

COPY 10

NO. 411 & "B- " INTERVIEW  
415

JLB

p. 2

It was a beautiful day; my colleague and I went by bus near Innsbruck to interview a professor of botanics and his family. We had heard that the wife of the professor was also a professional - cartoonist. For some strange reason, I expected her to be a political cartoonist, thus an intelligent, "wicked" person, sort of a Bohemian. To my greatest surprise, ~~the~~ a perfect housewife greeted us. The perfection achieved was not easily done, though: She had "laboured" and her features showed signs of strain and resentment. It was apparent, from the first minute, that great injustices <sup>been done</sup> had happened to this woman. She was offended and yet tried to put on a good show. This was most painful. They lived in wooden barracks in two spotlessly clean rooms. The family, as we found out, <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ composed of five members: Three children, a girl aged 20, <sup>another</sup> ~~one~~ aged 16, and a boy of 13. ~~of age~~. As soon as we entered, a great wooden box, which showed the signs of recent scrubbing, was pulled into the middle of the room. An extremely white, -to the point of hurting the eyes, -tablecloth was put on it and in came sandwiches, elaborately decorated, and beer. The sandwiches <sup>were</sup> meant to appear as small chef-d'oeuvres--of bad taste.

"flowers of mustard" were put with the utmost care on the Salami. The lettuce under it was not torn carelessly by rushing hands, it was cut with the utmost care with <sup>seasonal</sup> ~~thithers~~. Suddenly a guilt-complex came over me: "How

could I be such a savage and ruin this elaborate work by eating it?" Looking at the woman's expression, this did not help my diminishing appetite. I suddenly remembered where I have seen her before: She was the martyr of my childhood's history book, the woman thrown into the middle of the arena to be devoured by hungry beasts.

I suddenly turned toward the husband for some solace - but there was no solace for me that day. The husband had no face - I almost asked him: "When did you lose your face?" There were so many lies written on it that I

suddenly realized it would be a super-human task to ~~unbury~~ <sup>uncover</sup> from under them the real face. I suddenly turned to my colleague and said: "You take the man - although we had <sup>previously</sup> decided that I will handle him - I hope, I can manage the woman." I <sup>we</sup> ~~perfectly~~ started to talk about

bagatelles and working my way back through the crowded path of chinoiserie, of little lace covers, of biedermeier furniture, her past was unravelled. She, the

daughter of a Royal commercial councillor, the granddaughter of a professor at the Ludovika Academy, the mistress of countless country houses, of majestic apartments in the Capital, had to undergo the Communist

<sup>regime</sup> rules! Indeed, she was offended, life seemed to hurl one offense after the other at her - the greatest maybe being the fact that at a university ball she had to dance with the janitor of the school. Compared to this, the fact that her husband entered the Communist

Party, was insignificant. After all, he did it for the good of the students. They begged him to do it and, as a good professor, he obeyed. ~~For~~ Plus, he had another ~~and~~ consideration, she communicated in a very low voice - it was higher politic, only a few selected ones knew about it, namely that a merger with the Social Democrats might eventually lead to a gradual softening of the Communist doctrine. So, ~~her husband~~, in joining the Party, performed a patriotic deed. He wilfully took it upon himself to be called a: "Dirty Communist", because he knew only too well that very few would understand his perspectives. All this was said quasi in parentheses, we both gracefully slipped over this rather unpleasant subject and arrived back to the ball where she, the daughter of so and so, the granddaughter of so and so, had to valse with the janitor. At this point, I saw it fit to ask for the family album - apparently the spirit of martyrdom is infectious. We went through many baptisms, family reunions, and Christmas Evenings. One picture was shown with special loving care: "It was Christmas 1944 with our dearest friends" It did not surprise me at all that the "very dearest" was in an SS-uniform. The other "poor dears" had to flee from Hungary and some of them were caught in Austria, tried as war criminals, some of them were taken prisoners to Russia, and most of them could never set their foot back on Hungarian soil. "Life is indeed sad" - we both agreed.

