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NO. 509

"B" FACESHEET AND RATING

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p. 1

B - 5,6,7,

July 1957
London

1. L-9
2. [REDACTED]
3. London
4. 21
5. M
6. Hungarian
7. Reformed
8. Reformed
9. S
10. ---
11. Student
12. Student
13. ---
14. Middle Class
15. None
16. Rumania (1956)
17. No
18. No
19. 1 year of Actors' Academy
20. Budapest
21. Budapest
22. Pest
23. ---
24. Dec 15, 1956
25. London, Oxford
26. None
27. ---
28. ---
29. ---

31. "10", excellent
32. "10", excellent
33. "10", excellent
34. ---

Interviewer's introductory remarks:

Respondent is Andrew Cs. Szabó, son of the prominent Hungarian writer László Cs. Szabó from his first marriage.

(First I asked respondent how old he is and about his life since 1945.)

I am now 21 years old. I was 9 years old in 1945. I went through a serious illness in 1946 after finishing the Dutch founded Juliana Elementary School in Budapest. I first went to the Evangelical Gymnasium, later in the **Rottenbiller St. Gymnasium**. The upper classes of the gymnasium I finished in the former Benedictine Gymnasium which is now called Fazekas Mihály Gymnasium. I passed the matura there in 1955. I have been always interested in theater and I wanted to become a director. Because of my social background I have had grave doubts whether I will be admitted to the Actors' Academy. When my mother inquired at the academy whether I have any chances, the director of the academy, the actress Zsuzsa Simon replied that I have no chances whatsoever. None the less I don't know how, I was admitted in 1955 as a student of the Actors' Academy. I have studied for a year. In 1956, however, I was refused admittance. Then I tried to enroll in the School of Journalism at

Budapest University. My chances were very slim. I got in none the less with some protection coming from a former friend of my father István Soter, Deputy Minister of Education. But, please, treat this information very confidentially. Thus I became a student at the School of Journalism. But not for too long because shortly after the semester began the Revolution broke out.

(Next I have asked respondent to discuss all in detail his experiences as a student both of the gymnasium and at the Actors' Academy as well as at the School of Journalism. In particular I have asked him to what extent did political indoctrination effect him.)

I have been immune to political indoctrination. To begin with I was not interested in politics. My attitude towards the Communist regime in Hungary was absolutely negative. Ever since I remember I looked toward England for my social ideals and, in all truthfulness until the October Revolution I have had a rather low opinion about my own nation. Unjustly perhaps, but I thought that the Hungarian society behaved both under the Nazi and Soviet occupation very badly. The state of morality of my nation I believed was very low.

(I have asked respondent whether his school experiences had something to do with his adverse opinion.)

Not exactly. These opinions were based more on general observations. In the school, and I am thinking now mostly of the upper gymnasium, when I was able to observe better, I have had rather good experiences. My class

was particularly a good one. My school-mates were mostly of middle class origin, not one among them was a Communist, and ~~they were~~ there were no real Communists among the teachers either. Several of them were Party members but ~~that~~ ^{that} was only a formality for them because they did not behave like Communists. Or, more exactly, except Mrs. Hofmann who was the Party secretary at the Fazekas Mihaly Gymnasium. She was a new kader, a young teacher. Her subject was biology and she took the Party line seriously. But even she has changed her attitude and when I got to know her better around 1955 she was already openly criticizing the regime.

(I asked respondent to say something about class work.)

As a rule the teacher recited the ~~ex~~-book without adding much commentary. Sometimes, however, we skipped the text-book because politically it became outdated. This was true about our history text following the reconciliation between the Soviets and Tito. We could use the text only up to page 157. There we skipped the pages which were full of abuses of Tito. The history teacher dictated the revised text. Speaking about our history class our teacher recited the text-book with sarcasm which we understood only too well. At some places we burst out in loud laughter which the teacher did not mind at all.

(Next I asked respondent whether Marxist indoctrination had any effects on his school-mates and at what age he thought was such indoctrination most effective.)

Above the age 16 Marxist indoctrination had no effects whatsoever. Under 16 in my experience it had some effects appealing to the idealism of the young people. But even those who were effected got cured of these effects before long. I have seen several such cases in the lower gymnasium in **Rottenbiller** Street Gymnasium. There Communism was **more frequent** a subject of discussion among my school-mates than later in the upper gymnasium. These discussions had centered around the question whether God existed. Later in the upper gymnasium I don't remember of any such discussions. Communism was no topic. And as I have said those who in their younger years showed sympathy towards Communist doctrines did not grow up to become Communists. I could cite one example in particular. A friend of mine who was one year older than I was a convinced Communist and as a good student he was sent after the matura for one year to the Soviet Union. I remember talking to him after his return from the Soviet Union. He was entirely disillusioned. He was no Communist anymore. He said he had not seen one well-dressed man in the Soviet Union. He was appaled by the very low standard of life in Soviet Russia.

