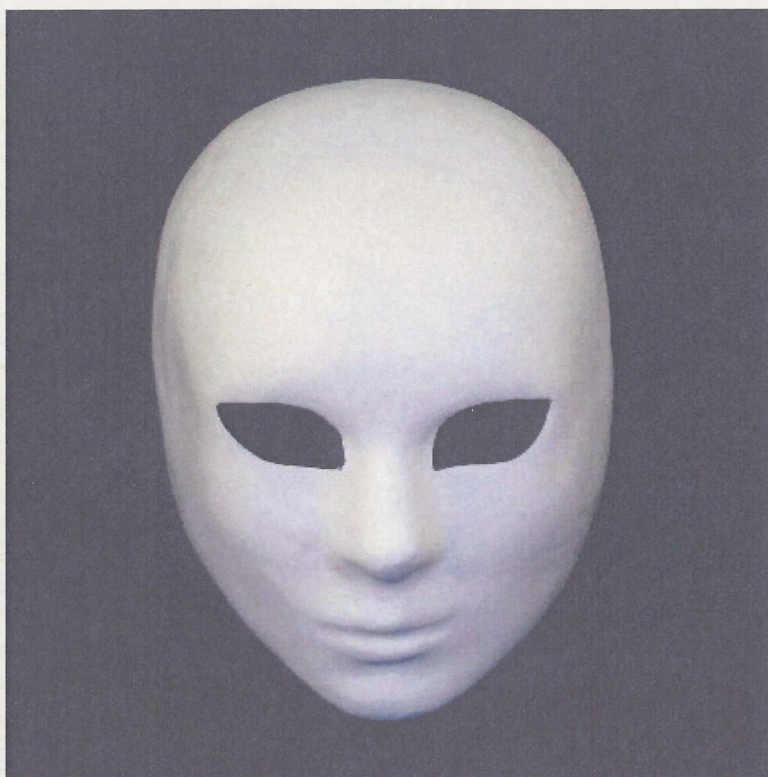


No. 22

TRONDHEIM STUDIES
ON EAST EUROPEAN CULTURES & SOCIETIES



János M. Rainer



THE AGENT

**Fragments on State Security and Middle Class Values
in Kádárist Hungary**

October 2007

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Translated from the Hungarian by **Mario D. Fenyo**. Revised and edited by **György Péteri**.

ISSN 1501-6684

Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies

Editors: **György Péteri** and **Sabrina P. Ramet**

Editorial Board: Trond Berge, Tanja Ellingsen, Knut Andreas Grimstad, Arne Halvorsen

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The Agent
Fragments on State Security and Middle Class Values in Kádárist Hungary

by

János M. Rainer
1956 Institute, Budapest

Preface

One of the innovations introduced by the Kádár regime installing itself in Hungary after 1956 was the policy of „selective integration” that came to replace the „class struggle” of the previous Rákosi era. Its essence was to change the way neutral or even antagonistic groups would be handled by the regime. Earlier, during the classical period of Stalinism, such groups would be persuaded not only to give up their opposition views, but to demonstrate active support. The methods of persuasion included resorting to open or indirect force as well as pressure. The members of these groups were expected to identify themselves with the regime while giving up, or even denying, rejecting their former identity.

After 1956 -- and after a few years of transition -- it became obvious that the Kádár regime did not expect this much. To the contrary: identity could be individualistic rather than group, or even offer the possibility of collective preservation within a narrowly confined and controlled environment. In return, the neutral or antagonistic persons were expected to pursue an individual or collective project that did not conflict with the project of building socialism. The trendsetters were not ideological issues and disagreements, but the job of each and every individual. “Whoever works, will make good” declared János Kádár in his concluding remarks at one of the party congresses in the seventies. By then this meant primarily that everyone would be allowed to amass wealth, to accumulate at a modest level, whereas ten years earlier it would have meant something different: if the person worked hard enough she or he would not be harassed for going to church, or because the father had been a capitalist (landowner, kulak, self-employed, merchant, etc.), or because she or he hated the Russians and sneered at, looked down on party officials.

A few years ago, using József Antall (1932-1993) as a case study, I began to study the practical evolution of this never explicitly stated principle. Antall had been a teacher of

history at the *gimnázium* (high school), a librarian and archivist, who had graduated from the university in 1954; in the eighties he was appointed director of the not particularly important Museum of Medical History in Budapest. In 1990, and until his death in 1993, he became the Prime Minister of Hungary by virtue of being the chairman of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, a populist, nationalist and conservative political formation. His father, József Antall Sr., was a high-ranking civil servant in the period before 1945, and a member of the opposition Smallholders Party. He made a name for himself in World War II, by saving and caring for Polish refugees fleeing the German occupation. He was a member of the new parliament between 1944 and 1953 and even became Minister of Reconstruction in 1947-48. At the same time, he was under surveillance, from 1952 to his death, (as was his son, from 1956 to 1989) by the state security services, as a former “Horthyite”, a “reactionary” or “Counter-revolutionary.” The records of the secret police provide meaningful information primarily about their own organization, but allow us a peek into the thoughts of those under observation, particularly when the observer developed a close relationship with the observed.

Kádár’s policies of selective integration could not have succeeded without assistance. They expressed a tendency, they were an “offer” which had to be accepted. Dynamic dialectics, signals and messages defined the new social space which, before 1956, was characterized mainly by immobility, or by unilateral, from top-down command actions and movements. Through the case-study of the Antalls I examined the nature of these signals, that is, in final analysis, how an attitude of “coexistence with reservations” evolved within a typical middle-class and anti-Soviet family.¹

Among the protagonists of this coexistence I include the apparatus of institutionalized violence and control, as well as individuals around the Antalls. After the late fifties the secret police seldom intruded in the life of the Antall family, and was not particularly successful

¹ Cf. Rainer (2005).

when it did. It recorded and automatically constructed a diagnosis which reveals all the ailments and shortcomings of the “soft”, consolidated Soviet-type society in Hungary after 1956.

