that the help he had hoped from the West was not forthcoming. But the campaign against him was already at its height, and Rákosi made up his mind to have him ar-

rested. The Cardinal made a statement that if ever he were arrested and made any "confession" in prison, people should know it had been made under duress. He felt what was approaching. Nevertheless the fact that a Cardinal could be gaoled must have come as a terrible shock to him.

To be isolated from every soul with whom one might exchange a human word, and to feel oneself at the mercy of cruel enemies, is bound to disturb anyone's mind; but chiefly the mind of a man who had filled the position and had the outlook of Cardinal Mindszenty. There is no saint who cannot be in some way broken by humiliation—especially in solitude. The Cardinal, as far as I know, was not beaten up. But his treatment was hardly less cruel than the shower of truncheons. He was deprived of sleep, and ordered to do physical jerks like other prisoners; in addition, the thugs made him a special butt for their coarse amusements. The fact that a Cardinal had the same biological needs as everybody was a special pleasure for them. They made fun of him in the most revolting way. The leader of the torture squad, Princz, pressed his buttocks to the Cardinal's mouth.

At that time—(1949) a Yellow Book was published in several languages by the Hungarian Government on the Mindszenty case. It contained the well-known charges levelled against him at his trial. It showed the secret manuscript documents found in the Primate's park. It also showed photographs of documents signed by the Cardinal in A.V.H. custody. Since then, as we know, the handwriting expert employed by the A.V.H. has escaped from Hungary and made clear that some of these documents were forged. I was in London at the time of the trial and did not know that; but two of the documents gave away their origin beyond doubt. One was a letter addressed to the Minister of Justice, István Ries, the typical manifestation of a disturbed and tormented mind, alternately blaming and defending himself in almost incoherent sentences. This was obviously genuine—if I am wrong about it I should have to alter all my opinions of the A.V.H. and congratulate them for having once, exceptionally, produced such a masterpiece of a fake. In this, truly, nothing was

"confessed," except that the Cardinal was feeling miserable and wondered whether his ideas had all been right. He had every reason to feel and express himself thus. The other was a deposition starting with the phrase "I am a nobleman," then confessing he had hated the common people and been a spy. Anybody could tell at once, whether this document was forged or not, that its text must must have been dictated by the A.V.H. Talking about the case with friends in London—for instance, with a Left-wing Catholic priest, the Basque Dean Onaindia—I gave my honest opinion about these papers. When interrogated by A.V.H. officers I confessed this crime, but it was not important enough to prove that I had acted as an "I.S. agent" so they did not bother about it.

The Cardinal's trial, it will be remembered, was a shock to those who expected him to appear in the posture of heroic martyrdom. He did admit the truth of some of the allegations against him. His manner was embarrassed and apologetic, though not servile. The first reaction in the Vatican press was that "he admitted what was true and denied what was untrue." I think this was the case indeed. Later on, those who felt disappointed that he was not more pugnacious in the dock spread the belief that he must have been doped with a mysterious drug. I think this is nonsense. I spoke to a great number of prisoners who confessed under torture, and never heard of anything like that, except for morphia injections after tortures.

But I learned much later that the reports and broadcast commentaries of the trial were edited to the extent of falsification. The Cardinal may not know this, even today, but his hosts at the America Legation in Budapest might tell him. By the time he was tried, the Iron Curtain had become almost impregnable. Only very few non-Communist Western correspondents were admitted to political trials in Hungary, and these were surrounded by interpreters who had been carefully trained in the Party office. They had been told what to translate and what to forget about in unpredictable events. The version of the Cardinal's confession which reached Western readers was thus to some extent distorted; the tape made of his confessions, and

transmitted by the Budapest radio, had been carefully cut. His voice, however, was genuine. In his trial the most substantial cuts and deletions had to be made from the confessions of his co-defendant, the former editor of a Catholic daily paper, László Tóth. When imprisoned he was almost deaf, and his evidence in the dock was a most pathetic sight. But he had the courage to describe the tortures which he had undergone at No. 60, naming and describing exactly the rooms where they had taken place. Later, he died in prison.

Catholic priests and non-Socialist politicians were as a rule ordered to confess that they had acted as American spies. Spying for Britain was the rôle meted out to the Socialists. In the Socialist Party, bitter factional fights had been going on before their merger with the Communists; not only between those who were for and against the merger, but also among smaller groups. Now, however, they were all united in the I.S. ring. Most fortunate among them was the man to whom the A.V.H. interrogator showed a great map or diagram, representing the British Socialist World Conspiracy which had to be "revealed." The interrogator was a comparatively good-natured man who wanted his victim to save trouble. "Look here, we shall have to prove this and you are a fool if you do not help us." There was a criss-cross of lines on the map, with such captions as Political line leading to the Foreign Office; Military line leading to the British Military Attaché; and so forth. There were the names of well-known Socialist leaders such as Kéthly, Bán, Peyer, Szakasits. . . .

The Socialist questioned in this way got a hiding now and then but was far more fortunate than most of his comrades who could not get access to such helpful maps of their crimes. Usually the A.V.H. started the sessions with maltreatment, partly as a way to break the morale of their victims and partly because they really hoped that the victims might thus spill something worth knowing. In any case they had nothing to lose by it. Miss Kéthly herself has told me she was not beaten up, but all other methods of maltreatment were applied to her. Since, owing to her international reputation and her sex, the crime-in-

ventors apparently hesitated about what her rôle in the World Conspiracy should be, she was kept in prison for years without sentence. In a way the most fantastic case was that of Madam Ries, the wife of the former Minister of Justice. She was arrested at the same time as her husband; she was put in solitary confinement without a word of explanation and kept there for years and when the Thaw came she was suddenly released. She had never been asked to confess—but I wonder whether her position was better for that.

I remember also the case of Z, a Socialist intellectual of the fellow-travelling wing, who started by confessing to as many imaginary crimes as anyone could invent. He was panic-stricken, worried about his wife and children, and knew enough of A.V.H. methods to judge that nothing short of ludicrous self-denigration would satisfy them. He put down such things as "The C.I.C. agent posing as an American editor, X, gave me so many dollars for disclosing the production figures of the Y armaments factory. The I.S. agent, posing as a British editor, P gave me so many pounds . . ." This should really have satisfied the most sanguine expectations. But his interrogators were insatiable and reproached him for "not coming down to the heart of the matter." He was, as so many of us were, taken to Major Princz, and received the treatment known as "wolf's bandage." This meant tying his wrists to his knees and hanging him on a pole, head downwards. In this position they spat at him and beat him, mainly on his testicles. After such treatment, he was ordered to drink salt water so that his swollen tongue nearly strangled him. This went on for days or, more exactly, for nights. After dusk he had to crawl—for he could no longer walk—up the stairs and was "interrogated" overnight while he lay on his back on a couch. He implored his torturers to tell him what else they would like to hear from him; but the answer again and again was torture and the same shouts: "You know very well yourself, you won't get away with it until you have confessed the real thing."

He was hardly alive when Major Princz, after one of his performances, bellowed: "Now we have had enough

of the nonsense you talk; you must describe how the Jugoslavs organized you in." This was indeed something which could not have occurred to Z. As a political writer, he had been in touch with a number of Western intellectuals and diplomats but hardly ever with Jugoslavs. His response, of course, was prompt. "O yes, forgive me, I quite forgot about them . . . I shall write about that by all means . . . But so many things have happened since, and so many names have escaped me. Could I perhaps get the list of the Diplomatic Corps of the Jugoslav Embassy in Budapest? There is a copy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If I saw that I should be able to describe the thing." "All right, now at last you are talking sense. But beware if you try to deceive us again." After a day or two Z got the list and sat down to work at once: Counsellor of Legation X . . . itch had offered him so many dinars for this information, and Secretary of Embassy Y . . . itch so many for the other. Dates were given in the deposition, with diplomatic receptions where these talks had taken place. "Well you old bastard this seems all right; you could have begun like that," the Interrogator patted him on the back. After a few days there was a question: "Look here, Z, you say you met Y . . . itch on the . . . But he had not yet come to Budapest, had he?" "O yes, I forgot to point out that had really taken place by correspondence through some other agent I had seen. . . ."

This was reassuring. Z was given medical assistance: an operation on his testicles was carried out while he lay on the wooden bunk. He was allowed some months to recuperate before being tried. On the eve of his trial, the officer in charge summed up his depositions. He redictated Z's confessions about C.I.C. and I.S., dollars and pound notes, spying and Socialism. He was already at the end when Z told him, "Now, sir, I think I should add that the Titoist agents . . ." The officer interrupted him with a gesture which gave him to understand that all that was of no importance. The A.V.H. had changed their minds; they had first thought of including Z in a "Titoist" trial but had later decided that he could be better used in the context of Anglo-American spying.

The Tito agents were *ex officio* arrested Communists. In addition to Jugoslav spy-links they had to confess British, German, French, American, South-American, Swiss and other spy-contacts if they had spent any time before or during the war in such countries. Theirs was the most complex situation: they could not sensibly say they had opposed Communism, as to some extent everybody else could. Their confessions, known now to be nonsense, were particularly puzzling to some people. Did they simply yield to threats and torture? Did they believe the promises that even if they were sentenced to death the sentence would not be carried out, and that they would be allowed to live in comfort away from the public eye? Or were they persuaded, like the hero of *Darkness at Noon*, that they owed this moral sacrifice to the Party?

It was a mixture of all this. But in general, torture was surely more decisive than one would think from the otherwise often startlingly accurate descriptions in *Darkness at Noon*. I knew some Communists in prison who had not specifically been tortured under arrest before trial but the threat had been permanent and minor samples had been given of its fulfilment. At the other extreme, for example, one was "electrified" while he sat in cold water for hours, day after day, and wrapped in a rag and beaten until his ribs were broken—all for not confessing to crimes which he could not have guessed, as they had been invented by another imprisoned Communist under duress. The average was a cross between the two.

As to Rajk, my information is that he was so shocked by the call of the three A.V.H. agents who came to fetch him that at first he resisted them. They had to struggle to take him to No. 60. Then, the various methods of breaking a man were applied simultaneously. He was beaten up and tortured. He was informed that his wife and was also under arrest and might also be tortured. They threatened that his baby son would as though by accident be run over by a car. He was promised "sanatorium" treatment after his "purely formal" death sentence. Meanwhile, appeals were made to his belief in Communism. It was explained to him that the Party needed this great sacrifice on his

part: Tito's Jugoslavia had to be revealed as the agency of a capitalist world conspiracy "which it really is," and he, Rajk, alone could convincingly perform the rôle of its leading figure in Hungary. Among others the Minister of the Interior at that time, János Kádár, is said to have personally called on him in his cell, bringing Rákosi's most comradely messages and assuring him of the Party's profound appreciation and gratitude in case he consented. The coaching of "accomplices" and "witnesses" was managed on similar lines. Rehearsals for an open trial were staged in the presence of the A.V.H. chief, Péter. Rajk then was a nervous wreck. Now and then he forgot his lesson and was reprimanded by Péter.

At his trial, he acted perfectly as prescribed. When asked by the president of the Court "And who finally foiled your attempts?" he answered like a model schoolboy, "Great Stalin and wise Rákosi." Among all the promises they had made, there must have been one he found it hard to believe—the "purely formal" nature of his death sentence. Under the gallows he did not seem to be surprised. His last words allegedly were "Long live the Soviet Union." Was it for the sake of his wife and son? Was it meant to demonstrate that he was a better Communist than those who were murdering him? Or was he ultimately convinced, whatever his own tragedy, that his "Compass" must be right? We shall never know.

Others who shared his fate did turn out to be surprised. Major-General Pálffy-Osterreicher shouted "we were deceived," and a young Communist, András Szalai, cried with the rope round his neck "I perish innocently, how can Rákosi tolerate this?" He could, quite lightheartedly. But surprises can always crop up in a "planned" society, including the surprise of a promise honoured. In prison we met in comparatively good health a Communist whose hanging had been reported in the Budapest press, and there may have been other similar cases.

Many of those who had endured grave tortures to bargain off at least some of their alleged crimes felt it had been worthwhile if they had thus escaped hanging. This may have been so in certain cases—but in others, unwill-

ingness to confess yielded a different crop. A memorable example was that of the two Szücs brothers. Both started their Communist careers in the underground movement before the war. One of them, Miklós, was my friend. He was a leading member of the London Hungarian Club during the war,* and afterwards correspondent of the Hungarian Communist Party paper and chief of the Hungarian Government-sponsored information bureau in Britain. At first he struck me as tiresome and parrot-Communist, but I became fond of him. He was sincere and honest to the limit of party loyalty and occasionally beyond. In the course of years he acquired a real sympathy for the British Labour Movement and, so long as that was possible, really hoped for a mutual arrangement "between the two workers' parties." He could hardly hide his disgust at the outrageous attacks on old Hungarian Socialist leaders at the time of the merger and showed an open concern for their fate. But, needless to say, he fulfilled Party orders obediently and served the Communist Government loyally. His authority among Hungarians in London was much increased after Rákosi, arriving on a Government mission at London Airport on one occasion, looked about for him and cordially shook his hands: "I am so glad to see you; you know your brother and I are old friends."

They were. Ernö Szücs was Rákosi's cell-mate in Horthy's prison. After the war he became a senior official of the Ministry of the Interior and later, as a colonel, one of Gábor Péter's deputies at the head of the A.V.H. When Miklós from time to time visited Budapest, he used to stay with his brother. "Do you always see eye to eye with him?" I once asked him. "Let's not discuss family matters," he answered with a faint smile. I did not of course press the question. Among prisoners of the A.V.H. it was common knowledge that Ernö Szücs was one of the great confession-forgers, together with Lieutenant-General Péter, Colonel Décsy and Colonel Janikovsky (who was to the best of my belief responsible for my own suffering, the man who had taken me in to see Gábor Péter.)

* His was a Magyarized surname; in London, he was known by his original surname, Szüsz. He had been an engineer.

Miklós Szücs, visiting Hungary on an official trip in the spring of 1949, was suddenly ordered to appoint someone else to his post in London and to stay in Budapest as "an important post" had been found for him there. He was made director of the Technological Institute. When I last saw him, in the summer of that year, he spoke with some nostalgia of England but felt quite happy—especially, I think, as he had parted from his London girl-friend, an ardent but unattractive comrade. He was arrested two or three days before me. The order was given by his brother Ernö.

Six months after my trial I was taken once again to the Budapest police headquarters where Lieutenant-Colonel Károlyi and Lieutenant Szántó started by overfeeding me, as they always did on such occasions, and went on to torment me with threats and questions—this time about the "spy-links between the Szücs brothers." As an agent of the I.S., I must know that the British authorities, once having learned of the family ties between Miklós and Ernö, made use of them. In spite of my worries and jitters, I was unwilling to give conclusive evidence and was ultimately left in peace about them without getting the promised "hiding." I learned the background and sequel later.

Lieutenant-General Péter fell out with his Colonel Ernö Szücs, according to some informers, because even Ernö Szücs thought that his chief overdid the fabrication of evidence. Péter announced to Rákosi his suspicions of a "spy-contact" between the two brothers. Rákosi authorized him to arrest Ernö Szücs. From then onwards the Szücs brothers were alternately tortured and brought together to confess. Their belief was that if they yielded they would be executed. They were taken to a spot in A.V.H. headquarters known as the *lefolyó*—the drains. At that spot the bodies of victims were made liquid with an acid and then let down the drains into the sewage of the city. A former assistant of Colonel Ernö Szücs, having witnessed a bit of the scene, was horror-stricken and ran to Rákosi: "Comrade Rákosi, I don't know what to say, Comrade Ernö Szücs is being beaten up over the *lefolyó*. . . ." "What?" Rákosi exclaimed, "those people are simply mad,

what did you say? Awful. I'll ring them at once to stop that. You go back now to assist the Comrade Colonel." The man hurried back and at the entrance to the A.V.H. was caught by the guards who were waiting for him: "You swine, you dared to squeal against us to Comrade Rákosi?" He was terribly beaten up and later interned. The bodies of the Szücs brothers meanwhile vanished down the *lefolyó*.

I cannot vouch for the truth of all details in this story.* But the essence of it—that the Szücs brothers were beaten to death by the A.V.H. for their unwillingess to "confess" to imaginary crimes—was admitted to me personally, at the time of the Thaw in 1956, by György Nonn, then Attorney General of the People's Republic, formerly private secretary to Rákosi.

There may have been some who refused to confess anything at all. Certainly some were unwilling to confess everything demanded from them. It was comparatively easy to confess lies and conceal the truth. This was to some extent what I did. During my years in the prison of the A.V.H. I was in constant terror of what might next be asked from me. The interrogations were a nightmare. I leave it to the imagination of the reader to realize what it was like to be pestered on one occasion—in 1951 I think —by questioners who wanted me to confess that my brother and sister had acted as my informers when I had been a spy in London.

Confessions were not uniform. The behaviour of prisoners was not uniform. Differences of moral strength and of mental awareness, even at the moment of prostration and fainting, manifested themselves in the various depositions. But in one thing there could be no difference between us: none of us could be dignified. In prison I often recalled the various romantic descriptions of saints and heroes who would not falter under whips and hot iron: there was, for instance, the excellent and in many ways realistic Italian film, *The Open City*, in which the Resistance hero spat in the face of his cruel interrogator, the Gestapo officer. This

* I have heard that in despair Miklós Szücz shouted: "I am ready to sign any confession you want."

is just the scene which in such circumstances cannot happen. The Resistance hero, or his opposite number in A.V.H. custody, by the time he faces the demands of his interrogator, is physically unable to show pride. The Gestapo or A.V.H. see to that. To be proud and dignified while cigarette ends are stamped out on one's skin is surely more difficult than cinema-goers would think. But it can be tried. To be proud and dignified after being forbidden to go to the lavatory for twenty-four hours cannot even be tried. It is this sort of torture which all A.V.H. prisoners had to undergo from the beginning. They were dirty, miserable and exhausted by the time their conclusive interrogations started. Sense of honour may not have gone but their self-respect must have been crushed. Coming from damp cellars, they were shivering— in itself a bad start to dignified composure. Many of the Frenchmen guillotined under the Terror behaved magnificently. But even they trembled. "Tu trembles Bailly," a guard sneered at the great scientist, and former Mayor of Paris, seeing him on the way to the guillotine. "Oui, parcequ'il fait froid," Bailly answered, so that the crowd should hear. But no crowd attended the interrogations at No. 60. Proud gestures in the circumstances would have been grotesque and silly as well as suicidal.

Few people are able to bear witness to that. Most rewrite in their memories the stages of their ordeals. Self-deception started even in prison. I remember the hospital room in Vác where I spent some weeks with, among others, Father Bozsik and my old friend, the former Secretary General of the Social Democrat Party, Ferenc Szeder. About fifteen of us were in that room for suspected heart trouble. We were a motely little crowd which ranged from the former Arrow-Cross Fascist Lord Mayor of Budapest to a "Trotskyite-Titoist" who insisted even there that "history will vindicate our People's Republic": the representatives of all political shades and of practically all social strata. We were treated abominably, buffeted about, threatened all the time, spied on, and fed on fodder. I asked a very soldierly former Fascist whether he had been beaten up and he answered "O no, if that had hap-

pened, I shouldn't be here; because whatever the result, if anyone dared to strike me I couldn't stop myself from hitting back."

One night our room was raided. Seventeen-year-old thugs with rifles chased us out of our beds, kicked us, abused us, and searched our beds and drawers; and one of them slapped the face of my soldierly cell-mate. We all took it humbly. The day after, we started whispering about what had happened. What a shame, how disgraceful!—we all sighed. After a pause, one of us began: "But at least I had my own back," and told us a witty answer he believed he had made. We all nodded, confirming that he had been very brave. In the course of the following days some three or four of us remembered equally brave remarks we had made. If our whispers had been tape-recorded, that night of humiliations would have gone down as a heroic act of Resistance. If the night itself had been tape-recorded, we should all have emerged as cowards. We were but human in a sub-human world.

Chapter 7

Gaol and Gaolers

I BEGAN to write a long poem on the morrow of my arrest, at 60 Andrássy ut, and finished it on New Year's Eve, 1950–1, in my prison cell at Vác. I put in it "Worn-out and threadbare after the nights of interrogation and torture, I felt it would be seventh heaven for me to be committed to penal servitude. There at last my personal identity would be dissolved in the collective sweat of all convicts. Longing for that, I confessed to everything except the truth, and felt an exhilarating relief when I learned that I had been sentenced to fifteen years of Vác." But it was far forse than I had expected. I often wondered whether it would have been better not to be sentenced at all.

Our trial closed, we were huddled into a lorry and

driven to Vác, some 15 miles from Budapest. Our belongings, if any, had to be left behind. Mine by then consisted of a toothbrush, a packet of cigarettes, a Russian school book granted at my own request for learning the language of the new Master Race, and some sheets of paper on which I had put down, by my interrogator's special permission, some of my verse translations, the results of more than a year of almost uninterrupted solitude.

In Vác, we were stripped and given frieze uniforms and ragged prison underwear. Before slipping into them we were disinfected, which meant a hot shower-bath—the sole good part of the procedure—and haircutting over our heads and bodies. The latter was performed by a robust, muscular prison barber. He received us with a broad grin and did the job with gusto; he would suddenly tear away his haircutting gadget so as to cause pain to the novices, especially when approaching the genitals. Subsequently he shaved us so as to make our faces sore and bloodstained. We found later that he had served in the French Foreign Legion and then escaped; had become leader of a Nazi firing squad, and been imprisoned as a war criminal. He shouted dirty jokes about, showered the humour of the underworld, and was the gaolers' favourite. In some weeks' time we became friends and then he shaved us perfectly. "It's because of you that I am here," he told one of my co-defendants, "but damn it all, now we are in the same boat." He suggested he would smuggle out letters from the prison as "I have the means to do so." Amongst those known well to me no one was reckless enough to make use of these services, and I am not sure whether he would not have done it honestly for some. Such characters are too erratic to be consistently wicked. I knew however of some cases when he hurried along with the private letters thus obtained to the prison Commander, and the result was innumerable blows on the head of the hoaxed prisoner. In these proceedings he seemed politically unbiased: he gave away some of his former Arrow-Cross comrades as lightheartedly as those whom he knew to be responsible for his being here.

This Vác prison consisted of old buildings inherited

from previous régimes. We novices were huddled into the block MZ—which stood for "Magánzárka," that is, solitary confinement. Its cells had been planned for one person each, but four or six were crammed into most of them. While my co-defendants were at once crammed together I was first given solitary confinement—I think simply by oversight. A sturdy sergeant, with a swollen face, bloodshot eyes, and bulging belly, showed me to my cell and in a rattling N.C.O. diction recited a text which he knew well by heart: "Every morning and every evening when we open the door you put the water jug and the bucket out to the passage and say in a soldierly way 'I respectfully report, the number of cell inmates is one.' If pieces of paper, or books, or tobacco, or matches, or anything other than what is specifically allowed, is found in the cell, or if you are caught knocking or scribbling on the wall, or peeping through the keyhole or the window, the punishment is in the first instance: *short-iron*." This was indeed the most frequent corporal punishment in the A.V.H. prisons: the prisoner's hands were fettered to his feet and strained as much as possible from four to sixteen hours, according to the gravity of the offence. I was strictly ordered to go to bed at the time of Retreat and to get up in time: I must "make my bed" in a soldierly manner and not lie down in daytime. My bed was a strawsack or rather a rag full of dust on the floor—it should have been restuffed about a year before. The window was so placed that one had to stand on the chair to open or close it; I was allowed to do so for ventilation. Sick of the stench coming from the bucket, I took advantage of this permission several times a day, despite the cold which made me shiver all the time. For this I was reprimanded and ordered not to do it more often than after getting up and after supper for a few minutes.

The first night we were left without supper and went to bed exhausted by strain and hunger. The following day, I began to get acquainted with the political prisoners' food. I found it meagre and hardly eatable, and could not have imagined that in years to come it would steadily further deteriorate. But this was the case, at any rate, until

the summer of 1953 when, as in politics, recurring tides of improvement and again deteriorations were manifest in our diet. On the average food was sufficient in quantity for some but too little for most. Many a prisoner lost several stone in a few months. As to the kind of food one got, it is difficult to give an idea of it by describing the menu. Nominally, it was quite satisfactory: black coffee in the morning, one dixie of soup and one of vegetable or *pasta* at mid-day, and again vegetable or some kind of farinaceous food in the evening, for weekdays; sausages or the like on Sundays; and a piece of bread every day. Besides this, one was supposed two or three times a week to get some meat. In reality, however, all the food one got, with the exception of bread, bore hardly any likeness to what it was supposed to be. Potatoes were black stuff, dehydrated or processed in alcohol factories and then used for animal and prisoner consumption; the carrots were a kind of cattle fodder; the lentils were full of worms; of the meat there was often only some gravy left by the time it reached the ordinary prisoner because most of it had been eaten already by the few prisoners who acted as gaolers' assistants. Most of the food was simply refuse, and what was not refuse was stolen by the guards and their assistants.

In the first weeks after my sentence, no books, no walk, no "favour" whatever was granted to me; even my application for some work was refused with an answer that "this must first be earned." Most prisoners in M.Z. had to "bobbin" in their cells, that is, to reel up yarns from old socks and pullovers on an old-fashioned gadget which I, by the way, never saw.

I had been there for about two days when the sergeant with bloodshot eyes suddenly entered my cell. As I stood up and said nothing he shouted at me: "You will be short-ironed at once if you behave like that, you . . . didn't I tell you what to do when anyone in Authority enters?" "I don't remember, sir." "Don't you, you . . . didn't I tell you that you should say 'I respectfully report, the number of cell-inmates is one.' " "I thought only twice a day." "And also if someone of us enters, you . . . Well, this time

I forgive you. Now hurry along. Clasp hands behind you while you go along the passage." This way of walking was no surprise to me; it had been the same when in custody before trial. Nor was it surprising that I had to turn against the wall and stand stiffly when waiting in the passage. But what awaited me in the office of the prison was the worst of surprises. I got some comfort from the warmth in the office room as my limbs had already been numbed with cold. But I had to pay dearly for this solace. One of my former Interrogators, Ervin Faludy—well known for his cruelty and cynical lies—received me. After hearing my complaints and assuring me they would be remedied ("there are of course always misunderstandings and difficulties at the beginning") he started questioning me about the alleged spy-connexions of my friend Mrs. . . .—exactly in the A.V.H. fashion which I had known only too well. So not even that ordeal could be dismissed from my seventh heaven of penal servitude. It was to go on and on, for years.

Whenever I was summoned to the office rooms, this same mixture of feelings overwhelmed me. I got some minutes or hours of warmth and some cigarettes to soothe the pains in my limbs and nerves; at the same time, I had to be prepared for the most trying arguments about the persons whose spy-activities, according to my Interrogator, I was concealing. Not only the threats disturbed me, but also the questions themselves. What should I say if asked whether I knew Mr. So-and-So? I could simply answer No. But he may be interrogated at the same time, and differences between our depositions would be a reason for torturing both of us. Should I say I knew him as a reliable Communist? My vouching for his reliability would be the worst of recommendations. The best I could do was to blur the subject with vague and incoherent narratives such as: "I knew him only through his fiancée who had died. I really do not think he was very much interested in politics . . . certainly he was anti-Nazi. . . ." It took some time for me to find out that to refer to the anti-Nazi records of the suspected was far from being a service to them. If one was against Hitler he must have been in touch either with

Royalists or with Socialists or with "Titoist-Trotskyites"; the fact that someone had been in the Resistance against the Nazis before the Russian occupation was a reason for suspecting that he was in the resistance against Bolsheviks now. The reliable and patriotic Hungarian, in the ruling view, was the one who had blindly obeyed the orders of pro-German generals (apart from the handful of Moscow-trained Communists and A.V.H. leaders). Those in particular who had worked for Britain were traitors.

