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## Life of an Agent: Re-Energizing Stalinism and Learning the Language of Collaboration after 1956 in Hungary

In order for a secret police report to be taken seriously, it had to be lodged in the proper form, according to the discursive styles of the state bureaucracy, and in particular the secret police. Thus, the authors of the reports adopted numerous elements of style and rhetoric in order to ensure that their goals would be achieved. How was this bureaucratic style adopted in Hungary, and how did ordinary citizens decide to accommodate to or cooperate with the authorities under the communist regime after the 1956 Revolution? I argue that the creators and editors of the secret police reports (the “unofficial informants” and their case officers) were “sculpting” the official language as an artefact and mapping their social network in accordance with idealized images of the politico-social body. The first step in the implementation of massive, forceful coercion was to change the narratives and the social categories that were used to depict the social status of a “good citizen” and the local communities. In the early phases of their work, during which they learned what was expected of them and how to meet these expectations, the informants mastered the language of the secret police in order to ensure, in the meantime, that they were able to realize their own personal goals in their local communities by taking advantage of their access to the state security network. Thus the function of the reports on the one hand was rhetorical: they were made in order to feed the bureaucracy. On the other, they served as a means with which their authors won approval among other members of the network of their personal, everyday goals. The authoring of reports, which can be understood as a kind of period of training, thus was not simply a matter of exercising social control, but quite the reverse, it also served as a means of appropriating power by members of society in the interests of specific personal goals that had little or nothing to do directly with the agendas of the regime.

Keywords: communist regime, Kádár regime, bureaucratic language, secret police, cooperation, political participation, Eastern Europe, Hungary

### *Introduction*

Throughout the entire Kádár regime (the period between 1957 and 1989 in Hungary),<sup>1</sup> a man referred to in the records as Gy. wrote reports from a mining

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1 More on the Kádár regime see János M. Rainer, *Bevezetés a kádárizmusba* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet–L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2011); György Majtényi, “What Made the Kádár Era?,” *The Hungarian Historical Review*

village in Nógrád county, which is dotted with small villages nestled in valleys.<sup>2</sup> Like a king in disguise, with his reports he dispensed justice in the everyday affairs of the village. Gradually, he mastered the language of the bureaucracy. As the president of the division of the local football team, which played in the second tier of the national championship teams when it was at its best, he traveled through the mining region. He was given his first task because of the figures who prompted a massacre by the Communist police in the city of Salgótarján on December 8, 1956<sup>3</sup> (a large part of the victims were from the village in which he lived) and because of his father-in-law, a Social Democrat who hailed from a mining family that had emigrated to Hungary from northern Italy. He was given his last task because of the reburial of Imre Nagy, the Prime Minister of the revolutionary government in 1956 who was executed in 1958. The reburial, which took place in 1989, was an event of great symbolic significance.<sup>4</sup> Gy. himself was injured at the time of the 1956 massacre (according to his relatives, not in the actual violence of the massacre, but rather in an accident that took place elsewhere), but presumably the police did not use this in order to pressure him to write reports, but rather the fact that in 1948 he had been sentenced to ten years in prison as a war criminal (he had been released after having served 18 months). His refusal to cooperate with the state security forces, his alleged or presumed participation in the events of 1956 (Gy. had been a member of a workers' council in 1956), and his conviction as a war criminal provided the police with ample material with which to blackmail and recruit him.

National politics repeatedly crisscrossed the life history of the informant referred to in the official documents simply by the letters Gy., in spite of the fact that, having gotten average grades in school, he spent the better part of his life working as a physical laborer or in a low-level office position in the railway service and later the mine. Using his life history, I attempt to make a local interpretation (in other words the “view from the bottom”) of the major events that shaped

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2, no. 3 (2013): 667–75; and Majtényi's seminal book regarding the social functions of the Kádár cult. György Majtényi, *Vezérsel. Kádár János mindennapjai* (Budapest: Libri Kiadó, 2012).

2 Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára [Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security Services, hereafter: ÁSzITL]. M-42230/1-3.

3 More on the local history of 1956: 1956 *Nógrád megyei kronológiája és személyi adattára: a forradalom eseményei és aktív szereplői a megyében*, ed. László Á. Varga (Salgótarján: Nógrád Megyei Levéltár, 1996).

4 Karl P. Benziger, “The Funeral of Imre Nagy: Contested History and the Power of Memory Culture,” *History and Memory* 12, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2000): 142–64; Gábor Ittész, “Ritual and National Self-Interpretation: The Nagy Imre Funeral,” *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, 1 (November 2005), accessed February 3, 2015, <http://www.rascee.net/index.php/rascee/article/view/26/7>.

the twentieth century more understandable.<sup>5</sup> In this article, I address, within this larger framework, how Gy. became part of the secret police network and how he mastered the official language with which he was able, on the one hand, to write reports that were considered acceptable by the authorities and, on the other, to achieve his own personal goals, using the network as a means.

According to Michael Shafir, when an official view of history, such as the Marxist–Leninist one, is abolished, memory and historical scholarship become competitors. Shafir makes this observation in connection with the report of the Tismăneanu Committee as the presentation of a kind of conclusive and absolute historical narrative.<sup>6</sup> A similar process was underway following the events of 1989 which shaped the “agent-hunting” narrative mode based on the impassioned call to make the files of the secret police and the lists of operatives and agents accessible to the public.

After all, if society consisted exclusively of victims and perpetrators, then not only could the perpetrators be found out, on moral grounds they *must* be found out, as this would contribute to the consolidation of democracy, at least according to prevailing public opinion. According to this narrative, the denunciation of agents and the “cleansing” of public life of the “perpetrators” of the previous system (lustration) were both demands of civil rights activists and political tools.<sup>7</sup> The demand to make the files accessible to the public was a campaign the emotional point of departure of which was the belief that the success of the committees “in search of the truth” depended on society’s fortitude. Thus, the many volumes that have been written on state security forces notwithstanding, as of yet no empirical studies have been done addressing the question of the extent to which the state securities actually constituted an element that stabilized the system. As by now has come to seem almost self-evident on the basis of source criticism on the documents of the state security forces, for the contents

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5 This study is a part of a larger monograph based on the life story of Gy. with the support of program number K-104408 of the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA).

6 Michael Shafir, “Memory and History in Postcommunism: Preliminary Theoretical Remarks,” *Sfera Politicii* 120–121–122 (2006), accessed December 15, 2014, <http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/120-121-122/art21-shafir.html>.