The following essay tries to reinterpret the process through a secondary figure, that of the most successful agent around the Antall family.

The agent

From the early 1990s the agent (the informer or spy of the state security organs in the socialist period) has become one of the key concepts in the public discourse pertaining to the previous period, the most powerful symbol which expresses the lies and cheating permeating and spoiling the entire society, embodying the regime, revealing its true nature. The agent is a demon who strives to remain anonymous, at all cost, forever. If, however, the agent is unmasked (if it turns out that somebody was an agent), somehow that reveals the truth about the whole diabolical system in which he or she participated.

Although the demonization of persons and roles has always played a major role in the critique of Soviet-type social organizations, it was not always and not necessarily the agent who appeared to be the most appropriate figure for the purpose. In 1956, during the thaw, before the outbreak of the revolution, the intellectuals who surfaced among the opposition believed to have discovered the emblem of the regime under scrutiny in the person of the Party functionary.² In the days of the revolution the discourse that surfaces after years of being repressed, focuses on blaming the *ávós* (professional staff of the *ÁVH*³) in lieu of the officials of the regime. Although the existence of informers, for the most part not yet agents, and not necessarily working for State Security, but informers on behalf of any organization --

² For an influential contemporary description of the functionary, see Háy (1956).

³ *Államvédelmi Hatóság* – State Security Authority; the popular shorthand for it is *ávó* [pronounced: avaw] and for its staff *ávós* [avosh].

such as Party, plant management, military unit, state authority for control of the churches , etc. -- was common knowledge, but they were mentioned by name only in restricted circles, where it was possible to reveal their identity, as often happened in the days of the Revolution.

For a short while after 1956, during the period of consolidation of the Kádár regime, the extent to which it would make allowances for the denunciation of the Rákosi regime, and whether it would resort to demonization, remained undetermined. The terms Rákosiite and Stalinist were used within the higher circles of the new regime itself, as applied to the previous targets of social resentment, the Party officials and the members of the secret police (AVH). The term Rákosiite was applied to the official (possibly a member of the AVH) who rejected even the minor discontinuity implied by the Kádár system; in other words, it was applied to whomever was so defined by the Kádár leadership. The Party resolution of 1962 about “unlawful acts directed against persons involved in the workers’ movement” put an end to the uncertainty, and the former demons were readmitted into society as private individuals or, more often, they “melted into” a peripheral position around the elite in power, shedding their diabolical traits; they were rarely mentioned, and even then only in euphemistic terms (e.g., as those who “made mistakes during the period of the personality cult”).

At the time of the crisis of the Kádár regime in the late 1980s the figures symbolizing the essence of the regime reappeared; their unmasking was precisely what best represented the rejection of the previous regime. At first the law of historical repetition went into operation; the Communist official of the fifties became demonized once again (those who were still around in the Political Bureau, the Central Committee, the government, the parliament, in the main offices, in the councils, factories, cooperatives and were still “in charge” in the eighties), as were the members of the AVO (meaning those active in the reprisals following 1956, the former AVO prosecutors and judges). Later, while the change of regime was already in process, the concept of “nomenklatura” came up.

In 1956 it was relatively easy to define the image of the enemy but, given the conditions that prevailed under the Kádár regime, that definition became far more problematic. Earlier the conditions of rule were crude enough, hence clear, whereas at the end of the eighties the system of latent compromise solutions operating throughout society made it increasingly difficult to identify the “demons.” Yet the basic need was obviously there, because of all the compromises. The enemy had to be identified, whether in decline or in a state of collapse, otherwise it would have been necessary to deal with entire social groups, particular leaders and the function (and perhaps responsibility) they assumed under the previous regime. The branding of the symbols, their eventual punishment, opened the way for a scape-goating mechanism.

The demons of the eighties and nineties proved to be problematic. There remained few obvious “Communist functionaries” or “AVO agents”, mostly elderly persons whose career included other long stages after they had completed their roles as demons. The demonizing and scape-goating, however, was a simplifying and emotional process, whereas the boundary lines of the nomenklatura were hazy. This group had undergone considerable change under the Kádár regime; its rule had changed from the stage of crude power control and ideological rigidity tending in the direction of the employment of experts and technocrats who were able to apply their skills in the performance of a task. Moreover, these persons were able to convert successfully at the time of the critical historical change, as they became managers, entrepreneurs, bankers, civil servants and politicians. The critique, the distaste, the hatred applied to them was mixed with a goodly dose of envy and even a certain degree of admiration. The person of the nomenklatura did not resemble much the stereotype of the functionary, of the AVO agent, being younger, better-trained, and striving to appear, retroactively, as a neutral technocrat, who might even become a “hero for our age”, a “star” in one form or another.

The agent came in handy, one might say, in this situation. He or she was a concealed person, a conspiratorial figure; the change of regime did not automatically place him in the spotlight, for the determining feature of the change in Hungary, and the region as a whole, was its institutional continuity. Yet the agents had left enough tracks behind them to become identifiable in public parlance and the media. At the same time, their role under the conditions of the “soft and paternalistic relations” was frightfully, almost excitingly and titillatingly close to that of the society at large. They played a role, a specific role in the operations of the regime, yet this did not become manifest. Only records gathering dust in firmly guarded records deposits may shed light on how she or he did it. Nor are these very specific, for a considerable portion of the records have disappeared or been destroyed (nobody knows how large a proportion or even whether this has happened at all). The formation of scape-goating can become more extensive or more complete by dint of “detective work” and by facts revealed thanks to spotlight in the media, the randomly generated victims of which do become demonized.