In the midst of our lamentations, the 20 years old daughter came in. She made a gracious curtsy to me ("Am I that ancient, or is ~~is~~ she?") and greeted both of her parents with: ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ "Küss die Hand, Mama und Papa!" Inutile to add that she had blond hair and blue eyes, empty blue eyes. Her legs were very heavy and her body was not young. The face was infantile, very common in 1937, an anachronism though in 1957. In a school girl fashion, she gave a report of her morning activities. The mother listened with undisguised pride, her eyes were provokingly asking me: "Do you see?" and I nodded, I saw it. "How did you manage?" was my next logical question. "I did not take any outside job, I was at home. My main concern was to keep the family together. My apartment was always spotlessly clean. I washed every day the leaves of the palm, and I watched. And watched. I suddenly saw a big spider sitting on her spotless palm leaves - big pause. I knew, I was being cruel to the woman, <sup>by</sup> ~~is~~ not putting further questions at this point, but somehow I could not help it and I knew that I will get the result of her watching, whether I wanted it or not. So, finally, triumphantly she said: "And in 1956 I brought two virgins out of Hungary!"

~~For the last few years I have been working on a book about the history of the Hungarian people. I have been working on it for a long time and I have been very busy with it. I have been working on it for a long time and I have been very busy with it.~~

"And what else did you do during the last years?" "was my next - I must admit, clumsy - question. Looking at the woman's eyes, I quickly added: "I know that you have suffered. All I want now is you to tell me, how." - "I practically never left my home, ~~I have been working on a book about the history of the Hungarian people. I have been working on it for a long time and I have been very busy with it.~~ but I did the work at home. I illustrated books, botany and zoology books." Although I did believe it, she still insisted that I looked at some of the books she had illustrated. When this was done with, she brought out the other type of work she busied herself with. She illustrated graduation pictures voluntarily - she was not paid for this job. "But it paid, she added, with a shrewd smile, because look at this graduation picture, what do you see?" Other painful seconds. What should I see? Among the young faces intertwined with grapes <sup>then was</sup> and a great white horse with a barbarian on it. "Who is he," she asked me inquisitively. "the God of the Hungarians helped me at this moment, because I bluntly said: "This is Arpad and his famous White horse." I passed the examination. "But what don't you see on this picture?" I saw no signs of a designing talent, but I did not insist to point this out and I am sure that that was not the answer she was driving at.

"There are no Red Stars or Red Flags in this xxxxxx



picture! Grand, this is my doing. I smuggled out the Red Stars and smuggled in patriotic feeling." ~~Against~~  
~~had the anxiety that she expected a little~~  
~~decoration from me, from Columbia, from the United~~  
~~States, from the world. I definitely felt embarrassed~~  
~~not to be able to live up to her expectations~~  
~~waiting her.~~ "Another of my very significant accomplishments", she added, "was the new flag of the gymnasium my daughter went to. The flag did not have any Russian emblems on. I insisted and won the battle that Arpad on his White Horse should be the centre of the flag. I became ~~the~~ a member of the parents' co-operative", ~~this infatigable woman~~ <sup>she</sup> added, "to save children." The hidden goals of this parents' co-operative was to spy on the children, rather their families under the pretext of visiting, while they were sick. Another member of the parents' co-operative was a worker woman. And I, the wife of a university professor, had to <sup>go</sup> with this worker woman to different homes, tolerate her uncultured speech and her inexistent manners." As a member of this parents' co-operative, she/taught to the graduating class of 1955 (her daughter was in it) to sing <sup>G</sup>gaudeamus... the ~~the~~ "Old Student" could not be sung any more, because there was a mentioning of <sup>a</sup>certain "magister" in it. Furthermore, <sup>"E"</sup>elindultam szép Magyarországról, the patriotic song. Then she insisted that the monthly giving of 1-5 forints by the school

children for Stalin's or Lenin's <sup>statues</sup> ~~sculptures~~ or Communist flags should be <sup>stopped</sup> ~~once for~~ <sup>24.</sup> ~~even stopped.~~  
In connection with the Lenin <sup>statue</sup> ~~sculpture~~, Elvirka remembered that, ~~the Lenin sculpture~~ <sup>it</sup> at their school <sup>^</sup> was standing in a rivulet of spittings. Furthermore, that the geography professor, who was responsible for the general cleanliness of the school, had to go around with a big rag with which he would constantly wipe the spittings off Stalin's, Lenin's, Marx's, etc. pictures.