7 On lustration in Eastern Europe see: Herman Schwartz, “Lustration in Eastern Europe,” *Parker School Journal of East European Law* 1 (1994): 141–71; Lavinia Stan, “The Vanishing Truth? Politics and Memory in Post-Communist Europe,” *East European Quarterly* 40 (2006): 392–410; Maria Lo, “Lustration and Truth Claims: Unfinished Revolutions in Central Europe,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 20 (1995): 117–61; Alexander Mayer-Rieckh and Pablo de Greiff, eds., *Justice as Prevention: Vetting Public Employees in Transitional Societies* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2007); *Encyclopedia of Transitional Justice*, ed. Lavinia Stan and Nadya Nedelsky (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

of these documents have been understood as reflections not of “reality,” but rather of the expectations of the state security forces and the party, and not only by scholars and researchers, but also by readers at the time.

For these reasons, relatively little attention has been devoted to the fact that the texts that were created and used by the networks were the products of a form of interaction in which the informers became part of the bureaucracy through a distinctive kind of training process. In order to be able to write reports that would meet the needs of the authorities, they had to learn the clichés that they were expected to use. As Katherine Verdery has written in connection with the Securitate on the last period of the era, “the Securitate increasingly became a pedagogical or didactic rather than a punitive institution.”<sup>8</sup> As I intend to show in this article, however, the relationship between Gy. and his case officer was similar to the relationship between a teacher and a pupil, at least from their perspective, even from the outset, though in the case of Gy. we are speaking of a “pupil” who learned not only what was expected of him, but also how to achieve his own goals indirectly by making use of the reports.

I argue in this article that the function of the secret police reports on the one hand was rhetorical: they were made in order to feed the bureaucracy. On the other hand, however, they served as a means with which their authors won approval among other members of the network of their personal, everyday goals. The authoring of reports, which can be understood as a kind of period of training, thus was not simply a matter of exercising social control, but quite the reverse, it also served as a means of appropriating power by members of society in the interests of specific personal goals that had little or nothing to do directly with the agendas of the regime.

Towards the end of the 1960s, mining in Nógrád was irrelevant on the national level as the working class policy had become less and less important for the Kádár regime.<sup>9</sup> Gy.’s mine was closed in 1968 because it was no longer regarded as economically viable,<sup>10</sup> though the sedulous sentries of the state security forces continued to insist on the submission of reports by agents who took a fancy to writing them and who, by then, had provided ample proof of their

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8 Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania’s Secret Police* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2014), 17.

9 For more on the state policy regarding industrial workers during the 1950s, especially at the beginning of the Kádár era, see: Mark Pittaway, *The Workers’ State: Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944–1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

10 Ferenc Szvircsek, *Bányászkönyv* (Salgótarján: Nógrád Megyei Múzeum, 2000), 403.

reliability. More and more frequently, Gy. used the reports as tools with which to promote his own interests. He could enforce “justice” for the “little man” (for instance, in the tavern they were watering down the wine, or cars were being repaired on the black market in the neighboring street). The reports contain not calls for collective action, but rather numerous manners of attempting to further personal interests.

In this article, I seek the answer to the question of how Gy., as the author of texts used by the state security, reinterpreted his own identity and how he created a portrayal of himself as a useful member of society. This was the period in his life when, as the head of the division of the local soccer team, he had a large network of relationships, which he used when writing reports. His collaboration with the local authorities (in comparison with the transformation of the inhabitants of the village) was not striking by any means. The financial positions of his neighbors and relatives (which can be clearly traced in the census records) were closely linked to his cooperation with the regime.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Preconditions: A Life Story before the Secret Police*

Gy. was born in 1923, the son of a mechanic who worked at the Salgótarján Coal Mine Company, which was sinking into financial ruin because of the new borders of the Treaty of Trianon, which severed the mines from many of the communities they have served. His mother used her mother’s Swabian name.<sup>12</sup> Gy.’s mother, like her mother before her, gave birth to her first child at the age of sixteen as an unwed girl. Fortunately for her, one fine day towards the end of World War I she was introduced to a man six years her senior, a locksmith named Aladár whose family was part of the petty nobility and who would later become Gy.’s father. Until the beginning of the Communist era in Hungary, Gy. spelled his family name with the letter “y” on the end, an indication of noble rank, but he then changed it to “i,” which helped spare him the wrath of the authorities. Aladár’s father was a magistrate of an administrative district in Zagyvapálfalva, a village that later was inundated with miners, but according to the recollections of family members, after

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11 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [Hungarian National Archives, hereafter: MNL]. XXXII-23-a 1970. évi népszámlálás [National Census Records, 1970]. Nógrád, Kisterenye, 1970. évi. 019 számlálókörzet anyagai.

12 MNL Nógrád Megyei Levéltár [Nógrád County Archive], hereafter: NML. XXXIII. Anyakönyvi kivonatok másodpéldányai. Születési anyakönyvek. [Duplicates of Registration Certificates. Birth Certificates]. Zagyvapálfalva. 1915–1924.

the war, having been caught embezzling money from the widows' war relief fund, he shot himself in the head, either out of guilt or shame.<sup>13</sup> Aladár had only one flaw: he limped, because during the war he had been shot in the heel while serving on the front by Isonzo. So he was slightly less popular among the women. This may explain why he was willing to marry a woman who had already given birth to an illegitimate child. She would give birth to six more children. The birth registries of her many children allow one to track the wanderings of the family in the mining region relatively easily. Gy. had two older sisters, but following the death of his older brother in childhood he was the oldest boy in the family. (His parents went on to have three more children, all girls.)<sup>14</sup>

Sociographer Zoltán Szabó characterized Kisterenye, the village in Nógrád county where Gy. was born, in the 1930s as a community in which, in exchange for their submissiveness and compliance, workers could live a bit better: "they had the best opportunities regarding schooling for their children, they read the most bourgeois newspapers, and most of the radios were playing in their apartments."<sup>15</sup> The village had a public elementary school paid for by the mine, a tavern, a club for balls, a physician's office and, in the middle of the settlement, a soccer field, which was the center of social life and the marriage market. Girls could gather to socialize near the field without having to fear people gossiping about them. Gy. met his wife by the soccer field, leaning on the fence. In the village, a house with two rooms, like the one in which Gy.'s family lived (with six children), counted as upper middle class in the local community. The careers of Gy.'s surviving brothers are tales of social mobility. One of his younger brothers became a factory director (towards the end of his life he was discharged with a pension after facing accusations of having abused his position as director for personal gain).<sup>16</sup> His other brother became an accountant and was later found guilty of embezzlement.<sup>17</sup>

13 Most of these details could be reconstructed from the registers of birth and recollections of family members. Interviews with Mrs. Gy., Veronika G., the widow of Gy., and Mrs. M. Ilonka G., his sister-in-law. Interviews were done by the author in October 2011 in Kisterenye.