The haphazard nature of the pursuit reinforced the demonizing by afterthought. From the point of view of sociology and political science, the agent is nothing but an insignificant cog in the machinery. The earlier symbolic figures played a far greater role in the operation of the extant regime, whether in reality or as symbols. The agent, however, is much closer to the faceless, average human being. His conspiratorial activities are secret but may become known to anyone as a result of disclosure, putting an end to any mystery. (The function of the average individual in the operation of the system is no secret, but can be revealed only at the cost of complicated and occasionally painful intelligence). The disclosed secret singles out the agent from the innumerable persons who had been active in the regime, and this disclosure may constitute absolution for everyone else.

The above described mechanisms were observed already at the time, as the processes were taking place, and gave rise to various warnings -- most notably by Péter Nádas, János Kenedi, Péter Esterházy or, more generally for the entire region, by Timothy Garton Ash.⁴ This does not make it superfluous for historical science to analyze the phenomenon with its own methods. So far, we have seen only occasional documents published regarding the operations of the agent. Indeed, the text below does not purport to be anything more than a draft, an interim report on research in progress. Although I approach the agent from the point of view of the targeted person, the story is not his, but that of the observer. More exactly, it is not the story of a particular individual (although it focuses on a single person), but of the role of the „network⁵ person”. Since the concealed role is based on the utilization of real life roles and situations, we could not avoid signaling other data pertaining to the career, the “manifest history” of both the observer and the observed.

Thus the protagonist of this history is easily recognizable; but unlike those who “hunt agents”, my goal is not to identify the agent but rather the disclosures resulting from the process of identification. I am interested in the phenomenon of the network person, hence I present him throughout under the first alias he ever used. No matter how he related to his role, for us, for those who examine the past, the network person has his own identity, which is expressed even by the choice of the alias.

On the radar-screen

I first ran across György Kátai in the secret service records kept on the target person he was watching, József Antall Jr. I will try to reconstruct, with the help of the records at my disposal, the network career of the network person; its beginning, its stages and end or ends

⁴ Nádas (1995), Kenedi (2000), pp. 195-203, Esterházy (2002), Garton Ash (1997).

⁵ Network: the sum total of the secret aides of the state security agencies. Its members can be categorized according to their relations to the agencies (agent, secret agent, secret collaborator). Kenedi (1996), p. 417.

are constructed primarily by the institution creating and operating the network. György Kátai was not born (let's say at the beginning of December 1931, as the real person who lives in the same body was), but rather he was created. He was created on August 5, 1960, when he signed the document coopting him and when he received his cover-name (György Kátai, the name he used to sign the document), when he received instruction in conspiracy techniques -- for instance, on how to keep in touch with the institution -- and when he was given his first assignments. This date is his birthday as a network person only in some regards. In other regards it is a developmental process, the successful end-result of the construction of a network person. An objective is achieved in this act of giving birth -- specified as to day and time.

The first moment in the construction or conception of the network man is when his real person falls within the awareness, the "radar" of the state security agency. Very seldom is this the consequence of a deliberate search, usually it is a chance occurrence. Sub-section 5 ("the prevention of domestic reaction") of the Office of Political Investigation of the Ministry of the Interior launched, in 1957, a so-called confidential investigation against József Antall Jr., teacher of Hungarian history at the Toldy *Gimnázium*.⁶ He was suspected of "counterrevolutionary activities" in 1956 and of being in contact with Western intelligence. His case was part of a so-called "combination." The Service meant to put pressure on his father, József Antall Sr., a former cabinet minister and leader of the Smallholder Party, by the eventual arrest of his son; by the same token, they intended to coopt the father and use him as an agent against other members of his former party. At the first sign of investigation against his son, Antall Sr. turned to political contacts in his former party who had earlier functioned as fellow-travelers, primarily to István Dobi, the chairman of the Presidential Council. (Dobi performed some ceremonial functions of the head of the state.) Thus he was able to prevent an

⁶ For more detail, see Rainer (2002).

arrest. The central bureau of the Ministry of the Interior, however, did not give up, but delegated the task to the Political Investigation Section of the Budapest Police Headquarters. Since the political amnesty in the offing, affecting Antall Jr., pertained only to the hastily improvised data regarding his “activities” in 1956, the investigators at the Budapest police were expected to prove that the young teacher at the high school was consistently involved in anti-regime activities, possibly even in agitation against the regime. Ongoing surveillance could only be partial -- eavesdropping on his apartment, checking his mail -- therefore the Budapest agency surrounded him with agents. The older network persons around his father were deemed inadequate for the purpose, given his father’s cautious and suspicious disposition. On the other hand, one of his students, as well as a colleague who was placed at the Toldy school for the purpose, managed to win Antall’s trust.

The teacher and the student were able, reliable and systematic agents⁷; the former managed to befriend Antall quickly. Thus it seemed that the target was now “encircled.” The police captain in charge of the investigation, Lilli Kállai, was not fully satisfied with all this. Judging from her reports she considered Antall to be an especially dangerous, circumspect, determined and intelligent “enemy” whose apparent passivity concealed various secret activities, a stubborn resistance. She also assumed that his actions in 1956 had not yet been fully investigated: that is, his contact with the revolutionary committee (perhaps as chairman) at his former school, the Eötvös *Gimnázium*; a few speeches delivered here and there in the villages of the Somlyó mountain region, and his involvement with his father and other Smallholder leaders after November 4. Therefore, captain Kállai persisted in placing informers around Antall to uncover further details about his activities as well as to observe the other agents around him. This “self-generating“ activity of the authorities reveals a pattern

⁷ Their alias in the service were Gyula Egri and János Kerekes respectively.

quite typical of the agency and of the times. Predictably too, the results remained below expectations.

State Security would have been satisfied, as a first step, with banning Antall from a career in teaching, but the extreme zeal shown by the assistant principal in reporting people at his school represented a graver danger to his position than the meticulous work of about half a dozen informers around the target. Antall managed to surround himself with a “counter” network made up of colleagues, of lower-rank and middle-rank administrators, not to mention the shield deployed above him by his father. Had the members of the graduating class, in their uninhibited celebration in June of 1959, not thrashed a few Russian grammar books and had they not damaged the political paraphernalia in one of the classrooms, it is unlikely that Antall would have been fired. But once again, upon the intervention of his father, Antall was able to find work in a professional capacity. All of this only spurred Kállai and company to greater efforts.