A piece of good luck in my distress was that comparatively little was asked of me concerning people with whom I had really been in close touch before my arrest. The A.V.H., as an instrument of investigation, was astonishingly incompetent and muddled. They piled up towers of compromising information about as many people as possible, but apparently the officer in one room did not know what his colleague in the neighbouring room had already found out, and was not even very much interested in it. My staying in the Grand Hotel Platinus on Margaret Island had been decreed by Under-Secretary of State Berei, in agreement with the A.V.H. where his son-in-law, Lieutenant-Colonel Vladimir Farkas, held a key post. They wanted to keep their eyes on me, and this was facilitated by my staying in that great hotel. Nevertheless, on the night of my arrest they looked for me at my mother's flat and blocked that until I was safe in their hands. They were similarly misinformed about my "contacts" in Budapest—to use one of their favourite expressions. They did not bother even to read my diary which they had taken from my pocket: not even the letter to London which I had planned to post the following day. They were simply too lazy to do so. I should add that they did not lose very much by their laziness. The utmost they could have found out about my friends was that they had made disparaging comments on the régime and perhaps one or two of them had smuggled some money out of the country. These were no spy-contacts, and nothing short of spy-contacts satisfied the A.V.H. As to the people about whom I had to be interrogated, the catchwords in the sentence passed on me —I.S. and Social Democracy—were supposed to be more

revealing than the dates found in my diary. To most questions, therefore, I could easily answer that, having lived in Britain during the ten years before my arrest, I had hardly known the person concerned.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, I was taken for such hearings not only to the office-rooms of the prison but also, occasionally, to police headquarters in Budapest. After the planning and shelving of the open trial which was "to inculpate Social Democracy," my solitary confinement ended for several years and I was crammed together in one M.Z. cell with three of those who would have been my co-defendants: Zoltán Horváth, Sándor Szalai and George Pálóczi-Horváth.

It is difficult to decide which is worse, compulsory solitude or co-existence without breathing space. I myself, in the long run would always decide for solitude. Nevertheless at that moment it was a great relief, after many a month, to meet old friends who spoke my language and had undergone experiences like mine. Not only my limbs had been numbed in prison, but also my universe. Cut off from people other than interrogators and gaolers, I was simply unable to imagine that the world was carrying on outside as though nothing had happened. When, shuttled about between various prisons, I got a chance now and then to look at people freely strolling about in the streets I could hardly believe my eyes. They struck me as shadows from another world. The universe had stopped being real for me. Even the wall-knocking—which I still exchanged with some neighbours in Vác and Markó utca as well as at No. 60—gave only a shadow-picture of other people who were suffering like me. When sitting at last together in a dingy cell with three other fellow-shadows, life had become somewhat less unreal. And there are moments when nothing is a greater gift than that.

We had to pay for it by getting on one another's nerves. This cannot be helped. There was only room for three straw-sacks in the cell for four of us. We had to share straw-sacks and a wash-basin and bucket and air. To cram people together in a close community is the best way of making them hostile to one another. It is ludicrous to

ask, after many a year, whose fault this or that quarrel was—either in that particular cell with those cell-mates, or later in others with others. We were breathing the same air, and that accounted for everything.

One of our disputes, however, seems worth recalling. A dispute and not a quarrel, though necessarily couched now and then in the irritated terms of compulsory day-and-night companionship. Two of my cell-mates, Horváth and Szalai, had belonged to the "crypto-Communist" wing of the Social-Democratic Party and, though disapproving of much that had happened, still stuck to their opinion that the régime was a dictatorship of the proletariat and popular with the poor. I contradicted them: "I never met in Hungary, outside the special circle of Party favourites and careerists, one single person who liked this régime. Certainly no worker and no peasant, not even the poorest peasant. . . ."

"When did you ever meet a genuine worker? Those you met were concierges and waiters, tied to the bourgeoisie."

"But their brothers-in-law and their cousins to whom I also talked were, one a turner, the other a bricklayer, and so forth. They hated all that was going on more than did the intelligentsia. And I moved about in suburbs, too. I did the same in Genoa and Paris. There, you see at once that Communism is popular. It is brought home to you by clumsy scribbles 'VV Stalin' and the like. Ever seen such a scribble on a Budapest wall or hoarding? Carefully painted party slogans—but scribbles? Occasionally a reference to the Old Man's Arsehead." Rákosi was the "Old Man," and Stalin the "Very Old," in case we were overheard by the guard.

In our capacity of sentenced convicts all of us were still novices—which means the deepest pit of hell. Habit can alleviate any ordeal. One gaoler takes a liking for one prisoner, and another for another. The ways to persuade and oblige gaolers are found out by experience. But at the start there are only kicks and threats from them and suspicious glances from unknown fellow-prisoners if he meets any. We had not yet heard anything from our gaolers but "you bloody . . ." It was in a way touching but even more

irritating that the fourth of us, Pálóczi-Horváth, still stubbornly stood up for the régime. He knew, he said, that a great injustice had been done to him and to many others. But scientific truth . . . he still believed in it in a "Marxist-Leninist" way. He had come from the landed gentry, a near-aristocratic family, well known in Hungarian history. It was a family of Whig traditions but incidentally the richest of his uncles, dead by then, had been a frantic die-hard, a Jew-hater, the sort of man who would have supported the Nazis except that Hitler was a corporal. But if he hated Hitler for daring to be a general he hated his nephew, George, no less for besmearing the historical name Pálóczi-Horváth by joining the staff of a "Jewish," liberal paper and being friends with disreputable Left-Wing people, though perhaps not yet with Communists at that time. They had hardly been on speaking terms. George had broken away from him and also from far less radical non-Communists later on because, as he liked to say, he accepted the cause of the working classes as his own. Now we were receiving together the kicks and threats and shouts of "the working classes."

As we were talking, the peep-hole opened and a representative of those working classes, in the person of an A.V.H. corporal, called in, rather hesitatingly: "Is there a Pálóczi-Horváth in this cell?" After learning that there was one, he disappeared and later reappeared: "Are you this Pálóczi-Horváth . . . Come here for a moment." We, the other three of us, went on whispering—trying to guess what the interview could be about. When Pálóczi-Horváth returned, he seemed quite flabbergasted. "Well," he told me, and it was the first time I heard anything like that from him, "really . . . I wonder whether you are not right to some extent. I don't think so of course; but that gaoler. . . ."

That gaoler had asked him whether he was a relative of the die-hard uncle, the semi-Fascist landlord. "Yes," Pálóczi-Horváth answered, in alarm; he was prepared to apologize for having had such a despotic and reactionary relative. "O," the gaoler sighed, almost with tears in his eyes, "You know, my father used to be his farmhand.

What a fine, what a splendid gentleman he was! Never again shall we have such a good master." Then, after some musing: "Well you will understand me . . . what *can* we do? We must serve *these* here." It did not occur to him for a moment that a thorough-bred Pálóczi-Horváth, gaoled by the Communists, should be scientific enough not to see eye to eye with him in such matters. Pálóczi-Horváth did not give himself away but simply thanked him for his kindness. "I shall do everything I can for you," the gaoler concluded. He could not do much because in about one week's time he was transferred to another post. But we have never stopped recalling that dialogue since. The first human word granted to us in Vác prison under the Reds was a tribute to the memory of a fiercely White landlord.

What were other gaolers like? In describing them, I should not confine myself to Vác only but to all types I came across in other prison-blocks as well—60 Andrássy ut and Markó utca, and the great prison camp in the suburbs of Pest, "Gyüjtö," and the prison-block used later as political police headquarters in Buda, known as "P.V.," to which I was transferred afterwards.

Most of them were either soldierly Sadists or simply gangsters: and on the average, it was more agreeable to communicate with the gangsters. An incarnation of the "soldierly" type was the sergeant with bloodshot eyes, Mocsáry* by name. In 1945, he was cashiered for having maltreated Communist prisoners as a gaoler under the Horthy régime, but was later admitted to the Party and got his pips back again. During the drive against "Titoite-Trotskyites," he got some Communist prisoners back and told them jocularly: "See, sooner or later we always meet again." He once heard we had complained about food and uttered some critical words about the authorities. He gave a furious grunt and we feared he would denounce us. We

* Previously "vitéz" Mocsáry. The Order of the Vitéz (of the "Brave") was a new nobility of a military character, with the Regent at its head, established after the 1919 counter-revolution. Like some other nonsense typical of the Horthy régime, it was abolished in 1945.

learned later that this should never be feared from him: he hated writing so much that everyone to whom he had not done harm on the spot could feel safe from his anger. But he was an intolerable maniac. In those winter months, when all of us suffered from the cold—many with chilblains turned into septic wounds all over their limbs—we comforted ourselves by using either stuff pinched from the "bobbin" industry, or our sheets, as supplementary underwear. Mocsáry would search the cells to discover such "illicit" acts and make terrible trouble. Once, he called me and my cell-mates to the shower bath at an unexpected moment when I had no chance to rid myself of the sheet under my jacket. I had never so panicky a shower bath as was that one. When I undressed he happened to watch others. But when I had to dress he was glaring just at me. I was temporizing as much as I could, looking for my boots. "You bloody . . . What are you mucking about for, dress at once!" "God will help me or not," I thought and, my heart ferociously beating, the sergeant no less ferociously staring at me, I touched my shirt under which the sheet was hidden. At that moment, there was a short circuit. I never knew I could dress in the dark so quickly.

While the true gangsters had been recruited by the A.V.H., most of the soldierly gaolers had previously belonged to the personnel of the Ministry of Justice. They had been taken over from the Ministry by the A.V.H., together with the political prisons themselves, in 1950.

In the previous period, from 1945–50, the treatment of sentenced political prisoners had been humane in every way. The political police and their military sister institution, the Kat. Pol., started committing brutal and illegal acts as early as 1947, if not earlier; but the convict after trial—even though on partially false charges—was committed to a place where he could move about freely during the day, order food and books from outside, listen to the wireless and read the newspapers, even attend football matches and film performances held inside the prison. The Minister of Justice at that time, the Socialist Dr. Ries, though guilty of extreme weakness and ultimate subservience to the Communists, was undoubtedly a man of high

humanitarian standards, and the golden age for political prisoners ended at the time of his own arrest.

When the A.V.H. staff took over from the Ministry of Justice, they made a "disciplinary" tour of all prison establishments and beat up about 50 per cent of the prisoners. Their procedure usually followed this pattern: the warders would ask the prisoners: "Why don't you stack all your dixies?" The prisoners would reply that they had never been told to do so. "You swine, how dare you argue with me," was the rejoinder, and the beating up started. Many of the Ministry of Justice gaolers who acted as guides outdid their A.V.H. colleagues in brutality in order to get taken on as reliable Communists. Nobody doubted that they would be pleased to indulge in "soldierly" Sadism under a White régime at least as willingly as under a Red one; but for this very reason, they showed off their eagerness to brutalize their "Fascist" victims.

Amongst the gangsters, my favourite was a young corporal with glittering black eyes and thick eyebrows. As we found out, he had served as a volunteer in an S.S. brigade but been forgiven for his past in 1945 when he joined the Communist Party. He was proud of his skill in eavesdropping. One morning he burst into our cell: "Ignawtoosh, what did you say last night about Rákosi?" Indeed I had forgotten I should refer to him as "The Old" only. I was stammering something about the necessity of venting my feelings at least in jokes. "You had better shut your mouth, you old bastard!" he told me, and thus friendship begins. Some days after, he showed me the photograph of his girl-friend, a tramway conductress. "Pretty thing," I said; "your fiancée?" "My whore," he answered. "At your age one shouldn't look for tarts who only cost money but for elderly ladies who pay." "I get money even from the young," he replied, and thus friendships develop. He was very kind to us. He several times overheard our talks not destined for gaolers' ears, but he never made use of them. Later he was imprisoned for undisciplined behaviour.

Political faith was the thing no gaoler had—with one exception, who ranked as my favourite No. 2. He was a

pleasant-looking, short young man, an A.V.H. recruit but, exceptionally, a muddled semi-intellectual rather than a gangster. He liked middle-brow novels, especially when they described rapes and incestuous scenes in order to denounce the *ancien régime*. One day he decided he must learn book-keeping and started picking the brains of one prisoner, but gave it up quickly. Another day he started something else and gave it up even more quickly. There was one thing which he could not give up, and that was studying Marxism-Leninism. So he was busy all the time picking the brains of my cell-mates who prepared compendia for him, to be used at the Party seminar. He could not suppress his liking for Social Democrats and "Titoist-Trotskyites," in spite of his Party loyalty. My name and my father's he had vaguely remembered from literary text-books, and he would chat with me for an hour if no other gaoler was in the neighbourhood. Altogether the only occasion when a gaoler could be comparatively kind was when he was not overheard by his colleagues. When in company, they outdid one another in rudeness and cruelty—partly to show their "guts" and partly to help their careers.

Our transportation from Vác to the Budapest Gyüjtö was a splendid opportunity for such competition. Before being pushed into the lorries, we were ordered to stand stiff turned against the wall. We were abused as dirt and murderers and told we would be hanged before long. Now and then we felt a gaoler's fist on our necks, bumping our noses into the wall, or a kick in our pants. When leaving the building I saw my intellectual friend and tried to catch his eyes as it were for a farewell. He was gloomily turning his eyes away. I later learned from fellow-prisoners that it had been he who gave me the kicks. Was it because of the presence of the gaolers who perhaps suspected him of liking me? Or did he himself feel guilty because of doing so and did he want thus to relieve his conscience?

In Budapest Gyüjtö, torture reached its peak in 1951–2. Sometimes I could hardly sleep at night for being awakened again and again by the howls and cries of "short-ironed" prisoners. At dawn, I used to welcome the

concert of the birds not so much for its beauty as because it superseded those deadly human sounds. The guards had the right to beat or torture prisoners as they liked, and also to have it done by those prisoners whom they picked out for their assistants, mainly from among the former Fascist Arrow-Cross storm-troopers, S.S. men, agents of the Nazi White political police and so forth, and Communist A.V.H. and "Katpol" officers who even after their imprisonment carried on their former work. Tortures differed according to the different temperaments of the gaolers. "Short-iron" had to be ordered by the prison Commander on the evidence of reports from the guards; but some guards did not bother with reports, and beat up or otherwise tortured prisoners on the spur of the moment. Sergeant Berkes—a former gaoler in the Horthy régime—was known for never beating prisoners but having them "short-ironed" *en masse* for no offence whatsoever, whereas Sergeant Pintér—a former butcher's assistant—disliked writing, even a report of misbehaviour, and specialized in beating up. Some people were literally beaten to death—for instance, because of an alleged attempt to escape—in the presence of other prisoners, one man picked out of each prisoners' "work-brigade," "so that everybody should learn his lesson." One of these memorable scenes was attended by a woman Sanitary N.C.O., a well-known figure all over the prison camp, Irénke by her first name. It was she who dutifully reported that the criminal had "farted out"—which in the A.V.H. Glossary stood for "he died." The prisoners who were on the spot to learn their lesson said she had faintly winced. In general she was not very tender and had some people short-ironed herself. She owed her fame however to her language rather than her deeds. When a privileged prisoner, who had been allowed cigarettes but not given matches, respectfully asked her for light she replied indignantly: "Why not ask for my ——?"

Corruption in the prisons knew no limit. There were some factories operated in the prison camps to make them profitable: a branch of the Gamma precision instrument factory in Vác, a button factory and later a children's toy

factory in the Gyüjtö. According to expert calculations, these were bound to be unprofitable because in spite of sweating the prisoners—they were made to work fourteen to sixteen hours a day—the waste of material and manpower, the outdated mechanical arrangements, and not least the theft of goods by the guards, severely limited output. One guard, for instance, used to arrive every morning with an empty bag and go home with one filled with expensive buttons which he sent straight off to the black market; another took away sham "gold" rings which the prisoners made illicitly of tin, and sold them on the black market as genuine wedding rings: a third was known to put on about five brand new prisoners' shirts every day, also for black marketeering. Up to 1953, such proceedings were not, on the whole, discouraged by the authorities; the idea was that whatever the A.V.H. men committed did not matter so long as they were loyal to the régime. But when one A.V.H. clique succeeded in overthrowing the other, they used against the vanquished their knowledge of these illicit acts. The gaolers were much amused by the misfortune of their colleagues, especially of those formerly of higher ranks; Sergeant Pintér is reported to have given a pail full of water with great pleasure into the hands of his former prison Commander when the latter had been arrested: "Now carry on at once and scrub the floor."

There were many wicked, many actively cruel and many callously dull A.V.H. gaolers. In one thing, there was no apparent difference between them: they were all oversexed. "Tough guys," well-fed and confined to a day-long idleness except the hours of crashing boredom spent on their ideological education, often tired of the delight to bully and humiliate the former overlords now at their mercy, the only thing in which they could indulge was the vision of crude erotic scenes. Most of the conversation one overheard was of such matters as "She wanted to get money from me for she became pregnant but I kicked her . . .," and the one thing with which a prisoner could be sure of pleasing them was to tell dirty stories or, even more, to provide them with obscene drawings. There was

a strange young fellow-prisoner of ours, deaf and of proletarian origin, who had been snatched and made use of as a genius of the Hungarian people in his 'teens by the Arrow-Cross Fascists. Heaven only knows why that crime, easily forgiven to others, was not forgiven him; he spent at least ten years in prison. But whatever favour could be granted to a prisoner was granted to him—for the simple reason that he provided all gaolers, including majors and captains (and also, I should add, some lady N.C.O.s) with ribald sketches. What I liked most in them, and in the taste of the recipients, was their conservatism; the men were all tail-coated in their unbuttoned trousers, and the women as if taken out, before half stripping them, from a *Vogue* of 1939. Irrespective of changes in ideologies and fashions, belief in the pre-war symbols of social superiority had prevailed in that most sincere mirror of popular fantasies—pornography.

As to *good* A.V.H. gaolers—were there any at all? Most people in Hungary would answer No; and surely so would most of my former fellow-prisoners. But they would not be fair and could not really be expected to be fair. The blue-lapelled uniform grew into the symbol of human abjection in their eyes; I could well understand them when they said "If our time comes, the best of the A.V.H. gaolers must be fried in the fat of the worst." Indeed, even comparative kindness on the part of A.V.H. men was as a rule due to negligence or cynicism and, in the years of the Thaw, to a wish to re-insure themselves, rather than to honesty. But there were exceptions. I remember one who as early as the autumn of 1949, round the torturing cells of 60 Andrássy ut, always did his best to help me; he was a very simple man who had accepted this job, unknown to him, for the high pay and, once caught in it, could do no better than be helpful to prisoners when not watched by his colleagues. To apply for release from A.V.H. service was itself a risky step. This was particularly sad for those who had never applied to be enrolled and had got this unwished-for present as a surprise. I remember particularly one, a slim young man, an amateurish but enthusiastic singer, specializing in folksongs

and rather sloppy pseudo-folk songs. He had asked for a musical training, hoping he would finally be admitted to the stage. The answer from the authorities concerned was that his request would be considered but for the time being he must do his military service; and he woke up in a blue-lapelled uniform before he knew where he was. This happened in the Thaw period when some at least of the worst A.V.H. torturers were already transferred into less conspicuous posts, and recruits with a record of innocence required. On the whole, the A.V.H. had still remained a riff-raff of legalized Sadism and gangsterdom, and the folksong gaoler, despite the risks involved, ran from pillar to post to be transferred to another armed unit, but in vain. He took even greater risks in siding with the prisoners. When we were walking under his supervision, he told me "Now you talk to whom you like; I shall warn you when necessary." He hated, as he told me, the very sight of a uniform and would ask me, his bright brown eyes flashing, "Do you know the song 'It is not I who grew unfaithful to you, but you who deserted me.' "

In the days of the Revolution, in October–November, 1956, a general hunt after the A.V.H. men was raging in the streets of Budapest. I and some fellow-writers—including two or three imprisoned today—protested against it and urged that everybody suspected of crimes should be handed over, without harm to his person, to the authorized Courts. Many thought (even amongst my most charitably-minded friends in Britain, for instance) that our attitude was an excess of humanitarianism and legal-mindedness: after all, a gang such as the A.V.H. should learn their lesson and remember in future. There is much to be said for this trend of thought. One must not be sentimental about mass-murderers. Had I heard that some of our expert torturers were tortured to death in their own style, I might have deplored it as poor propaganda but would not have felt the slightest pity for them. But who could know about the people simply caught in blue-lapelled uniform or denounced for personal reasons in those days? I bore in my mind the face of my singing friend with his flashing brown eyes—he might, I felt, be

caught and massacred together with the rest. He was an exception. There were very, very few such exceptions, one tenth of one per cent perhaps. But the main lesson to be learned of Gestapo, N.K.V.D. and A.V.H. stories is that no one should be punished for what others have done.

Chapter 8

Murderers Murdering Murderers

IT WAS MY GOOD FORTUNE for years to be in the "Translating bureau" which was set up to provide Party and A.V.H. headquarters with the material they wanted. The material included literature on spying, technical reports on the developments of methods that might interest the political police (such as microscopic photography) and such "reactionary" literature as no one else in Hungary was allowed at that time to read. I had great pleasure in translating a volume of Sir Winston Churchill's memoirs and books by Hungarian political émigrés published in France. Others received even more confidential material, such as the contents of the wastepaper baskets of one or another legation in Budapest, and secret documents stolen from Italian atomic research bodies and Austrian Government offices. We had U.N.O. material on conditions in countries all over the world, so in some ways we knew more about them than our own countrymen at large. And all this time we were not allowed to see even the official Hungarian Communist Gazette or to listen to broadcasts.

This degree of trust in the branded enemies of the régime had a simple explanation. Those who had imprisoned us meant to keep us in gaol for good, to let us rot alive. This is not a figure of speech, but literally true. At the retrial of my case, in June 1956, the A.V.H. officer witnesses spoke with equanimity of their discussions about who should be sent to prison to rot alive and who might get away with internment which, though no less painful, would end when the authorities so decided. For this very

reason, no political convict was allowed to have contact with his acquaintances outside, by letter or any other channel; if very exceptionally one got permission to exchange letters with near relatives these were carried each way by A.V.H. officers, and no information of the whereabouts of the prisoner was given to anyone.

At Vác, translators worked in isolated cells unaware of one another. Our single cell not only housed four of us, but served also as an office, equipped with a typewriter and dictionaries. As a reward, we were granted a ration of cigarettes and some extra food: one day some lard with extra bread, another some lumps of sugar, and so forth. The cigarettes reached us more often than not, the food was withheld more often than not. We had books from the prison library to read and, as a special privilege, permission to play chess. We would mould the chessmen out of bread, and if they turned out too attractively, a warder would step in and confiscate them on the grounds that he had never been told about this privilege of ours. Another time he would tell us he had heard of our privileges but we should make another set—three in fact, for he would be willing to accept two of them. It was a gracious present for his nephews.

In the Budapest Gyüjtö, the Translating officers were merged into one single unit and after some months of hesitation, were allocated to the most comfortable prison-building, the "Little Hotel," together with the most privileged working unit, the Engineers. There were beds to sleep in at the Little Hotel and W.Cs. with something near privacy—a rarity in prisons. The Engineering unit, including its clerical and auxiliary staff, amounted to 80–120 men; ours came to thirty or forty men, about one third of them concerned with translating from Serb, Croat and Slovene. We had amongst us Jugoslav diplomats who, at the time of the break between the Cominform and Tito, turned against their own Government and sought refuge in Hungary. They had been extolled as true Communists and used for a while in propaganda against Tito, and then suddenly they were arrested as Tito's agents. Most of them had little idea of politics and even less of

what an expert translator is supposed to know. But assisted by the Hungarians who had spent some time in Jugoslavia—and who were also called Tito's agents—they managed somehow. They excelled in various labours: singing folksongs and operetta, and moulding most decorative chessmen after hours of collective chewing.

Our Jugoslav section had to translate literally whole volumes of the Jugoslav *Official Gazette* into Hungarian. All advertisements and announcements had to be included. There was apparently a race between all Stalin's agencies, to prove the truth of Stalin's charges against Jugoslavia. They spared no time and money to seek evidence. Our Jugoslavs from time to time disappeared from the Little Hotel; they enjoyed the hospitality of N.K.V.D. headquarters, and obliged the Russian interrogators with stories of Titoist conspiracies with the Anglo-American emissaries which they had noticed as early as in 1942.

The engineers were entrusted with even more confidential work than ours: they made plans for constructions of a military character, and some were taken to the spot under special supervision to attend the works. Our two units were allowed now and then to consult each other, the Engineers needing our help in translating scientific literature, and our unit needing technical advice to make these translations properly. We managed to arrange very pleasant social gatherings under these pretexts—and it would be hard to decide when they were pretexts only and when genuine reasons. I am grateful for what I learned on such occasions of the theory of relativity and of nuclear physics; and I did my best to answer questions the engineers asked about English grammar, British living conditions and Hungarian literature including, I am ashamed to say, my own prison poems. Much of our talk was not meant to be heard by the guards; if one came in, we could always point to the texts which we were supposed to be discussing.

In other ways life and arrangements in the Translating bureau changed all the time as in all prison departments. One day we were told that a special norm system was to be worked out for paying us; so much of it could be

used for extra food and cigarettes, so much transferred to our relatives, so much put aside in our accounts. We did receive extra food now and then—tomatoes and sausages and raw onions and garlic and the like. Their arrival was a great event, and for days we were quite drunk with the treat we gave ourselves. The engineers were good at the illicit technique of using the electricity for frying, and though often caught and reprimanded they carried on and made us share in it. My main discovery was a fondness for garlic. I had always detested it but the smell in prison filled me with nostalgia for the taverns and cheap restaurants of the outside world. Since then I have remained a passionate garlic eater, with all the grave consequences involved for those near me.

But no sooner had the norm system been worked out than we learned it had been dropped. The officers responsible for catering made it their rule to withhold from our accounts the money for goods which had been offered to us but which turned out to be "unobtainable." It was a great improvement, in the time of the Thaw, when an exceptionally honest catering officer had the idea of buying, say, paprika in place of the out-of-stock tomatoes for the prisoner concerned, instead of pocketing the money.

Equally sudden were the changes concerning the prisoners' behaviour and routine. One day we were ordered, whenever we met "someone in Authority," to say loudly "Good morning, Sergeant, Sir," or "Corporal, Sir"; the next day we were told not to say a word but just to take our caps off; the third day, we were ordered never to take our caps off when not in the cell but to salute with our fingers at the peak of our caps. One day we were solemnly allowed to walk with whomever we chose from among the Engineers and the Translators; the following day we were no less seriously told that each should walk only with his cell-mate at the time of communal walking in the courtyard. One day we were ordered to turn, without saying a word, with our faces to the wall when someone in Authority entered our cells and, on the next, respectfully to report the number of cell inmates and to wait for further instructions. It was no secret that those

in charge of the prison-block themselves were unable to make up their minds about these questions of high importance. As a rule some prisoners were punished for forgetting or not obeying one or another recently issued order but the orders themselves went into oblivion automatically after a few months until they were either renewed or modified.

My work, when not translating, consisted in revealing the secrets of "I.S." I was most pleased to share with others my expert knowledge of that devilish machinery which haunted the minds of the A.V.H. chiefs. In their view, the world outside the Soviet sphere was pulled by I.S., C.I.C. and U.D.B.A. wires, and I who had spent years with the B.B.C. and in friendship with British Labour M.P.s must have had deep insight into such machinations. The reader may ask whether they knew that my I.S. affiliations were their own inventions. In fact, they knew this while inventing them but were able to believe in their own lies the next moment. They had excellent formulas enabling them to forget what they liked. When interrogating us and finding that the facts did not tally with their preconceived ideas, they would say "There is not only factual but also political truth, and political truth is the more important." When taking my depositions they knew very well that my talks with Richard Crossman or Kingsley Martin had not been spy-contacts; they had only been so in a "political" sense. But some weeks later they would ask me quite seriously about those spy-contacts which, they would add, "you yourself admitted." They would again and again consult me on spying and counter-intelligence techniques in the British Empire—and I saw no reason to avoid describing and inventing as much as I could manage.