14 NML. XXXIII. Duplicates of registration certificates. Registers of births. Zagyvapálfalva, Kisterenye.

15 Zoltán Szabó, *Cifra nyomorúság* ["Poverty in Fine Dress"] (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1938), 88–89.

16 As the general manager of the Mátraaljai Coal Mines, he was awarded numerous state distinctions. In 1988, many complaints were lodged against him, and indeed this was even mentioned at sittings of the party committee. MNL. Heves Megyei Levéltár. XXXV. 22/2. Sittings of the Heves County Party Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. 14. box 187. custody section: Minutes of the Sitting of the Party Committee, March 31, 1988. 129.

17 NML. Balassagyarmati Büntető Törvényszék. XXV. 4 c. B 273/1954.

For Gy.'s family, schooling meant an opportunity to rise in the social hierarchy, and they strove to take advantage of this opportunity. In autumn 1929, Gy. began to attend school, and in the first class of elementary school he was already among the best students in the class. He was given the highest possible marks in every subject with the exception of reading.<sup>18</sup> He may have been one of the favorite students of instructor Emil Sümeg. "Old man Emil," as he was called, was the one-man organizer of the school in the village, and he was passionate about the task. He was regarded as the "voice of the people" in the village. He wrote petitions, as did Gy.'s social democratic father-in-law. For instance, after the occupation of the country by Germany in March 1944, old man Emil denounced the German soldiers in the village to the management of the mine because they had insulted three women and "did not respect the fence, [...] in many places simply trampling them down."<sup>19</sup> Later his name was listed in the records of the secret service recruits, but whatever reports he may have made did not survive.<sup>20</sup> In the end, Gy. wrote one of his first reports for the communist secret police about Emil.

Because of his excellent grades in school, Gy. was enrolled in the higher elementary school (a kind of middle school, called *polgári*, which means citizen) in the neighboring agricultural town. Because of his acuity, he was allowed to begin in the second form, where he paid discounted tuition. The pupils from the mining towns went in separate train cars to the school, which was intended to fashion citizens out of them who would be loyal to the state and could later fill positions in the local bureaucracy. In the first semester, Gy. got the highest possible mark in only one subject, religious instruction. In the other subjects he usually got the lowest passing grade, though a few times he got a decent mark. His form-master classified his handwriting as passably legible. This improved considerably with time. The handwritten reports that he submitted to the political police as an adult are written with precise, clearly legible letters, and as a young adult he also worked as a clerk at the mine. As the years passed, Gy. became better and better as a student, though he was never an outstanding talent.<sup>21</sup>

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18 NML. VIII. 287. g. Documents of the Elementary School of the Mining Company of Kisterenye-Chorin. Attendance books.

19 Emil's Sümegi's letter quoted in András Szomszéd, *Zagyva mentén "egybekelvén"*. Bátönyterenyé (Bátönyterenyé: Önkormányzat, 2002), 134.

20 M-42230/1. 85–86 and ÁSZTL. 3.1.9. V-150373. Summary report on the armed counter-revolutionary groups and organizations of Nógrád County. March 23, 1959, 81.

21 NML. VIII. 202. A Pásztói Állami Polgári Fiú- és Leányiskola iratai. Anyakönyvek. (=Pásztói Polgári anyakönyvek). 4. d. 1934–1935 második b osztály anyakönyve.

The representatives of the city of Pásztó were hesitant to vote on the establishment of a school because of the costs. The school commissioner convinced them to give their approval by informing them that if they were to resolve to have the school built, they would be eligible to receive support from the state, which could be a good source of income for local builders. If, however, the state were to order the construction of a school because of the size of the population of the city, then they would lose any possibility of funding. The local farmers continued to look with skepticism on the idea of a school.<sup>22</sup>

The railway employees, however, saw schooling as an opportunity to rise in the community, as did the miners who in the meantime had immigrated to and colonized the city. Gy.'s class was comprised almost entirely of the children of the local employees and miners.<sup>23</sup> All of his siblings attended the higher elementary school, where they were given a patriotic education. As was noted in the school bulletin, the students began and ended the school day with prayer, as was common at the time. They commemorated the heroes of the battle of Limonowa (in late 1914, the troops of the Austro-Hungarian army defeated the army of the Russian Czar near the city of Limonowa in what today is Poland) and discussed the ties between the Hungarians and the Finno-Ugric peoples in Hungarian class (an idea that by then had gained widespread acceptance). In an attempt to support Hungarian industry, careful attention was paid to ensure that the students only used school supplies and materials for handicrafts that had been made in Hungary.<sup>24</sup>

When Gy. was in the third grade, the schools found themselves obliged to introduce a uniform text for prayer and exclude all other prayers. Religion functioned as an obligatory state and ideological framework in the process of fashioning the ideal citizenry. Gy., who like his father was a Calvinist, was almost alone in the almost entirely Catholic class. There were two Lutheran boys and also three Jews who, while the other students were reciting the text of the uniform prayer, were allowed not to make the sign of the cross.<sup>25</sup>

In 1937, following visits to the factory, Gy.'s class went on an excursion to Budapest. In Budapest, which to many of the students must have seemed

22 Nándor Pintér, Ferenc Vincze, and István Csépany, *Pásztó története* (Pásztó: a Pásztói Községi Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottsága, 1970), 37–39.

23 *Pásztói Polgári Értesítője* 1934–1935, 2–3; 34–35.

24 *Ibid.*, 7–8.

25 NML. VIII. 604. A Pásztói Kereskedelmi Szaktanfolyam iratai, benne a polgári iskolákra is vonatkozó körlevelek 1. d. Körlevél az egységes iskolai imádság bevezetése tárgyában, April 20, 1936.

like an enormous metropolis, they watched the military parade that was held in honor of the Italian king and queen on Mussolini Square (as of 1936, this was the name of the square that today is Oktogon). The school yearbook contained the following lines about the event: “They can take everything from us, Trianon can banish planes from the skies, forbid tanks, but there is one thing they cannot take from our souls, cannot kill in our hearts: the Hungarian Soldier.”<sup>26</sup> The notion of the Hungarian soldier and the repudiation of the Treaty of Trianon (the post-war treaty according to which Hungary had lost roughly two-thirds of its territory to the surrounding states in the wake of World War I) were two pillars of the cultivation of a patriotic citizenry in the school.