The mapping of Antall’s circle of friends and acquaintances was one of the main objectives of the investigation. The opportunity presented by Egri’s membership on the faculty of Toldy *Gimnázium* was deemed insufficient, but he was regarded to be good enough to assist the Service in finding further candidates for the work. Whenever his bi-weekly reports about Antall mentioned some new name or other, he was directed to find out more about that individual, either by way of Antall or through some other channel or contact.

The name „Kátai” does not appear in any of the earlier documents pertaining to the Antall affair; neither do the first reports mentioning his name indicate that he had been on the horizon. On September 30, 1958, Gyula Egri requested a special meeting with Police Captain Kállai, and told her that Antall had read out to him and a colleague a letter from a friend named Pali who had fled to France. According to Antall the name of Pali did emerge in the trial of the Bibó-Göncz group, and the letter was addressed not to him, but to a certain

“Gyuri.” The detectives were soon able to identify Pali with Pál Tar, a former classmate of Antall at the Piarist *Gimnázium*, who had managed to get out of the country thanks to the assistance of Göncz and company.⁸ Kállai immediately instructed her agent to find out the identity of this “Gyuri.” The person was identified in a matter of weeks: in October of 1958, at the Belvárosi coffee-house Antall mentioned György Kátai’s real name to Egri. The perceptive Egri immediately noted, in his report, that “it seems likely that this is the ‘György Kátai’ who helped Antall correspond with persons in France.”⁹

Thus the mapping of Antall’s contacts in Hungary provided a key to the other main objective of the investigation: Antall’s foreign contacts. A “dangerous” individual like Antall naturally had to have foreign contacts -- presumably spies and, moreover, since it was a matter of “conspiracy” (i.e. he received the letter under an alias), the contact was dangerous by definition, and spying could be expected to have been involved. Moreover, there were a number of reports in the files of the intelligence service about Pál Tar, a student at the School of International Trade (*Ecole de Commerce*) in Paris.¹⁰ Thus Kátai’s relevance was already established by then, even when they knew nothing about him other than the fact that he was receiving mail from Paris addressed to “Dear Gyuri! Dear fellows!”

A few weeks later Antall showed Egri a postcard Tar had sent from Rome, which displayed Kátai’s address. Egri even met him personally at a sample lecture, in connection with an application for a position; thus he found out that the person was a history teacher at the *gimnázium* in Rákospalota. Even more importantly, Kátai described “Antall as his good

⁸ Report by the agent with the code-name Gyula Egri, September 30, 1958. *Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára* (Historical Archives of the State Security Services), hereafter ÁBTL, O-11386/1, folios 294-95.

⁹ Report by Egri, October 23, 1958. ÁBTL, O-11386/1, folio 320.

¹⁰ Especially in the reports by the agent code-named Roger (sometimes Roge or Rogee) from Paris. ÁBTL MT 499/1 Vol. 3. Roger worked in Paris in 1957-59 for Hungarian intelligence. From 1951 to 1957 he was the agent of the state security counterintelligence against domestic reactionary forces, under code-name “Faragó”, in Smallholder circles (during the coalition period 1945-1948, he had been a MP belonging to the Smallholders’ Party). Before leaving the country he paid a goodbye visit to several persons, including József Antall, who entrusted him with a message for József Kóvágó. Report by Faragó concerning his conversation with Antall, February 22, 1957. ÁBTL O-14820/2, folio 24. Faragó/Roger was friends with Antall for twenty years, and helped in the assistance to Polish and Jewish refugees during the war. Regarding Roger, see Tar (2003), p. 31.

and dear friend. They had been classmates in high school and fellow-students at the same year at the university, a man of far lesser talent than Antall who was completely under the latter's influence."¹¹ From that moment Egri's ongoing assignment was to keep in touch with Kátai. The agency went into action: it obtained Kátai's biographical data and placed his mail under surveillance.

Egri was soon able to supply additional information regarding the relationship between Antall and Kátai. "On December 28, 1958, I met with József Antall ... and he told me that there was opportunity to cooperate in a project at the National Archives, but here it is not advisable to show up with [György Kátai], whom we wish to get involved in the work, because he is known to several of the staff. According to Antall's account he was the commander of the armed group occupying the National Archives during the counter-revolution [in 1956], he was walking up and down with an automatic [gun] in the building and, in several instances, issued instructions to the leading officials of the archives. According to Antall, he walks around with dark sunglasses and a bigger moustache, for fear of being recognized."¹² Egri, who was so apt at building relationships, making good use of his friendship with Antall and of his experiences during the revolution in order to expand his contacts, soon established a good relationship with Kátai as well. He perceived Kátai as a "rather cautious, circumspect man, who kept warning Antall during the conversation, even though he was fully in agreement"¹³ whereas Antall could not be stopped talking about their friendship and their common doings during the revolution. An increasing number of the names of the participants in the action at the National Archives on November 3, 1956, came up. There were meaningful hints that Antall, Kátai, Tar, and Police Lt. Colonel H. József as leader were "looking for secret materials regarding the Soviet Union and the people's democracies", and that the "Western embassies were also interested in these materials." If all

¹¹ Report by Egri, 13 November 1958. ÁBTL O-11386/1, folio 342.

¹² Report by Egri, January 2, 1959. Same place, folios 383, 388.