~~To give the mother a better picture of the school and the teachers, the attitude of the students, the subjects liked or disliked, the entrance requirements at the universities and so on. As far as teachers were concerned, only those from the old ones would be kept for whom no substitutes had been found, as yet. The recruitment of new "teachers" happened this way: If a factory worker happened to be alert and a good Communist, then he was sent to a "quickie" at a university and at the same time, delegated to a secondary school as a teacher. Elvirka's biology teacher was a factory worker, a very able textile worker, but she did not know anything about biology. She acknowledged this once to the mother of Elvirka while they were going out to one of their monthly visits to a supposedly sick child. At this point the mother proudly intervened and said that~~  
~~the mother of Elvirka while they were going out to one of their monthly visits to a supposedly sick child. At this point the mother proudly intervened and said that~~

after that ride on the street-car the biology teacher never recovered and in a couple of months gave her resignation to the principal<sup>al</sup>, saying that it was made clear to her that she is not the right person to fill the job. She went back to the factory. "This was one of my minor accomplishments in that school," the mother modestly added. The history teacher happened to be an "old" teacher and he constantly complained that ~~for him~~ <sup>for him</sup> learning history anew is much more difficult than for his pupils. Actually they learned no world history, because world history, as far as the Communists were concerned, consisted of the history of Marxism and Leninism; and the history of the Bolchevis<sup>k</sup> Party was much more important than the one of Hungary. "Now", Elvirka added, "it is ~~much~~ most embarrassing to talk to people of my age who had such vast knowledge in history. I do not even know who Hitler was actually. All I learned about him was that he was no good. Maybe, I should revise my opinion now." ~~that I have revised my opinion in many fields~~ ~~with her own~~ The most hated person in school was the Russian teacher, originally a teacher of German language, but now a member of the Party and an ardent pupil of the Lenin Academy. Before graduation, she was supposed to take the graduating students for a 4-5 day vacation in the mountains of Bakony. She <sup>[the teacher]</sup> ~~did not dare~~ <sup>not</sup> to do it, because she was aware of the fact that the



~~children~~ <sup>students</sup> would beat her. ~~This~~ <sup>It</sup> had happened many times that, before or immediately after graduation, students would get hold of the Communist members of the faculty and somehow manage to beat them almost to death. Of course, these facts were never publicized, but they were common knowledge among secondary school pupils. So, this teacher being aware of the fate awaiting her, asked the mother of Elvirka to take her place and go on the planned ~~extension~~ excursion. ~~The mother~~ <sup>The mother</sup> said that those four days were the most harrowing of her experiences. She had never realized before, how different her children were, if compared to their ~~colleagues~~ <sup>schoolmates</sup>.

"Ildiko was sure different", the young son of the family ~~interfered~~ <sup>vened</sup> (a very conscientious young man, who since he came into the room did not bother to look up too much and buried himself in his homework) "she had a [ec] "3" from good conduct," he continued. "That is right", the mother took over, "and I am proud of it, because she got it only due to the fact that she argued with the teachers. She said, for instance, that Petöfi was not a Communist. This audacious statement was discussed by the faculty and it was finally decided that she should leave school immediately. They did not dare bother my husband" - "Because he was a Party member," the son quietly added from his corner. "My son is at an age, the mother irritat<sup>bly</sup>ly added, when he does

not know when to talk or shut up. Coming back to my little Ildiko, I hurriedly had to take her to another school. There we looked at each other with the principle, <sup>al</sup> no ~~work~~ words were uttered - one could not talk about certain things in Hungary - and she was accepted in silence. The night before, my husband lectured Ildiko the following way: Remember, he shouted at her, that whatever comes from Russia is good and whatever comes from the West is bad. If you do not go by this guiding principle, you will be a failure, like your father is."