The formal rank of the institution as a grammar school did not guarantee the pupils positions in offices.<sup>27</sup> When he left the school, as the oldest male child in the family Gy. pursued the study of a trade in industry at the mine and waited for an opportunity to acquire a position at the railway, where salaries were much higher. In 1942, with his uncle’s help, he was given a position as a trainee at the Hungarian National Railway.<sup>28</sup>

Because of the program promoting industrialization (the so-called 1938 Győri program), the railway was expanding and needed more and more employees. In 1942, Gy. began to work as an apprentice in the stock room in the train station in Miskolc, a city in northeastern Hungary. However, one evening he was caught rummaging through boxes from the Cikta shoe factory (the Hungarian name for the Bata shoe factory) and also boxes of cigarettes. In the wake of the territorial changes according to which a strip of territory in southern Czechoslovakia became part of Hungary, the Czech company, Bata, founded a Hungarian factory. For Gy., the Cikta shoes were sort of like an entrance ticket into the world of the “middle class”. They did not actually find any shoes on him, but they did find two boxes of so-called Dames cigarettes for women. Dames were the favorite cigarettes of Katalin Karády, a popular actress at the time (the Hungarian Marlene Dietrich, as it were), and they were popular in part because of their elegant, decorative packaging. Gy. may have wanted to use them as part of a romantic conquest, because he smoked a different brand. He was given a reprimand and fired.<sup>29</sup>

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26 *Pásztói Polgári Értesítője*, 1936–1937, 5.

27 See Tibor Péter Nagy, *A növekvő állam árnyékában. Oktatás, politika 1867–1945* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2011), 312–13.

28 Recollections of his widow. Interview done by the author in October 2011.

29 MÁV Irattár. 7352/1942. Csontos István főraktárnok jelentése, Miskolc, March 2, 1942.

He was nonetheless able to find a position as a traffic assistant at another railway post in Transdanubia, since the records were not coordinated on the national level. In 1944, the frontline reached his station in Fejér County. He served in Seregélyes, a settlement not far from Székesfehérvár, on the front, the so-called Margit-line, which was one of the best fortified defense lines in Hungary and in the winter of 1944 was becoming rigid. According to the locals, towards the end of the war the village went back and forth between the Soviet and the German forces seven times.<sup>30</sup> Gy. escaped conscription, but at the time of the second occupation of the village by the Germans (which witnessed the vengeful acts of Arrow Cross men from the area around Székesfehérvár) he committed the act for which he was later convicted of being a war criminal. Indirectly because of him, a Ruthenian railway employee was executed. The man, who was accused of having helped the Soviet soldiers get women in the village and having robbed the official residence of the station agent, was executed. When the German soldiers recaptured the village (in the course of a maneuver called Konrad III), Gy. reported the Ruthenian man to the gendarmerie in Székesfehérvár, which at the time was working together closely with the Arrow Cross. Not once in the records of the people's tribunal was the man's name spelled correctly, but thanks to the digitalized documents and records of the Archives of the Hungarian National Railway and the assistance of an archivist (and also a bit of good luck), I was able to identify him and find his descendants. The history of the Ruthenian railway employee offers a pithy encapsulation of the experiences of the inhabitants of Sub-Carpathia between 1939 and 1944, as well as their relationship to Hungary. Without ever having changed places of residence, over the course of his life the man worked for the railway service of three different countries (since in the space of a mere two decades the territory was part first of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, then Czechoslovakia, and then Hungary). Then, like most people from Sub-Carpathia, he was labeled a "politically unreliable Ruthenian" and sent to the western Hungarian border and then the stations near the front.<sup>31</sup> The conflict between him and the station agent arose because the station master failed to pay him three months' salary in

30 For more on the battles near this front line see: Csaba Veress D., "A II. világháború hadműveletei Fejér megyében (1944. december 3 – 1945. március 23.)," in *Harok és bűnök*, ed. József Csurgai Horváth, Tamás Tihanyi, and Csaba Veress D. (Székesfehérvár: Fejér Megyei Önkormányzat, 2002), 115–18.

31 MÁV Irattár. Szmolánka László szolgálati aktája; MÁV Irattár. 290/1940. Bánhegyi István. Áthelyezések Kárpátalja területéről. A Magyar Királyi Államvasutak igazgatóságának bizalmas levele valamennyi üzemvezetőségnek. 1940. július 24.

advance, which all the other employees had received with the approach of the front.<sup>32</sup>

After the war, Gy. became one of the targets of the Communist political police, which was beginning to organize in Székesfehérvár.<sup>33</sup> In 1949, the officer responsible for his case, a man named György Székely, emigrated for the West, and the state security forces gathered a significant amount of material on him when he was abroad, because he was accused of collaborating with the English secret service.<sup>34</sup> When the case involving Gy. was underway, Székely was not named chief of police in Székesfehérvár, which was a sign of the temporary relegation of the Communist police to the background.<sup>35</sup> In 1945, Gy. was acquitted, the confessions that had been extracted from him by the police notwithstanding, as indeed was the overwhelming majority of people facing accusations in front of the people's court in Székesfehérvár. What factors determined whether someone was convicted of war crimes or not?

The marginalization of the Communists in rural areas towards the end of 1945 made it possible for the accused who stood before the tribunal, which was by no means in the hands of the Communists, to withdraw confessions that had been made (often violently coerced) to the police, which was in the hands of the Communists.<sup>36</sup> On the basis of the ruling, if someone helped the gendarmerie commit an act that was regarded as “necessary retribution” or that was in compliance with the laws at the time, this did not constitute a war crime. Since the police had acted in compliance with the laws that were in effect in 1944, according to this logic the deportations and the provision of assistance with the deportations were not illegal unless someone had been excessively “diligent.” The tribunal regarded Gy.'s report, which had resulted in a man's execution, as legal, and the members of the tribunal were able to portray the victim, whose

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32 Budapest Municipal Archives (=BFL) XXV. 2-b. People's Prosecutor of Budapest. Criminal Cases. Documents of the Criminal Case of Gy. 689/1948. consolidated with 88425/1949. Confession of the Station Master of Mezősi.