¹³ Report by Egri, February 21, same place, folios 417-19.

this was found out, “they would hang.”¹⁴ Since that time, added Antall, Kátai is „my secretary and archivist”, in charge of the confidential documents of the Antall family.¹⁵

Of course, given all this potentially useful data, Kátai aroused Captain Kállai’s curiosity, but first only as a “target person”, as a member of Antall’s so-called conspiracy (*szervezkedés*). Kállai and the agency were considering another history teacher to help map Antall’s contacts, another classmate at the university.¹⁶ They got in touch with Ferenc T. in the summer of 1959, but he immediately related the incident to Antall (as well as to Egri), hence the attempt failed. In September, however, they succeeded in recruiting an agent -- to observe Kátai! -- a colleague at the school in Rákospalota, Attila A. (code-named “Arany” [gold]). As with Ferenc T., once again it was Egri, with his nimble mind and wide contacts owing to his interest in pedagogy, who supplied the initial data.¹⁷ The third person in the combination was the police officer, József H., who had led the action at the archives in 1956. After 1945 József H. became a criminologist with the police (and collaborated with the secret service in the same capacity), he had been arrested in connection with the Rajk affair¹⁸ and sent to an internment camp. In 1951-55 he was an agent of the state security under the code-name “Harmath”. After his release from service he found employment as blue-collar. In 1955-56 he was employed at the National Archives, where he met Antall for the first time. Shortly before the revolution he was reactivated as a police official. Afterward he obtained a position as department head in a foreign trade outfit and joined the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party. Antall told his friends, however, that they -- that is, the Smallholder Party --

¹⁴ Report by Egri, July 17, 1959. ÁBTL O-11386/2, folios 164-172.

¹⁵ Report by Egri, July 2, same place, folios 153-54.

¹⁶ Report by Egri, June 5, 1959, same place, folios 100-101.

¹⁷ Arany’s network dossier, nr 6, ÁBTL 2. 2. 2. According to the staff of ÁBTL, the cooption (B -- *beszerzés*) and service (M -- *munka*) dossiers of Arany are not in the holdings. His or her employment ceased in July 1961 “for lack of further opportunity to collect intelligence.” With regard to B and M dossiers, see Mrs. Petrik (1999), pp. 49-50.

¹⁸ László Rajk (1909-1949) was a leading Communist politician and interior minister (1946-8). In 1949 he was arrested on fabricated charges. The so-called Rajk Trial marked the beginning of the Soviet-bloc campaign against Tito’s Yugoslavia. Rajk was sentenced to death and executed. Rehabilitated in 1955. His reburial on October 6, 1956, turned into a demonstration against the Rákosi regime.

were the ones to send him into the police and even claimed that they gave him a safe-conduct in writing to certify his “reliability,” in case of another change of regime.¹⁹ At first, the security people were after József H. because of the action involving Antall, Kátai and Tar.²⁰ Later they received intelligence to the effect that H. intended to flee the country some time in 1957, with Antall’s assistance.²¹ Egri’s reports also created the impression that H. had become close friends with Antall ever since. This was probably an exaggeration but, at this point, Kállai and her supervisors were determined to reactivate “Harmath” as an agent. They became especially eager when the feelers directed at Harmath elicited great alarm from Antall and Kátai.²² The experienced Harmath, however, immediately revealed to Antall the attempt at recruitment, assuring the latter that he would not talk and probably expecting the voluble Antall to spread the news.

The great combination aimed at uncovering the operations of the Antall conspiracy seemed to have reached a dead-end by early summer of 1960; the cooptation of the teacher T. and of József H. proved a fiasco. The secret police had to show some kind of positive outcome, however. György Kátai was still considered to be a participant in the Antall “conspiracy” when, on July 23, 1959, Egri, prompted by his supervisor, described him in a special report. He stressed Kátai’s nervous, standoffish and cautious nature, which he ascribed to his participation in the events of 1956 and his fear of being held accountable. “My feeling is that ‘Kátai’ is a timid man who does not like to take the initiative. He is just as reactionary

¹⁹ Regarding József H. see report by Gyula Egri, July 17, 1959. ÁBTL O-11386/2, folios 164-172, July 23, 1959, same place, folio 181, December 3, 1959, same place, folios 281-85, etc. See also the protocol on József H. as witness and “scholar and researcher,” December 8, 1955, ÁBTL dossier V-142748/86, or the network dossier nr 6 on Harmath, ÁBTL 2.2.2. According to the staff of ÁBTL the B and M dossiers on Harmath cannot be found in the collection.

²⁰ The 1959 plan for the Antall operation and the reports on its execution are in ÁBTL O-11386/1, folios 393-94, 11386/2, folios 22-35, 410-13, and 473-77.

²¹ “Ferenc Végh,” the person allegedly in charge of facilitating illegal exits from the country, an agent of the state security since 1953 (or 1945 according to a different source) was taken into custody early in 1960 and accused of influence-peddling and breach of security. It is alleged that Végh did report that H. intended to leave the country, but he was found not credible by his superiors. See ÁBTL V-148314 and O-11386/2, folios 410-13, 438-44, and 473-77.

²² Report by Egri, February 16, 1960, ÁBTL O-11386/2 folios 339-341, March 17, 1960, same place 363-64, May 19, 1960, same place 395-98.

as Antall (although not as aristocratic in his demeanor or extreme in his attitude), but he is lacking in courage. He is also much more cautious on account of his family.”²³ Then he added some details regarding Kátai’s private life which reflected negatively on him, for Egri, who had been working in the network for over a year, knew exactly what the secret police were hoping to hear. Captain Kállai’s comment used the term “cooptation” for the first time: “I asked for a report on ‘Kátai’ primarily to enable me to study his human and character traits. Considering that our agent describes him as cowardly, cringing, afraid of being held to account -- all this indicates that he may be ripe for cooptation.”²⁴ It took them almost another year to collect the data needed, and it was only after H. refused to be inducted and conspire that they decide to carry out the action.²⁵

Cooptation

By the time of his cooptation the secret service had ample data regarding their candidate. We cannot know these in their entirety, because the file regarding his cooptation has disappeared.²⁶ Presumably most of the data came from people in the network -- from Egri, the colleague, from the reports filed by Arany and others. Neither do these relate to György Kátai, the civilian, the human being, but to him as a potential member of the network. In other words, they are distorted in two directions: the emphasis is on data the authorities find compromising, and on certain traits of his character. Moreover, they provide details about Kátai’s chances to gather information in the area designed for him. This area was the Antall

²³ Report by Egri, July 23, 1959, ÁBTL M-25787/1, folios 331-32. This report is preserved only in handwritten form and was probably not placed in any file. It is almost certain that Egri’s assessment was utilized in the analysis of Kátai’s social environment and, eventually, in the plan for his cooptation.