"Mother, could I say some <sup>thing</sup>, it has nothing to do with family affairs", added the voice from the corner. Permission was granted. "What irritated me most in school, was the fact that <sup>the</sup> teacher always had to contradict themselves. I felt sorry and angry at the same time watching their plight. For instance, one year we would have to learn that Tito is a gangster, as a matter of fact, it was even written in our history book. And the next year we did not receive our reports until we would hand over the books which we had to buy from <sup>our</sup> own funds, because suddenly we had <sup>to</sup> discover <sup>that</sup> they were full with lies and they did not want to leave the lies between our hands. Then, I was so eager to find out who the great Hungarian writers were, <sup>but</sup> ~~that~~ the <sup>is</sup> list always changed. In geography, we were taught that Transylvania belongs to Rumania, and my parents told

me confidentially that it ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> still ours, rather it should be ours. And all the comedies we had to go through, when going to church...." - "I think", the mother took authoritatively over, "that you have said what ~~you~~<sup>she</sup> wanted to say." - "You know, mother, there is freedom of speech in Austria; we are no more in Hungary." - "You are in my house!" - "Yes, mother." - "And what about doing something outside? Our little garden needs water. What about watering our flowers?" - "Yes, mother."

"The child was right about church, there was quite a comedy attached to attending church services. First, we would never go in our district where we were known. Then, if in some other neighbourhood we met people from our district who would walk around the church, we would walk around with them and after talking to them for a couple of minutes, say good bye and leave in the opposite direction from <sup>the</sup> church door. Half an hour <sup>later</sup> we would go back and, to our greatest surprise, find the friends, who had also departed in an opposite direction from the church door, in the church itself. To our greatest distress, Elvirka could not be confirmed, because if they had found out at school, they might not have let her graduate. There was quite a circus in connection with the last ointment given to my poor mother - the hospital authorities, at the time, did not want the priest to enter the hospital; but I and my five brothers

insisted. She did die in peace after having seen the priest, but <sup>at</sup> the very last moments of her life she asked for a Catholic burial. Some of my brothers said that she was unconscious at the time, so we should not consider it as her last wish, but I felt that she knew perfectly well what she was asking for and insisted that she <sup>receive</sup> ~~got~~ a Catholic burial. My brothers were afraid for their jobs. (Two of them are statisticians - statistics, what a circus!) But I was of the opinion that the peace of my mother's mind is more important than their jobs. As you can see, life in Hungary was a constant fight for me.

As sad as this may sound, I was ridiculed by my own children. I was accused of being a fossil of times gone by. But I insisted to chaperon my daughters wherever they would go, I insisted that the doors be closed quietly, that service plates should be always on the table, that in street-cars they should jump up and give their places to the eldest <sup>one</sup>. I had to fight their speech, I had to fight their movements, they were not able to sit down as gentlemen or ladies should. I preached that women be respected. I demanded that my husband kissed my hand whenever <sup>he</sup> ~~we~~ would come home, not for <sup>my</sup> ~~his~~ sake but for my children's sake. Communism ceased outside the walls of my apartment and inside we lived as I used to live when I was a little girl. My children took music lessons, my children took private language lessons, I



raised them in the Western sense of the word. I felt like putting cotton in my little Ildiko's and Elvirka's ears when going on the street we would hear the following conversation: "Szevasz (hi!)" followed by a big slap on the shoulder, this slap coming from a boy toward a girl, mind you. "Gyerünk csörögeni" ("Let's go and rattle our old bones!"). "Tudok egy klassz filmet" ("I know a classy, topping movie.") And then the young "gentleman" would start going with the young "lady" in a way that I could never figure out how they managed to walk, so much they were leaning on each other. ~~They~~

~~and this was the first time~~ Leaving the walls of our apartment, meant a heartache for me every time I would do it. We left our fortress and ventured out into the dirtiest of all worlds.

One/exception to this was the Revolution; then I was the one who sent ~~out~~ my family out. I, who so vigilantly guarded them at home, told my children: "Go and fight!" Elvirka was even wounded. (At the window, the blond head of junior appeared and he made me sign with his eyes that this was not true. I thanked him for the silent information and, luckily for him, the mother did not notice this little scene between us. She enthusiastically continued:) I may just as well tell you, if you have not heard it from others, that I was the first woman in Budapest to cut out the Soviet emblem

from the Hungarian flag. It ~~was~~ a shattering scene. Our apartment faced the square where General Bem's statue is, and suddenly, when I heard the demonstrations, I felt that I should contribute with putting the red-white-green flag in the window. While I was feverishly doing it, a divine inspiration came. I ran for the letter opening ~~knives~~ <sup>scissors</sup> and went out the window, risking my life and cut out the emblem. A tremendous cheer followed. I was standing alone in the window, facing the crowd, and crying. "This moment, she got up from the chair, spread her arms, and started to cry, ~~and I did not have any trouble crying in the presence of the crowd when I was~~ <sup>earn</sup> ~~it necessary, but somehow now I could not squeeze one~~ ~~trial out. So I took over the part of the crowd and cheered, because I definitely felt that I should enter~~ ~~into the history.~~ "So, she continued, with tears in her voice, I was the first woman to cut the emblem out and my husband was the first volunteer faculty member to join the university's youth brigade. We both embarked on a road with no return; ~~(I remember this because I said many, many times in the family)~~ and here we are in Innsbruck.