33 MNL. Fejér County Archive (=FML) XXIV. 18. Székesfehérvár Városi Rendőrkapitányság Általános Iratok, 1.d.

34 ÁSzTL. 3.2.5. “Colorado” O-8-018/1. 520. Jelentés Székely György százados ügyéről. Sütöry Lajos áv. ny. alhadgy. Székesfehérvár, 1950. július 10.

35 FML. IV. 402. Fejér Vármegye Törvényhatósági Bizottságának iratai. Közgyűlés. 1945. szeptember 26.

36 FML. XXIV. 18. Székesfehérvár Városi Rendőrfőkapitányság. Általános iratok. 1.d; FML. XVII. 401. Fejér Vármegye Központi és Székesfehérvár Járási 3. sz. Igazoló Bizottság. 1. d. 22/1945. Törvényszéki alkalmazottak. Boda József, a Gy. ügyében tanácsvezető bíró életrajza az igazolási eljáráshoz.

name they could not spell and about whom they knew next to nothing, as guilty without any discussion.<sup>37</sup>

Having been acquitted, Gy. returned to his village. With the help of his family, he found a position at the mine as a clerk. In 1946, he wrote a few lines in *Népsport* (“People’s Sports”) about the local miners’ soccer team, which was doing well at the time. Few people knew anything about his case. He married the daughter, a girl sixteen years of age, of a prominent local Social Democratic miner who, as a something of an active agitator, paid visits to prisons between 1917 and 1957, under several different political systems. His father-in-law, furthermore, was an important figure of the Social Democratic party in Nógrád, which to an extent broke from “mainstream” Peyer Social Democratic ideas.<sup>38</sup> He was present at strikes that were held in the village of Etes during World War I and in the crowd that gathered before the massacre in Salgótarján in 1956. His political activism made him a symbolic figure in the area. Gy. argued about politics with him more than with anyone else.

In 1948, before he emigrated, Székely, the police captain who had interrogated and beaten Gy. in 1945, traveled to Budapest, where he met with the National Soviet of the People’s Tribunals. Gy.’s case was reopened and he was sentenced to ten years of forced labor, though the sentence was changed to imprisonment.<sup>39</sup> He was put in the prison on Kozma Street in Budapest, which at the time was one of the strictest prisons in Hungary. I was allowed by the director of the prison to examine prison files that have not yet been turned over to the archives.<sup>40</sup> In 1950, the Hungarian State Security Authorities took over control of the building, and there was greater need for space in the cells, which had once been crowded with the accused who had been convicted by the people’s tribunals.<sup>41</sup> In early 1950, Gy. was granted amnesty in order to help address the lack of space. Initially, he worked as a barrowman in the mine, but as he was not accustomed to difficult physical labor and was able to write well,

37 BFL. XXV. 2-b. Budapesti Néppügyészség. Büntetőügyek. 689/1948. On the functions of people’s courts in Hungary and in Eastern Europe see: *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath*, ed. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); and recently Ildikó Barna and Andrea Pető, *Political Justice Budapest after World War II* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2014).

38 BFL. XXV. 1.a. Budapesti Népbíróság. 1949 – 1081. G. János ügye.

39 BFL. XXV. 2-b. Budapesti Néppügyészség. Büntetőügyek. 689/1948. Nb XII. 802/1948/2. Ítélet. 1948. október 15.

40 Budapesti Fegyház és Börtön Irattára. Fegyenclapló 3296-3599. No. 3299.

41 *Ibid.*, Napi parancsok. 1947–1952.

with the help of sympathetic souls who had gathered around him, he was given a position—of no great prominence—in an office.<sup>42</sup>

In 1956, Nógrád, which was regarded as a county rife with the spirit of rebellion, played an important role in national politics, since lack of coal due to the miners' strike crippled industrial production.<sup>43</sup> This is one of the reasons why the first Kádár government strove to restart production by using workers' councils.<sup>44</sup> Gy. was elected by his coworkers to serve as a member of the workers' council at his workplace.<sup>45</sup> Later, the workers' councils were cast as enemies of the people in the official discourses of the Kádár era. By the end of 1957, the local Social Democrats had also come to be seen or at least cast by the regime as enemies of the people. Gy.'s first important task was to keep them under close watch, and his father-in-law, an old Social Democrat, was the first person of interest.

### *The Proper Report: Pedagogy of the Oppressed?*

Reports and the bureaucratic forms of the reports (i.e. the written reports) were important elements of the “institutionalized culture of complaint,” as several historians have referred to it.<sup>46</sup> It is not irrelevant, however, to consider who obtained the right to lodge complaints and how, and whose complaints were actually taken seriously. Anyone whose complaint was taken seriously unavoidably became part of the state exercise of power, since the complaint functioned as the point of departure for the series of measures that were taken by the state. In order for a complaint to be taken seriously, it had to be lodged in the proper form, according to the discursive styles of the state bureaucracy. Thus the authors of the reports adopted numerous elements of style and rhetoric in order to ensure that their complaints would be heard. I analyze how these reports actually gave

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42 The source of his precise position: NML. XXIX. 681. I. A. 16. Nógrádi Szénbányászati Tröszt (NSZB). Újlaki bányauzem. Csigai lejtősakna. Kisterenyé. NSZB. Baleset-jelentőkönyv.

43 László Á. Varga, ed., 1956 *Nógrád megyei kronológiája és személyi adattára: a forr. eseményei és aktív szereplői a megyében* (Salgótarján: Nógrád Megyei Levéltár, 1996).

44 One of the functions of the worker council's from the point of view of the government at the end of 1956 was to start industrial production in the wake of several strikes; however, for the most part they did not fulfill this task. For more on this see: Pittaway, *The Workers' State*, 230–56.

45 ÁSzTL. V-141818. Vizsgálati dosszié Filep Lajos ügyében; ÁSzTL. O-15325. 1a. 487–88.