²⁴ Same place.

²⁵ For the analysis of the reason for his cooptation, see the comment by the handlers and Egri’s report of April 22, 1960, ÁBTL O-11386/2, folios 287-88.

²⁶ According to the staff of ÁBTL the dossier on the cooptation of György Kátai (B dossier) can not be found in the collection.

affair, then under the code-name “Árvai” as well as counterintelligence among high school teachers in Budapest.

At this time Kátai was 28 years old. He was born in 1931, in Budapest, his father was self-employed white-collar, his mother a homemaker -- in other words, the family may be said to be middle-class. This is confirmed by the fact that he attended elementary school in district XII (presumably near their home), and attended secondary school, from grade 5 (that is, in 1945) at the Piarist *Gimnázium*. Once the school became public it was renamed after the poet Endre Ady and, in 1950, when the *gimnázium* resumed its former name as the Piarist school, Kátai received his diploma (along with Antall). He worked for a year as an inventory taker with the Hungarian State Railways (MÁV) and then, in 1951, was admitted to the faculty of liberal arts at the Eötvös Lóránd University, as a philosophy major. Much like Antall, Kátai married rather young, at age 21, and a daughter was born three years later. They lived not far from the residence of Antall, downtown, on Kossuth Lajos street. More exactly, he lived in the maid's room of a bourgeois apartment with his wife and child, whereas the rest of the apartment was occupied by his widowed mother -- which must have been an occasion for repressed tension and explosive conflicts.²⁷ It should be noted that his father was a member of the Communist Party and of the Workers Party from 1947 onward and worked at the State Central Control Office until his death in 1950. Upon graduation Kátai became a teacher at a public school in Óbuda; he was still there in 1956, and was elected chairman of the school's revolutionary committee. He transferred to the *gimnázium* in Rákospalota in 1957.²⁸

Egri's reports intimate that whereas Kátai was in close friendship with Antall the relationship was strikingly one-sided. Antall was the absolutely dominant party, the stories about the two of them were always related by Antall, whereas Kátai did not even play the role

²⁷ Communication by Gábor Hanák to the author in July 2004.

²⁸ The most important source for all this is the extensive confession at the time of the cooptation, in the protocol for the interrogation of György Kátai, August 5, 1960, TH O-11386/2, handwritten note (exists only in duplicate), and the first report by agent code-named György Kátai, August 15, 1960, same place.

of a yes-man, remaining mostly silent.²⁹ The perceptive Egri also noticed that this caused tension in Kátai's behavior. He was obviously worried that he may be held accountable for his activities in 1956, and was irritated by Antall's constant loquaciousness about those days, and how he kept on adding further details, assessing himself and themselves, thoroughly exaggerating their role. Kátai was obviously disturbed by this self-assurance which was obviously due to the protection Antall could count on from his father -- who would probably not protect Kátai should the need arise.³⁰

It is possible that the agency received additional information about Kátai's activities in 1956 from Arany, since the latter taught at the same Rákospalota school, and Antall referred to him as a friend.³¹ But all they knew for certain were the activities at the National Archives, and that Kátai and Antall spent much time together. Lili Kállai and her colleague, Police Captain Imre Papp probably paid special attention to the reports about Kátai's anxieties and phobias. Four years after the events, after two -- albeit partial -- amnesties, he still walked about in disguise (dark sunglasses, moustache, beard) indicating how vulnerable he felt on this score. They knew about Kátai's scholarly ambitions and strivings, that he hoped to become more than just a high school teacher, and could assume that his secret, "guilty" past was construed as an obstacle to fulfilling those ambitions. They could presume that he would be inclined to deny or reject this past in order to achieve his career goals.

Around 1960 the formation and operations of the network of state security agencies were regulated only by directives at the lower level,³² and the training was based mainly on materials translated from the Russian; comprehensive regulations at the ministerial level had

²⁹ József Antall's niece, Edit Héjj, and Géza Jeszenszky remembered Kátai the same way during a conversation with the author in June 2003.

³⁰ Report by Egri, November 20, 1959, ÁBTL O-11386/2, folios 271-74.

³¹ We are not familiar with the reports submitted by Arany since these cannot be found, according to the staff of ÁBTL.

³² The organization of the agency [OK] 1955. ÁBTL ÁB 1184. Regarding the training materials see Jobst (2004), pp. 304-07.

to wait another decade.³³ The basic methods, devices, techniques and terminology, however, would not change much. The network -- i.e. “the totality of the secret aide companions” of the state security agencies “who are in organized, lasting, continuous, planned and secret touch with the state security service”³⁴ -- served primarily intelligence purposes. (More rarely they were used for spreading information or disinformation). Cooption may take place on three accounts: on the basis of so-called patriotic (that is, political) conviction, on the basis of material interest (paid informers), or on the basis of compromising information (in plain language: blackmail). In the case of Kátai the third variant applied.