And in Innsbruck, we suffered again. We are humiliated every minute. It is true that my husband has a scholarship and works in a laboratory, it is true that I have a job at the university, meaning that I am allowed to work without being paid. It is true that Elvirka is

going to a medical school - that is what she wanted to do for years- it is true that my two other children are going to school and will be able to graduate in due time, nevertheless, life is hard. It is hard because my husband is apprehensive - he is afraid that people in Western countries will not be able to understand his attitude during the past years in Hungary. Should we suffer now for having been Communists, when we were fighting the régime every minute?! No.

But let me go back to the Revolution for one minute. I would like to tell you about an incident. In our house, lived the secretary and mistress of Mihály Farkas. She was always going around in his big car and was always denouncing people (I <sup>did</sup> not ask~~ing~~ at this point, how <sup>did</sup> it <sup>happen</sup> come that they lived in the same house with the secretary and mistress of Mihály Farkas. She probably lived in one of the very best apartment houses in Budapest. It must have been a Party house. So, this fortress she was talking about, was in a Communist apartment house!) During the Revolution, I heard one day voices <sup>shout</sup> saying: "Don't protect her, don't protect her!" I did not know what the crowd was shouting about, ran to the back of my apartment and there was this woman, who managed to come up bleeding to my door. Of course, I would not have thought of protecting her, so I did not let her in. My husband arrived from downstairs, with the crowd after him; about 20-30 people penetrated

into the house. When he saw the beaten up woman, he said: "That's what you get from denouncing people!"

We stepped aside and let the crowd take over. ~~There was a lot of shouting and crying and people were running around.~~

~~There was a lot of shouting and crying and people were running around.~~

"Let us go back to school," I said. "Elvirka, I have neglected you. What about telling me about school? What about telling me whether you owe something to the régime you were obliged to live under for the last decade? Was it really all black? Did not any colour creep into it?"

She furtively looked at her mother and then said: "Let us start with school. I ~~am~~ <sup>ad</sup> want to become a medical student, but I did not succeed in being accepted. On the Board of Admission were: One person with academic standing, one professor, from the school, one Party secretary, one secretary of the DISZ, or a substitute of the latter, and one person from the personnel department.

There were two types of entrance questions:

- 1) Questions from the respective fields the student intended to study.
- 2) Personal questions addressed to the future student about his past activities within the frames <sup>work</sup> of the DISZ, or about any type of pioneering activities, extra-curricular mostly.

In her case, she ~~would~~ <sup>had</sup> answer to questions of type 2



that she had been the leader of the biology study circle in her school, and ~~she~~ <sup>also</sup> was responsible for the decorations on festive occasions, like Women's Day and Stalin or Lenin Day. At this point, she did not say that, although she took care of the decorating, she never used the Soviet emblems, but only the portraits of Kossuth or Petöfi.

All in all, one could accumulate 25 points and the minimum number of points <sup>to be</sup> ~~one would~~ be admitted to, <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ five.

The entrance examinations were oral and written, and both were graded: Very good - 5, good - 4, average - 3, satisfactory - 2, unsatisfactory - 1.

High school graduation also counted: An excellent graduation - 6, very good - 5, good - 4, average - 3, satisfactory - 2, and unsatisfactory - 1.

In the above evaluation (judging by points), the kader did not figure ~~in~~. But after having been graded, the future student was examined from the point of view of the kader.

The categories in the kader were:

Worker - peasant; intelligentsia; functionaries; others (great or small industrialists, great or small merchants, kulaks, landowners, small or great, etc.).

Thus, in the kader file would be noted the origin and the feelings towards the régime of the candidate.