46 Cf. Joachim Staadt, *Eingaben: Die institutionalisierte Meckerkultur in der DDR* (Berlin: Forschungsverbund SED-Staat, 1996); Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 173.

someone the opportunity “to get as close to a public sphere as one is likely to get” under the Kádár regime.<sup>47</sup>

In this section of my article I argue that the participants in the secret police network, which included the agents (informants), the case officers (who oversaw the work of the agents), and the people who read the reports, sought solutions to the problems of their private lives by presenting them as if they were communal issues. In part as a consequence of this, they blurred the border between the private and public spheres by divulging the details of their private lives, thereby making communal (and therefore state) control seem more acceptable. By revealing details of their private lives, the authors of the reports let the figures of the state bureaucracy into their bedrooms, which they were not actually obliged to do, making their private lives part of the state bureaucracy by seeking solutions, with their reports, to their personal problems. The decision to blabber about one’s private life was for the most part the result of a personal decision on the part of an author seeking to further his or her own personal interests. One of the goals of the network of informants was thus not simply to ensure knowledge of and control over the circles in which the agents moved, but also to transform the informants themselves into bureaucrats on whom the regime could rely. Moreover, the authors of the reports attempted to veil their personal interests by (over)emphasizing their sense of responsibility to the community. In other words, both sides used the secret police network to achieve their goals: the network was used not only by the regime for purposes of surveillance and control, but also the operatives (the case officers and the unofficial informants), who used it in their interests. Indeed, their personal interests were far more important from their perspectives. This raises an important question, namely, who had the right to lodge a personal complaint, and what was the proper manner of doing so.

Gy. was 34 years old when he was recruited as an agent. He had three small children. His older daughter, who had been born while he was in prison, was 9 and was in school. His son, who was 4, had not been accepted to the kindergarten, and his wife took care of their youngest daughter, who was barely more than one year old and who had been born in 1956, during the miners’ strike.<sup>48</sup> Gy., who was not terribly accustomed to hard labor in an underground mine, first

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47 Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Suplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s”, *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 78. Fitzpatrick raises this question regarding the Stalinist period of the 1930s.

48 NML. Kisterenyei születési anyakönyvi kivonatok.

worked in an office. As of the beginning of 1957, he worked underground, and not just on paper, but in reality, as a barrowman, in three shifts. Workers were given bonus pay for working on Sundays, but in his case this bonus was withheld as punishment. His youngest daughter, who had been born in September 1956, was a year and a half old at the beginning of 1958, when the family was told she could attend the nursery school, which was a modest dream come true for them.<sup>49</sup> She was accepted into the nursery soon after Gy. began writing reports. Gy. had many reasons to submit to the regime and write reports: the hope that he might be reassigned to a position in the office, the possibility that he might be able to find employment for his wife, and later the hope that his children would be given places in the nursery and kindergarten, since his wife had fallen gravely ill. (He even made specific mention of the question of admittance to the kindergarten in one of his reports, and the secret police helped him resolve the problem.)

Gy. and his case officer learned, largely in the course of their collaborative work, how to write a good report, and this enabled them to write numerous reports, and at their own initiative. Gy. found it difficult to imitate the style of the reports, and he had hardly had much instruction. As a mining clerk, he had grown accustomed to beginning a text by addressing its projected audience, but obviously he couldn't address his first case officer, named Ecsegi, as "esteemed lieutenant, Sir," or "esteemed comrade" because of the conspiracy, because this might imply collusion. He didn't know quite how to start. In the end, he began his first report in an official tone: "I respectfully report that Sándor B., a resident of the Kossuth neighborhood of Kisterenye [...]" This was followed by a brief description of the man in question, "brown-haired, tall," and then a reference to his health as an identifying feature (he had a limp). The physical description was followed by an important characterization of his political stance, which later became one of Gy.'s favorite formulas: "he is an enemy of the people's democracy." This phrase he borrowed from the contemporary propaganda.<sup>50</sup>

Gy. had to be sure to write something that would be useful and incriminating, for he must have feared that if he were to submit a useless report, he himself might be dragged off to prison, as he had been in 1948 and as his coworkers had been after 1956. He was very afraid of prison. According to his wife, "he

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49 Recollection of Veronika Gy., Gy.'s widow.

50 ÁSzTL. M-42230. 59–60. Gy.'s report of December 22, 1957.

was badly beaten, he did not engage in politics.”<sup>51</sup> However, of the members of his family, he engaged in politics more intensively than anyone else at that time.

Gy. provided—probably in response to a specific request—a dramatic description of a dialogue just before the Salgótarján massacre that he had heard more than a year earlier: “the aforementioned went over to the shaft [of the mine] and made the following declaration: ‘everyone out of the engine room and off to [Salgó]Tarján. Your place is there. Anyone who doesn’t come is an enemy of the people.’”<sup>52</sup> Then another cliché regarding the enemy, which this time he put in the mouth of the enemy so that it would be understandable. Gy. submitted reports that clearly resembled denunciations. He thereby managed to ensure that his reports would be read and taken seriously, even if he wasn’t able to imitate the styles of the official discourse perfectly, and that he would be praised for his diligence.

Gy. managed to exceed expectations when completing his next task as well. His task, which was intended as a good warm-up for the novice agent, was to provide descriptions of the characters of two Social Democrats who were well-known in the village. The first of these two men was Gy.’s father-in-law himself, who was almost seventy years old, and Gy. provided a detailed characterization indeed. The warm-up task in other cases was also not something unusual, since first he had to learn the bureaucratic rules of the genre and the form of the report. In 1957, every Social Democrat was regarded as an enemy of the party, as they were seen as people who might insight workers to strike. Gy.’s report on his father-in-law was not restrained. “He is right-wing in his biases, someone who is not pleased by the fact that the Communists are in power,” he wrote, in the precise handwriting he had learned in the higher elementary school. And in order to ensure that his audience appreciated his achievement, he added, “he was never pleased by the fact that in the elections in 1945 and then the next elections, MKP [Hungarian Communist Party] [...] won. He was always an agitator of the former Social Democrat party.”<sup>53</sup> But alongside the political concerns, Gy. also makes frequent mention of personal tensions: “He is very verbose and quarrelsome.”<sup>54</sup>

51 Recollection of Veronika Gy., Gy.’s widow. Interview made by the author October 25, 2011 in Kisterenye.

52 ÁSzTL. M-42230. 59–60. Gy.’s report of December 22, 1957.

53 The 1945 national elections in the village were won by the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP: 46.5%). The Independent Smallholders’ Party (FKgP) got only 28.5% of the vote and the Social Democrats only 21.2%. Szomszéd, *Zagyva mentén “egybekelhen”*, 140–41.

54 Ibid.

Gy. wrote this report at home. In the modest miner's residence he seems to have found a corner where he could hide his deeds from his three children. He complained, however, that it was difficult for him to write reports in the tight space of his home. "Back home it was hard to write," he complained. It was difficult to work, and he had not been given an office. His case officer, Ecsegi, liked his style, but Ecsegi's superior wanted something different: "we must find out, by using the agents, what kinds of connections there are among the old Social Democrats in Kisterenye, Nagybátony, and Salgótarján. Are there any such people at all? Who are these people?"<sup>55</sup> In the end, both Ecsegi and Gy. learned what their task was. They did not have to fumble in the dark. Later, the case officer switched the order of the first two reports in the file precisely for this reason. It became clear for them that the Social Democrats were the topic of interest, not the 1956 massacre in Salgótarján.