Ideally, picking a person for cooption assumed the existence of four basic requirements in combination: a clear objective (meaning the addition to the network to be carried out for a particular purpose, and not just for its own sake, to bloat the statistics, etc.), the candidate’s qualifications and reliability for the task, and the right conditions for secret collaboration. Qualifications played a key role in two regards: whether the candidate had “operative opportunities” (contacts, position etc.), and his personal qualities (level of intelligence, personal and family circumstances, health³⁵, etc.). According to the pertinent manual, “the principles of selecting the individual form a dialectic whole. If any one of the requirements is missing, the cooption must not take place.”³⁶

The cooption always took place far from the subject’s natural social environment. If the recruitment was based on blackmail, the recommended procedure was taking the subject

³³ Order nr. 005/1972 of the Minister of the Interior, Hungarian People’s Republic: “Basic principles of the network operations of state security agencies” issued on April 5, 1972, in: *Az állambiztonsági operatív munka alapjai és titkos nyomozati (operatív) eszközei* [The foundations of the operations of state security services and its secret investigative (operative) tools], vols. 1-4, BM Tanulmányi és Propaganda Főcsoportfőnökség [Headquarters of the Studies and Propaganda Main Division of the Ministry of Interior], 1976.

³⁴ Sándor Lakatos and László Mulik, *Az állambiztonsági munkában felhasználható operatív erők, eszközök és alkalmazott módszerek, a hálózat szervezése. Jegyzet a BM Tartalékoszt-képző Iskola hallgatói részére* [The operational forces, means and methods employed in the work of state security agencies, and network building. Textbook for the students of the Training School for Reserve Officers of the Ministry of the Interior]. Budapest: BM Könyvkiadó, 1988. ÁBTL AB materials, number 848, p. 51.

³⁵ Chronically ill or mentally ill individuals could not be coopted according to the rules, and if the ideology of the person to be recruited was antagonistic, s/he could only be coopted with the help of negative or compromising circumstances (blackmail).

³⁶ Sándor Lakatos and László Mulik, as cited above, p. 61.

into secret custody, without the knowledge of the environment.³⁷ In such a case, the targeted person would not be able to prepare in advance, nobody could know what happened to him, he could no longer feel safe, whereas his isolation would “highlight the careful ways in which the the state security agencies work and this might make a favorable impression on the person” -- according to a later edition of the manual, which adds that this also indicates that they can guarantee his safety (as an agent).³⁸ The person to be recruited would be taken to a room specially designated for this purpose in the building occupied by the agency. Here, after recording all personal biographical data, there would be a regular interrogation, as in the case of all suspects, the purpose of which is to have reconnaissance and complete information to facilitate cooption. If the candidate should refuse to provide information or, if in the view of the coopter, he did not reveal everything, he held back information, then the process of cooption is considered to have failed.³⁹

At first they wanted to set the time of Kátai's cooption for July 1960 when he was expected to be in the countryside, accompanying his students to a camp in Tolna county in order to participate in seasonal agricultural works.⁴⁰ Seizing on this opportunity would have been adventurous and risky (they would have had to find some excuse to remove him from the camp and his colleagues might have notified the family) and it was eventually rejected. They resorted to a far safer, classical operation. In the last days of July, upon his return from the camp, he was drafted for reserve military duty to Pétervására, with an air defense and anti-aircraft unit. From here he was taken to the nearby town of Eger, where the officers of the Political Section of the Budapest Police Headquarters interrogated him over a period of two

³⁷ Secret custody. Instruction film, 9 minutes, BN Filmstudio, no date, ÁBTL 4.9.12. Regarding informational and training films for police and state security, see Baracsi (2004).

³⁸ ÁBTL ÁB document nr 848, folios 61-67.

³⁹ Same place, folio 69. There are many recollections by those who underwent cooption, albeit they overwhelmingly discuss failed attempts. Cf. Kőrösi and Molnár (1999) and the collection edited by Molnár (2004), pp. 148-163. For lack of statistics we may only surmise that the failed attempts exceeded those that succeeded by far.

⁴⁰ Report by Egri, June 24, 1960. ÁBTL O-11368/2, folios 493-95. Besides the report itself there is a comment by the handlers regarding the cooption.

days. On the second day György Kátai signed the protocol of interrogation, he signed his declaration of recruitment and pledge to keep everything related to it secret, all written in his own handwriting. His general duties were described to him, he was given (or chose) a code-name, and Imre Papp, the officer in charge, filed a written report. Three days later the agent's dossier nr. 6 was set up.⁴¹ It was signed by department head Lt. Colonel Sándor Tihanyi. At the same time as the network dossier was opened, the agent, under the alias of György Kátai, was born.

We do not know the details. A confession which he had written probably in his own hand has been preserved only in a copy dated from several weeks later.⁴² On the basis of this document we may assume that the interrogation focused on 1956 and its immediate aftermath. Kátai revealed more than could be gathered from Egri's reports, but not much more. He wrote that on November 4 he took up arms (albeit only for a few hours), that for a while he was hiding Pál Tar's pistol and that Antall and he participated in assisting the families of those arrested. He also revealed that, after the revolution, Antall kept in touch with Western journalists. The date of the protocol is August 5, 1960 but, judging from its length, it is more like the systematized "result" of the two day long interrogation.⁴³ It seems likely that the confession was the outcome of the initial scare, but during the extended interrogation they made use of details already collected. For example, while in his own declaration Kátai wrote that in 1956 they went to the National Archives in order to protect its holdings, in the protocol he is said to have indicated that the objective was to save from destruction the records incriminating the Communist leadership. In the passages on „white aid”⁴⁴, on the armed guard

⁴¹ Dossier number 6 of György Kátai, ÁBTL 2.2.2.

⁴² "Confession regarding the counterrevolution and its aftermath" -- carbon copy. September 27, 1960. ÁBTL O-11386/2, folios 519-528.

⁴³ Protocol of the interrogation of [György Kátai], August 5, 1960. Same place, folios 453-460.

⁴⁴ A mocking expression used to designate the aid provided for the relatives of those arrested in 1956-7 – in contrast to the "Red Aid" of the interwar years when relatives of arrested communists received support.

of the Smallholder Party in 1956, on plans for saving the revolution after 4 November⁴⁵, and in those on contacts with Pál Tar, Kátai identified several names. Except for József Antall, whose person is in the focus of the entire protocol, only Tar and József H. are discussed to any extent. In the concluding paragraph Kátai wrote: “I condemn my activities to-date and regard my conduct to have been incorrect. My social milieu was primarily responsible for this and, secondly, my political wavering, particularly during the period of counter-revolution.”