(Next I asked the respondent to tell me how his social status effected his standing in gymnasium.)

I belonged to the worst possible social category. Mine was the so-called ~~ex~~-kader, the class alien kader. This was the lowest kader. On the top were the workers, then the peasants, then the intelligentsia, then the so-called middle kader which meant you were neither for nor against the regime, and then came the ~~ex~~-kader which was mine which meant hostile to the regime. In spite of my bad kader I did not suffer any discrimination in the gymnasium. In the **Rottenbiller** Street Gymnasium when I was 13 I was even **selected** to become leader of the so-called Pioneer Group. I have declined, however, this honor saying that I don't feel fit for it. This, of course, did not help me to improve my status. But I am not so sure that by behaving more cooperatively I could have definitely improved my kader. I have seen others who were of the same social origin I was who tried hard to improve their kader and they did not succeed. The real proof came namely when ^{we} ~~xxxx~~ applied for admission to the university. There it was that discrimination began, rather than on the gymnasium level.

(Next I asked the respondent what was political indoctrination like at the Actors' Academy.)

We have had a course in Marxism at the academy but none of the students paid much attention to it. We were studying the text only a few days before the exams. Politics in general was no topic of conversation among the students of the Actors' Academy. The theater, the

arts rather than politics were our interest and professionally speaking the school was very good. To prove what I am saying, among 18 members of my class only 7 remained after one year. The rest **flung out**. The academy was indeed on a very high level. The best Hungarian actors were among our teachers. As for the students, about half or even more than that was of peasant or working class origin. But class origin did not matter. The 7 out of 18 in my class ^{who} remained at the first year's end were really the best.

(Next I asked the respondent whether any of the teachers was trying to put politics above the arts.)

Well, none of the teachers actually tried to put politics above the arts but some of them no doubt were putting greater emphasis on the so-called socialist art. So, for instance, Tamas Major, director of the National Theater, a great actor and a good teacher who addressed our class twice or three times during the year, emphasized the necessity of understanding what socialist art was. But even he although one of the leading Communists among the artists was doing this rather perfunctorily and I remember one occasion when even he was speaking sarcastically about socialist art. I should add, however, that when I went to the Academy in 1955/56 conditions were different as compared with the earlier years. I know ^{at} from my actor friends how the Academy during these past years the Soviet example in socialist art was much more

strongly stressed. When I went to the Academy all this had been **wholly** discredited.

(Next I asked the respondent what caused this change in the situation.)

Political conditions has had something to do with this. But above all the fact that there was practically not one good Soviet film or Soviet play we have seen during the past year. We still had appreciation for this early Soviet art, the films of Eisenstein, or we had appreciation for **Stanislavski** but not because he was a Soviet artist but because he was a good artist. When I went to the Academy our opinions about Soviet art were so unfavorable that it was almost a **prejudice**

(Next I have asked the respondent what were then the ideals they have accepted as their ideals.)

We were looking for ideals and examples towards the West, of course, and, while in literature or in fine arts we were cut off from the West, I must say that in the field of film production we have seen the very best of the West. It is true that none of the American pictures were played in Budapest but all the good Italian, French, English pictures have been shown. Also the theaters were playing the very best of the Western plays. All this was true of course only after 1953 or actually it began already in 1952. One reason why the Communist regime permitted Western films and plays to be produced in Hungary was financial. The movie houses and theaters

were empty. The people boycotted the Russian films and plays and it was good business to play Western films. This was from the point of view of the regime perhaps the prime~~f~~ reason why they were so liberal in allowing Western films and plays to be produced in Hungary.

(Next I have asked the respondent about his experiences at the School of Journalism.)

When I entered the School of Journalism in the Fall of 1956 conditions there as compared with the past have changed considerably. This School of Journalism was reputed to be one of the best disciplined divisions of the university. So-called socialist discipline was stronger there than at any other division of the university. But in September 1956 discipline ~~was~~ ^{has} disintegrated. The students of the School of Journalism took a prominent role in the students' movement to reform education in general. They were active in those movements which in final analysis led to the demonstrations on October 23rd. The chief target of the students' attack at the School of Journalism was the chairman of the division, a certain Sarkany. He was an illiterate, narrow-minded man repeating endlessly the Party slogans. The students demanded his removal. This **story** is best known by Mr. Marton. I know that you have interviewed him so I will not speak more about it. Anyway, I was not active in the movement itself although, of course, I was in full agreement with it. (Interviewer's

note: We have interviewed Mr. Marton in Oxford.)