The third report was the first to bear this word, "Report," as its title. They finally told Gy. to write this word at the top of the page. Ecsegi told him other things as well. Gy. begins the text with the "my task was to" formula. One of the first Social Democrats Gy. was instructed to observe was his former instructor, the former director of the elementary school in the miner's settlement, Emil Sümegi, who had taught Gy. to write. Gy. contacted Sümegi, allegedly in order to request assistance ensuring that his four-and-a-half year old son would be given a place in the kindergarten. In his report, Gy. complains about the difficulty he faced securing a place for his child in the school: "When the enrollments were going on, on September 1, 1957 my son's application was rejected. I asked him to dictate a petition to the Minister of Education or somewhere. I very much want him to be allowed to attend the school, since he cries about how badly he wants to be a kindergarten pupil. It would be easier for us too, his parents, if the task of caring for one of the children were entrusted to the kindergarten. He replied to my request by saying that we Social Democrats are oppressed." (underlined in the original) Ecsegi found this last half-sentence of the text important, and he underlined it. The link between the agent's task, his complaint, and his personal interest is clear.

Gy. wrote down Sümegi's contention, according to which any petition authored by him would be rejected, no matter where he sent it. (Sümegi was mistaken in this, the secret police may have intervened, since in the end the boy was admitted to the kindergarten.) The question of the boy's enrollment in

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55 Ibid., 54.

the kindergarten became an issue with implications relevant to national politics, since according to their dialogue ultimately the issue depended on whether or not it was worthwhile to submit any petition regarding admittance to the school. According to Gy., Sümegi said the following: “In any event let’s wait for the Bulganin peace proposal.<sup>56</sup> If they can reach an agreement, then elections will be held with oversight, and then we Social Democrats will win.” Following their discussion of the question of enrollment, Gy. asked Sümegi about his views of the peace negotiations. The last sentence of the report caught Ecsegi’s attention: “for the moment we must wait.” Clearly, the implication—that the retired Social Democratic instructor had been waiting for the opportune moment to topple Soviet power in a small village in Hungary—was absurd, but also useful to Ecsegi, since Sümegi was also a functionary of the system. Ecsegi found the report on Sümegi so important that he soon told Gy. to pay him another visit. Sümegi’s opinion, however, was not important because the authorities actually feared him, but rather because he too was an “agent of the department of internal affairs,” as Ecsegi wrote in his assessment of the report. So his political reliability and political inclinations were important from the perspective of his reports.<sup>57</sup> Gy. and Sümegi were used to keep tabs on each other, while the two of them both used the network of connections to serve their interests (for instance the question of gaining admittance for a child to the kindergarten).

As his next task, Gy. was told to monitor the actions of four Social Democrats. He filled more than five pieces of paper with his observations. The possibility of gaining admittance for his child to the kindergarten made him particularly diligent.<sup>58</sup> Like his report on his father-in-law, his report on the four Social Democrats also began with the “my task was to” formula (he only later adopted the practice of writing in the third-person singular in order to mislead the enemy years). Gy. began to think of himself as a person of no small importance. He was less afraid, and sometimes he even tried to save or help others. The more politically passive someone was, the more the network of power liked this. In his reports, Gy. noted someone’s political passiveness if he sought to avoid causing the person grief. According to him, in the depths of the mine “the current session of the National Assembly came up.” This observation regarding what transpired in the mines was seen as particularly significant, in

56 For more on this conflict (accessed February 15, 2015), see: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/tomzgroup/pmwiki/uploads/200-1956-11-KS-f-LIZ.pdf>.

57 *ÁSz/TL.* M-42230. 85–86.

58 *Ibid.*, 64–69. Gy.’s report of January 30, 1958.

part because it had been made by Gy. at his own initiative. It had not been part of one of his explicit tasks. He was therefore given a different shift in the mine so that he would be able to observe others while they worked. He was also given a raise.

The text of his next report, which was written less than two months after the first one, is testimony to his development as an agent.<sup>59</sup> He had something to say. He wrote almost four pages of observations. A good half of his remarks did not directly involve the instructions he had been given and were introduced with the formula, “and in addition I note that...” He provided an account of the ball that was held in the mining community and the profiteering that was allegedly underway involving the sale of wine. In a manner that was thinly veiled at best, Gy. began to use the reports as a forum with which to take steps to improve his life and the lives of those around him. Like a king in disguise, he sought to dispense justice, or at least this is the portrait he paints of himself in the reports.

The detailed description of the costume ball was Gy.’s first carefully thought-out composition in which he himself chose the subject of his report. He wrote a kind of self-standing denunciation within the framework of the report. There are no surviving family pictures of the ball, but there are pictures of the ball that was held the following year. In the pictures, Gy. and the members of his family can be seen wearing their costumes. Gy. is dressed in traditional ceremonial Hungarian attire. His oldest daughter is dressed as one of the odalisque’s of the Turkish pasha. There is a picture of his wife and her younger sister. In his denunciation, Gy. stands up for the crowd at the ball with his contention that Dobrocsi and Ogulin, a miner and a retired miner who were in charge of serving the wine and spirits, were turning a personal profit on the wine. As a conscientious consumer he took a stand and used his connections, though this stance, of course, was little more than a discursive posture that he adopted in order to achieve his personal goals. In fact, Gy. himself could have served the wine, instead of the two “profiteers,” since he and his father-in-law had a good relationship with a wine-grower in the city of Verpelét (a village that was known in the region for its fine wines). The issue at hand was a question of business interests. According to Gy.’s report, “many people say that Dobrocsi and his lot charge as much as they want for wine.” Gy. sometimes also breaks the rule according to which he should use the third-person singular: “On one occasion I asked for a wine spritzer [...] Gy. also asked for a wine spritzer, but

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59 Ibid., 73–76.

they didn't give him one because there was no soda water." In order to attain his goal, he even adopted a rather underhanded strategy and referred in his report not only to the alleged profiteering, but also to the acts Dobrocsi and Ogulin had (purportedly) committed in 1956 during the Revolution. According to his report, in 1956 they had "transported the drinks, the wine and brandy."