All the same I could not help now and then challenging their beliefs, simply because they interested me. Once when interrogated by a conspicuously cynical (and therefore comparatively intelligent) A.V.H. major, Vajda by name, about the activities of the London Hungarian Club which was "in a political sense a British spy-organization" I said to him:

"Sir, it is not for me to argue with you about the prevailing political ideas. But could I ask your personal opinion on a matter for my information?"

"Please."

"You say that the London Hungarian Club must be regarded objectively as a British spy-organization because it was in close touch with all sorts of British anti-Communist groups during the war. You say their leaders must therefore be regarded as Trotskyites. But during the war, the cry from Moscow was that everybody willing to fight Hitlerism should unite, and just those reluctant to do so were denounced as Trotskyites. Now what do you really think the Hungarian Club people should have done?"

"Nonsense. Of course we wanted a united front with every political party—but not with the Secret Service."

"Now what do you mean by Secret Service? Not to argue with you but just to clear my mind. After all, during the war, practically everybody fighting the Nazis had to share and keep secrets. The leaders of the British Communist Party were all engaged in secret political warfare."

The reply was a gesture of contempt: "O, that Party . . . That's typical of them. All police spies. We know very well that when we get power over Britain, nine-tenths of the Communist leaders will be hanged."

My friend Basil Davidson, at that time still doing his best to exonerate the Bolsheviks when comparing their practices with what went on under Anglo-American rule, was flabbergasted in 1956 when I told him he had been on the A.V.H. list of "Imperialist spies." But I can assure him that he was in quite good company and surely not in a fanatically anti-Communist setting. Harry Pollitt, Arthur Horner, Klugmann, Picasso, Joliot-Curie were all registered as I.S. and Deuxième Bureau directors in the archives of the A.V.H.—as well as such "petty bourgeois reactionaries" as Thomas Mann and Julian Huxley, or "Trotskyites" such as Stephen Spender.

Whether that cynical major who was so keen to hang his British comrades ever fooled himself into believing that they were really spies I could not tell. But his subordinates and the later vintage of A.V.H. officers were

certainly never told that the spy-stories found by them in the depositions must not be believed. They had to find out for themselves that if their bosses had declared something, theirs was the duty to prove and not to check it. He who acted differently dug his own grave. Does it sound too ridiculous for words that I was now and then worried about some of them? A young interrogator, a comparatively kind one, that is, one who did not threaten the arrest of my relatives, or to have me beaten up again, once asked me about that very boring subject on which I had been interrogated so often, the London Hungarian Club. Some unimportant people who had been members were suspected of "I.S. activities." I told him quite sincerely that it had been a Club run in conformity with Soviet wishes. I was frank about all details. He cast an alarmed glance at me. "But what then was their crime?" Should I tell him that it was nothing? If he reported the remark without further comment he would be imprisoned like me and I might be maltreated once again. "Leave it to me, sir, I'll make the report for you," I told him. "After all, I have had longer A.V.H. experience than you." He was most grateful. I phrased the minutes of my interrogation in usual A.V.H. jargon about the Trotskyite-Titoite-British-Monarchist covering organization called London Hungarian Club, and minimized the importance of the people involved by pointing out that they could not have had a great number of spy-contacts since they hardly knew English. This was the best one could say in their favour. Indeed they were not arrested. Their unfamiliarity with the English language had saved them. One of them became, after the Thaw, Hungarian Minister in Sudan.

I like to remember the few kind interrogators amongst the many unkind; in fact I found their behaviour more characteristic of the lies permeating them than that of those who were cruel for cruelty's sake. The most polite of all, the one who addressed me as "Mr. Ignotus" in the Stalinist period, used to offer not only cigarettes but also great slices of ham for my help in revealing the secrets of I.S. He brought me the latest edition of *Who's Who*. His request—for in the polite form of a request it was made—

was that I should carefully look through it and translate everything it contained on people of Hungarian origin. "Certainly," I answered, and tried to find out what his motives were. "Well, I suppose, all those included must belong to the Secret Service." That the Secret Service should thus put into the shop-window its own agents was a surprise to me even after my prison-years. The interrogator saw the expression of astonishment on my face: "Well, don't you agree? Or do you think all of them paid to be included?" A third possibility was hardly imaginable. Anyway, I was glad both to see a recent *Who's Who* and to eat the ham.

One of my memorable interrogations at A.V.H. headquarters conducted by Lieutenant-Colonel Márton Károlyi started with the question: "What was the opinion of I.S. about the dissolution of the illegal Communist Party in Hungary during the war?" I was stupid enough at first to reply "Sir, you know that I was a spy only in a political sense . . . Indeed how should I know?" He encouraged me to rack my brains: I must still remember something about it. He gave me the sanatorium treatment usual on such occations; its only disadvantage was that one had diarrhoea as a result of getting human food after many a month of fodder and refuse. He was really very patient with me, just hinting at the great damage done to the workers' movement by dissolving the illegal party. In fact, I had not even known of that tragic dissolution, let alone what I.S. had thought of it. But why not oblige the lieutenant-colonel? Twice I had about a week's sanatorium treatment, first for writing essays on the matter, and then for appearing as a witness at a secret trial where I had to tell my invention to the Court. The gist of it was that I.S. had wanted the illegal Communist Party to disappear from the Hungarian political scene; I.S. was confident that the underground leaders of Hungarian Communism were prone to Western influences and that the masses behind them could be lured into an anti-Soviet attitude once their Party had been dissolved and renamed—as it was—a "Peace Party," not properly a Communist one.

Who was to be discredited by such depositions? I had

no idea. I only knew that Communists were most keen on persecuting Communists. As early as 1950, before my sentence, Lieutenant Szántó—Károlyi's assistant—asked me to write a report on those Hungarian Communists whom the British had reckoned to be likely deviators from the Soviet line. "For a while they thought Rákosi might," I candidly replied. He answered I should leave out the names of "serious personalities." How could I know which of the personalities were serious? I asked him, and he told me: "Rákosi, Gerö, Farkas, Kádár, Péter." Three of them were Moscow-trained Communists; the fourth was Minister of the Interior; and the fifth was chief of the A.V.H. "May I refer to any of the Communist leaders except these five?" I asked. "By all means," he assured me, and I wrote rubbish, mixing in as many Communist leaders as I could, only careful to leave out Zoltán Vas and George Lukács whose unorthodox behaviour in some respects was really known to me.

Now again, Lieutentant-Colonel Károlyi asked which Communists were regarded in a friendly way by the British; but the names I mentioned at random did not seem to impress him. I certainly never thought of a "serious personality" such as Kádár. "Well, you need not mention names," he told me. With Pálóczi-Horváth, who was summoned to Budapest on the same occasion and for the same reason, I was trying to guess who the victims might be. Pálóczi-Horváth had by then stopped being a Communist; what he had heard by chance from recently arrested workers had completely shaken his faith. "Whoever the victims are," I told him, "we must not be worried about them. I don't see why we should not help murderers to murder other murderers."

Before the trial I was given a smart mufti suit and an assistant asked me to walk into Court with arms hanging naturally, not clasped behind my back as I usually had to. Why they took such trouble to make our appearance "natural" was their own secret: it was a regular A.V.H. trial *in camera*, the same group which had tried me, the same President of Court, the same faces in the seats for the Counsel for the Defence . . . Amongst the defendants, I

knew only one, my meek and embarrassed erstwhile chief, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gyula Kállai. But Pálóczi-Horváth, when we met in our special cell again, told me who the rest were: the Defendant No. 1 was no less a personality than the former Minister of the Interior, János Kádár.

After his betrayal of the Hungarian Revolution, in 1956, I cannot feel that I owe much to Mr. Kádár. But I owe him an apology, for my remark that they were but "murderers to be murdered by other murderers." I should apologize even more to some of his co-defendants and other comrades who were to be "politically liquidated" along with him for their criminal share in the Hungarian Communist Underground. Among them were, to mention only two, the distinguished journalist, Sándor Haraszti, once a fanatic Communist but a man of the purest moral character, and his son-in-law, Géza Losonczy, later a cabinet minister in the Imre Nagy coalition government. Haraszti was sentenced to death and then kept for three years in solitary confinement, so that whenever the door opened he might imagine that he was to be hanged the next moment. Losonczy, a man of a very well-ordered mind, became insane for a while and was kept in the prison hospital. I met them, and met others who had shared their fate, after my release in the heyday of the Thaw. No one bothered to recall testimonies made against one another: their backgrounds were clear. No doubt I did the best I could, for there was nothing else to do. But I should not even to the extent of a crack have forgotten that one Communist is not like another, though what we call Communism was—and is—responsible for making them appear so.

This and much else could not be foreseen just after the secret trial of Kádár and Haraszti, when I was led once again to Lieutenant-Colonel Márton Károlyi, in his office. He bade me farewell:

"Well, you did it quite well. Now, what do you feel like?"

"I feel rotten, sir."

"Why? Sorry for those dirty traitors? They are scum."

"Let me tell you sir, that frankly I am less worried about them than about myself. To go back again to that cell full of bugs, in Vác, again to be fed on pig-fodder and dishwater, to suffer day and night from cold."

"O, don't worry, we shall invite you here again before long. There are always new problems. . . ."

"May I expect another Minister of the Interior?"

The lieutenant-colonel was gracious enough to reply with a painful grin only. He did not know, nor did I indeed, how well justified was the pain in his grin. The turn of another Minister of the Interior came shortly afterwards: he killed himself and exterminated his family before being arrested by the A.V.H. chief, Gábor Péter. Stalin had not yet died and Socialist Legality had not yet been proclaimed when the campaign of mutual extermination between the chief thugs, Mátyás Rákosi, Mihály Farkas, and Gábor Péter, reached its peak. Now it was unequivocally a case of murderers murdering the murderers; they alone had been left in power, each dreading the presence of the other and trying to get rid of him. They denounced one another to their respective protectors in Moscow as imperialist agents. As a result, Gábor Péter was arrested as the leader of a "Zionist-Cosmopolitan" conspiracy, and so was his former deputy, later Minister of Justice, Gyula Décsy, a man of purest "Germano-Aryan" blood, who had started his Zionist career as a candidate for Roman Catholic priesthood. Among the arrested was Lieutenant-Colonel Márton Károlyi. He too turned out to be a "dirty traitor," one of the "scum." Allegedly he committed suicide in prison.

Many of the A.V.H. officers and their puppet judges and attorneys committed suicide in the years to come. Most of the Moscow-trained leaders were from time to time tempted, I gather, to commit suicide. On the whole, they have survived. Some are enjoying the hospitality of the Soviet Union, like Rákosi has been confined to living in the Soviet Union: an exile in Paradise. Others who also took refuge in the U.S.S.R. have since returned to Hungary, Gerö and Berei amongst them. Again, others such as Mihály Farkas and his son, Vladimir, and Gábor Péter

and Décsy and Princz, were imprisoned for a while, but were later released by the Kádár Government. Before cutting one another's throats, they were removed from absolute power. Their lives were only saved by what showed them all up as the gang of murderers which they were—that is, by the Thaw.

Chapter 9

Thaw Starting

"WHAT WOULD YOU like to eat now?" we would ask one another. Indeed it was the thing which most stubbornly haunted our minds. The destiny of the world and our country, our relatives and ourselves, could be left in the lap of the gods. The dixies handed in to us three times a day were the present, and we started guessing each morning what they might contain. Perhaps that heavy farinaceous stuff which was some small improvement upon the fodder offered as vegetable. So our day-dreams started but grew quickly beyond control. Why not imagine something better? For instance, paprika-chicken, the favourite dish in Hungary? We arranged competitions as to who could plan the most perfect menu if we had a chance to eat it. The winner was, I remember, a fellow-prisoner called Stolte, once an underground Communist, one-time Trotskyite, one-time Smallholder Party propagandist, one-time adviser to the American occupation forces in Germany, a man who had been about fifteen times in prison. He started the ideal dinner with mushrooms most carefully prepared, and ended it with brandy. The very idea was delicious. Then, we brushed all these fantasies aside and concentrated on scrambled eggs. After many a vote taken on the matter, we always concluded that what we really would most like to have were scrambled eggs, fresh and pure, perhaps as a reflection of modest and respectable home-life. It was a dish unobtainable even in our periods of "sanatorium" treatment, for it was unsuitable for mass production. We dreamt of it day and night. Then,

a familiar sound would strike our ears: doors of the cells opening one after another. Lunch was served. We got a can of stinking lentils, and our dreams were interrupted for some time. When that was forgotten, or replaced by another smell, we started dreaming again.

Our other serious hunger was for news. To learn something of the world outside we would have accepted much pain and sacrifice. When chased round the courtyard in front of the M.Z. building, in Vác, before day-break, on the pretext of "communal walking," prisoners would peep out of the ground-floor cells and ask us when we were approaching their windows, "Any news?" "No news," I answered. There was a particularly daring young fellow who could not be warned away. "Get away from the window, the gaoler is just coming," I told him as I was passing by. "Tell me some news or I'll kill you," he said at the next turn. "News, news, it needn't be true but it should be news," he repeated.

In fact we did get some news, wishful more often than truthful. The items varied according to the sources. In the Vác prison hospital, I learned of the Conservative election victory over Labour. As this information came from a Fascist, there was the addition that forty members of the Mosley Party had been elected to Parliament. Some few "Titoists" who had always been Stalinists said they knew the Communists had made great headway in France. They interpreted this optimistically: the U.S.S.R. would then feel safe, and an amnesty would quickly follow. Average information moved between these two extremes but was no more reliable. One of our "domestic prisoners" —who brought round the dixies, and were responsible for neatness—said he had seen with his own eyes the *Party Gazette* left behind mistakenly by a gaoler: Albania had been invaded by the Western Powers; in Norway, N.A.T.O. bases for atomic attacks had been established; Mao-Tse-tung had changed sides and was attacked now in the Russian press as a "dog on the leash of the Imperialists" like Tito. How disappointing to find out, months later, that all this was nonsense! But by then we had other comforting news—either true or false.

Where did true news come from? One of our main sources was the gaolers' affection for dance music. Very cheap receiving sets were distributed at that time in Hungary, but sealed so that only transmissions from a short distance were audible. The gaolers wanted jazz which was only broadcast from the West. The prisoners wanted news which was also broadcast only from the West. The gaolers asked the engineers to unseal and rearrange their sets; and the engineers used this opportunity to listen in to some Western news bulletins. What they subsequently disseminated turned out to be rather coloured with their own wishes; but the hang of what was going on could still be understood from them.

Another source was the actual machinery of A.V.H. investigations. We had found in the course of years that the interrogators never questioned to gain information but to seek confirmation. If they started to ask about the life of some public figure, we could be sure he had already been black-listed. One day, an interrogator began by threatening that if I went on concealing the truth as I had hitherto I would be hanged at once. "We are not tender-hearted," he repeated again and again; and I could well believe that his heart would not suffer from my execution. He wanted to get "facts" about someone who, he said, had been in touch with leading A.V.H. officers and acted as a *liaison* between these and the British Empire. He called me every name and then, suddenly turning pompous, told me that there was still hope. "Look here, you see my cigarette-case and my despatch-case. A great conspiracy will now be revealed, a conspiracy which compares to the Rajk case as the despatch-case does to the cigarette-case." I told him the usual mumbo-jumbo, and though not satisfied, he allowed me for the time being to return to the Little Hotel. I hastened to warn my fellow prisoners who might have to face similar questions. Others, just returned from the Police Headquarters where they had been interrogated, told us about similar experiences. A.V.H. chiefs suspected of "cosmopolitan" conspiracy! Then a fellow prisoner recently transferred from Vác to the Gyüjtö supplied the explanation. He had

worked at the prison-store and noticed among the prisoners' belongings an A.V.H. lieutenant-general's uniform. Gábor Péter alone could have worn that. His arrest was known to the prisoners sooner than to anybody else in Hungary.

The third source of information was the muddle in the A.V.H. They had very strict regulations about which prisoner to keep in solitary confinement and so forth. The regulations struck us as mysterious; they would suddenly isolate someone who had before mixed with anybody. But even these mysterious regulations were broken, simply by oversight. Convicts summoned to the Police Headquarters for special interrogation under great secrecy would be crammed into a common cell with people who had only been detained some days before. It was due to such a muddle that we learned, at the beginning of 1953, of Stalin's death. It spread like fire. Then, another item started circulating: Beria shot. He had been declared the sworn enemy of the people. After our many disappointments with wishful news, we were doubtful about this one. But one of us decided to try it on a gaoler. "In any case," he told him, "I presume you are happier in your sergeant's uniform than you would be in that of Gábor Péter or Beria." The gaoler nodded. He as well as his fellow gaolers started being more courteous with us.

In the summer of 1953, we learned that Rákosi had resigned as Premier though not as First Secretary to the Party. His successor at the head of the Government was Imre Nagy. "Personality Cult" was to stop. "Collective leadership" was to take over. Power was divided, and our hopes were flying high for its being divided even more. Whatever the outcome, it was a justified hope. We heard of the new Premier's speech, often rightly referred to as a turning point; peasant farmers must be allowed to leave the Kolchozi if they wished; more consumer goods must be produced, and unrealistic plans for capital investment abandoned; in the factories, better working conditions must be established; no more deportations into labour camps must take place; internment camps must be disbanded. What interested us most was Imre Nagy's criti-

cism of the A.V.H. which had "lost touch" with the people. A very euphemistic description of its proceedings this was; but what a great thing that so much should be said! A new era was dawning, that of "Socialist Legality." In December, the prison Commander walked round the cells and told each prisoner, looking up his name on a list: "You are allowed to send a postcard of so many lines to your closest relatives. You are entitled to get a food parcel, weighing three kilos, for Christmas. You may give the prison as your address, and mention your sentence; but nothing else concerning prison conditions or politics is allowed to be written. About further communication with your relatives, including perhaps visits in prison, you will get information in due course."

I still had to spend more than two years under lock and key after that news had been broken to us and, as far as my person is concerned, a long stretch of time in quite extraordinarily bad conditions. But this must not obscure the fact that after 1953 prison life was incomparably less bad than in the Stalinist peak years. The prisoner felt that he was not completely at the mercy of anyone who happened to wear a blue-lapelled uniform. Though maltreatment occasionally recurred, corporal punishment on the whole was abolished. Communication at least had become possible with human beings who enjoyed the right to open and lock their rooms when they liked and to have a stroll in the streets. To get a whiff of it was more than we had dared to dream of. The period of rotting alive had come to an end.

This seems to contradict what I said about our dreams of liberation. But it is not the sole contradiction one experiences in observing oneself. We were sanguine and daring in our day-dreams but intimidated in our real dreams. While in prison, I had dreams about the years before my arrest as though nothing had happened. I had dreams of prison-life. I had a strange series of dreams in which I was to be sent on leave from prison or, for instance, allowed to walk by myself from Gyüjtö to Markó utca. Such absurd situations so often returned in my dreams that even while sleeping I argued about them with

myself. "What nonsense," I thought in my dream, "how often I have caught myself indulging in such fantasies. But how strange, this time it is true." And so I thought until I woke. Never did I see myself in dreams as properly released from prison, and only on one occasion as escaped from prison. I threw aside my frieze jacket which could give me away, and in my ragged shirt I was running across a bridge. In panic, and panting with exhaustion, I reached a park where some sort of fair was going on. I did not dare to join the crowd but sat down on a bench in a dark corner and wondered where I might get hold of a little money. How could I try to slip out of this country or at least find an abode for cold nights to come, without approaching others who would either denounce me or endanger themselves? It was a nightmare. Waking and finding myself safe on the smelly straw-sack, I was quite relieved though ashamed of my cowardice which had given itself away.

The replies to our post-cards and the first parcels were a greater gift than any dream with which we had hitherto comforted ourselves. "My wife alive." "My children alive." "My family apparently getting on quite well . . . In a country town, as they have probably been deported, but they have apparently taken it quite well." The first peeps out of a crypt. The first bits of food recalling a white table-cloth over which it could be eaten, and a wife or mother who could have cooked it. However hungry we were for choice bits, the messages conveyed by the parcels moved us more than the pleasure of eating them. "I don't want to ask anything from them, I am sure they are almost starving themselves," one prisoner would say. "You can't do this to *them*," we would reply, "how miserable they would be if they heard of others sending in parcels, and not being able to do this for you." We were right. All friends of all our relatives were only too glad to contribute to these despatches, however bad living conditions in Hungary were. Amongst my friends, something like a competition was going on to that effect. The post officials, seeing that a parcel was addressed to the prison, were

never reluctant to write on it "3 kg.," however much it weighed.

The ordinary convict's food remained very bad till the end of my captivity. But some slight improvements even in that were a godsend. The reappearance of ordinary potatoes on our diet, instead of the dehydrated black stuff, was received with cries of triumph. Every week would present us with such marvels. A medical inspection was arranged at the Little Hotel. A friend returning from it dashed at me: "Go at once and report some illness. A nice-looking woman, smelling of *eau-de-Cologne* and saying 'please' to us. Never seen such a medical N.C.O. before. You mustn't miss it." I did not. Indeed, though a little plump, she was quite pretty. She said "won't you sit down? What's wrong?" It was a miracle. The first human word for years. And not only human but feminine. I confess I wrote a poem to her.

Imre Nagy made a fashion of being human. Rákosi had to join in. He did so in his own style. He denounced the "mistakes made in the last few years" as the machinations of bandits with whom he had nothing to do. They had simply deceived him. He was undeceivable but all the same it had happened. Moscow ordered *rapprochement* with Jugoslavia. Rákosi made a speech courting Jugoslavia. There had only been misunderstandings between our two Socialist countries, and he, Rákosi, had been misled by the "Gábor Péter gang." The interrogations about the practices of that gang were going on. But Zionist-Cosmopolitan conspiracy, and links with I.S. and U.D.B.A., had suddenly dropped out of the agenda. Interrogators started asking us about the tortures we had undergone at No. 60. It was the Gang that had violated Socialist Legality. A gang of left-wing deviators, sectarians, dogmatists and, by the by, gangsters. How could Rákosi and the whole Party leadership have been aware of all that?

Gábor Péter behaved quite bravely under arrest. It was his good fortune to be treated better than he had treated others. Now it was Socialist Legality; maltreatment of detainees had to be reduced, at any rate, to the extent of

being unnoticeable. He made great rows on his way along the passage and shouted "Rákosi knew about everything! Now he wants to smear all the dirt on me!" No less plucky though somewhat more rhetorical was his comrade-wife, née Jolán Simon, arrested simultaneously with him. She would shout: "Justice to Jolán Simon!"

However great a blessing the Thaw was, it did not spare us new A.V.H. mysteries and new personal tragedies. A number of prisoners including every alien and several Hungarians were suddenly divided from the rest, put into a separate wing of a building, and denied the right to communicate with anyone outside. The prisoners called this special wing "the ghetto." Whatever the reason for this increased vigilance about aliens, we could never find out why Hungarian subjects were included. In the next years, most of them were taken out of the ghetto, again without apparent reasons. I had myself been shifted into an odd kind of semi-ghetto. All rights now due to the average prisoner were granted to me, except that of receiving a visitor. This curtailing of my rights was the more astonishing as I had been amongst the few who could from time to time exchange letters with their relatives in the Stalin period. But to see them seemed very dangerous. Only about a year and a half later did a prison Commander by an oversight allow my sister to come and see me, and once the rule had been broken, the visits continued as a routine.

Tragedies were in store for those who had permission to notify their closest relatives, but received no answer. The wife of Péter Mód (at the time of writing this the representative of the Budapest Government at U.N.O.) turned out to have killed herself after her husband's arrest. The wife of Imre Vajda (also a high official of the present régime in Hungary) had died in her place of deportation. Parents and wives of many prisoners had met the same fate. Some prisoners knew their relatives to be alive but were unable to see them because for financial reasons they were unable to leave the country place to which they had been confined in the years of Rákosi's dictatorship. Some learned that their families were living

in stables, huddled together with other deportees. Some learned that their children had been ill and refused admittance to a hospital on account of their father's "crime." Wives turned out to have divorced their husbands and remarried. One of the wives bravely resisted the Party pressure to divorce until she saw her husband again. Then, after two or three prison visits, she told him she no longer felt able to live with him: they must divorce. A young colonel of the traffic police was released after four of five years' imprisonment. He only spent one week at large. Finding that his wife had deserted him, he shot himself.

Most astounding was the news of babies who had disappeared. This only happened, as far as I know, in "Titoist-Trotskyite" families, particularly when both husband and wife had been sentenced. Their babies had for a while been left with grandparents or uncles, but later suddenly a representative of the authority concerned would take and despatch them to unknown destinations. Some of these babies had been born in prison and went to their "safe homes" straight from there. After the release of Titoist-Trotskyites it took a long time to trace these children and to identify them. They had been renamed by the authorities and placed in orphanages without an indication as to their origin.

It was an era of hope and relief but also of embarrassment and indecision. Most embarrassed among the prisoners were those few who had been and remained all the time diehard Stalinists. They had thought it their duty to take the blame on themselves for the crimes never committed. They would argue that they had been traitors and would be hurt by anyone doubting it. Now the news was leaking through that all these farcical allegations were to be done away with. The friends of Tito's Jugoslavia were to be vindicated. Did that mean relief for all those involved? The thing was not so simple as that. Those who had excelled in self-denigration "in the service of the Party" were now blamed for having given a helping hand to the violators of Socialist Legality. If they held to the ideas disseminated from Moscow, as they always would,

they had to plead guilty again now though for opposite reasons.

Most amusing was the chaos noticeable in the A.V.H. *vamzer* camp. In the time-honoured slang of Hungarian prison life, the German sounding word of obscure origin, *vamzer,* means the prisoner used by the gaolers for spying on other prisoners. In a state where practically all citizens are encouraged, if not compelled, to *vamz* on one another, it was no surprise to see that the same technique was applied under the direct supervision of the A.V.H. The prison authorities cajoled and forced in this way practically everybody they could get hold of. They would first, for instance, invite one "just to write a little essay on the state of mind of prisoners" so as "to show good will"; and then, if he consented, press him further and blackmail him with what he had already revealed. Later, they would get tired of him and suddenly drop his services. Prisoners supposed to have been favoured for a while for such services were later found in most lamentable positions.

Suspicions that one or another prisoner was acting as *vamzer* were going round all the time both in the Stalinist years and afterwards. I should add that I could never get these suspicions confirmed—except when the case was so obvious that there could be no question of mere suspicion. As a matter of fact, the dividing line could not always be clearly drawn between the man who told something in terror or embarrassment, and another who really denounced his fellow prisoners methodically. Many, no doubt, used this as an opportunity to harm their political or racial enemies. In the Stalinist years, everybody was offered such opportunities. Nazis claimed they had heard Trotskyite and pro-British talk from Jews and Reds. Communists reported on reactionary remarks made by non-Communists; they concentrated their hatred on branches of the old aristocracy, former capitalists, clergymen, Horthyite military officers and Social Democrat Leaders. There was one good thing in these denunciations: they cancelled each other out. I cannot judge how often harm was caused to a prisoner by such reports but on the whole

they were useless because, fortunately, all *vamzers* lied and the authorities were thus unable to get a truthful picture from them. In some prison-blocks, raids were organized on "Zionists," that is, Jews, by Nazi war criminals who assisted the gaolers; and the "Marxist-Leninist gaolers"—usually subconscious or quite conscious Jew-haters—watched these performances with broad grins. In Vác a most privileged convict, a former S.S. man, beat up a former colonel of the International Brigade shouting at him "Now, sir, you will get what you deserve" and the gaolers found this very amusing. On the other hand, I knew of people who were "short-ironed" for anti-Jewish and anti-Communist remarks after being denounced by a Jewish Communist cell-mate. When the authorities had to decide whether to torture someone or not, they decided for torture, and so far as that went neither occasional nor professional *vamzing* was fruitless. But as a detector of the prisoners' state of mind it completely failed; the sole fact which emerged was that the prisoners on the whole hated their gaolers—which could be guessed without special investigations anyway.