(Next I asked respondent to say something about his class at the School of Journalism and class work.)

Our class had about 30 students. They were all bright, mostly of middle class origin. ^{that} It should be noted / very few among the students was studying to become ~~a~~ political writer^s. Most of them were interested in the arts, in sports or in **belle lettres**. As far as I know none of my school-mates was anxious to become a political newspaper man. Professionally teaching at the School of Journalism was very low. This I would contrast with the very high professional level ~~and~~ at the Actors' Academy. The low level of the school reflected above all the personality of Mr. Sarkany, chairman of the division. To give you an idea what this man was doing and how he was teaching journalism I would give the following example: He would write on the blackboard "there are two kinds of newspapers, imperialist and socialist", and under the imperialist newspaper men he would write ~~their~~ ^{their} characteristics such as ^{"lies} ~~xxxx~~ bribes, immorality, etc.". Under socialist newspaper men he would write "honesty, truthfulness, **loyalty** to the people", and so on. Now this was the spirit of the School of Journalism and this was what the students protested against. They were too bright to accept such nonsense and political conditions were such that it was possible for them to say what they thought of such an education. With Mr. Sarkany we did not even

discuss this matters in the class-room. It was hopeless. He was a hopeless case, we just ~~did~~^{sat} and paid no attention to what he was saying. To give you an illustration of the relationship between the students and Mr. Sarkany you^r should ask Mr. Marton about his meeting with Mr. Sarkany. When Sarkany ~~asked~~^{told} Marton to see him ~~xx~~ for his opinions ~~saying~~^{said} "In my ~~view~~^{opinion} you are an SOB", whereupon Marton ~~replied~~^{said} "My opinion about you is the same". You better ask Marton about this incident. But with some of the other professors, especially with Professor Lang, it was possible to disagree and have discussions. For instance, we would bring the Paris New York Herald Tribune and the Pravda to the class and compared it to saying how superior the Western paper was in every respect. Professor Lang would not deny that the Western paper was better in outlay, in news print, technically in general but he would repeat the slogan that what really matters is the spirit. Thus the students forced him to concede at least the technical superiority of Western papers. I am sure Mr. Marton could tell you all about this subject better than I because I did not ~~know~~ go much to the classes. ~~xx~~ As you will remember I enrolled in the School of Journalism just because I was not successful in continuing my studies at the Actors' Academy. The theater, however, remained my main interest. I was also acting in minor roles. I was going to all premieres and my interest in

the School of Journalism was very limited.

(Next I have asked respondent about his experiences during the Revolution.)

I would like to make it clear from the outset that I was not a Freedom Fighter. I was eye witness to many events of the Revolution and I tried to be an eye witness but I was not fighting. Most of the time I was roaming the city with my good friend Janos Gere^bden who was a newspaper man working on the staff of Hetfői Hir-
lap.

(What were your thoughts on October 23rd, I have asked respondent.)

The first time in my life perhaps I was enthusiastic on October 23rd. Another thought I had and remember so distinctly was to put on the brakes. It was namely so evident from the events of October 23rd that if we are unable to put on the brakes the situation will get out of hand and nothing good can come out of it. This was not just my own feelings. Many of my friends felt the same way. The group that was active in preparing the demonstrations at the School of Journalism felt that way. There were great many students who felt like myself that excesses can lead to no good results. It was incredible what happened on October 23rd and many of us were ~~both~~ enthusiastic no doubt, but also frightened by these events. After ten years of oppression we could not believe that such things, such excesses as, for instance, the pulling down of the Stalin statue could be

possible. We did not believe that it can lead to ~~many~~ good results. Actually those who prepared the demonstrations of October 23rd and who prepared so to speak the Revolution were trying to put on the brakes. It was of no avail, of course. But I would say that those who prepared the Revolution were for moderation. This holds true about the students and the writers in the Petöfi circle. But, of course, the control of the events got out of hand of the people who prepared the Revolution or rather who were instrumental in preparing the Revolution. The students in general favored peaceful ^{views} evolution. I think the ~~point~~ of the West concerning the role of the students in the Revolution is exaggerated and not ~~accurate~~ ^{accurate}. The students did not make the Revolution and also their role in the Revolution was less than the West is brought to believe. In my opinion the story is as follows: The ^{preparation} ~~preparation~~ was done by the writers in the Petöfi circle. The demonstration on October 23rd was the work of the students but the fighting and the Revolution was the work of the proletariat, of the workers. Of course, I am not to blame neither the students nor the workers. It was Gerö's radio speech on the evening of October 23rd and the AVO provocation that ignited the fighting, that started the Revolution. There was great confusion throughout the revolutionary days. The police ^{were} trying to seize control over the

situation. The police was, of course, supporting the new revolutionary government. What I mean, however, is that the police ^{in order to consolidate the} ~~in order to consolidate the~~ ^{Magyar} ~~National~~ ^{Government,} ~~Government,~~ ~~was~~ was trying to seize the arms and the ammunition which was widely distributed in the first days of the Revolution. The confusion was, however, too great to achieve consolidation.