The best origin was ~~that of the~~ "worker" - if somebody

was of this origin, even if his final grading was ~~unsatisfactory~~ ~~"unsatisfactory"~~ from everything, he still would be accepted, unless ~~the~~ <sup>or she</sup> had relatives in America; what actually counted was the fact whether the parents were workers even before 1945 and whether they were active Party members. If not, a certain pull was needed - this pull was useless, though, in the case of the children of the aristocracy, ~~the~~ ex-officers, landowners, ex-landowners, and <sup>of</sup> the intelligentsia.

Sometimes one <sup>could</sup> would successfully cheat in giving one's data. A good friend of hers wrote in as the occupation of her father "ex-farm-hand", although he used to be a ~~big~~ <sup>big</sup> landowner. But, as they had lived in <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ Selvidék, now Czechoslovakia, the checking was not easy and the girl took the risk.

Scholarships were given according to ~~scholastic~~ ~~scholastic~~ results, or according to the social circumstances of the family.

According to scholastic records, the "good" student would get 140 forints per month, the "very good" - 220 forints, and the "excellent" - 320 forints per month.

According to the social circumstances of the family, scholarships would start from 560 per month.

There was also such a phenomenon as the so-called <sup>of</sup> "technical graduation" (1-2 years of schooling after elemen-

tary classes). In these cases even the average student would receive 80 forints and everyone of these students, regardless of their social standing, <sup>or scholastic achievement</sup> would automatically receive at least 400 forints per month. Plus everyone would receive help to buy <sup>books</sup> ~~new~~ and help to buy clothing.

If the respective parents earned more than 1.800 forints per month, then the student had to pay tuition, unless he was an "excellent" or "very good" student. If he was simply a "good" student, then he would have to pay 100 forints, if he was an "average" student, then would have to pay more. But for a "good" grade a student coming from the stratum of the intelligentsia would have to work much harder than a student coming from the stratum of workers or peasants. The statistics were given in advance to the teachers and they had to work out the student material accordingly, in other words, they were told that students, children of peasants and workers will have to attain "good" or "very good" grades, while no more than a given percentage of children of the intelligentsia could attain a "good" grade.

In addition to the above, there was the so-called Rákosi scholarship, received by those who had been excellent students in secondary schools and had an excellent kader in addition. Of course, very few students did get the above-mentioned scholarship. It meant 750 forints per month.

Coming back to my second question, about the sides of Communism she enjoyed, she must in all fairness <sup>answer</sup> ~~say~~ that she is very glad to have studied Leninism and Marxism. It certainly developed her logic and sharpened her political view. The new generation in Hungary is much more mature than the preceding one at the particular age she is at, e.g., ~~the~~ because her generation always thinks of the consequences of an action. She <sup>believes</sup> thinks that Leninism is relatively acceptable. And had the Communist régime stayed at Leninism, <sup>it</sup> might have had good results in Hungary.

Stalin was not a Marxist, he only quoted Marx in his speeches. He deterred from it in its essence, because Marxism ~~has~~ taught that the workers <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ suppressed and Stalin's principles were based on the suppression of the workers.

She certainly knows that there was feudalism in Hungary during the Horthy régime, that the situation was intolerable, and now she feels that <sup>even if communism come to an end in Hungary</sup> ~~if a change would come,~~ one should not give more to a <sup>person</sup> ~~person~~ than the necessary capital to live ~~where they~~ very well - in other words, one should not forget humanitarian principles.

Colour did creep into everybody's life when going to the theater or <sup>to</sup> opera. She just felt sorry for herself, and the public generally, that they were so shabbily dressed, while such beautiful materials were seen on the stage. And yet, compared to her <sup>school mates</sup> ~~colleagues~~, she, with her



skirt and blouses, was always thought of as very elegant. She liked to listen to her mother when she would describe the balls of her girlhood - she liked ~~the~~ the glitter her mother was surrounded with - although she felt that she would not like to live in that society, where the social differences were so accentuated. '

Her mother closed the conversation by saying: "Elvirka, you said enough, more than enough."

~~She said that she was not interested in the glitter and the social differences, but in the people who were around her.~~  
~~She said that she was not interested in the glitter and the social differences, but in the people who were around her.~~

(Note: Interviewer's impression was that Respondents - the mother in particular, and the children to a varying degree - were hypocritical, opportunists and possibly still with nazi sympathies.)