Further complications in the A.V.H. *vamzing* machinery arose after the Thaw had started. These were aggravated by struggles which had been going on within the A.V.H. Apart from controversies touching higher regions of politics, as for instance between Gábor Péter's followers and his enemies, there were departmental antagonisms due to the organizational structure of the A.V.H. within each prison. Broadly speaking, there were three A.V.H. hierarchies working side by side or rather against one another. There was the ordinary gaolers' organization, with a Prison Commander at the top and lance-corporals at the bottom. There were the officers of the "Economic bureau," in charge of the various industrial plants and other enterprises run within the prisons. And there was the "Operative Unit," an A.V.H. within the A.V.H. The "Operatives" were appointed to watch the A.V.H. gaolers from a political point of view and also to interrogate prisoners about them. Confidential political tasks were given by the Operatives behind the back of the Pris-

on Commander. They were therefore hated by the A.V.H. men, just as the A.V.H. were hated by the ordinary soldiers and policemen.

The Thaw brought these antagonisms to a head. Some of the ill-famed favourites of the A.V.H. officers now made a parade of their defiance. There were two brothers, both from the Nazi branch of Horthy's political police, who for years had been the pets of the leader of the Operative Unit at Gyüjtö. One was a prison barber, and the other the chief domestic prisoner supervising the stores, the cleaning of cells and passages, and the distribution of food. Especially the latter. When the great cauldron of soup arrived in the prison block, he took a canful of its fat, for frying. He took several cans full of meat for himself and his favourites on any occasion, and often only its gravy reached the ordinary prisoner. As he had got special facilities for frying, he and his friends could arrange Lucullan feasts while their fellow-prisoners starved. These circulated as scandalous stories: understandably, they shocked prisoners more than the actions of their gaolers. Then, like so many Thaw stories, the news spread that a gaoler had severely reprimanded the Chief Domestic for trying to skim the soup—and that was the end of it. The two brothers fell out of favour. In the Thaw period they were allowed, as other prisoners were, to volunteer for work in the mines. They did so. An Operative who attended the interviews intervened: "You are not allowed to leave." "Why am I not? I want to." "Shut your mouth, you. . . ." and an unprintable expletive followed. The former Chief Domestic, in a fury, reciprocated: "You persecute me because I am unwilling to act as your *vamzer*," he shouted. I am not aware of further developments, but as far as I know, no greater harm was done to him.

Another gaolers' favourite was, like many, a prison barber, and incidentally one with quite a good record in that trade. Before the war he had been a hairdresser and masseur in a fashionable beauty parlour in what could be called the West End of Budapest. He was a stout man with huge belly and remarkable muscles, a heavy body

with light fingers—doubtless destined for the job. But he wanted something else. After the Russian occupation he emerged as an A.V.H. captain. Some of my fellow prisoners, now shaved by him, had been arrested by him. For his affiliation with the "Gábor Péter gang," he was imprisoned on account of financial rackets previously encouraged. My friends warned me about talking to him: "you know he is a *vamzer*." I never thought it worth being cautious when talking to suspected or real *vamzers*. I knew they would report whatever they liked, and a suspicious reticence would only induce them to invent more lies about me. Besides, such a career interested me. I chatted to him in a friendly way. "Look here," I told him after an exchange of dirty stories about mutual friends, the actresses who used to be his customers, "you had in that beauty parlour quite an agreeable job, fingering the prettiest necks in Hungary and making quite a good living. What on earth made you leave that and change into that bloody uniform?" On such occasions he would lose his taste for ribaldries and answer pompously: "Fingering pretty necks was no ambition for a lifetime. History will vindicate us." I knew he had wanted an even better living and was a snob like so many "revolutionaries." He loved the captain's uniform. Even when imprisoned he could not conceal his pride in having worn it. Anyway he made no secret of his loyalty to Communism, even when the Thaw started. Everyone knew of his frequent interviews with the head of the Operative.

He was appointed Chief Domestic of the Gyüjtö hospital and granted a comfortable little separate room. His fellow domestics noticed he was scribbling all the time. In a tactful way, they drew the gaolers' attention to this. After all, gaolers had the right to search even a Chief Domestic's cell. They may not have dared in Stalin's time but now it was Socialist Legality. They read the handwriting found under his pillow, and the result was sensational. It contained denunciations not only of the prisoners but also of the prison staff. The head physician of the hospital was accused of harbouring "perfectly healthy reactionaries," and several officers and N.C.O.s were de-

nounced for lack of vigilance about the machinations of Fascists, Social Democrats and other criminals. It was not really very different from what might have been expected but the gaolers were shocked and—this was the new feature—professed to be shocked. They formally complained to the Commander who was known to detest the Operative no less than they did. But he could not decide at once what to do.

Some of the gaolers decided without him. Particularly one, called Pintér, mentioned above as a chief beater up. A straightforward and single-minded torturer, he always hated the Operatives. Besides, since the Imre Nagy speech, he had shown willingness to make amends for his past. What amends could he offer? Only another beating up—this time of one whom the prisoners hated as much as the ordinary gaolers. The *vamzer* thus caught was beaten half-dead by Sergeant Pintér and his associates. This was the sole spectacular instance of corporal punishment since its abolition *de jure*.

By the summer of 1954 most of the Communist prisoners had disappeared from Gyüjtö, and rumour had it that many of them had been released, some solemnly rehabilitated and put into important posts. Kádár was among the first to be set free, but the exculpation of Rajk was still far ahead. That was a point, Rákosi felt, on which he could not give in without detriment to himself. He declared now that the Tito-Rajk conspiracy had been a mere invention, concocted by the "Gábor Péter gang," but that the accusations against Rajk as a Horthy police-spy and as an American agent were unfortunately true. The levels of truth to be accepted were changing all the time.

I was still frequently interrogated by the A.V.H., with regard to Communists, but this time with the idea of exculpating them. Mostly they were new interrogators, speaking sardonically about the accusations extorted by their predecessors. I was questioned about my former cell-mate, and erstwhile colleague on the staff of the B.B.C., George Pálóczi-Horváth. "Do you know of his having had a share in the protest of writers against the

racial law in 1938?" Of course I knew. It had never been denied. But between 1949 and 1953, it used to be referred to as an act of divergency manipulated by the anti-Soviet bourgeoisie to deceive the working classes. "The Gábor Péter gang"—with a Jewish majority in its leadership—gleefully delivered the one-time protectors of persecuted Jews to its Nazi staff. The new interrogators were as a rule young gentiles of proletarian origin, and it was their task to do justice to the victims of that sordid mania. "Finally I have to ask you a question which you may find strange," the Interrogator apologetically said: "What was the connexion between the B.B.C. and the Secret Service?" I answered that the security agencies had their own observers, especially during the war, at the B.B.C., but to suppose that the Corporation had at any time been run by them was nonsense. "Of course, I know that," the Interrogator readily replied, "I just wanted to have this confirmed." Co-existence had been put on the agenda.

The rehabilitating interrogations often struck me as no less absurd than had been the inculpating ones. I was asked to reconfess about several people. The Interrogator drew up the minutes with ease: "My former confession on the subject was made under threats and as a result of physical maltreatment. . . ." My overgrown sensibility about accuracy induced me to contradict him: "On that particular occasion I was not maltreated." "But you were maltreated before, weren't you?"—he replied. "O, certainly." "Well then, OK. Why should it make any difference whether it was on that occasion or another one?" I agreed that he was after all right.

The saddest of my "rehabilitating" depositions concerned my late friend, the poet Endre Havas. He was the ugliest and most awkward charmer I knew. A horse-like jaw, a high and concave forehead, a slim and nervous body, its limbs scarcely fitted together, he hobbled about in life feverishly, driven by an incessant enthusiasm. The objects of his enthusiasm changed from time to time but not its substance: he wanted to belong somewhere and was forever making fantasies about the various camps he chose to join.

In the Horthy régime, as a young man, he joined the literary *avant-garde* and, shortly afterwards, the underground Communist movement. The political police caught and ill-treated him but as he was strong enough to be silent, he was released without trial. The *avant-garde* group, in the meantime, stopped being *avant-garde;* and he got disillusioned about Communism. The outbreak of the Second World War found him in Paris, an admirer of Roger Martin du Gard (whose novels he had translated into Hungarian) and a believer in the Fight for Freedom against Fascism. He was embittered against Stalin because of the Pact between Germany and Russia. Only the persecution of Communists then going on in France kept him from passionately turning against them; he could not let them down while they were persecuted. After the collapse of France, he succeeded in escaping to North Africa and later, assisted by British military units, in reaching London. At the time of his arrival, war had already been going on for months between Germany and Russia.

It was at that time that I became friends with him. He was an endearing personality, able both to convey his enthusiasm and amicably to share in a laugh at it. His limbs and voice trembling, his face and eyes shining, his emotions always at a temperature above average, he ran about between the various Free Hungarian headquarters, searching for the road of revolutionary salvation. "I've decided I'll join Károlyi," he reported; "whatever his errors, he is the man I can believe in." He became Károlyi's secretary and was to assist him, in various capacities for years to come.

The war going on, and the prestige of Russia growing, Havas rediscovered his Bolshevik sympathies. He was a man unable to support anything without engaging his heart; and who would not have supported the Bolsheviks at that time? He fell in love with the Red Army and, simultaneously, with a Hungarian refugee woman whose very existence drove him further towards Lenin. This was less from her personal influence, than her background. She was the daughter of a well-known Hungarian artist. Both her brother and her sister were artists. In her early

youth, she had been involved in the underground Communist movement, as had her sister and brother and most of their circle. She had suffered from the political police, and from private sorrows. She landed in England as one making port after a shipwrecked youth. She was living in an English country town, working as a factory clerk, without showing any desire to be entangled in movements again, when Havas met her; and after marrying him she became, in the course of years, a flawless housewife and mother, concerned with politics mainly because her family interests had by then been vested in it.

Havas himself was a devoted husband and father, a man full of tenderness and coveting the atmosphere of home life. The more he became tossed about by fate, worn down by misadventure, and far from his homeland, the more he needed that. What we call home life is *bourgeois* home life. More or less everybody needs it because everybody is more or less a bourgeois, and Havas was fundamentally that. He would deny it but his most endearing ways gave him away. He had always been fascinated by Rimbaud; and as soon as he got hold of Aragon's Resistance poems he set about translating them, and would forever recite and quote them, his cheeks glowing, his chest panting. But in his own poetry, his best verses resembled neither Rimbaud nor Aragon; they resembled Francois Coppée. His vision of the Workers of the World Uniting was but an expanded substitute for family surroundings which he seemed to have lacked in early youth, for a home providing him with the sense of security, warmth, and self-respect. Those Workers of course were an abstraction; though he had as an underground Communist dutifully distributed leaflets in the Budapest factory districts, and later entertained charwomen and junior clerks in the London Hungarian Club, these were not the workers he was anxious to unite with. What he dreamt of was turners, bricklayers, and Maquis, converted to high-brow poetry-reading, and Villons and Rimbauds converted to virtue. Once exploitation of man by man was at an end, they would all settle down as breadwinners and join hands, and praise the Red Army happily ever after.

In keeping such high moral standards, one has to become either intellectually dishonest or mad. Poor Endre Havas was spared neither of these alternatives. After the end of hostilities, he woke up as one intermarried with the ruling political caste in Hungary. All his new relatives were about to drop, if they had not dropped yet, their pre-war Café Dôme manners and their Bloomsbury sneers at patriotic duties and military distinctions. Now they were all united in applauding the Liberators, in holding good jobs and, particularly from 1948 onwards, in Socialist Realism. Havas went all the way with them, and further. As he was fond of me, he resented my hesitation over the same path. My sceptical support for the Government was not the sort of thing he expected from one worthy of Uniting. I had no doubt about his pangs of conscience. They could only be silenced by adopting theories ever more obscure, together with devices ever less fastidious. In a way, and for a while, this helped him to display quite valuable faculties, hitherto unsuspected in him. As a Counsellor of Legation in Paris, assisting Count Michael Károlyi, he proved to be not only a punctual civil servant and amiable colleague, but, indeed, a good diplomat. His main task was to ward off anti-Soviet influences from his chief; but he did this so tactfully and showed, when not prevented by Party politics, so much helpfulness to any honest endeavour that even the Countess, the anti-Soviet pole in the Count's surroundings at that time, had a tender spot in her heart for the man she called "our *Eminence rouge*."

Diplomats have been defined as "respectable spies." Where a spy's respectability ends, may be open to argument. A diplomat submerged in Stalinism would certainly consider as respectable anything which was useful to the Party. The two Communist Counsellors of Legation, serving under Count Károlyi in Paris, Péter Mód and Endre Havas, rendered services, without the knowledge of their Chief, to some authorities concerned with collecting information of a not strictly diplomatic character. They had both been summoned to Budapest for reporting when, in the early summer of 1949, the Hungarian Minister in Paris was notified from the Quai d'Orsay that both were

considered *persona non grata*. This coincided with the moment of Mód's arrest—as an agent of the Deuxième Bureau. He was one of "Rajk's accomplices."

Havas used to admire both Rajk and Mód; he regarded them as model Communists. Their arrest shook him. "That must be a misunderstanding; they must be released very soon, you will see," he stuttered. When I met him that summer in Budapest, he had already succeeded in persuading himself that "the Party knows what it is doing." In June, "they must have made tragic errors"; in July, "they must have been traitors"; in August, he said: "First I was sorry for them but now I have only contempt for them." He himself was to stay in Budapest, as a publisher's reader, in the self-deceptive happiness of "being at last united" with everybody he cared for. At the very beginning of September, I told him of the arrest of the London Hungarian Club leaders. His big jaw fell, and he gazed at the wall.

About one and a half years later, in Vác, we would now and then hear hoarse and frantic shouts: "Help! Help! Long live Stalin! Long live the Soviet Union! Help! Help!" Then the blows of truncheons, and inarticulate cries and moans. The prisoner was apparently either beaten or doped into swooning. That was my friend Endre Havas. After his arrest, he had gone mad. His madness consisted in an inability to believe in the madness of others. He was obsessed with a mania that his gaolers were White terrorists and that he was the victim of a counter-revolutionary plot. I was not astonished by such a delusion, as I had had similar ideas myself. At 60 Andrássy ut, in my underground cell, when recalling how keen my hearers were on spotting "Trotskyites" among their comrades and "liquidating" them, I wondered whether a White conspiracy had not surreptitiously taken over and, the following night, watched to see whether the saints of Marxism-Leninism, including Rákosi, were still visible on the walls. I found their portraits there unharmed, and later recalled this mad guess of mine with irony.

Havas waited in vain for the relieving detachments of the Red Army. Instead, he was visited by the gaolers,

most incensed by such "impudent provocation," and by their Nazi assistants, the prison barber and chief domestic, who were only too glad to thrash a Communist. Havas, with his conspicuous appearance and the typical awkwardness of an intellectual, was a tempting target. They dragged him about and played football with his body. He was left lying in his excrement for days. Officers and N.C.O.s and privileged prisoners all agreed that he was just pretending. After being transferred to Gyüjtö he calmed down but got no saner. He would mumble some incoherent sentences; such as "Farkas wanted me to . . . but I refused. . . ." He also mentioned "Károlyi"; apparently, they had wanted to extort a confession from him inculpating his former chief. Then, for two or three days he would mumble "My lips will be sealed." He kept to this. He got quite apathetic. The gaolers tired of beating him and let him lie about on the bunk. Once Péter Mód, doing some domestic work, succeeded in calling in to him: "Hello, Endre." He seemed not to recognize him and gave no answer. In 1952, the Authorities concerned came at last to the conclusion that he might not be "pretending." He was taken to a prison hospital. After minor troubles—hunger strikes and attempts at suicide by throwing himself on the floor—he seemed to have improved. But when the Thaw came, he was already dead.

And now, face to face with a young proletarian who had to rehabilitate by dozens the victims of Personality Cult and of deviation from Legality, it was for me to explain what an impeccable Communist the late poet had been. It was the routine procedure. "A poet, a Communist of deep convictions" he put down on his typewriter, respectfully and with some spelling mistakes. He prompted me with what to say, and I readily complied; his widow and two orphans should at least enjoy the benefits of Communist rehabilitation. What an ordeal the past few years must have been for them, in an environment where people were unwilling to believe in the innocence of anyone imprisoned.

"So he didn't work for I.S.," the Interrogator said after concluding his minutes.

"Of course not."

"But you said he was your friend, and you certainly were an I.S. agent, weren't you?"

"Of course I was not."

The Interrogator made the angry face which A.V.H. officers thought compulsory even when offering a gesture of good-will: this was an aspect of discipline. "Well, weren't you condemned as an I.S. agent?"

"I was, but on false charges."

"Then why the hell didn't you apply for a revision of your trial?"

"I wondered. . . ."

"If you don't do it at once it may be too late." Obviously it was a message from higher quarters.

Indeed there had already been rumours for months that it was now the Social Democrats' turn, and then the Smallholders would follow . . . Imre Nagy would leave no fake sentences unaltered.

"Thank you for your advice, sir; I shall hand in my application to the Prison Commander."

At the end of October, 1954, together with a load of Socialist convicts, I was dispatched in a lorry to the political police headquarters, "P.V.," for the revision of my case.

Chapter 10

God, Sex, Immortality

THREE defences have been invented against death: belief in God, in fame, and in birth. An agnostic by nature, I have never shared these beliefs. Many of my fellow prisoners discovered the Infallibility of the Pope, or the existence of a Divine Force above the Universe, or immortal souls in themselves, when nothing else, not even wishful News, was forthcoming to alleviate their suffering and despair. My good-natured friend who had once been a colonel in the traffic police, found solace in spiritualism

and theosophy; and thanks to the interest shown by certain Marxist-Leninist gaolers in the messages arriving through a shaky prison table from deceased relatives, his indulgence in illicit research among the spirits was benevolently ignored. But this did not prevent him from killing himself when he found that his wife no longer loved him. My scientific friends in the Engineering Unit told me that the more they learned of the construction of the atom, or of the behaviour of the galaxies, the more they were induced to share the faith of one or another pious and uneducated flock; but when I asked why, they repeated the neat and distant arguments of some modern physicists and astronomers—about particles too tiny for men to predict their moves, or about the finiteness of the world, or the impossibility of proving the non-existence of God. I should have liked to be convinced by them; not only because a celestial consolation would have been welcome at that moment, but even more because I like to agree with the persecuted. But my sense of logic protested.

I have remained equally sceptical about the two secular creeds which ought to reconcile us with the idea of disappearing from life. Posterity may for a while remember a name, and children and grand-children may wear it; genes may outlast a hundred generations, and statues of stone may survive their creators; all this does not save us from dissipating into unconsciousness. So why bother about either moral or biological survival? Why take so much care with such symbols as a poem or a child? My scepticism about them was enhanced by natural laziness and a liking for independence.

In the summer of 1949, shortly before my arrest, when I felt my end might be approaching, I suddenly caught myself reacting differently. My opinions remained unaltered but not my desires. Verses started moulding themselves in my brain. I regretted that there would be neither a *magnum opus* nor a small baby left behind if I were to vanish. It was of course a stupid desire and I knew it to be so. It was also utterly irresponsible as far as the baby was concerned; it would have been an orphan. But I could not help longing for it and was sorry to have had no children

in England. I was determined to have one in Hungary. I became passionate about it, and could not decide whether it was my disintegration or my rebirth which had begun; but I felt interested enough in myself to decide that I should go to the end of it. Previously, however much I loved a woman, I never thought she might bear me a child. Now I watched all women as potential breeding mares. I picked out a young girl who I thought might do perfectly though I was far from being in love with her. I had an appointment with her for the day following my arrest.

Prison life strengthened this longing. My coevals got photographs of their grandchildren. One baby was like another to me, all were charming and impersonal pictures, of token lives rather than human beings. Symbols, tokens —but what else had been left to us? The female sex itself had shrunk to an algebraic formula. I could also use the word "grown" instead of "shrunk," it had acquired both the unreality and the greatness of dreams.

Dreams are fairy-like and carnal. In the promiscuity of the prison cells, it is their carnal nature that gets more conspicuous. It starts with the crisp patches on blankets distributed by the storekeepers, continues with dirty stories, told often in a shy and avid *tremolo,* and ends in confidences. "I confess I masturbated . . ." a friend once started telling me but I pretended not to hear him, and he shut up. What is the use of learning what one could guess anyway? The frequency depended on age, and the opportunities to do it unnoticed, and on certain personal factors. But psychologically it was too much needed to be dispensed with by anybody. It could be done without guilt; without, at any rate, any feeling that it was the unwillingness of suitable partners that had prompted it. For some, it must have been quite a relief. Others, and perhaps most, were crippled by the years passed in artificial seclusion. A sturdy young Jugoslav, a lady killer second to none, was near committing suicide when, after his release, he discovered that he was impotent. As his testicles had been beaten hard by the A.V.H., he thought his deficiency might be organic and could perhaps never be cured. But it turned out to have been psychological; and

once the difficulty was overcome, he went on "killing ladies" happily ever after.

Sex life in prison was nearest to normal among the homosexuals. They were a special group, who, though raided and dispersed several times, managed to get together again and again, either in the dormitories or the workshops. I presume they must have suffered a good deal because of their inclinations; the gaolers were glad to double their cruelty with anyone in whom they discovered a corporal disability or abnormality, and they must have trebled it when they had a right to do so on "moral" grounds. But this is just my assumption. What I came across was two or three youths with chubby cheeks, wagging hips, in the best clothes obtainable from the depot, allowed to grow longer hair than the rest and making ample use of this permission. One was a storekeeper, the other a Deputy Chief Domestic; they had frequent opportunities to meet; according to public opinion, they were all *vamzers,* accomplices not in sexual offences only. This may not have applied to all homosexuals but it certainly did to some.

Incurable heterosexuals, like myself, were confined to erotic symbolism. They lived in dreams and recollections. They would glare at a uniformed female, a gaoler or a nurse, and wonder whether these could be female beings indeed. Most of them were extremely coarse, in looks, manners, and feelings alike. But not all. I have mentioned one pleasant exception and could mention more. They were not, as a rule, ugly; an extremely pretty blonde, known to be cruel particularly with women prisoners, had been a street prostitute until that calling was officially abolished. The prisoners would say about all of them that they had been prostitutes, but in such allegations allowance must of course be made for spiteful thinking. Some of the women gaolers struck one as ideal lower-middle-class housewives, with broad country accents and precise manners. Such was, for instance, the supervisor of the depot at Gyüjtö. Suddenly she was removed: her superiors had found out that she had betrayed her husband with a handsome Chief Domestic. But such cases were rare.

Altogether the A.V.H. uniform worn by women acted as a deterrent, or at least as a question-mark for male prisoners.

Then, there were the female fellow-prisoners. They could hardly ever be seen but their existence was constantly emanating from day-to-day trivialities. We knew they were in our neighbourhood. Everything we knew about them made them appear dirty, humiliated and denaturalized, even more than ourselves. What must they have suffered! How strong they must have been to survive! Their very wretchedness transformed them into mythical personalities in our minds. Now and then, on the day when clean linen was distributed, one of us would get a pair of woman's pants by accident; a coarse and ragged piece of underwear, a pathetic caricature of the sex for which it was destined. Giggling and reveries started at its sight. "I decided," a prison barber told me (one who, unlike many of his colleagues, was surely no *vamzer*) "to marry no one but a woman prisoner." Many felt like that. There was some pity in this feeling, and comradeliness; but more of a nostalgia for the miraculous. Women as our equals in that state were a miracle even greater than the whole world outside from which we had been cut off.

There were odd minutes when they could be seen. When led to and from the hospital, one would see four or five women in frieze turned with their faces to the wall. For hours after one would try to guess what they looked like. In the hospital, facing the Little Hotel, women were treated as well as men. One prisoner doctor was caught by the cruel blonde woman gaoler when he was about to deliver a letter from a female prisoner to a male comrade. A tragedy followed; not only because all three of them were punished but because the letter-writer had already promised by the same channels to be the faithful wife of another male comrade. This amounted to adultery.

There was a period when, in two groups, some eight or ten women prisoners of the hospital made their daily walk in the courtyard visible from the Little Hotel. Before this started, the gaolers shouted "All windows to be closed, everybody off the window." Needless to say, everybody sneaked to the window. It was indeed an exhilarating and

at the same time a weird sight: that they did exist indeed. Despite the watchfulness of both men and women gaolers, partnerships developed through the air. The most untiring creeper-to-the-window was the deaf young painter. He quickly fell in love with a Jugoslav girl, alleged to have been a spy. His love story became a matter of common knowledge, talked about and made fun of by gaolers and prisoners alike. Notwithstanding the ban on peeping, he drew a coloured picture of the women prisoners walking in the courtyards. The gaolers were delighted with it and turned a blind eye to his peeping. They thought art more important than vigilance.

That was the limit of the prisoners' share of everything which in the world outside could have made them lechers, lovers, fathers. It was a universe of sex-substitutes. I do not say that it was uninteresting; it revealed the skeleton of one's own feelings. I wish everyone could be spared the ordeals which led me to that experience, but I feel it was an experience worth having. It was like discovering religion in my flesh. My vision, a condensed projection of prison dreams, was fairy-like and carnal. It was a wish to be united with someone who would come. A wish to be born again by being united.

Chapter 11

"I Voman"

At "P.V." after my transfer for the revision of my case . . . I was alone in my cell, but no matter: I was offered books to read, and pencil and paper to make notes if I liked. The electric bulb above the door had to be on all night, as this was the regulation in all police prison buildings; Thaw or no Thaw, prisoners before trial could not be trusted not to attempt suicide. But the gaolers assured me that in my case that was a mere formality, I should be allowed to hide my face in the pillow at night. I was given fifteen cigarettes and matches per day, and the same food

as the gaolers—"sanatorium" once again. This time, even the gaolers behaved as though they were my hired attendants rather than my masters. No wonder: many convicts who had in the last eighteen months arrived in circumstances similar to mine, were subsequently released and now serving in high posts. Kádár stepping from solitary confinement, as it were overnight, into the Party secretaryship of the most important industrial district . . . The gaolers were not keen on running risks by bullying those who might emerge as their superiors next week. "If you want anything, kindly tell us" was how they received me.

In spite of the prospects of release, I went on training myself in caution. I must not allow myself to be carried away by dreams lest I should be disappointed. Let me concentrate on the benefits of the moment—readable books and edible food. My neighbour turned out to be a friend of mine, waiting for his release like myself. He was waiting less patiently. Knocking over the wall, he would ask, "Opinion?" Our signature tune was the V-sign, ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ —, and our question mark a seemingly more complicated but strikingly rhythmical couple of bars ⏑ ⏑ — — ⏑ ⏑ —. I confined myself mainly to exchanging experiences about books and food. As my friend had applied for light diet, we had important things to tell each other. For instance, after lunch. *I:* ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ —, *He:* ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ —, *I:* "Stuffed paprika tomatosauce poppyseed noodles." *He:* "Semolinasoup grillveal mashpotato." *I:* "Enjoying Confessions" (by Rousseau, sent in by my relatives at my request). *He:* "English books obtainable here, got a Linklater quite amusing." "News ⏑ ⏑ — — ⏑ ⏑ —," *I:* "None. ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ —," *He:* ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ —. And a pause followed till after supper.

My cell was the last in the passage. But I should have liked to know who my neighbour's neighbour was. "Try find out," I asked my friend. "Tried he doesn't know how knock," he replied. In the meantime, we agreed that confidential messages between us should be exchanged in English rather than in Hungarian though we should keep to the Hungarian alphabet; *x, y, w* and *q* should be dispensed with. And doubling of vowels and consonants

omitted, whenever possible. "Vont be dificult. Kuite easi inded." My absentmindedness made me a slow knocking-partner. But, thank the Thaw, I could sit quietly on my bunk, paper and pencil in my hands, absorbed by literary notes which I was authorized to make. In such comfort, even our special Hungaro-English was smoothly decipherable.

A post-meal exchange of, I think, "Sausages" on my part, and "Boiledegs" on my neighbour's, was interrupted by an aggressive signature tune, hitherto not in our use. It was the couple of bars most popular with Hungarian football-match audiences and juvenile applauders: — — ∪ ∪ —. As it could not come from a neighbour, where could it have come from? One should beware of *agents provocateurs*. My neighbour seemed worried. He turned to English. But the new would-be partner was adamant. "Vho are" we heard over the wall, and then, a succinct introduction: "I voman."