(Next I asked respondent about his experiences after the Russian aggression on November the 4th.)

I was living with my mother and our two main concerns were first how to get bread, second how to prevent Freedom Fighters to enter the house in which we were living. We have organized a guard with ^{the} ~~with~~ intention to prevent fighters to enter the house. Not that we were against them but we were afraid that if they would open fire from the house, the Russians would mercilessly shoot and demolish the ~~house~~ whole building. It was the hopelessness of the situation that ~~compelled~~ ^{understood} us doing so. I know that in most houses the people were doing the same thing. The hopelessness of the situation was ~~known~~ ^{understood} by the Hungarian soldiers, too. I know of ~~some~~ ^{that} instances ~~where~~ the soldiers refused to obey orders to attack the Russians. These are stories the West does not know much about. But this is the full story of the Revolution.

(Next I have asked respondent about the hopes the people laid in the Western help.)

We were hopeful of Western aid or ^{more} ~~or~~ accurately we were

hopeful of American aid because the United States was the only country in the position to help. But here I would draw a line between our expectations prior to November the 4th and after November the 4th. Prior to November the 4th hopes in Western aid did not play any decisive role. On the contrary, many of us felt that if consolidation is possible at all it would come without Western interference. We were of the view namely that Western interference would only make things worse, would provoke the Soviets, would give a pretext for the Soviets to smash the new revolutionary regime. The situation became different after November the 4th. Then we were very much in need of help and we expected help from the United States. Hopes were maintained also by the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe. Radio Free Europe referred repeatedly to the American elections as a turning point in America's attitude. It was not stated in so many words but the impression was created that after the elections the United States would do something on our behalf. To explain more fully the feelings prior to November 4th I would like to add that the aid we ^{then} expected was not so much from the Western powers or from the United States but from the United Nations. Also the diplomatic actions of the Indian ambassador Menon in Moscow aroused some hopes that something would be done for consolidating

the Revolution^{ary} regime I personally think that had the United Nations acted prior to November 4th the Soviets could have been forced into accepting some sort of peaceful settlement of the Hungarian Revolution. Speaking about the West I would like to add finally that I have certain fears of the Hungarian emigration. The emigre politicians were not popular at home and many of us were afraid that they may initiate ~~some~~ ~~some~~ something that would be only harmful.

(Next I asked the respondent what in his opinion the Hungarians were hoping for to attain through the victorious Revolution.)

I think most Hungarians were anxious to preserve those achievements which served the democratization of the Hungarian society. We agreed with nationalization. I can speak from my own experience that I never thought of regaining ownership over the apartment house which we owned and which was nationalized and I hope you would not suspect me of Communist sympathies. But the truth is that we were, of most of us were, or most of the ~~Hungarian~~ Hungarians were ~~with~~ in agreement with national-^{mentioned} ization. You could hear very often the Swedish example as being best suited for Hungary. It was a sort of transition from bourgeois democracy to socialism. Of course, socialism not in the Soviet interpretation of the word or not in the form of Soviet practice. What I mean is that ~~the~~ we approved of the idea that banking

industry should remain nationalized. Also, of course, we rejected the idea of returning the land to their former owners, the big estates.

(Finally I have asked respondent about his escape from Hungary.)

I left Hungary on December 15th 1956. I first did not want to leave. There were perhaps two motivations which changed my mind. One was the absolute hopelessness of the situation at home. I saw no sense whatsoever in staying. The second was that I was afraid of being arrested or being deported.

(Are you planning to go back to Hungary, I asked respondent.)

By all means if conditions would change.

Interviewer's rating:

Respondent's rapport, frankness, cooperativeness were excellent. No sign of compliance or flattery. Respondent does not belong among the ^{top} ~~best~~ intellectuals of the Oxford group. He is, ^{nevertheless}, an extremely intelligent boy. He did not participate actively in the students' movement, however, his observations seem to be reliable and based on good judgement. His main interest is the theater and the art in general. His lack of interest in politics and lack of participation in the students' political movements ^{does not. in my view,} ~~decrease~~ the value of his statements.