Gy. wanted to play a central role among the "sport friends" (this was the term that was used for the regular spectators at the soccer games and the people who participated in the organizational work related to the team). After 1956, however, his chances were not good, given his political past. However, years later he became the president of the local soccer division, which was important because at the time as many as 1,000 people might attend a given match, i.e. half of the population of the mining town. The soccer games were the most important social events, after the miners' balls.<sup>60</sup> It's possible that he accused Dobrocsi of wrongdoing because Dobrocsi, who lived with his family next to the soccer field and across from the sports club, was doing a bit better than he was. He was accused of embezzlement from his workplace, though his daughter and his widow have no recollection of any sanctions or punishment.<sup>61</sup> Gy.'s report did not bring about the result he had hoped for, though officer Ecsegi did send it on to the criminal division.

When the threat of a possible strike had been averted, Gy. was given another range of duties. He was charged with the task of observing his old "bird-of-a-feather colleagues," the former sympathizers of the Arrow Cross. He had to report on people who were regarded as "Arrow Cross" or "gendarmes." Since he himself was on file as a "bird-of-a-feather" (in spite of the fact that he was also considered a Social Democrat because of his father-in-law), he knew who the authorities were thinking about.

In his reports, Gy. frequently recounts how, in the course of soccer matches, he would begin conversations with the people under observation in order to learn more about their political views. The Salgótarján soccer team was one of the best teams outside of Budapest at the time. As a supporter of the local team, the organizer of the various tasks regarding the its upkeep was able to chat with almost anyone about the games, and he could use these opportunities to discover details about people's political views, even the people who were the

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60 Recollections of János V., deputy-president of the local soccer division. Interview done by the author. October 25, 2011 in Kisterenye.

61 Recollections of Dobrocsi's widow and daughter. Interview done by the author with Mrs. István Dobrocsi (1919) and her daughter, Mrs. Gábor O. (1942), October 21, 2011, Budapest.

most reluctant to talk on the subject. Gy. sought to cast aspersions on one of the local “petty monarchs,” a man name Racskó, whom he portrayed as someone loyal to the old system.<sup>62</sup> Thus, he was able to present himself as a righter of wrongs, who was acting not in his own personal interests, but rather in the interests of the community, even if there was some overlap between the two.

### *Conclusion*

As an examination of the early reports submitted by Gy. reveals, in order to attain his goals he first had to learn the style necessary in order to write reports that would be met with interest among the authorities. Later he attempted to portray his work, which was done primarily in the service of his interests, as a kind of process of dispensing justice, a process that was, according to his depiction, closely tied to the exigencies of the state. But loyalty alone would not have been enough to have enabled him to obtain admittance for his child to the kindergarten with the help of the department of internal affairs, or later, in the 1970s, to get permission for a private enterprise of his son. When he wanted to achieve a specific goal, he began to go into copious detail, and he transformed his reports into denunciations, sometimes using articles in the local newspaper for help. On other occasions, when he submitted reports that were curt and offered little detail, this could be interpreted as a form of political passiveness, and he also helped others avoid the wrath of the authorities by characterizing them as politically passive, which at the time was the kindest thing one could say about someone under observation by the state. He portrayed himself as politically passive as well, though by submitting reports he continuously influenced the lives of those around him, since he often steered their conversations in the direction of politics specifically because he had been charged with the task of doing so. He was a bureaucrat without a desk or office. His “friendships” were little more than official affairs. The details of his reports, which were intended to demonstrate his aptness for the role, were as much a part of the game as the reports written in self-defense, the primary goal of which was to ensure that he himself would not be seen as responsible for anything. An act of vengeance motivated by envy (in the case of alleged profiteering with wine) was written in the style of a petition, however, so that it would be sure to catch the attention of the authorities.

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62 ÁSzTL. M-42230. 95–96. Report of March 27, 1958.

He was as passionate in his denunciations of the local “petty monarchs” (people who played influential local roles because of their access to political power) as he was in his purported role as the defender of the oppressed and defenseless. In the state bureaucracy, which followed characteristically paternalistic traditions, this mode of administration was entirely commonplace and long-standing. In practical affairs, archaic rhetoric that rested on references to supporters and principles that were little more than matters of terminology harmonized perfectly well with Communist ideology because of the inclination of communist thinking in a normative system.

One of the recurring questions historians who deal with the communist era must address is whether or not the “ordinary people” whose cooperation was instrumental to the functioning of the state actually identified with or how far accepted the goals of that state.<sup>63</sup> According to the totalitarian paradigm, the state and the citizen were locked in a struggle like David and Goliath, and in the end the weaker but more clever and cunning of the two would triumph. These are stories of oppression and resistance, the stories of perpetrators and victims, stories the inadequacies of which, as narratives of the past, have already been clearly shown time and time again by representatives of the so-called revisionist school of Sovietology. Gy.’s story and the texts he crafted clearly illustrate that the personal decisions of ordinary people and the methods they used in order to achieve their aims influenced the functioning of the state. Furthermore, the self-portrayals and discourses of the people who used the system for personal advantage also changed, since the acceptance of the rules of the game left its mark on them. The Kádár system, which maintained power in part by searching for compromises, nonetheless still rested on essentially Stalinist principles, though it gave the people who took part in the mechanics of the system the impression that they could exert an influence on it. The sense of an open (or at least somewhat open) public sphere contributed to this, as did the (pseudo) debates in the press or the apparent attention that was given to the reports submitted by the informants who helped the state security forces. All of this provided new energies for the everyday workings of the system, which thus enjoyed a significantly greater degree of acceptance and stability by the 1960s than it had before 1956. Ultimately, to the extent that the Kádár regime represented a rupture with the classic Stalinism of the early 1950s, this

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63 See John Connelly’s inquiry on this matter with regards to Nazi Germany, John Connelly, “The Uses of Volksgemeinschaft,” *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 4. (December 1996): 899–930.

break lay in its more perceptive grasp of people's everyday lives and inclinations and the discourses on experience.<sup>64</sup> The denunciations bundled into the reports offered an opportunity for an agent to realize personal aims as if he or she were fighting in the interests of the larger community and sought to take part in the functioning of the state by playing an active role in politics. Dispensing justice like a king in disguise, the agent, who was thus a representative of political power, would obtain his goals by alternately pursuing personal aims and playing the necessary bureaucratic roles. This not only strengthened the appearance of the legitimacy of the state, but also made the role of an agent acceptable to people who portrayed themselves as if they were writing reports on the community (including relatives and neighbors) in the very interests of that community.

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