This was enough for us to overcome our reluctance. More detailed introductions followed. She was an old acquaintance of my neighbour's, and accommodated now in the cell above his. She said she had met me once in the Hungarian Ministry of Information, but I did not remember, and I was glad I did not. The unknown entity expressed in knocks that arranged themselves on the pattern of "voman"-hood—that was just the thing that appealed to me. It was the living symbol of the sex which I wanted to bear me children.

I had a clear vision of her, clear though partly mistaken. In any case, I tried to check it. I asked both my neighbour and herself about her looks. I was sure she must be a brunette, and she turned out to be ashblond. I was right in assuming that she must be middle-size and slim. I was sure she must have an impertinent little nose. I should have liked to inquire about the matter but since impertinence, as far as noses are concerned, is not identifiable on factual grounds, I refrained from asking questions about it and trusted my imagination.

Impertinence was, at any rate at the onset, her main appeal. It was a challenge for me to break it. It was also a

challenge which I felt was made on my behalf, a gesture of comradeship, challenge to the prison walls, to the authorities, and to fate. Not-giving-in consisted in getting round the regulations. It is no easy task to praise her now that she is my wife but I must confess she did it admirably. She chatted with unremitting *élan*. It is fantastic how temperaments reveal themselves in a language as abstract as knocking-over-the-wall. I do not mean the texts; but the technique. Hers was fast and astoundingly self-confident. She would interrupt any sentence by fast knocks suggesting that she knew what the end of it was to be. She either knew or did not. And more often than not, it was hopeless to interrupt her narrative by a "Rep" (eat from . . .) as was usual when one had missed a part of the text; she would not hear anything until she had finished. Communication with me was of course more difficult than with my neighbour right under her cell; and in the first days of what I should call her company, I was just dumbfounded by the shower of her knocks. I thought I might stop listening in from time to time, and go on reading or writing; I could not. I wished she would go to hell. Her proximity permeated me.

Florence had been imprisoned for more than four years. Her story was heartrending. Her mother was an Englishwoman by birth. She herself had never been in Britain but she as well as her mother used to be on friendly terms with some members of the British diplomatic staff in Budapest. After the war, she worked as the secretary, first, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and later, to the Minister of Information. When Hungary turned into a People's Democracy she was dismissed from Government service, and when spy-hunting reached its peak, in 1950, she was detained as a British spy. So we were colleagues. But she had been maltreated much more cruelly than I. Her toe nails stamped out, her body almost crippled by beatings, she had first been given a satisfactory but short hospital treatment and then dragged about in the filthy cellars of women's prison camps. When the Thaw started her turn came, and after being transferred to P. V. she could not believe her eyes when books and cigarettes and sausages

for breakfast were offered her. But her gratefulness for the "sanatorium" boarding did not last long; once encouraged to hope for an early release, she became impatient with the interrogations and cross-interrogations still going on about her "spy contacts," and vented her feelings in a hurricane of knocks.

When facing the bravery and impertinence of a female one's natural reaction is to break it. The strength of mind of a girl may be impressive but it impresses even more when it is faltering. Strength unbroken is vulgar; it is its lapses into weakness which make it human and feminine. It was the touch of broken-heartedness and the palpable craving for a surrender which made me feel that that girl must be mine. The knocks were showering and showering and I was unable to put aside my pencil and paper on which I reconstructed her words. Now and then I just joined in with some clumsy coquetteries. "Blodi" I heard from her about someone and then let her know that "Mi future vife mustnt talk so." She gave a facetious reply, travestying a well-known love-dialogue from a Hungarian classic play. The joke went on for weeks, undisturbed by the fact that I did mean it. When she had been allowed a visit from her mother I inquired about my "Inlav"; and she after having been given a cell-mate, a recently arrested woman, who had arrived with some wishful news that the Russians were planning to withdraw from Hungary altogether, passed this piece of information on to me as "Engagement present." Once the ball was set rolling it went on its own way. We chose as our special signature tune when knocking to each other a double anapaest ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ —.

She told me: "Darling I must confes Ive a child." Love or no love, that was too much. "Iou joke?" I asked. *She:* "No shes caled Dinki and is a dachshund." *I:* "Cheek, gave me a shock." *She:* "Vil iou like mi dogi?" *I:* "Ies and iou never think of other babies?" *She:* "Im mad about real babies." *I:* "Nov seriously Flo do iou vant child bi me?" *She:* "I do." Facetiousness had given way.

It was love at the first lack of sight, as I put it to myself. I had never been able to throw in my lot with anyone I knew; when very much attracted to one or another it was

the power of attraction which my nerves resisted. Only the unknown could make me as brave as that. But I had some anxieties. I was twenty-three years her elder. "Sili girl" I told her. *She:* "Vhi am sili?" *I:* "For loving me." *She:* "Dont hurt mi felings." *I:* Could be iour father." *She:* "I dont vant veri ioung husband." Not "very" but I was already 53. Surely not the age of an opera *amoroso*. I felt I was ridiculous but did not care.

Technical hitches often interrupted our interchanges. Apart from stopping after a quick danger sign whenever we heard the boots of the gaolers approaching, voices from outside were frequently too loud for us to out-knock them. There were military exercises in the courtyards. There were madmen or pretenders in the prison-block who would burst out shouting in animal sounds. Most disturbing was the lavatory plug which was pulled in our neighbourhood in the middle of one or another devoted declaration of love. It was a blessing no longer to have the buckets but everything has its disadvantages.

While I tried to explain and to define my own feelings she was concentrated on more practical issues. For instance, how to make use of the fact that we had our weekly shower baths in the same premises—Saturday morning women, Saturday afternoon men. "Betven first and second ribs of radiator vil be a boks for iou" she told me. It was an empty matchbox, only with a lock of her hair in it.

Our main concern was from then onwards the "Bokses." It was no easy matter to exchange them. We needed luck which we did not always have and adroitness such as I had never possessed. Luck was needed because there were two bathrooms. If for three weeks successively she had bathroom No. 1 and I No. 2 our boxes piled up and we could not get hold of them. In No. 2 there was no radiator; the venthole was used instead. That hole was fortunately filled with filthy straw in which the box could be hidden. But one got dirty right up to the elbow when searching for it. Besides, it was only the gaolers' laziness or "lack of vigilance" which enabled us to do so. They should have watched us all the time, and would call in every second or third minute: "Hurry up." I started every shower bath in

No. 1 by slipping a piece of soap under the radiator so that I should be able to pretend I was looking for it if I were caught mucking about underneath. Because of my clumsiness in any manual performance I walked in a stage-fright to these feverishly expected excursions and am still astonished that I got away with it. After one or another successful venture I felt I was a hero; but surely Florence was a greater heroine as on one occasion she sacrificed her bath to get at the depth of the vent-hole and was glad she could at least clean her arms by the time her lady gaoler arrived. One of our boxes had disappeared and, as it happened, the following week no boxes of matches were given to us. Did they discover it, we wondered? We only learned later that this had been due to quite a different thing: an embittered prisoner had set his mattress on fire. This is why the gaolers were ordered not to distribute matches but to give light to the prisoners themselves. As it was too boring a procedure they managed to restore the *status quo ante,* and with it our means of communication.

My first box to her contained a poem, in strict metrical form and rhyme like all my ventures in that branch of literature, but I give here a literal translation:

Through railings, walls and prohibitions
I am grasping her hand
As one who through a nightmare is hearing
Some soft memories,
Memories of a continent never seen before
Where there is no departure but arrival,
And delight rips in the flesh as though it were a pain,
And wakening soothes one's nerves like a dream.
It was the curve of destiny that threw me to her,
It was its whip which chased me to her,
It was destiny turned into my blood which wants me
Never to leave her,
To stand by her in disgrace and blows,
To rest her head on my chest
And to see my face turning beautiful
In that of the child she will bear me.

Mostly the contents of the boxes, as could readily be

guessed, were letters. There was but one exception, on New Year's Eve, when I received a little piece of Palmolive soap just sent in by my "Inlav." I acknowledged it by knocking: "I start this iear vith iour soap and finish it vith iour babi." In spite of my caution I hoped in some months we would be free.

As to the letters I can only say I am glad to have no longer got them with me. I might feel it my duty to print the parts which would make me blush most. My memory will I hope select from them only what makes me blush a little.

I wanted to know about all details of her life, particularly as it was at that moment. How does she dress, how does she wash, does she get hot water and shampoo for washing her hair? Her reply was reassuringly ungrammatical. "My dear Pasha, you have rather unrealistic imaginings about Slaves in prison. Shampoo, here? Cold water and ordinary soap, one can quite well get used to it. At home I used to pull my nose whenever I had to wash something but here I have become quite a wash-bear." The word Slave did not stand for prisoners, but for women. She was Pasha's Slave. Very cheeky in this capacity as I often had reason to point out, but insisting on that qualification. She was, as she said, prepared to serve me but at the same time took it for granted that I should give her the orders which she had ordered me to give.

"I must know all about you," she wrote, "your favourite colour, your favourite authors and composers, your favourite dishes, your favourite fruit, your favourite drink." She also inquired about my "favourite slave" but I dismissed this question by allowing her "three guesses." As to the rest, I tried to give her an honest answer but I am not a man of Yes or No in so far as favourites go. "I am rather an eclectic," I wrote to her, "both by nature and philosophy. Dishes of course are a grave problem. I used to love English breakfasts if properly prepared, with bacon and eggs, and Oxford marmalade, and toast and strong tea. But a *café crême* in Paris with fresh croissants is not contemptible either. In my youth my favourite meat was *rántott csirke* (spring chicken *pané*) with green peas and

cucumber, and my favourite sweet dish was *szilvásgombóc* (a Hungarian speciality: dumpling stuffed with plum). But there are so many other meats and other vegetables and other sweets competing with them. My mother used to be a marvellous cook and particularly excelled in preparing *vágotthus*—rissole, as it would be called in London, but I should think it a blasphemy to call it that. She used to make it of goose, veal, beef and pork, with a little goose-liver, and slices of hard-boiled eggs in it. The best fried *scampi* of my life with enchanting green salad, I ate in a modest restaurant at Viareggio (not the spa, but the old village). I have tender recollections of Chinese pancake rolls (stuffed with fried vegetable) though I made their acquaintance in war-time London where they may have been *Ersatz*. Black coffee of course nowhere equals that which you get in any Italian *café-espresso*. I like practically all sorts of alcoholic drinks except those made of mint and the very sweet ones. Fruit: some apples in Britain, such as Cox's Orange Pippin, or plums in Jugoslavia are delicious, but about peaches, apricots and mainly grapes I am rather a jingo. Which to prefer must depend on what is around. At this very moment my wish would be rather modest. I should like to walk out with you from P.V. to the *Lukács fürdö* (an open air swimming pool) five minutes hence, and have a swim either in your company or if you don't feel like it leaving you for a quarter of an hour alone. Then we should go to the next *tejcsarnok* (a kind of milk-bar) and have some white cheese with sour cream and a plateful of scrambled eggs. In the meantime I might wonder what my favourite colour is—the green-grey, which you say is that of your eyes, or that of your hair. At the moment I decide for the latter, for obvious reasons."

We agreed that to lessen the dangers involved we should not write anything of politics or of A.V.H. cruelties. But otherwise the register of our subjects was unlimited. Florence, once in her stride, crowded the sheets so much with tiny letters that I was sometimes hardly able to decipher them in the scanty light of the electric bulb. Recollections of her family and details of her everyday life varied in her letters with most serious problems. Herewith

an example of the latter: "Please don't laugh, but I worry a lot about a problem which I can't settle without you. What should the baby be called? I hope you will agree that only a girl-baby can come in question. I don't mind twins, a girl and a boy, but I must have a girl-baby." The names which I subsequently suggested horrified her. Slave rebellion started at once.

One night after a long knocking dialogue a gaoler called in with a broad grin: "Knuckles on your fingers, I suppose?" I pretended not to understand but it was in vain. He had overheard me. "Why the hell do you do such things?" he said. "All right if you think it worth knocking him a Good night, but to go on for hours . . ." I promised him never to do it again. He pretended to believe it. Whether he was an honest chap or simply anxious to avoid controversy with one who might be released as a new Kádár the following day, I cannot decide. As I pointed out, statistically speaking, the decent amongst them were very few but I had never known him before and ought not to pass judgement. His reprimand was really meant to be a warning for caution. My neighbour got the same warning: we did not disclose of course that we had not simply been knocking to each other. "Really I promise, Sir, I shan't do it any more," I said. And then added with a smile of complicity, "Or at any rate not often, it is really not worth while. It was only family matters. But what's the use of taking risks for that. It may be if it were a girl. . . ." The sergeant waved his hand: "O you old men and the girls. Your time has long passed for it." "You are right," I said, "so I promise. . . ."

So we decided to be cautious. We reduced knocking to the minimum. Instead Florence invented another prison language, far more lengthy and cumbersome but it seemed to us safe at that moment. The pushing of the chair would be our signature tune. Three kicks on the wall would be a signal that we could listen. And then we would start walking letters. With awful big bangs we walked all day. After *a* or *b* one had to stop as though petrified and scratch one's head as in a fit of deepest abstraction, lest it should look very unnatural to the gaoler if he happened to peep in.

Z of course gave opportunities for a long though sometimes emphatic walk, and then one was most careful to step so that, if possible, one stopped by the window or the door: again, to avoid unnatural gestures. Florence I knew was not a great walker; she regularly shirked the solitary morning walks in the courtyard (fifteen minutes of these were allowed to each prisoner). It amused me that she had now to walk for hours all the same. It was noble of her. For me it was a sacrifice for different reasons. However spoiled we were at that moment of our hoped-for release, I was unable to get a pair of boots which fitted. This was due to inefficiency rather than ill-will but it could not apparently be helped. There were nails sticking up from my heels. This made my pleasure somewhat painful.

More painful, I was again almost caught. My benevolent sergeant showed me a sheet of paper. Some incoherent words were written on it but some I could nevertheless decipher. "Mi love" for instance. "Now what's that?" the sergeant asked me. "No idea," I answered, "these don't make sense." The sergeant, needless to say, did not know English. It was up to him and his fellow gaolers to pass it on to quarters who might know. "Well, I don't know, but you'd better be careful how you walk, you are not alone in this prison and some complain about how loud you do it." He banged the door on my nose. I thought of rewarding him by an invitation card to my wedding later on but I did not know his name.

We could assume we were surrounded by *vamzers* but could not decide to give it up. Our more detailed exchanges were by now confined to the "Bokses" but information about the whereabouts of the boxes themselves and other urgent messages had to be delivered at once by stepping hard. Such was my message, after a slave's mutiny, that I would "smack" her. "I don't sugest iou dare" she walked and, on that evening, we went to bed without walking Good Night.

In the first half of March, 1954, she told me about the most recent promise made to her by an Interrogator. She would be released under an amnesty on April 4th (anniversary of Hungary's liberation from the Nazi rule) and

would later have a chance of applying for a revision of her case. I was of course very glad. But farewell is a melancholy affair. I wrote my first and presumably last poem in English:

How can I bear
Losing Washbear?
In three weeks' time, I learn, she will be free;
Within three months she'll have forgotten me.
Forgotten all our calls
Through ceilings, floors and walls;
Our kisses and our talks,
By knocks, by kicks, by walks;
The meetings of our souls,
Through boxes, ribs and holes;
Our arguments and cracks
Concerning hits and smacks;
Our intercourses pending,
And still with happy ending . . .
Her love in solitude arisen
Will vanish once she's left the prison,
Its memory will turn to dust and ashes
Eclipsed by young, and smart and handsome Pashas.

So spoke a voice internal
Sneering with grins infernal
But don't think I believe a word
Of what I heard.
O no, I know for sure,
That that's but nonsense pure,
And that my rapping-stepping pet
Won't me forget.
And so we'll have in June
Defacto honeymoon,
Followed by babies, girl and sonny,
Bright as fullmoon and sweet as honey,
(Presumably though somewhat funny).

This at any rate is the recollection which makes me blush very much; but it has to be printed, not only for the per-

son who inspired these rhymes and surely deserved something better, but for the truth of the record.

In prison I had difficulties with my teeth. Some had to be extracted. As I was careless enough to report them I was several times taken to hospital. On the day I learned of Florence's hopes for release I told her that, as I had heard from the prison doctor, I might be dispatched to the hospital any moment. Danger or no danger, we were walking in a rage. *She:* "In Easter cake vil be leter." *I:* "Dont im afraid it mai involve mi sister." My sister would have brought the cake to me after Florence had been released. I could not finish the sentence as the guard called in for me.

Chapter 12

Hunger-Strike and Mona Lisa

My shuttle-trips between various prison-blocks reflected the tug-of-war going on between the de-Stalinizers and the Stalinists. It was thawing and freezing, re-thawing and re-freezing all the time. The A.V.H. was a Stalinist stronghold; it did not openly oppose Socialist Legality but sabotaged its implementation. On the morrow of my arrival at P.V. I was interrogated by a young officer, who tried to persuade me that I should now freely confess—if not to the whole, at least to some of the charges for which I had been sentenced. "I confess I am not a Communist," I said, "but this I suppose is no crime under the laws of the People's Republic." "I agree it is not; but I did not ask you about your opinions. The question is, what were your reasons for gathering information about Hungary. . . ." After two such sessions, nothing more happened in that direction. The interrogator very politely reassured me: "The fact that you are here means that your case is to be taken up. But you mustn't be impatient. You must understand that things are very complicated . . ." I did "understand" but I am sure he did not. He just repeated what he

was told to say. The Rákosi clique was temporizing; of the Socalist convicts, Anna Kéthly alone was released, obvously as a sop to her comrades in the West. Dozens of others who had been sentenced as her subordinates in the "spy-ring" remained in gaol. I was taken to the Gyüjtö hospital, and then taken back to P.V., and then again to hospital. It was there that the re-freezing of my case became apparent to me.

A gaoler at the hospital received me with the coarse shouts to which I had not been accustomed since the revision of my trial. "What's all that dirt," he grumbled pointing to my belongings, and started fumbling in my papers. I had a shock: Florence's letters were among them. But impertinence is on such occasions the sole chance. And again, reliance on the literophobia of political policemen. "I warn you, sir, that I wrote all this on instructions from the Commander at P.V. If one single sheet goes astray it will be your responsibility." "Shut your bloody mouth," the gaoler answered but he left my papers alone; one never knew . . . Next he wanted to confiscate my cigarettes. "I warn you, sir, that I received them from the guards at P.V. and was explicitly told before being transported to this place that here too I should get the daily ration of fifteen cigarettes and the same food as the A.V.H. staff. If you deprive me of them I shall refuse to eat, and it will be your responsibility." After an unprintable reply he left the cigarettes and left me altogether with a furious bang.

My next quarrel arose about books. The people in charge said that for three or four days no books would be distributed and until then I could not get any. I started banging at the door and said I would repeat this every hour unless I got something to read. Amidst the most threatening shouts the gaolers refused to grant my request but after some hours' time a domestic worker entered with a huge volume in his hand: "Now look here, keep quiet. That sergeant woman (at that time it was a woman) would not allow this but I managed to get you . . ." I knew this was a face-saving manoeuvre but I ac-

cepted the volume with thanks. I was punished for my violence: it was *Communists* by Aragon, one of the dullest books I ever read.

I was given the ordinary prisoner's food which was bad as always, and the cigarette ration was not forthcoming, however often I asked for them. My reserves had run out. Some fellow prisoners clandestinely sent cigarettes to me through the prison doctor but the day came when I had nothing to smoke. That had of course happened frequently before but now I was no longer willing to put up with it. Indeed I was ashamed of caring so much about smoking—more than about the quality of the books, or the quality of my food, or the chances of my liberation or the delay in the revision of my case. A smoker is a slave. Could I take the risk of a hunger-strike? Apart from anything else, it might give them the idea of searching my papers thoroughly. I felt it would be irresponsible in the circumstances to provoke them; yet I was at the end of my tether. The following morning, when the door opened with the can of dark, lukewarm liquid they called coffee, and a piece of bread, I told the domestic worker: "Will you please report that I refused to accept food and shall go on doing so until I get the ration of cigarettes promised to me?" I repeated this at midday and in the evening for two subsequent days.

Of course, it was very disagreeable. Stinking food is bad but no food whatever is even worse. But I felt I could not give in. Now in a state of stubborn hunger I paced my cell all day long. On the third day, the Deputy Commander of the Gyüjtö dropped in: "Is it true that you refuse to eat?" "Yes, sir." In a very irritated but not particularly rude tone he asked me a dozen questions and then abruptly said: "I order you to eat. You can't make conditions. But I promise your case will be taken up. I promise. This has nothing to do with your hunger strike. You should be grateful that on this occasion we shall not punish you for it. Now start eating at once. I promise . . ." I knew it was the utmost he could do without openly giving in. The semolina boiled in smelly sunflower oil was

quite welcome at that moment. I took care not to eat too much at once after almost three days of fasting. A few days later I was transferred to a special wing of the Gyüjtö—the section for those prisoners whose case had been accepted for revision.

My solitary confinement ended for a while. During the courtyard walks we could exchange messages with the inmates of other cells and with some new prisoners peeping out from their windows. We got the guards' diet again and our daily ration of cigarettes. We shared them with whom we could; we went out for walks with half-loaves of bread hidden under our jackets and, when not observed by the guards, threw them into one or another window. Between upper and lower floors, a post by string was developing which worked quite tolerably with our assistance at dusk. Traffic in cigarettes and matches was strong, in spite of strict prohibition. Even more, in fag ends, surreptitiously picked up from the court; the contents of three average fag ends, rolled in a piece of toilet-paper, made a good strong cigarette and no prisoner was so fastidious as to refuse it. To some, we threw paper and pencil—and this was not merely for unselfish reasons. We hoped that someone recently arrested might provide us with up-to-date information. One or two of them, not more, were intelligent enough to do this properly.

The most striking information was that Imre Nagy had resigned. His successor as head of the Government was a fairly unknown young man, András Hegedüs, from a People's College and with what was called a "Hungarian popular" background. How to evaluate this? The wishful thinkers believed it must be a good thing: not even Imre Nagy, they thought, had been national enough for the new era as he had after all been a Moscow-trained man. This interpretation was supported by the fact that the former Minister of Defence, Mihály Farkas, a leading figure of the anti-Tito terror campaign, had been pushed aside.

But we found out gradually that the opposite had hap-

pened. Rákosi had succeeded in torpedoing Imre Nagy at the Kremlin. Nagy was forced to resign. His successor, Hegedüs, was Rákosi's puppet. The eclipse of Mihály Farkas had a private cause. When de-Stalinization started, Farkas suddenly changed sides and turned against Rákosi. He experimented with Fouché's trick; for it was Fouché who, after acting as Robespierre's henchman, joined the conspiracy which overthrew and killed his master and thus managed to keep himself in high positions for later régimes. Farkas was less fortunate. Rákosi came back and took his revenge on him: he used him as a scapegoat for the illegalities committed. The Stalinists ousted him and later, in 1956, the de-Stalinizers had him arrested. Even treachery does not always pay.

We learned from a young prisoner recently arrested that Malenkov had resigned and made "self-criticism" because of his right-wing deviation. Imre Nagy, we gathered, was expected to do the same but refused. The Government cry was "back into the co-operatives"; the Imre Nagy Government was blamed for its willingness to abandon the plans for huge capital investment and to concentrate on consumer goods. In spite of this Rákosi made repeated gestures of friendship to Tito and received one snub after another. The Jugoslav prisoners felt this and became increasingly courageous—and even, to their credit, impertinent. Some of them had always been rather daring. Now they organized loud demonstrations and hunger-strikes, and beat some of their own *vamzers*. They got away with fairly light punishments.

We Hungarian subjects were given increasingly harsh treatment. The release of prisoners did not altogether stop, and some events encouraged us to hope that our own turn was about to come. We learned, for instance, that Cardinal Mindszenty had "provisionally been released from prison"; would it then be possible to keep the masses of minor "criminals" in gaol? As events showed, it would have been possible if Rákosi had had it his own way. He was cynical enough for propaganda pur-

poses to release Cardinal Mindszenty or Anna Kéthly and, at the same time, to keep in gaol their less known "accomplices."

The re-freezing was carried out gradually. One day we were ordered not to talk, even to one another, during communal exercise. Next, our diet was changed back to that of the ordinary prisoners. Then the distribution of cigarettes stopped, and surprise raids were made on our cells, resulting in the confiscation of tobacco, matches, lighters . . . Our "telegraph" decision, by knocks over the walls and whispers during exercise, was quick. About a dozen of us chose a deadline, and then collectively refused to accept food.

The prisoner who was keenest on this decision was a Marxist believer who took Socialist Legality seriously. He urged us to insist on the continuation of hearings concerning the revision of our case. This was one, and formally the most important, of our demands. But I did not deny that what interested me most was cigarettes. I believed in Socialist Legality less than in the possibility of soothing my nerves with nicotine.

A good hunger-striker always eats in secret. Not much, but enough to keep himself going while he is conspicuously losing weight. Some of us had already hidden some slices of bread and now soaked and ate them in little bits. Others were helped to a spoonful of vegetable by a domestic worker. I had hard luck. Two of my three cellmates were devoted supporters of the Stalinist régime; they refused to take part in the strike, and I could certainly not trust their discretion if they had seen me eating. Some who were in a position similar to mine, refused to go to exercise or to the weekly shower-bath, arguing that they were too weak to do so, and used this opportunity to take a bit unnoticed. But I could not decide to do this; I wanted the shower-bath too badly; and the walks with a chance of finding fag-ends in the courtyard, and getting matches from the engineers peeping out of their windows, were too tempting to be resisted. On just one occasion I managed to get a piece of bread from the domestic

worker, unnoticed by my cell-mates. I chewed and swallowed it on my couch late at night.

This hunger-strike lasted about eight to ten days. For the first forty-eight hours I felt the sort of ferocious urge for eating which I had experienced on the earlier occasion, in the hospital. But later, hunger stopped. In fact, during my imprisonment, this short period was the only one when I refrained from day-dreaming meals; my appetite, even for scrambled eggs, had gone. After the critical hunger-days I simply felt nausea. I was weak, had a sickish taste in my mouth, but did not feel faint. I should have liked to vomit, as an expression of my view of the world rather than any other reason. The other thing I should have liked to do was smoke. Nothing could spoil my appetite for cigarettes.

Higher quarters for a while pretended not to know about our hunger strike. They thought we might get tired of it before the critical time. But we held out. At last an investigating commission arrived on the spot and we were summoned before them, one by one.

"Is it true, Ignotus, that you have been refusing to eat since. . . .?"

"That's right, sir."

He clapped his hands, as if by amazement: "You, such an intelligent man as you are, how could you have done so? You know that's a disciplinary offence?"

"I know, sir."

"How then could you have done such a thing?"

"I think, sir, that no man, not even a prisoner, should be expected to abide by regulations if these are violated by the very authorities which are responsible for their implementation."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I presume we live under Socialist legality. I know that was not the case when we were in the hands of the Gábor Péter gang. Then we had no right whatever. . . ."

"You know of course that Gábor Péter is under arrest?"

"I do, sir."

"You recognize that many a thing has changed in the treatment of prisoners since we got rid of those gangsters."

"Certainly, sir, it has changed first for the better and now for the worse."

"Now what are your complaints?"

"That promises made to me by the authorities were not kept, and favours granted, revoked, one after another, without reason given."

He shook his head disapprovingly but kept up his benevolent tone. He took his pencil: "Now tell me what those promises were and what you expect should happen."

"I was encouraged to apply for a revision of my case. After two hearings when it became clear that I had been sentenced on false charges the proceedings were stopped. I have no idea what is to happen to me. In the meantime, the privileges allowed to those prisoners whose case is under revision have all been withdrawn. In fact I am now worse off than I was before the revision of my case. Then at least I was allowed to work in the translating bureau and received cigarettes and pay. Now I am deprived of the rights of the ordinary prisoners simply because the falseness of the charges against me had become so obvious that I was selected for revision."

"Well, it is not for me to decide what was true in those charges and what was not. You know a great number of people have already been released but you are an intelligent man and will certainly realize that we can't annul all sentences because some indeed were based on forged evidence. The willingness of the Authorities to remedy past evils should induce you to show more self-discipline and not the contrary."

"Yes, if I knew that something is being done about my case."

"I assure you it won't be forgotten."

"In the meantime I am unable to accept a worse position than I was in before." I suddenly dropped the official tone and said in anger: "I tell you frankly, sir, whatever happens I shan't eat until I am allowed to smoke. That

may seem ludicrous to anyone but certainly not to a smoker. I don't speak of our other requests or demands —call them what you like—of which I presume you have already a full list from my fellow hunger-strikers. As to myself, I can only tell you that if you don't let me smoke I shall die here. Artificial nourishment may save my life for one week or two but you know very well that it won't do more than that."

He shook his head, as it were, in benevolent despair: "You, such an intelligent man . . . now look here. I promise you, I give you my word of honour, that we shall take up the case, and look into the matter. But you too must co-operate. Please consent to eat from now onwards."

"Sorry, sir, not until the distribution of cigarettes is resumed."

"So you don't trust us?"

"It's not a question of trusting or not. My experience of the last few months convinced me that it is no good for me just to trust and carry on like that. I must insist that promises made to me should be kept."

"Well, I am sorry. You are doing a great disfavour to yourself." And he dismissed me.

A few hours later a domestic worker stepped into the cell with a can full of semolina boiled in milk—in milk, this time, specifically prepared for us in the hospital! "Now start eating, I'll bring you five cigarettes at once, unofficially. And tomorrow, everything confiscated from you will be returned. You need not worry."

"Do the rest of us accept it?"

"Of course. I wouldn't say so, if they didn't." It was a domestic worker we trusted. I started eating and indeed got the cigarettes. The following day "everything" (which meant some books, a pair of socks and some cigarettes) was returned to me. Only my lighter, handed in by my sister some months ago by the commander's special permission had disappeared for good. Later I applied again and again to get it back but it "could not be found."

So our status was for a while re-established. We went on waiting for new hearings about our case. But this did

not last long. Several of us were taken away—in fact the whole "unit" was dispersed. When the gaoler stepped in and asked one or another to follow him the prisoner could not of course know whether he would be led to a place where his case would at last be taken up, or just sent into another prison. Against such orders, resistance would not only have been hopeless but might have turned out to be a protest against one's own liberation.

Without explanation, I was thus led into a tiny cell, in an overcrowded "wing for Social Democrats" whose case was not under revision. Hygienic conditions were atrocious all over the wing. I was huddled together with three others in a cell designed, at the most, for two; but twelve to fourteen prisoners were squeezed into some other cells of the same size. Our main pastime was to catch bugs and fleas. Some prisoners were so ill that they simply could not leave their dusty straw-sacks; their companions had to hand them the bed-pans. Such people had been kept for a while in hospital but now, apparently under the order that Social Democrats must be crammed together in one wing, such hygienic considerations were no longer valid. Through a domestic worker I still received some cigarettes and matches, sent to me by the engineers. Another domestic worker, one of the well-known *vamzers,* denounced us. Our cell was raided, the straw scattered out of our sacks and spread over the floor, we were left in a suffocating cloud of dust. An old fellow-prisoner of mine was mainly sorry for a booklet in which he had till then succeeded in preserving his prison-poetry. They were very bad poems but he had put his heart into them. I was sorry for my cigarettes. I protested to the sergeant who made the raid. He was a smart fellow, resembling the young Maurice Chevalier. At the time of the first Thaw he had acquired a reputation as a considerate gaoler. He was in charge of Cardinal Mindszenty's carefully isolated cell, and moved about in the prison-block with a genial smile. Since then he had refrozen, together with the Government. He was brutal with us too. Violating the regula-

tions according to which (since regulations were vaguely supposed to be observed) the cells and belongings of prisoners must not be searched without their attendance, he ordered us to leave the cell and to stand, our faces towards the wall, while his favourite domestic worker was messing our things up and taking what he cared to keep. My protest was futile.

Winter came, my last prison winter. Inside our cell only our breath preserved some warmth, and it was bitterly cold outside. But I would never miss the communal walk in the courtyard, both for fresh air and a hope of hearing some news. Now it was in crowds, about eighty at once, that we went for our walk; and as there were always some surprising innovations, physical jerks were now introduced for the sake of our health. It was a pathetic sight and in a way quite amusing to see the worn down prisoners in their ill-fitting boots and ragged frieze uniforms, hopping about and rhythmically bowing to keep themselves fit. We were severly ordered to line up according to cells, but always managed to create a bit of chaos in which information could be clandestinely exchanged.

Though the ban on my seeing visitors was never lifted I got round it by ignoring it. When the turn came for names starting with *I,* I applied for permission to invite my sister—my half-sister in fact, my mother's daughter by her first marriage—as a matter of course. She had to queue from 1 till 8.30 in the evening but was at last allowed to see me, in the presence of the Prison Commander, a major well known for his stupidity.

This happened when I had not yet been thrown back into the mass of ordinary prisoners; my case was still supposed to be under review and, accordingly, I spoke to her with considerable optimism. She had aged of course during the past six years and so had I, though fairly fit at that moment through sharing the guards' diet.

It was the first face in which I could see a reflection of what had been happening while I was secluded from the world.

I knew I was not allowed to touch her but ignored this to exchange a quick kiss with her. The Prison Commander called us to order but was not rude; I still ranked with those of whom one could not know . . . It was a moving and embarrassing moment: how would we carry on after six years' interruption?

Most embarrassing for me was the loss of some of my front teeth. At the time of my arrest my teeth were in a sound state but after that a decline in number and quality set in—first from kicks in the face during interrogations, and later from more natural causes. They were neglected or badly mended, and ultimately a number of them had to be extracted. This made me feel awkward, not so much for my appearance but the fact that I heard myself lisping.

"Well, what really is your work now?" I asked my sister.

I knew she had had to leave the Floris restaurant, in the centre of Budapest, of which she had been manageress for many a year; but she had contrived to stay "in the trade," managing a little suburban cafeteria. I felt she had had a harrassed life. I only learned the details later. She had not declared that she was my sister. On the usual printed forms asking whether she had any relations in prison, or concentration camps, she answered No. She constantly feared that her lie might be found out. The concierge of the block where she lived was an extremely honest woman and told her, "Yesterday your boss called on me and asked about you. She asked whether you were in correspondence with anyone in Western countries. I said 'Yes, with her sister, Mrs. Erdös'; I did not of course mention that she was a Miss Ignotus. Then she asked me whether you were planning to go abroad. I answered 'Oh no, I don't think so, on the contrary, as far as I know she is trying to persuade her sister to return to Hungary.' " This is just an example of what life was like in the Rákosi régime. Every second night the lorries arrived under A.V.H. surveyance, collecting the people who were singled out for deportation. Many a person spent these

nights sleepless, glaring out of the windows, trying to guess whose turn it was and wondering when it might be his own. Many of my friends were deported and some died before reaching their destination.

My half-brother, a doctor of some standing, a member of the Social Democrat Party, had died of heart failure. Whether he guessed that prison was so near for him as my interrogations suggested, we shall never discover. He was apparently worried, mainly because of my arrest, but behaved in a calm way, even pretending to believe what I wrote in the small ration of letters to my relatives, that my treatment was humane and satisfactory.

"And Mother?" I asked my sister. She was by then the doyenne not only of my immediate family but of our whole circle, approaching her ninetieth birthday. This made her livelier and more sanguine than anybody else. She had endured and seen so much, that nothing shocked her any more. Each new day of her life was a special gift for her, only spoiled by my younger sister's exile and still more by my imprisonment. "I just want to see you once more before I die," she scrawled on a letter to me with her trembling hands; her eyesight and hearing were failing but altogether, as my sister said, "she is a miracle, carrying on, interested in everything . . ." Through the worst years of the Rákosi régime it was her good luck, and that of her son and daughter, that the man in charge of the literary funds, György Bölöni, allowed her a pension on account of my deceased father; so she did not have to depend entirely on the support of her children and friends.

"And what about Flo? Did you see her?" I asked *en passant*. My sister was quick and answered with an unemphatic "No, I didn't." I learned this way that Florence was still in prison.

I had three more such visits from my sister, in ever harsher circumstances. She saw me always more and more haggard, more depressed. The two last visits took place in the hall designed for that purpose, with double railings between us, under the supervision of sergeants. She cas-

ually mentioned that she had met "Florka." So she had indeed been released, though later than promised . . . And what did she say, I inquired. She said "Still."

This had been a keyword in our knocking conversations. Once when I had been away from my cell for a fortnight she knocked after my return: "I onli ask iou one vord: Stil?" I answered "More than ever." But now my message was that she should give that up. I saw no more hope for my release. I could not expect her to wait for me forever.

The sergeants in charge just stupidly glared at us while we were talking. When I burst out in shouts "Ils mentent, ils mentent," hinting at the promises made to me and then broken, they did not take any notice of the strange mumbo-jumbo. My sister tried to reassure me: "Don't be desperate, Mona Lisa often inquires about you." The sergeant just behaved like an hour-glass; his job was to see that the visit was not to last more than ten minutes. That a girl called Lisa should have tender feelings for me was not a thing he would object to. I appreciated the kind message, but confess I did not know how to interpret it. A fellow prisoner solved the riddle: Mona Lisa was in Paris. Surely my refugee friends had stirred up the interest of French writers who were now agitating for my release.

I found this interpretation plausible and it proved right. I had already had signs of steps taken to help me. I knew that back in 1949 Michael Károlyi had approached Rákosi's deputy Gerö on my behalf. I learned even in the Stalin era that the B.B.C. had quoted my name beside that of Anna Kéthly when referring to Labour Party protests. Later, I was interrogated about my contacts with "the American agent Thomas Mann" and the "covering organization of I.S. which uses the covering name P.E.N. Club," and I could well guess from the questions that they had tried something on my behalf; in fact, as I later learned, Thomas Mann had written a letter to the "ideological dictator," József Révai, inquiring about me, but received no reply. The "Trotskyite leaders" Stephen

Spender, Arthur Koestler and Ignazio Silone used also to crop up among those plotters against the working class who must have been known to me (though in fact I had never met Silone before my arrest). The questions were tiresome but more amusing than those about people living in Hungary. And they were also flattering by implication.

Now such interrogation went on less crudely: I was just asked very politely to explain about British and French authors and scholars who were in my opinion the sworn enemies of the People's Democracies, and about others who might be won over to support the Peace Movement. They assumed I was a progressive man and sensible enough to realize that in case of a *détente* my chances of release were to increase . . . I could not guess the list of very distinguished French writers who, warned by my friends, had protested on my behalf; but putting little hints together it had become my conviction that I was not forgotten either in London or in Paris.

At this juncture it was this which saved me from death, or at least from mental collapse. Many things were hideous in the A.V.H. prisons. The systematic corporal tortures at the beginning, and the nightmare of interrogations about relatives and friends for years to come. Cold, hunger, lack of space and air, solitary confinement, and to be crammed together with fellow-sufferers were all terrible; but nothing, not even lack of tobacco, could be so bad as the sense that one was forgotten. It is worth emphasizing this because the question often arises, whether or not to take a moral stand for people suffering in political prisons. "Do we not do them more harm than good by showing our sympathy for them?" many would ask. The answer is No. First of all because there is hardly ever a tryant, however determined to defy world opinion, who would not be more easily prepared to victimize someone about whom nobody cares than one whose martyrdom, he knows, will go down in history. It was not an accident that Cardinal Mindszenty among the priests, and Anna Kéthly among Social Democrats, were released first; the chief

culprits before their accomplices—for the simple reason that their imprisonment had aroused the greatest public indignation.

Can there be no exception to this rule? Has there never been an example of increased vigilance over the prisoner concerned, and even of maltreatment, on account of such protests? This is possible. But a prisoner is glad to endure such additional pains if he knows that they are due to the interest taken in him. This anyway was how I felt. Once I knew that British and French authors, journalists and politicians were asking about me, and that my chief-gaolers were nervous about these inquiries, I did not mind for a moment what additional troubles might be in store for me. It gave me courage, and made me feel my importance. There was perhaps some vanity in this, of which I should be ashamed; but without it perhaps life not only in prison but anywhere would be intolerable.

I did not spend long in the cell with the old Social Democrats. "Pack up your traps and come," the gaoler told me.

"Where?"

"You'll see, come at once."

He led me into the Small Gaol, a building within the great prison camp of Gyüjtö. It was famous for its various peculiarities. Next to it stood the scaffold, and prisoners could now and then hear the sounds connected with executions. On its first floor women prisoners were held. On its other floors were the cells for specially rigorous imprisonment. The windows were so high that prisoners could not look through them, and there was an extra iron mesh on them which made it impossible to climb up. Many of its prisoners were in solitary confinement but even those who shared a cell were most severely segregated from the rest. There could be no chance for anyone in the Small Gaol to receive extra food or cigarettes. The greatest privilege allowed to a few was books from a very poor library, and some ten minutes' walk in the courtyard under strict supervision.

My sojourn in the building started with the confiscation of my "traps," including four or five dirty fag ends which I had been planning to roll into cigarettes and light when I could get a chance. I was stripped and searched all over. A ragged vest which I had managed to keep till then was also among the confiscated properties. It was bitterly cold in the cell, and I received only one flimsy blanket for the night.

"So you want to take all this from me and leave me freezing here?" I asked the gaoler.

"Don't ask questions, do as you are ordered."

I started shouting: "You have no right to do this. You think you can still behave as you did under the Gábor Péter gang. I shan't tolerate this."

There were thick carpets on the passages of the Small Gaol; silence was compulsory. My howling, lisping voice cleaved the air. I dared this because I felt the British and French writers behind me, believe it or not . . . "If I perish here it shall be known that the successors of the Péter gang murdered me."

"Will you shut up or else. . . ."

"No, I shall not. People will know who is to be murdered," and I raised my voice as much as I could: "I am Paul Ignotuf!" I made another effort to pronounce it properly: "Ignotusss!"

The gaolers, three of them by then, were exasperated. One was a female from the women's department. They threatened, among other things, to take me at once to the prison lunatic asylum which was also situated in the Gyüjtö camp. I myself became tired of the melodramatic scene. "Well," I said, "it is your duty to report to the Prison Commander that from now onwards I refuse to accept food. Not until my grievances are remedied shall I eat."

"It's not your business to tell us what our duty is, you . . ." and the door banged.

So my third hunger-strike started. The following day when the gaoler arrived with the morning "coffee," I refused to accept it and applied for an immediate interview

with the Prison Commander, and for a book. The door was banged again and even angrier abuse than the gaoler's was shouted by the assisting domestic worker, a former White Gendarme Lieutenant. I have the impression he was really angry. He was a believer in subordination, servile and cruel on principle as well as by nature. He did not care which people or parties one might be serving. He liked disciplined injustice for its own sake.

Change of shift took place as a rule at 9 a.m. At midday a comparatively mild sergeant popped in. I repeated what I had said early in the morning. "Oh, you are mad," he shook his head. "Now that you have started hunger-striking you haven't a dog's chance of talking to the Commander or getting any books. I advise you to start eating at once and think yourself lucky if you can get away without punishment. Then in two or three months' time maybe the Comrade Commander might receive you."

"Sorry, Sergeant," I answered, "I can't change my mind. . . ."

I fasted for about three days. I felt my backbone was bent and my ribs sharply standing out like a skeleton's. I felt it was a struggle for life or death. Let me see whether they can afford to let me perish. Suddenly a domestic worker whispered through the peep-hole "I say! The Commander said he would come and see you in your cell. Man, do behave. Never anything like that has happened."

The Commander really came along. He was extremely polite. "Well, I really don't know about your case," he told me apologetically after hearing my complaints. "But look here, I have instructions to keep you here and it is very much against the rule to allow anyone to smoke in the Small Gaol. But I promise I shall urge a decision on your case and you will get an explanation soon. And what else did you want? Yes, you will get two extra blankets. . . ." I agreed to eat. The more so as at least my reputation was saved in that torture chamber. Again I must confess to vanity. When I saw the gaolers and domestic workers from then onwards glaring awestruck

at me, I felt I had won a victory—at any rate for some weeks.

I am not sure whether I started two or three more hunger-strikes later. In any case I knew it was worth making myself a nuisance. By threatening hunger-strikes, I managed to get transferred to hospital, hoping as always for some cigarettes and news, at least from the convict doctors. But I got hardly any. My main pastime was reading, but I did not always get any books. That is to say, not always the thing which I was interested in reading. Once the gaoler in charge could offer me nothing better than *By-Laws of the Chimney-Sweep Trade.* All right, I said, why not study these for a few hours? When at large I shall never have leisure to do so . . . For three weeks I could not get another book. The gaoler always gave me the stereotyped answer that "The library is being changed, and for the time being no books can be issued." Then he added to comfort me, "But look here, you have got a book to read . . ." I protested that I had already read and re-read it a hundred times and that I was not after all so much interested in the by-laws of the chimney-sweep trade. He could not understand my complaint. "All the same, it's a book," he repeated. Finally one of the convict doctors saved me from dying of boredom, by handing in some English volumes—plays by Shaw for instance, which he, as a great privilege, was allowed to keep with him.

As I pretended to be ill—which perhaps I was, though I am not sure of what—I was allowed to lie about during the day. Once an A.V.H. nurse came and ordered me to dress and go back to the Small Gaol. "Sorry, I shall not," I replied. She was flabbergasted. "What do you mean? You were ordered to." "I repeat I shan't. You do what you like, but I shan't go. If you want a row, you can have it." That happened before Christmas. I was left alone for some ten days. After New Year I felt it was not worth resisting any more. No news or tobacco. I occupied a cell among the prisoners again, under specially rigorous supervision. I found out that I was at that moment the only

one in solitary confinement throughout the building. Indeed I was proud of it. *Vanitatum vanitas,* luckily.

For technical reasons, at that time male and female gaolers were on duty together. This turned out to be lucky for me. Since my release I have often been told by former women-prisoners that they had found the female gaolers more cruel than the male. This was not my experience. Apparently, and not for very mysterious reasons perhaps, men were nicer to women, and women to men. Altogether, as I have said, almost all were hideous. But one of the women gaolers, a pretty young brunette, really contributed to saving my life by her kindness then. Perhaps it was my privilege of solitary confinement which turned her sympathy towards me, or perhaps my skeleton-like figure at that time. She offered me as many books as possible to read and gave me double portions of bread—a great treasure in view of the rottenness of the meals which I was often unable to eat even without a hunger-strike.

I knocked on the wall and on the radiator as usual to get news from fellow prisoners. But I got nothing except some silly wishful news. Cut off from everybody and everything, I did not know where to look for hope. I was tempted again to start a hunger-strike, demanding an interview with the Commander . . . But was it worth while? I should only ruin myself without getting anywhere. I had to decide whether to live or not.

I remember the dawn of 29th March. I struggled to my feet from my dusty straw-sack, and made my bed as ordered and washed. I got the lukewarm pseudo-coffee and double portion of bread from my brunette patroness. I started pacing my cell and wondering what to do. Then I clenched what had remained of my teeth and made up my mind: whatever happens I shall try to get well. I shall behave and eat, for two more years. If I have endured more than six years and a half I shall be able to endure two more. I must note this date, 29th March. If by 29th March, 1958, I am not released I shall kill myself. I shall make a final hunger-strike or commit suicide

in some other way. It is difficult to live in prison, but even harder to die without permission. But one manages with determination, and so shall I. For two more years I shall try. Two years more I shall invest in survival. No more than two, but until then no fuss: I shall eat.

Chapter 13

Released

AT THAT MOMENT my door opened, and the Young Chevalier sergeant burst in. His face was gleaming with humanitarian joy—apparently re-thawed. "Pack up your traps." "All of them or only my personal belongings?" I asked as usual. The reply was not so usual. "Come on my friend, don't ask a lot of questions." Friend? What quick promotion from his normal form of address! With a gesture of triumph, as though he had solicited my release, he showed the way.

I took "my personal belongings," chief of which were a toothbrush and a piece of lard, about one ounce, saved for the rest of the week from my Sunday supper four days before.

From his sudden benevolence I might have guessed that my captivity had come to an end. But I did not. I had trained myself so thoroughly in wariness against wishful thoughts that I did not allow myself to indulge that idea. I stepped automatically. In the central hall of the prison block I saw about a score of Social Democrat prisoners; some of them just being shaved by the prison barber, and the rest waiting their turn. I remember their faces less than the big wash-basin on the floor, covered with foam, and the gestures of the prison barber as he cleaned his knife and asked me to sit down, whispering: "Didn't I tell you the other day that you'd be released very soon?" In fact he had whispered it in my ears but I paid no attention. Even now I would not believe my own eyes. It could just be a hoax. Or, maybe, they would ask me to return

when I reached the prison gates, explaining they had mistaken me for someone else—it had already happened to some. Nevertheless I was willing to take one risk—my slice of lard. My fellow prisoner Stolte had been longing for fat all the time. "Couldn't you hand this to him or someone else . . ." I asked the barber. "I can't take anything now," he answered, "ask the gaoler . . ." Before I had a chance to do so I found myself clean-shaven together with other clean-shaven prisoners in the "room of smiles."

This was what the prisoners called the room where those awaiting liberation were collected. My fellow prisoners dashed at me in a state of agitation. "You have been in solitary all the time? You don't know a thing?" It was then that I learned about the de-canonization of Stalin. The news of the Twentieth Congress had leaked through —as had always been the case, with some exaggerations. "Stalin's corpse was transferred from the Mausoleum into the common cemetery. All books of Party History, etc. have been withdrawn—and do you know, what a funny chap D . . . (a domestic worker) is! Pretending not to know about the whole thing he applied for Stalin's works, as he said, to complete his own ideological re-education. He was told to go to hell. . . ."

I had a last look at ourselves in frieze uniforms as we queued in the passage to be admitted to the office room. It was exhilarating and heartrending at the same time. Next to me an octogenarian, a former Social Democrat M.P., sitting on a stretcher as for years he had been unable to stand on his feet; one of the dangerous "plotters" who might never have been released if it had not been for the orders from Moscow.

In the office, a stereotyped text was read to me, about my provisional release from prison; and some money handed to me in an envelope, irrespective of the claims which I might still have. . . . In the prison store, a suitcase with mufti in it which I recognized with great astonishment: a suit which I had left in London before my return to Hungary in 1949. . . . How did it arrive here? I only later learned that my half-sister in Budapest had got it

from my sister in London as they had been preparing to receive me. On the day before my release, my half-sister had been notified of the coming event and asked to send in some clothes. Practically everybody knew of my release sooner than myself.

A last attempt, as I was changing, with my lard: "Corporal, do you know the prisoner Stolte or someone else who needs fat badly. . . ." He was in too great a hurry to bother. Before arriving at the gates, I just saw my brunette patroness for an instant. "Kiss your hand," I called farewell in the old Hungarian fashion, and she reciprocated with the Magyar version of "au revoir." With my little suitcase in my hand, containing my notes and two or three books from my confiscated belongings, I found myself in a taxi which was to take me from the suburb where the Gyüjtö was situated towards the middle of the city.

Shall I say I was happy? It would not be the right word. I was simply unable to believe that it had happened. It was a dull day, and we drove between shabby grey rows of houses. I eagerly breathed the air so as to make sure that I was alive. Dull existence, the dullest on earth, but without a door locked on me: that was the thing I had day-dreamed of for almost seven years. That was the very thing which in my true dreams I knew to be unachievable. Now it had been achieved.

We were approaching the main avenue of Budapest, named since 1950 after Stalin. The driver turned back and asked me "Do you know what the new name of that Avenue will be?" And he cracked a pun at it. I had made up my mind to be cautious about *agents provocateurs.* And it would be only too logical to assume that a driver ordered to the prison building to collect recently released prisoners might report on what he heard from his passengers. But I answered his pun with a frank and uninhibited laugh. It was too good to be resisted. It was the first word which made freedom palpable to me. Under the dull sky, I felt the vibration of hopes and complicities which at that time penetrated Hungary.

Yet I felt I must see whether I really was free. Reaching the Grand Boulevard of Budapest I stopped the taxi:

would I really be able to cross the street unhampered and buy a ticket in the Metro as any ordinary human being, in the familiar stench of sweat and metal? Yes, I did. I had no idea how much a ticket was. I groped my way towards the seats as a provincial who had never seen anything like that. I glared at every face to see if I might find an acquaintance. No one took any notice of me.

As I had not heard of my mother for a long while I was worried about her. Where could I inquire? I called on a couple of concierges who knew her. "Oh Mr. Ignotus, is it really true. . . ." I shook their hands. "Please tell me only one thing. Is my mother still alive?" "Surely . . . she's been very ill but is much better now. Lying in a hospital. But why did you think that . . ." My half-sister was working in her cafeteria but the concierge let me into her small flat. He also gave me the telephone number where I could ring her, so that she could come at once. "Thanks, thanks." Before anything, I felt I must ring a dentist cousin of mine; it is absurd to see people if one lisps all the time. Before I could do so, the telephone rang. "Florence speaking." It was the first time I heard her voice. Another dream fulfilled. It was too sudden to be realized. "Look here, I really don't know, it's horrid for me to talk to you with such a senile accent. I must see a dentist. I am so sorry . . ." She took no notice of my apologies. "I want to ask you one word," she said: "Still?"

My half-sister arrived. A friend arrived. Florence arrived. The impressions were too crammed to be digested. The problems of the moment were overwhelming. It was well I had always prepared myself to face them once I got into the dreamland of freedom. Mainly the trivial problem of how to dispose of one's time. I must see X who had been helpful to my people in the worst period, and Y who had inquired so much about me, and must buy a tie and see a doctor and of course the dentist and call at the police. . . . On the first day, I could not spare time to visit my mother in the hospital. One friend rang after another. I must get a diary at once. . . . However

small my luggage, it was some time before I found a few minutes to unpack it. My notes, including the letters from Florence, which were stored and returned to me unread; some two or three books, two or three pairs of socks, a vest and a pair of slippers which had been sent to me but never reached me in gaol; and a toothbrush; and a slice of lard wrapped in a dirty piece of paper. My sister glared at it horror-stricken. "You won't eat it, I suppose." I did not know what to do about it; I was not used to throwing away such treasures but I realized there would be no one to take it to Stolte by now . . . "By the way," said Florence, "don't you want to eat anything?" "Yes, how stupid of me," my sister intervened. "I ask you about so many things and forget to ask you about that." In fact I had forgotten myself. How could I now revive my day-dreams of meals? Lunch time had passed by. "What about some scrambled eggs?" I asked her.

I stayed with my sister, sleeping on a broad and comfortable divan, in clean sheets, under a comfortable Central-European eiderdown. Again an impossible dream fulfilled. I stretched myself and tried to clean my brains. How account for all that had happened? I recalled the night of my arrest, the glare of the yellow electric bulb as I lay on the wooden bunk and thinking: "that's the end of it . . . I shall never be free again." In the depths of despair I had fallen asleep at once. In this night of relief I was unable to sleep for a second.

I was unable to sleep and unable to believe that I was not dreaming. So my first few days outside prison passed. In the meantime it was anything but dreamlike. It was a struggle to work through my agenda each day. My weight was about twenty kilos below the normal, my stomach had been unused to human food. I must put on weight and save myself from indigestion and mend my teeth and see everybody I should, and for heaven's sake not offend anyone. Such were my problems. And where transfer my mother who could no longer stay in the hospital but was still too weak to live on her own? And how should I let my sister in London know about my release? She had

been in touch with my half-sister during the last few years; but all the same would it be wise for me to write to her direct? Rákosi was still in power. He hated those he had released. Some few of his former prisoners joined and made common cause with him. The rest of us wandered about in the country as the branded enemies of a dictator who had been forced to tolerate them.

No one was allowed to move without an identity card in Hungary at that time. This was not an innovation; in the last twenty years there had hardly been any régime under which people could easily afford to leave their card at home if they went out for a walk. As a matter of course I had to report for registration, in various offices. It was quite amusing. I met a number of Social Democrat comrades, former fellow prisoners, on every occasion. In the antechambers of the police and other authorities we held gatherings without ever planning to do so. The very sight of these men whom I had only seen in frieze before was amazing as they turned up in their new outfits. . . . Most of them had no idea why this had happened to them. Should one take the promise of Socialist Democracy seriously? Socialist Democracy would inevitably bring us nearer to something like Social Democracy . . . Should we be grateful to Bulganin and Khrushchev for denouncing Stalin and compelling Rákosi to release us? "By no means" some argued; "they are no better than their master Stalin was. They were compelled to do what they did. The Soviet Union is on the brink of collapse. Do you think Bulganin and Khrushchev would invite themselves to Britain unless they had to? They wanted to please Gaitskell and Bevan, that's why they set us free." And so on and so forth. But it would be wrong to imagine that we talked mainly politics. We jubilantly congratulated a septuagenarian who had just married. When we walked out to the street and arrived at a tramway stop a staunch Socialist leader lifted his two hands as if in despair: "I can't get used to it . . . isn't it awful?"

"What?"

"At every tram stop to see these fat fag-ends lying about and not to pick them up. What a waste!"

For more than six years and a half I had prepared myself not only for death in prison but also for unhappiness on being released. I knew many of my friends would have died or grown old by that time; others would have forgotten me; and the young would not know me at all. It would be one disappointment after another.

It turned out much better than that. All my life pessimism had saved me from fatal shocks. In freedom I had chiefly to worry about reciprocating the kindness of people who remembered me. No doubt many of them revealed their kindness only after my release, but I was really too much concerned with the present to bother very much about reproaches for the past.

I went to see the director of the Literary Funds, Bölöni, to thank him for his generosity towards my mother in the worst years. He was friendly in his own reserved way but I did not even try to talk things over more fully with him; in spite of personal honesty, he was a diehard Communist. But he arranged that I should be invited to write a book which might have been a mixture of essays and autobiography. I am still sorry it could not have been written and published, but I enjoyed starting work on it.

I was invited to join the Writers' Association, and the Journalists' Union; I gladly accepted. I was invited to join the Party; I gratefully declined. I was invited to join the staff of the Government paper which was supposed to belong to the Popular Front, and I refused for the time being. It was agreed with a friendly editor, Géza Losonczy (later abducted by the Russians and killed in deportation), that I would join them if or when some of us got a chance to write as we liked.

I was asked to join the staff of the Institute for Research in Literary History, and accepted but the appointment was only confirmed six months later. Inviting and deceiving people like me were equally usual.

In general, everything seemed reassuring. There was no question of my having to be shy about my prison years. On the contrary, it was taken for granted that some amends must be made to us. The Stalinists were still in power, but we were in fashion.

There was a retrial. The nine of us who had been lumped together by the logic of A.V.H. at the end of 1950 and sentenced as British spies plotting against the international working class, were now summoned again to be rehabilitated as Hungarian patriots devoted to the international working class. Some of us had not known one another before meeting as co-plotters in 1950; and some had quarrelled so as not to be on speaking terms when we met as co-heroes in 1956. Our retrial, like our earlier trial, was held *in camera,* and this play-back of a farce was itself farcical. Yet this retrial, unlike the former trial, contained some elements of surprise—mainly from the just and legal manner in which the President of the Court, Mr. József Domokos, conducted it.

That we had all been sentenced on false charges, and had "confessed" under threats and tortures, was readily admitted by the prosecutor himself. Nevertheless some of the evidence about the kinds of torture surprised even me; it became clear not merely that my fellow prisoners had not exaggerated in describing their ordeals to me in prison, but that they had been afraid to tell me the whole story. Now, the cross-examination of former A.V.H. officers who were called as witnesses threw light on Grand Guignol details. One of the worst A.V.H. torturers, Ervin Faludi, by then dismissed from State Security service to a less conspicuous position as "Chief of a national enterprise," admitted everything with equanimity. That they had lied and had made us lie was a foregone conclusion.

There was just one important charge maintained against one of us. Ironically, he had done his best to please the Russians since their occupation of Hungary—Arpád Szakasits, former puppet President of the Hungarian People's Republic. Rákosi apparently dreaded his rivalry so much that he had ordered the prosecutor to insist on his guilt. The prosecutor admitted he had not been a British spy but maintained that he had been a police spy under Admiral Horthy. As proof of this a document was handed in, a report by the Hungarian political police chief to the Minister of Interior in the thirties, in which Szaka-

sits was mentioned with benevolence as one who provided the police with useful information.

There could be no doubt as to the authenticity of the stamps and signatures on the document. Szakasits pleaded not guilty on the grounds that he could not say why the Police Chief had "talked such nonsense"; it did not occur to him to question the authenticity of the document. To the surprise of all those present, including Szakasits himself, Mr. Justice Domokos declared: "The Court is not satisfied that all sheets in that document were typed by the same typewriter and therefore orders that it should be examined by an expert." Indeed it was examined; and the page containing the sentences compromising Szakasits turned out to have been faked.

Before the verdict all the accused—or rather the justified—made their last pleas. Marosán, once sentenced to death by Rákosi's court, after which he had co-operated again with Rákosi in running the Party machinery, made a most fiery speech. He is a suburban play-boy type, not unattractive, touching and grotesque in his awkward response to what had happened to him. Apparently his first thought was far removed from revenge; it was rather a wish to prove to his forsaken Social Democrat comrades that he had been right all the time. "György Marosán is no longer a Social Democrat," he shouted dramatically, "György Marosán is a Communist." And then: "We must denounce the lie according to which we have to thank Western Social Democracy for our release. The Twentieth Congress alone has liberated us."

The President of the Court promulgated that the details of the trial were to remain secret, except for the fact that all defendants were rehabilitated. I wired it to my sister in London.

I married. The event took place about one year after the date we had planned in prison, and as simply as possible. Not that I dislike ceremonies or spectacular weddings, and though I did not put the question to my wife I do not think she had any such objection either. But a cere-

mony should be appropriate, and nothing to fit our particular case has yet been invented. It just had to come as a semi-colon; the second half of the sentence, the "*de facto* honeymoon" forecast in my prison-doggerel, was to follow. It was a matter of grammar rather than social or religious organization.

There we were standing, six of us, in a medium-sized room of the Registry Office in the Town Hall. The mistress of ceremonies was a kind and ugly woman with a broad red-white-green band across her chest. With automatic solemnity she read the legal terms to us and asked each the expected question. I glanced at Florence to my left. She wore a Cameron tartan costume, a present from her relatives in Suffolk. Her nose was tilted in the air with just the impertinence I had imagined from the knocks on the wall: "Vho are? I voman." She had told me her eyes were grey-green. This turned out to be true, but different from my fantasies. I had known her as a heroine of conversations; these eyes now had the shimmer of inscrutable silence.

The fourth person in the room was a professional photographer authorized to attend all weddings in the building. Immediately after the ceremony he dashed at me with his price list, with its details of pictures in various sizes, with or without the lady with the red-white-green band, with or without the two witnesses who stood behind us. "All right, send me some samples," I told him and had a quick word with the lady official. She complained about the great number of divorces. "No wonder," she added, "as I see how marriages are arranged it is not astonishing to see how short they last. The other day a young man asked me to hurry up because after the wedding he had to go back to his office."

One of the witnesses was my wife's uncle, a former judge, a man of much knowledge, humour and affection. He could hardly find a word to say and quickly left us. The other was an old friend of mine and of my deceased father, a most charming and witty Hungarian author with the habit (which he thinks more important than his literary work) of hiding a flute under his jacket and impro-

vising strange performances on it when the right moment comes. He saw us to Florence's home, shared a cold meal in the family circle and made friends with the dachshund who had by then become my stepdaughter. In a few hours' time, my wife and I were in the train on our way towards a few days in the country.

The Stalinists kept in power but we did not disappear from fashion. The kindness showered on me became embarrassing. I had glances of envy and hope from people of the *ancien régime*: "I am sure it is *your* turn now . . . they won't be able to prevent that . . ." It was not always clear who they had in mind. I was trying tactfully to disenchant them. Khruschchev might not be a Stalin but this did not mean he was an Ignotus. Nor was Ignotus a Count Bethlen . . . Oh, they were sure Khrushchev would come round. He must see the moral and economic bankruptcy of a régime forced upon a people against everybody's will. And there was no question of their wanting a Count Bethlen or a Cardinal Mindszenty or anything like that, let alone an extremist of the Right. They wanted sound and enlightened people in power. They simply wanted to breathe freely and to earn their living.

Even more embarrassing were the fits of kindness from Communists. "When can I see you, when could you have dinner with us? Yes, I realize you are busy but perhaps one evening next week. . . ." And another: "Now you are told that I am a wicked Stalinist. But those who are clamouring loudest today for Socialist Legality and the like did not open their mouths before '53. I saw . . . the other day with you. Do you know what he said about you after your arrest? He said 'I have always known he is a dirty swine, a British spy.' Now he is playing the fighter for freedom." Even Rákosi's supporters talked like that. And there was a spark of truth in what they said. Every fashion, even the noblest, has its host of opportunists.

Of the Communist writers I met at this time, the most remarkable was Tibor Déry. We were old friends but had never really been on intimate terms. Before the war, we used to sit about in the same cafés and contribute to the

same periodicals—and a strong link between us was our mutual friend the late Attila József, the great Hungarian poet from between the wars; but we had few interests in common. He was an experimentalist doomed, I thought, to refined immaturity for his life-time. Socialist Realism, some years after the end of the war, had a double effect on him; it induced him to make concessions to Party propaganda and vulgarity, and at the same time helped him to call a spade a spade—something from which he had been inhibited by his *avantgarde* tendencies. This new mixture of sincerity and insincerity could have been the end of his originality; as things turned out, it was his great stimulus. As he had been the best-known fiction-writer among the old Party members, the cultural dictators expected him to *Zhdanovize* without reservation; and the artist in him protested. A campaign against him was launched by the local Zhdanovs in the heyday of Stalinist dictatorship, and several of us in prison who had known him were pestered to disclose "Déry's contacts with Horthy's political police" of which we "must have been aware."

I cannot judge whether, without such Party pressure, he would have become the fighter for freedom and the eminent and mature writer he is. Maybe he is indebted to our local Zhdanovs for his glorious career. If he had been left in peace, as many a non-Party writer was, and appreciated as a highbrow eccentric without being taken too seriously, he might have remained one of the distinguished nonentities crowding every nation's literature. But he was forced by Party orders to look to the common man, and the discovery of the common man turned him against the Party. "Do you feel you were mistaken in trusting the Party?" I asked him after my release. "Yes," he said, "I was mistaken; but I don't regret it."

I never asked him to explain what he meant by this; I agreed. Not only because old Party membership at that time—just after the Twentieth Congress—enabled anyone to stand up for human rights more vigorously than if he had been outside the Party or a new recruit; there was also a deeper reason. To believe in Communism was an

error, no less detrimental perhaps to millions of people than belief in Fascism; but, unlike Fascism, it was a fruitful error. From former Fascists humanity has learned nothing except perhaps the art of dissimulating their pasts. From former Communists humanity has learned the art of being anti-Communist intelligently. I know some intelligent people who have never been Communists—from Sir Winston Churchill to Paul Ignotus. But the anti-Communism of all of us, whether Tory, Labour or Liberal, and whether Western, Oriental, or Central European, was either a rejection of social revolution (Sir Winston's case) or of unintellectual dullness (my own) or, at the best, of tyranny and bloodshed in general. The basic error of Communism, its utterly retrograde system, more rigid than the one it abolished, was first grasped and laid bare by writers who had gone through its schooling—instinctively by Silone, in lucid though incoherent visions by my great countryman Attila József, to some extent by his friend François Fejtö, and later, in impressionist patches, by Gide, and quite articulately by Orwell and Koestler, and now by Djilas.

Revolution in Hungary in 1956 did not come from the anti-Communists but from the disenchanted Communists. Such Dark-Pinks as I am, or such Whites as Cardinal Mindszenty's adherents, may or may not have sailed in its wake or wished it well for their various reasons. I knew a number of near-Fascists, of die-hard Conservatives and, among the writers, some co-called Narodniks, mystic believers in Hungarian Blood and Soil, who refused to side either with Rákosi or the followers of Imre Nagy on the ground that this was "merely the struggle of two Communist factions, one no better than the other." I myself felt it was none of my business to play a conspicuous part in arguments which to a great extent ran round such questions as whether Imre Nagy or Rákosi had applied the tenets of Marxism-Leninism correctly. But whatever the past mistakes of those who worked towards democracy with Imre Nagy, they were taking risks and pains to make Hungary a country worth living in. Except the diehards of old or new caste systems, and the staunchest sitters on

a fence which stood upon pure Hungarian Soil, the whole country was with them. So was I of course.

Literature was the means of that Revolution, and belief in free literature its touchstone. A discussion organized by the Petöfi Circle of young left-wing intellectuals, on 27th June, about the state of the Press and literature marked the climax of a mass movement. The meeting was held in a hall but was transmitted by loudspeakers to the street and a courtyard which was crowded with people for about twelve hours—from early afternoon till the small hours. My wife and I were lingering in the courtyard watching the photographers on the roof. Everybody assumed that many of the photographs were taken for the A.V.H., but I do not believe many of us were frightened away by this assumption. It was after all a "Marxist-Leninist" meeting, publicly announced and authorized; it included among its speakers the Zhdanovist editor of the Party daily. I interrupted my peripatetic listening with a walk out to a neighbouring restaurant for some fish in paprika-stew and a glass of beer. But I did not miss Tibor Déry's speech. It was not really a very good speeech, but it was moving and impressive from its polite impertinence and its acoustic effects.

Déry has a deep and sonorous voice, modulating in long waves of tenderness, emotion, irony and pathos. He also articulates clearly and puts his verbs in the right tenses—less usual in my country than it should be. At the start of the meeting the audience was warned not to interrupt the speakers. They were nevertheless interrupted. Déry started with a simple sentence, the most effective possible at that moment. "Comrades, I only wish to tell you that I shall not be at all annoyed if you interrupt me." The battle was won by this invitation. In most of his speech Déry dealt with the attacks made on his novel by the Hungarian petty-Zhdanovs and their followers, the Minister of Culture among them. He referred to these only by way of example, adding "I am not moved by a thought of revenge." It might have been more convincing to hear other examples, but the ordeal which a Communist writer had to endure if he wanted to be faithful to his

people had become clear. And it was a shattering moment when the man who had once run amok among the visions of Chagall and the prose of Proust, summed up his creed in the simple sentence: "I am a writer and cannot see people suffering."

Déry was expelled from the Party. My wife and I were due to have supper with him and his wife in their villa in the outskirts of Buda. Would he still be at large by the time we were expected there? I did not know whether it was very clever of me to visit him just then; but I felt it would be disgraceful not to do so. We chatted with him till late at night. We had missed the last bus. Rain was pouring, and there seemed no hope for a taxi. Then he rang a cab-rank himself, and said: "This is Tibor Déry speaking. . . ." "Oh, God, the writer? Are you free?" We got the taxi at once.

Ten weeks later the Writers' Association held its annual meeting, to elect its Presidential Board—a pompous name for its Committee, inherited from the Stalin era. But its election was a landmark, a real election with candidates and counter-candidates, with secret ballots such as had not been seen in Hungary for nine years. Déry was among the three newly elected members who had got the greatest number of votes. All the Muscovite writers, all supporters of Rákosi and all their agents, including the Minister of Culture, had failed.

To my surprise, I was nominated while away at my dentist's and elected. Less than half a year after my imprisonment this was quite a sensational event. An old Stalinist dashed at me and pressed my hands affectionately: "Cheers, so we have won." The secret votes in my favour were quite impressive; but the open handshakes were unanimous. It would have been rude not to drink a glass with my colleagues after such an event. I owed my first domestic row to this glory of mine. "For heaven's sake," my wife received me, "why couldn't you tell me that you were elected; somebody rang me with congratulations about it and I made a fool of myself by not knowing. Meanwhile your supper has got spoiled."

It was an era of hopes for happiness. Nobody was satis-

fied with existing conditions but everybody recognized their improvement and felt excited at the prospect of further improvements. Rákosi had been overthrown—Mikoyan on his visit to Budapest had chucked him out and replaced him by Gerö. This may not have been a very substantial improvement but was symbolic enough to be encouraging. One of the most relaxing features of the Thaw was a series of group excursions to the West, notably Vienna. There was a special steamer on the Danube, carrying groups of actors, printing workers, or whoever, for about a week to the Austrian capital. Visitors had got drunk with what they saw. The wonder of eating a banana, which for a decade they had only heard about! Many dashed at the first milk bar to have a glass of Coca Cola. Its reputation in Hungary arose from its reputed link with American bourgeois culture. The Communist press had never been tired of sneering at the American way of life symbolized by Coca Cola. "Oh, we must taste it," the visitors sighed. And they were very disappointed indeed. "I can't understand why they run it down so much; it's really not so very good."

But the universe of Coca Cola and the multi-party system had its appeal. From all these excursions some of the tourists had disappeared and had refused to return to Hungary. The melting Iron Curtain was still too solid for them to take the risk of staying behind it. Stalinist propaganda used such defections as an argument against further facilities to tourists. The writers' excursion at the beginning of October was viewed with particular anxiety. Who will return and who won't? When I applied for passage together with my wife, I really did not believe we would be allowed to go. The official in charge said at first he could only grant permission to me. But I made a row and succeeded in getting both tickets.

My sister from London came to see me in Vienna. Hungarian Social Democrats from London sent messages that I should by all means stay away: one could not trust the Bolsheviks, however much they might be thawing at that moment . . . I met a Hungarian journalist, by then installed in the Austrian film industry: "What do you

think will be their reaction in Hungary when they learn that you have not gone back?" "But I *shall* go back," I answered. He was flabbergasted. My friend Fejtö rang me from Paris. When he asked whether I thought that the evolution towards Socialist Democracy would last I answered that I did not know but one had to try. It was a unique chance for my country and also for me. I could not fail my fellow-writers, who had vouched collectively for me and for us all. I wished to be with them while they were hoping and struggling.

When after our six days' visit, we were back on the boat, all of us listened to the transmissions from Budapest radio. We heard the speeches made at the ceremonial reburial of Rajk. We heard the passionate attacks on "personality cult." One of the speakers is now Prime Minister of the Russian-appointed Hungarian Government. Another is, like me, a refugee.

Before the steamer started home, it was announced that all passengers without exception had returned on board. Tremendous applause followed. It expressed the conviction that Stalinism could and should be fought at home.

Chapter 14

London Again

I RETURNED from Vienna to Budapest—and am a refugee in London once again. That crowded interval in my story can only be told briefly and out of scale, for it includes a Revolution, of which I was witness. So were nine million Hungarians, including two hundred thousand who escaped to the West soon afterwards. So also were a large number of Western diplomats, journalists and others who arrived on the spot to see with their own eyes and eventually to help the distressed and wounded. Their eye-witness accounts have been included in official and unofficial Reports and in thick volumes published on the matter in most languages. What I have added to them can here or there be traced by students of history. Photographs and

documents of indisputable authenticity are available in masses. What remains is to sum them up in fairness—which not even the fairest mind can achieve while looking into open wounds. My endeavour was to help those who might heal them. That is why I returned to Hungary in October, 1956, and why I left not quite two months later. I shall limit my story to explaining what made me change my mind.

I remember the last night of the victorious Revolution. In the company of my wife, then in the sixth month of her pregnancy, I spent some hours in the house of Parliament. Any visitor to Budapest will remember that huge building on the bank of the Danube. It was built on the British model and was meant to outdo its model in size, comfort, and beauty. Its huge and bulging dome, unsuited to its delicate spires and pointed windows, bends like a protecting helmet over the population of the capital. It is a part of nature no less than the mountains on the opposite bank of the river, and since childhood I have got used to considering it as no less inexorable than nature itself. I used to walk under its arcades with my nurse, on fine summer evenings. I walked there, though with different desires and other women, in later years. In the era of comparative liberalism, and particularly in the weeks of parliamentary recess, thousands of young people used to discover some substitute for a proper flat among its zigzags with their girl friends. Had there been less ornaments and more style in planning the majestic building, it would have been less suitable for that purpose.

In its splendid lack of style, this enormous palace has served as a factotum through the last outrageous decades. Originally it was to serve as the seat of Lords and Commons as at Westminister. But nothing like that had been there for years when the Revolution came. It had been gunned and damaged. The park around it had been the scene of mass demonstrations and bloodbaths. Some of its chambers were just used as Government departments, including the Prime Minister's office. The premises I vis-

ited were the temporary centre of the Free Kossuth Radio.

Muddle and enthusiasm were touching. It was a revolutionary headquarters at its best. We arrived in late afternoon, and had to cross the cordon of armed guards. No wonder: one had to be careful about spies and provocateurs, Soviet agents and Fascist plotters alike. Through its passages, as confusing as streets in London, I managed to find my way. I was to make a speech in Hungarian that day, and to start a series of talks for listeners in English some days after. I had ample opportunity to talk with the staff—one or two of them fellow-writers who had long been known to me, but mostly unknown young men, typical of the front line of the Revolution. They addressed one another as Comrade. "Are you a Communist?" I asked one of them, a young man who had just arrived from the revolutionary headquarters in Győr, the great city in the West of Hungary. "I am," he answered. He was quite clear that the Revolution which he supported wholeheartedly meant the end of Communist dictatorship in Hungary. "Never mind," he said, "our people must first be free and be allowed to discover for themselves that our theories were basically right."

I submitted my script to him. He was not altogether satisfied. "Of course you will say what you like, I have no right to censor you. But if you will let me advise you . . ."—and he had two objections. One, that some of my expressions smelled too much of middle-class democracy. Let us drop every phrase which might make people believe that an independent Hungary would be less socialist in spirit than the one dominated by Russia. Second he thought I was going too far in trying to protect the A.V.O. men hunted down by the outraged population. Would I not at least make it clear that I wanted the criminals to be punished severely. After some discussion we agreed on a fair compromise. My appeal to the Hungarians for unity and discipline, monitored and printed in various English publications, was the result of it.

My speech was recorded for broadcasting late at night. At the peak hour, Cardinal Mindszenty was to speak. I stayed to see him. It was a fantastic sight; the diehard Primate Cardinal arriving with an armed guard of honour amidst the Communist revolutionaries. He was received by a cabinet minister, once President of the Republic, originally a Protestant parson, Zoltán Tildy; later a political prisoner, released in April, 1959. The Cardinal walked in with swaying steps and glaring eyes the strange expression of which may or may not have been the result of his ordeal in A.V.O. imprisonment. I listened to his speech. Its text can be read and checked in several volumes of documentary literature. The spokesmen of Soviet policy on Hungary have since made a habit of referring to it as a counter-revolutionary incitement to restore the old *latifundia.* This is nonsense. The Cardinal's speech was moderate and cautious. But it was not appropriate to the extraordinary moment when it was made. One could not help feeling that a ghost was speaking from the past.

We hurried home through the pitchdark streets, and had just time to switch on the wireless to hear my own voice and, at the end, my wife's English announcement of my forthcoming talks. It was a quiet night, the quietest I could remember since the outbreak of the Revolution. We slept well but not long. We were woken by gunfire. It was 4 a.m. We switched on the radio and heard patriotic marches and anthems, one after another. It was patriotism to the extent of panic, and the Prime Minister's announcement followed. The Russians were attacking Budapest, our troops were engaged in battle. A leading member of the Writers' Association appealed to the intellectuals of the world: "Help, help, help."

The familiar sound of tanks roaring along mingled with the sounds of the guns. We peeped out through the window: Soviet tanks had arrived. Free Kossuth Radio had stopped. My wife's reactions were quick: she tore up the manuscript of my appeal from the night before. We have often recalled this moment with amusement.

The revolutionary battle and strikes went on for weeks after. Again, there is no need for me to tell their story. But one aspect of it all has perhaps not been made clear: the tides of changing moods and guesses, starting in my own case with the destruction of my manuscript, and ending when we decided to escape the country.

A friend rang and told me he had morphia ready. Rákosi's return was almost taken for granted. Unless the Russians could be persuaded to withdraw either by the West or by the Hungarian people, it was felt that a wholesale campaign of extermination would start against all who had opened their mouths. When the new Prime Minister, Kádár, as head of a "Workers' and Peasants' Revolutionary Government" first spoke over the wireless, the response was bitter because of his treachery and the Russians' lack of principle in thus violating the Hungarian people—but there was also a sense of relief. He paid lip-service to the Revolution. He did not say a word against the left-wing intellectuals who had started it, or against the masses of industrial workers, mainly Socialists, who continued to resist the invaders. The Rákosi clique, attempting to return to power, was denounced in the new government press. Discussions about the ending of the strike and battles between the Kádár Government and the Workers' Councils were fairly transmitted by the newly established radio. The Russians, it seemed, were trying to come to terms with the Hungarian people. Kádár and his associates started negotiations not only with the Workers' Councils but also with non-Communist leaders of the former coalition government.

If freedom of speech means that people speak freely, it had never existed to a greater extent than in those days, immediately after the Russian re-occupation of Budapest, in the streets under the threat of machine guns. Badges of the national coat of arms were worn ostentatiously by masses of people. Leaflets were distributed and posters read without the slightest notice taken of the Russian patrols and their potential agents. The destruction in the city was heartrending. News of more and more blood-

shed was distressing. As the frontier between Hungary and Austria had been opened, many hurried to get out of the country. But those resisting the Russians stayed on.

The authority of the Writers' Association was not challenged by anybody. Our central office in Bajza Street was a headquarters for the revolutionary intelligentsia. The delegates from various revolutionary councils dashed in one after another and discussed consecutive plans, and issued manifestoes emphasizing their loyalty to the Revolution (and not to the "Revolutionary Government" of those days). It had other attractions too. In the middle of a city which looked as if it had suffered siege, this seemed an oasis of plenty. Some of its premises had been transformed into huge larders. Peasants from all over the country sent their goods freely, in one of the offices dozens of live chickens were twittering amongst the writing-desks. In another enormous bags of potatoes, carrots, and eggs were awaiting the authors and their spouses who carefully called for their rations.

Meetings went on incessantly. What should we do and what could we achieve? Should we repeat again and again our unwillingness to accept the *fait accompli* and insist on the "immediate withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Hungary" which was the main demand of the population? Or should we try to bring about a tolerable compromise between the occupiers and the people? Armed fights were dying down but the general strike still went on in the industrial suburbs of Budapest and in other factory districts and mining areas. The general cry was still everywhere "Ruszkik haza"—"Russians go home." But obviously it was the very thing which the Russians would not do—at any rate, not entirely and not immediately. Would it not be cleverer to demand something within reach than to ask for the moon?

Opinions were divided but the general atmosphere favoured intransigence. Despite Russian military occupation, people feared their own response more than they feared their master. Some recent events, however, tinged determination with panic. Crowds of young men had been

rounded up in some districts, a number of them deported to Soviet territory. What should be done about them? A delegation went to see both the Russian-appointed Minister of Interior and the Russian *Kommandatura.* With the Minister, they had some passionate exchanges. The talk at the *Kommandatura* was more polite and more alarming. There was no doubt that the Russians considered the prisoners as hostages. They would allow the writers to intervene in their favour, if in return they would support the new Government, call for peace and order, and urge the resumption of work.

It was a tragic moment when any decision had to be irresponsible. Should we try to save the lives of thousands of young men, or the honour of the Revolution? The majority decided for a middle way. It was a touching and futile experiment. I remember the harassed and worn-down face of Gyula Háy, arriving at a meeting after a sleepless night when he had drafted the manifesto which was to vindicate the Revolutionary ideas and at the same time appease those who had crushed the Revolution. Surely this was more sensible than to have followed the advice of those who still called for "complete and immediate withdrawal"—and who since then have come to quite tolerable terms with the Russian-appointed Government. Gyula Háy meanwhile has been sentenced to six years.*

I disagreed about some details, and took a line which many appreciated but none followed. I wished we had dared to be less transigent in one way and more flexible in another. I suggested we should make a clear offer, telling the *Kommandatura* and the Government that we

* Both Déry and Háy were imprisoned from the beginning of 1957 until April, 1960, and then released under an amnesty. Amongst the intellectuals trying to bring about understanding with the Russians, the most important personality was a noncommunist member of the Imre Nagy coalition government—Professor Istvan Bibó, the legal historian, who at that time drafted a compromise plan, i.e., for the gradual withdrawal of the Soviet forces. Bibó was sentenced to life imprisonment *in camera,* and is now (May, 1962) in gaol.

were willing to take a stand clearly and firmly for the conclusion of the strike; provided the deportations stopped and those held were released, and provided the U.N. investigators were allowed entry to Hungary. My colleagues thought we must not provoke the Russians by urging the admission of the U.N. commission, or risk upsetting the feelings of the people by speaking against the strike unless the general demand for total military evacuation (which I thought quite unrealistic) was achieved.

We were hoping against hope. What if the Russians were to agree to withdraw gradually? What if a network of Councils could be established on a roughly democratic basis, as a step towards real parliamentary government—a network of Worker, Peasant, Intellectual, Army and Youth Councils, for instance? Could democratic parties, socialist and non-socialist alike, be expected to take part in such an arrangement? From the Government, approaches were made to Smallholders, Peasant Party representatives, Social Democrats and all sorts of liberals and Christian democrats.

What about the uncompromisingly anti-Stalin Communists who had started the Revolution? They would certainly be willing to join; but it was no secret that the Moscow emissaries suspected them more than anyone else. To deviate had in the Bolshevik doctrine always been a greater crime than to oppose; and though the Twentieth Congress seemed to put an end to heresy-hunting, the passions underlying heresy-hunting had never disappeared. The Hungarian people and mainly the workers were worried about Imre Nagy and his associates who, after the Russian onslaught on Budapest, had taken shelter in the Yugoslav Embassy. The question was not whether one agreed with them in doctrine; they had acted as the vanguard, and so had become symbols of the hope for independence, freedom and neutrality. The Russian-appointed Premier Kádar—himself a former member of the Imre Nagy coalition Government—was questioned about the relation between his Government and Imre Nagy. The answer was firm and unequivocal; the "Work-

ers' and Peasants' Revolutionary Government" was willing to negotiate with Imre Nagy and his associates as soon as the latter left the Jugoslav Embassy. There would be no question of prosecuting them. They would not merely have safe conduct but would be considered as partners.

Then, a bolt from the blue. My sister had just spoken to a journalist friend of ours and ran to me: "Have you heard the news? Imre Nagy and his wife, and his daughter, and son-in-law, and grandchildren, and the Losonczys, and Lukács, and all the rest, you know . . . As soon as they left the Jugoslav Embassy they were caught by a Russian military detachment in the street and abducted . . ."

I rang the Writers' Association. A colleague who took the receiver confirmed the news with an agitated stammer. It was the end. Many felt infuriated with Kádár, but he seemed to me almost a figure of pity; especially when I heard him over the radio explaining that what the Russians had done was right, because after all the safety of Imre Nagy and his party had to be safeguarded. There had never been a Premier in such a pathetic position—compelled so conspicuously to spit in his own face.*

It seemed clear at that moment that my presence would be of no use whatever. Later I learned that I had been blacklisted by the organization which succeeded the A.V.H. I did not think it likely that they would imprison me again, but they would suspect and harass me. My attempts towards a sensible compromise, and my wish to do literary and scholarly work, had alike been frustrated. With a pregnant wife, could I take this risk? Besides, my old hobby of acting as bridge between the Hungarian and the Western Non-Communist Left overwhelmed me again. In 1949 that hobby had induced me to return to Budapest and expose myself to the A.V.H. At the end of 1956 the same thing induced me to escape as soon as possible.

* As will be remembered, Imre Nagy and his three comrades, General Pál Máleter, Miklós Gyimes, and József Szilágyi, were subsequently tried *in camera* and executed, according to a Budapest Government communiqué issued in June, 1958. This also announced the deportation and death of Géza Losonczy.

But how were we to set about it? I am very clumsy in such matters. I am no legalist, but perhaps for that reason most helpless when it comes to illegalities. I simply did not know whom to approach. Thousands and thousands were crossing the frontier every day, and Radio Free Europe transmitted for hours the messages of Hungarians who had just "arrived on free soil." It was a mass exodus, and the subject talked about everywhere and by everybody. A friend of my wife, a nice and simple woman, who shall be called Ann, an indifferent office clerk and excellent tennis player, came along to see us with her ten-year-old daughter. "Don't you think of escaping? I wish I could." Ann had a boy friend in Hungary and another in Australia. The more unbearable Russian terrorism seemed, the stronger the Australian *amoroso's* attraction grew as against the local one. But she knew as little as we did about how those tens of thousands went to it. We were just sighing.

Kádár repeatedly said, as reported later, on 27th November, in the Party newspaper: "We have promised not to start any punitive proceeding against Imre Nagy and we shall keep our word." Again a pledge. But who could believe any promise now? No hope either for improvement at home or escape to the West. It was a day of apathy until 3 p.m., November 26th. Then it changed to a day of melodrama.

The telephone rang, and Ann said excitably: "I met a dispatch carrier. The luggage must not include more than six boxes. It costs a lot of money and I am so unhappy, oh my God, I have got only half the amount . . . We must talk it over with . . . at once. If you want to send your things you must see those people without delay. It can't be postponed. The last load is to go tomorrow." A telephone censor would not have found it difficult to guess the meaning of such words. But everything was too much in a muddle for efficient terrorism. In fact, the suggestion that one should use special means to send boxes somewhere was credible. Very little railway traffic went about the country, and hitch-hiking was a substitute for it. In the city, the trams had not yet been brought back; which

meant that most people had to walk. It meant walking in mud and over ditches—the city was in a shambles. Streets were dimly lit, and the curfew came into force after 8 p.m. If we were to embark on the venture, we had to start at once. But should we?

I could not decide, but I said we must act on the assumption that we were to leave. We must not leave the chance unexplored. We went to see our friend. Could we raise the money for her as well as for ourselves? I still had some cash from my compensation money which I had been paid after my re-trial. Four thousand florins were needed for each of us—the sum spent by an average Hungarian family in three months. We hurried along, first to Ann, and then to the flat from which we were to start. It was already getting dark. "Hello, hello," a cheerful stout fellow shouted at us. It was the former Prime Minister Dinnyés. I hardly knew him but had always liked his unpretentious, friendly and gay nature. He had fought the Nazis heroically as a member of the Smallholders' Party. After the war, he felt he had been heroic long enough. He fellow-travelled without visible scruples but, as far as I know, without harming anyone. He kept his good humour and his luxurious car. On this occasion, however, he was walking.

After his volcanic Magyar embracements, he told us a torrent of anecdotes. We were not in a mood to listen to funny stories but he was not in the mood to let us go. He broached the subject most current at the moment: "What do you say to those thousands of fools rushing abroad now?"

"Damned fools," we answered in chorus.

"Aren't they? Of course, it's no easy matter to live in Hungary. But, my God, to go abroad! My friend D used to say that everyone was a fool to emigrate unless he was less than thirty years old or more than thirty-thousand dollars a year."

"Of course, of course, how right he is. I am afraid we must hurry up because of the curfew. . . ."

He played about with his walking stick. His storytelling seemed endless.

"Sz., you remember, the old crook? He was a clever man. He had to leave Budapest because of his fishy dealings. But he returned. I asked him why. 'I am getting old, you know, and having the usual trouble with my bowels. You can't live at my age in a city, where you don't know the whereabouts of the public lavatories.' A wise man I say. Wasn't he?"

"Extremely wise," we assured him and dashed off. Stumbling and panting we called on the "luggage man" and went home, still undecided. We carried on with our preparations "as if we were going." At the peak of our nervousness, a cousin entered. "Oh, I wanted so much to see you. Could you come and have dinner with us tomorrow? Do you like *gulyás* done in the Székely way?" I had to tell him I was not free for the next days.

Until the last moment I never really decided we should go. I only decided we should carry on as if we were to go. In haste, we crammed the most necessary belongings into a little suitcase, a dispatch-case and two shopping bags. No knapsack was available.

We had just a few hours of sleep on the night of the 26th. We took our little luggage and trod the streets like sleepwalkers. "Let us behave as if we were going." We arrived at a flat where seven of us were gathered, ready to start. The party included a baby in its pram which was to be left at the frontier, and also our friend Ann with her ten-year-old daughter. She was weeping: she had only money enough for one person. Would the driver agree to take her daughter as well? . . . The driver arrived at about 10 a.m. He was rough and hasty. About the additional infant he just shrugged his shoulders, saying we would have to pay as the frontier guards must get their own share; but trusting us to find some money somehow, he took us all on his lorry. He explained how we should behave. Whenever challenged, we should name a country town in the West of Hungary as our destination, and each of us should have his own explanation of why he had to get there. We must pretend we had been picked up as hitch-hikers. So we were leaving Budapest "as if we were going away."

Indeed we were stopped several times. A security policeman climbed into the lorry. "Well, why do you all want to go to the West? You don't think I am such a fool as not to know. . . ." We insisted on our respective stories. "I shan't allow you *all* to go." He eyed a pretty girl, a dancer, who had some special connexion with the driver's party. Then he cast a glance at the baby. "How can you expose such a tiny thing to such an ordeal?" And he let us go.

At another post, near the great industrial city of Győr, in the West of Hungary, a soldier asked us: "Now where are you for?" Most of us said our destination was Győr. "So you want to go to Győr? Then good luck to you all beyond Győr, in the free world."

Beyond Győr came hard luck. A big detachment, including Russians, stopped us. We were ordered to return. So we did, as far as Győr. There the lorry drove through some muddy lanes, and after dusk we arrived at the frontier village of Mosonszentjános.

We turned out to be in the hands of liars and blackmailers. They were an exceptionally rotten crowd. Those who smuggled people over the frontier were paid for doing so, which in itself could not be objected to, considering the labour and risks involved. But most did so with moderation. Our guides were greedy and cruel. When we stopped at a peasant's house, the father and son responsible for that trade started shouting at us that they would be unable to undertake the trip unless we gave them more. They had to bribe the frontier guards. They had to risk their lives. On the chest of drawers, in the stuffy and dreary peasant's bungalow, wristwatches and banknotes were piling up. The guides really did not count them, they only argued. My wife and I refused to give up our watches. We even hid a small sum of money. "Give us everything," the peasant guide insisted; "beyond the frontier, it won't be worth a farthing. . . ."

Their story about sharing the money with frontier guards turned out to be nonsense. So did their whole promise to help us over the frontier. In Budapest, they had said we would only have to go about four hundred

yards to the boundary, and that they would see us across. When we started the walk, it had grown to two miles. It turned out to be more than ten.

But it was not the distance that mattered. It was the land. We were dragging ourselves in mud, up to our ankles. Every step was an effort. Rain poured down, and it was dark. After about a hundred yards, I simply could not imagine how we would achieve it. I watched my pregnant wife: fortunately she wore a pair of high laced boots, but most of us had ordinary shoes. They stuck in the mud and had to be pulled out, full of muck. Some lost their shoes, which did not matter for a while but then we came to stubble. The barefooted were full of wounds on their soles and heels. The handle of my suitcase broke, and I took it under my arm. That made the journey even more painful. "Throw it away, you will not be able to take it over the frontier," the guide shouted at us. He gave this excellent advice to everybody. We knew he would pick them up if we did. I never knew I could stick to a suitcase with such fury.

It was pitch dark with only a few faint lights on the horizon when our guides abandoned us. We did not know quite where to go. We only knew where the bullets were coming from. Rocket flares went above us. We threw ourselves on our stomachs as a safety precaution. I was glad to have a rest even in such an uncomfortable spot, though I knew we should be almost too exhausted to get up. We came to a hedge where it seemed to us we could have a little rest. We decided we must already be in Austria. Anyway we made ourselves believe so—subconsciously no doubt, because we badly needed rest. It was about midnight. Then we heard steps. Torches were turned on our faces. We were still on Hungarian soil. Two Hungarian frontier-guards were approaching us.

"What are you doing here?" they asked. The question was correct but of course somewhat rhetorical. What could we be doing at midnight on the fallow by the Austrian frontier-line? "Well, I am sorry, I must escort you back to the next patrol-station." We appealed to their human feelings. We appealed to them as Hungarians. They

argued with us, though with obvious reluctance: "Look here, it is our duty . . ." Some of us were already preparing to follow them. But my wife, in particular, was adamant. "My dear friends"—she said, "I do not mind anything by now, I do not mind what you do. You may kill me at once if you wish. But I shall not return. I have had enough after five years in prison. I don't want my child to be born for prison . . ." The two armed young men looked at each other sternly. Then one of them took my wife under her elbow. "All right, come with me, come all of you. We shall see you to the frontier."

So it happened. Having been left in the lurch by our hired guides, we were saved by those appointed to check us.

We arrived at a double plough-line. "Now that is the boundary line," the guard on my wife's left told us. He was a peasant boy, about 17 or 18 years of age. "We are all Hungarians," was the sentence repeated alternately by them and ourselves. It is an uninteresting truism but there were moments when it could work miracles.

Now I was particularly glad that I had not given all my money to the crooks in the village. Some hundred-florin notes had remained in my pocket. I handed them to the young man. He refused. "I did not do it for that. . . ." I insisted. "I know you didn't but I should be glad if you were to accept. You told me you had an old mother to look after and that was your reason for not coming over with us. Do me the favour of buying her a present with that."

We shook hands and parted company. The rockets were still visible. But we felt at least *de jure* safe, though not entirely. The frontier-line in that district runs in zigzags, and one may easily lose the way. We decided we should march until we reached an Austrian patrol-station. But tiredness prevailed. We saw a little stone hut in the middle of a great waste of land, and climbed in. We found straw there to rest on. We reassured ourselves that we must be safe, though at heart, we were still full of worries. Dear Ann was less inhibited than the rest of us in moaning. She had every reason to be upset. Her legs and feet

seemed crippled for good. "I am afraid we may still be in Hungary. Oh my God, what are we to do if we are caught again. . . ." I apologize to her now by proxy for answering with something less than gentlemanly impatience.

We had run out of drinking water. I climbed out to find some. We remembered we had seen something like a well in the vicinity. Groping my way in the dark and the mud, I found it. Indeed it was a shadoof, a typical old well of the Hungarian country districts. This alarmed me a bit. As far as I knew, no shadoofs existed in Austria. All the same I set to work. I let the bucket down and pulled it up again, full of water. I took some in the thermos to the hut. So did another man. His conclusions from what he saw there were more optimistic. "Don't you see how different the shape of this bucket is from what they use in Hungarian shadoofs? This must be Austria. . . ." When day started breaking we got up and resumed our wandering. My wife had repaired my suitcase so that I was again able to hold it by the handle, which made a tremendous difference. Before carrying on, we called for another sip at the shadoof. We found the bucket full of corpses of frogs. We were nearly ill from the sight and carried on thirsty. How pleasant it had been to drink while we did not know what was there.

We wandered on between stacks of straw, only meeting refugees. We were still not absolutely sure of being on safe soil. Then we met a horse-driven cart, with an old peasant on it. We accosted him in Hungarian and German. He only knew German. He assured us we were in Austria. We begged him at least to take the women and children on his cart to an inhabited place. He refused at first: "I must hurry with my work, you see it's pouring. . . ." But then with a sudden change: "Kumts, alle." We all climbed on the dungheap in his cart, and were carried thus to the first village.

The sad and touching features of the reception camps have often been described already. I have myself published accounts of my experiences and expressed my gratitude and admiration for the people in the relief organizations out there. In general my refugee compatriots were

worth the attention and kindness showered on them. But this does not mean that all were heroes, or even that they were all honest. On the bus which took us from the frontier village to the Andau camp, we discussed the fates of the leading Hungarian freedom fighters. What about Pál Maléter, the leader of the Hungarian Army which resisted the invaders? I said I was worried that he might have been arrested by the Russians while negotiating with them, and kept in prison ever since. As we know today, this was so; and since then he has been murdered, together with Imre Nagy. But a young swashbuckler in the bus firmly contradicted me: "Nonsense! I saw him two days ago. He is leading our partisans in the Bükk forests. I was his aide-de-camp and only left him because he ordered me to come to the West and negotiate on his behalf. . . ." Later, in the camp, I met two other youngsters who pretended quite independently from each other to be on the same mission. One of them eagerly inquired as to the whereabouts of Prince Esterházy, who was known to possess even then quite considerable properties in Austria.

My wife and I spent the night on a straw-sack, crowded together in a room with five or six other people. The leader of the party was a dull and stubborn man, sitting with a fur-cap on his head and not letting me open the window for a moment. Stench and fug were unbearable. I found out that he was a miner with his family, including a baby three months old. The mother turned out to be a slightly more intelligent person. "Why did you decide to escape from Hungary?" I asked her. Conditions were bad, no doubt, but these did not seem to be the people involved in any political imbroglio. Indeed they were not; but that was just the trouble. "Well, sir, what's happened to us is this," she said. "My husband went working. As he descended the shaft and returned when his shift had ended, the Freedom Fighter caught him there. 'Now my man, if I catch you once again you won't get at the mine gates alive.' Next day my husband stayed at home. Then, the Russian patrol entered. The Russki said to him 'Isn't it your working time? Look here, if I catch you once again absent from the mine when you should be there I'll take

you to Zalaegerszeg, the internment camp, and you know people are not just imprisoned there but decimated. . . .' We simply did not know what to do. We liked it at home. We had just slaughtered a pig which we had reared, and we had enough to eat. But how could one live there? Death for working, death for not working . . . Then I said 'Very well, on the frontier we may meet death as well. But if we have luck we can get across. And so we packed as much as we could from the ham and sausages, and took our four kids, and set out . . ." I do not know what has happened to them since. They became submerged in the flood of 200,000 Hungarians fleeing over the frontier. But I do not know why anyone should be surprised at the fact that some 15,000 of the 200,000 have since returned. What could that dull peasant-miner have done in any country where the language, the way to rear pigs, the habits and outlook were completely unknown to him? Without being a traitor, he fled the Freedom Fighters no less than the invaders. When the Freedom Fighters were defeated, he had no more reason to live away from home. Perhaps he was too unimaginative even to return once he had escaped; otherwise it would really not be surprising if he had done so.

In the camp, a nurse asked us "Could you kindly act as interpreters for us with some children?" There was a party of about ten boys, the youngest 10, the eldest 15 years of age. Some came from Budapest, some from the country. We were to explain to them in Hungarian that they would get places in a hostel nearby. They were panic-stricken. "Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't let us be taken back to Hungary. The Russkis will catch us. The Russkis catch all children. . . ." We could hardly reassure them that by leaving the miserable, overcrowded camp in Andau they would not necessarily be returning to Hungary. That the Russians "took *all* children" was of course a legend. But facts making it believable were plentiful.

The rumour went round that I had arrived. Friends in Britain, France, Holland had been asking about me. A Danish journalist brought a message, and a lively, stout gentleman, Colonel Koenigsbert, from the World Veter-

ans Federation, offered my wife and me facilities to leave for Britain as soon as possible. So we did, and travelled quite comfortably from Andau to London. Enthusiasm was exhilarating. Hungarian refugees all over Europe were received with patriotic songs, and food and clothes parcels. In London, I was told, something like a fight was going on for the care of Hungarian refugees; all were keen to give hospitality to at least one Hungarian Freedom Fighter. Our popularity was fantastic. I felt some doubts. "I only dread the moment when I shall hear from someone that the Freedom Fighter he had sheltered pinched his wristwatch."

Reality turned out to be more romantic than my foreboding. The first complaint of this kind that I heard about concerned the Freedom Fighter who eloped with the daughter of a wealthy host. But even this had its happy ending in the form of paternal consent. After all, a hero—even if a beggar—is no disgrace to an honest family.

It was the beginning of December, 1956. Only a few weeks after our Revolution and its defeat, and the Suez adventure and its failure. People felt the world was in an impasse, and Britain in a crisis. What sort of crisis? I asked. Moral crisis, financial crisis, political crisis . . . I heard about the symptoms but what I saw round me struck me as by no means depressing. Many of my friends had aged, many had died. But most did quite well. The city seemed cleaner, food better, people nicer than ever. I was not perhaps an unbiased witness of all this. The kindness showered on me and my wife was indescribable. I felt I had arrived home abroad.

But all this could not comfort me for the alarming news of my people at home. Nor for the sufferings of the person who stood next to me. She was still with child when we arrived. A day or two later, under the stress and calamities of our escape, premature labour started. She became the mother of a stillborn baby girl whom she had intended to call Beatrix. That little creature who had never seen the sun paid with her life for ours.

Epilogue

I wrote the bulk of *Political Prisoner,* as a political refugee, in the French home for men of letters, "La Méssuguière," in Cabris, Alpes-Maritimes, from January to March of 1958. The book was first published by Messrs. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, in October, 1959. When I learned that it was going into paperback, I went through the text again, bringing it up to date, making slight corrections and adding a few footnotes; but, I did not alter the essentials. My fundamental views have not changed since I wrote it, and the story strikes me today, even more than when I set it down, as rounded out by fate, with a note at the end which is sad but in the spirit of reconciliation. To alter it would be forgery.

But the time since 1958 and 1959 has not been uneventful, and I feel I should tell my new American readers about the way these events affected the *dramatis personae* —me, my family, and my homeland. I shall restrict myself to recording two instances only; first, adding a gay note to the sad note; and the other—adding some emphasis to the bitterness which has always accompanied my willingness to be reconciled with my fate and that of others.

The gay note is what might be expected, a Dickensian postscript. My wife, whom I need not introduce to the reader, gave birth to our son, Paul Imre, in a nursing home in Greater London, on July 31, 1958. On the eve of the event I happened to take a double dose of sleeping pills and was fast asleep when, in the small hours, she felt she should wake me up and tell me that I was about to become a father. She shook me in vain, but managed to drive herself to the nursing home. The following afternoon I was relieved to learn over the telephone that, however disgraceful my absence, it did not really matter. The condition of both mother and child was satisfactory. The mother's mood was even more so. "If you saw him how

pretty he is," she told me before I could go and see them, "not that sort of purple other newborn babies are, you know. . . ." "Resigned to his being *he*?" "Even to that," she replied. My mother in Budapest, then about 90, had also, for some reason, hoped for a girl. On learning of the news she exclaimed, "Hang it all, it will be all right." And all right it was.

We live in an unluxurious but comfortable flat, facing Battersea Park, London, and Paul Imre spends much of his time feeding its ducks and climbing its trees, though with a bias for the swings and the rocking horse in its Children's Playground, where he has acquired a well-earned reputation as a bright, handsome, and lively representative of his age-group. It's a reputation too well-earned as far as liveliness is concerned! But as it is the very thing I was looking forward to, I must not grumble about it. I am happy watching him day by day, though I cannot help feeling this posture of belated paternal pride somewhat foolish. Maternal and grand-maternal pride is of course less inhibited and healthier. But life cannot be Dickensian, after all; surely not according to Dickens who knew and wrote a lot about the struggles to make ends meet. My wife works in an office; we have her English-born mother with us to look after the child. We also have my sister Elly who followed us to Britain some weeks after our escape. And we had for a while the intelligent but unheroic lady dachshund, Dinky. She had been helped to join us in this country, with more impeccable documents than we ever had, by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. She has since died of old age, and a black kitten now fills the vacuum—not an altogether worthy successor, concerning personal relations; but, apart from its Baudelairean charm, quite a useful member of the household in keeping down the mice.

In the meantime, I am trying my best to be an English writer. The obstacles are almost insurmountable: My Hungarian is too strong to be forgotten. Language is for me a bond stronger than kinship, comradeship, business or political allegiance. I shall never lose my interest in Hungary. But I also know that those things which bound

me to the Hungary of 1956 have now disintegrated—even more completely than I imagined while writing this book.

I do not mean the military defeat of the Revolution. That was a foregone conclusion once it had become clear that the Russians were, and their opponents on the international chessboard were not, prepared to take up arms on the issue. Many Hungarians hated the West for its unwillingness to fight. I rather reproached it for fighting to the last Hungarian. "The West," of course, is an abstraction. However, the radio stations set up in some western countries which transmitted Hungarian voices were tangible realities easily mistaken for "The West" especially when they were more uncompromising than the Hungarian Freedom Fighters themselves in their defense of "Hungarian Freedom." But that is all over now, and what's the good of crying over spilt blood?

Hungary, of course, had to capitulate: Her sole alternative was collective suicide. Most Hungarians accepted this cruel verdict of history with the utmost cynicism, that is, in the spirit most worthy of sensible people in circumstances where any hope of a reasonable settlement has gone. They did not fool themselves nor one another about the price they paid for survival. One of the cleverest and most humane rulers history has ever known paid for Paris "with a Mass." Afterwards, he made the best of it as a king. The Hungarians had to make the best of it as slaves. But slavery, too, can be leavened and borne in good humour. I feel I made this abundantly clear in this book, by talking about a much harsher variety of slavery.

What are conditions like in Hungary today? As travel restrictions have eased, there are a large number of eyewitness reports available. They converge in many details; they conflict in others; and as to their final conclusions, they are generally in accord with preconceived ideas, irrespective of the details reported. "It is better, no doubt, far better than it used to be under Stalin and Rákosi," one reporter will say, "but still pretty awful." He is right. "It is still pretty awful, no doubt," the other might say, "but better, far better than it used to be under Stalin and

Rákosi." He is no less right. It simply depends on what you feel should be emphasized. What we call "cold war" consists of intermittent hot quarrels and lukewarm handshakes between the super-powers, and it is only natural that, in the heat of a clash, the memory of the blood shed in the streets of Budapest should be revived, only to be forgotten in the ensuing lull. Accordingly, the emphasis shifts from "pretty awful" to "better, far better," and back again. So much should be taken for granted.

What strikes me as most disheartening in all this is really a matter of style. The average Hungarian, honest enough to have turned into an outright cynic, is not guilty. The guilty Hungarians are the lofty Hungarians; not the hypocrites, not the prostitutes, but the self-deceivers. They are the sort of people who, as de Tocqueville observed, "are often accused of acting without conviction; but," he adds, "this was much less frequently the case than one might think. Only they possess the precious and, sometimes in politics, even necessary faculty of creating transient convictions for themselves, according to the passions and the interests of the moment, and thus they succeed in committing, honourably enough, actions which in themselves are little to their credit."* They are the sort of people who, in present-day Hungary, perform the ritual of capitulation enthusiastically and spectacularly though with loopholes left wide-open to convince themselves of their having performed an act of bravery. Such acts may be appreciated on both sides of the Iron Curtain; they are, in "Eastern" sloganology, "an honest conversion to sympathy for Communism by one known never to have held such sympathies" and, in "Western" sloganology, "the continuation of the brave resistance against Communism though by subtler means." However different the interpretations, there is a comforting spark of "co-existence" in them.

Really why object to such harmony? For one who considered the Hungarian Revolution as the beginning of a crusade to overthrow Bolshevism, it does not matter

* From his *Recollections,* Meridian Books, New York.

whether the survivors of its defeat do or do not know that they have been defeated. But it was both the attraction and the weakness of that Revolution that it could mean so many different things to such a wide variety of people. To me it meant a struggle for the right to call a spade a spade. This right has not only been violated but forgotten, practically everywhere where it might be remembered. But as forgetfulness is still preferable to revengefulness, we had better let sleeping dogs lie, and sleepy minds believe the lie.

P. I.

London, June 1962.

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PAUL IGNOTUS is a prominent journalist and newspaper editor, a contributor to the **New Statesman, 20th Century,** and **Encounter.** He was Hungarian press agent in London after World War II. An implacable foe of Fascism and Communism, he prides himself on once having been the most unpopular person in prewar Hungary.

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