Considering the instructions in the manuals of the period, we must assume that the interrogator was not Captain Papp -- he was present only as an observer who only at the time of the confession, in the course of the assessment of possible consequences, made his move or, to use the parlance of the time, relayed the “invitation.”⁴⁶ From the same sources we may reconstruct the logic and ideal scenario of cooptation as seen by the agency. The motive force was the extent of the expected punishment. It is possible that the victim of cooptation was told how many years he would have to serve in jail, albeit this could only have been a rough estimate since the agents themselves could not know all the factors. The action at the archives and the active participation in the „white aid” could qualify as „active participation in [counter-revolutionary] conspiracy”, but Kátai did not participate in armed action, there was nothing illegal in the contact with Tar, and there was no evidence whatsoever (not from Kátai himself either) as to the „conspiracy” led by Antall. After the amnesty announced in 1960 these charges could not have earned him more than a year or two of jail-time, at worst. What really mattered here was the uncertainty and unpredictability in the whole situation where the expectable punishment is but one item among many. The psychological studies in connection with cooptation assumed that the psychological equilibrium of the candidate facing the authorities was already unbalanced, since the “crime” committed and the fear of punishment

⁴⁵ Soviet troops reentered Budapest on 4 November 1956, and eventually crushed the revolution.

⁴⁶ ÁBTL ÁB document nr 848, and *Secret Collaborator*, instructional film, 82 minutes. Film studio of the Ministry of the Interior, 1962. ÁBTL 4.9.11. This instructional film, prepared in the style of a “docudrama,” shows the cooptation of an agent pressured into service by the accusation of a common crime, but the methods are the same.

elicited anxiety. The lack of equilibrium is only enhanced by the shock of the unexpected arrest, the ensuing isolation. This is further enhanced by the interrogator who gradually, “drop by drop,” reveals the data they had acquired and systematized during the investigation. The candidate gets the feeling that the interrogators know a lot, perhaps everything, whereas he knows nothing. Finally, when he has reached the limit of his capacity to resist, the subject becomes completely disoriented and, at the same time, spontaneously he feels the need to regain his balance. The interrogators try to take advantage of this by pointing out that the candidate can regain his composure and emotional stability by agreeing to collaborate. After the confession, there is generally a brief period of relaxation, then the coopter tries again to further increase the emotional tensions (by summarizing what the two of them found out) and throws in the chance for redemption, by way of resolution of the tension. Added to all this are the tensions elicited by the severe inner conflicts of conscience and motivation; then we have reached the moment of decision.⁴⁷

Even if we had the report of Captain Papp regarding the cooption of “Kátai”, we would know no more about the actual experience, inasmuch as these documents are drafted according to a prescribed template. On the other hand, without sources we run the risk of naïve a posteriori psychologizing: the analyst is thinking according to the template of assumed normal behavior (he tries to imagine what he would have done under similar circumstances).⁴⁸ An awareness of a few unusual circumstances does not help here. We can say with probability, on the basis of a large number of recollections, that after the revolution, the possibility of becoming coopted was a topic of conversation in the circles of intellectuals. We know from the reports that especially Antall and company discussed this topic extensively and

⁴⁷ ÁBTL ÁB, document nr 848, folios 68-71. György Láng, *Büntetőeljárás megelőző felderítés eszközei, felhasználásuk nyomozástaktikai és lélektani problémái. (A terhelő alapon történő beszervezés taktikájának lélektani sajátosságai)*, [Means for investigation preceding criminal prosecution, issues in the tactics of investigation and psychological problems in their application (The psychological particularities of the tactics of cooptation when resorting to pressure based on incrimination), Budapest, 1973. ÁBTL ÁB, document nr 471. The research is based on the study of several hundred cases of cooptation of agents recruited for service on the basis of incriminating evidence.

⁴⁸ See Lackó (2001), especially pp. 27-66.

that there were some in Kátai's company who had experienced interrogation personally. In other words, they could prepare themselves and it is more than likely that Kátai also prepared himself obviously in order to avoid becoming an agent with all of its mental and moral implications. Nevertheless, and in spite of all this, it did happen. But perhaps it was not in spite of all this, but because of all this.

According to Egri's reports, Kátai was scared but, then, Egri had been expected by the agency to report about fear. The reports mention the cause of the fear, yet it would be oversimplifying if we said: he was scared -- that was the reason he gave in and signed. The comments attached to Kátai's first few reports all testify to the "normalcy" of the progress of cooption, and Captains Kállai and Papp were quite satisfied with his dedication, the thoroughness of his early reports. "The agent code-named Kátai carried out the assignment given him by comrade Police Captain Imre Papp well, since he sought out Antall, and behaved exactly, used the same tone, as he had done before. „There is no perceptible change in his behavior. His conduct so far has shown that we may assume that his relations with us is sincere. If he continues to behave this way, he will become a good agent" – was noted by Lilli Kállai on the margins of Egri's report, who was writing about Kátai's short vacation.⁴⁹ But she could just as easily assume the opposite. Before his cooption Kátai had written a letter to Antall from Pétervására, asking the latter to provide a doctor's note that would excuse him from service. Surveillance of the mail (so-called 'K'-surveillance) did not catch the letter, nor did he report it -- although he was given precisely such an assignment from Captain Papp: let him ask Antall to arrange for his demobilization.⁵⁰ During his leave, two weeks after his cooption, he told Antall, he was serving with a police unit, and the locals in the village call them "kékávósok"⁵¹. He even added that, since it was a special unit, they might "*scratch the*

⁴⁹ Report by Gyula Egri, August 26, 1960, ÁBTL O-11386/2, folio 531.

⁵⁰ Report by Gyula Egri, August 10, 1960, same place, folios 461-62.

⁵¹ As noted previously, "ávós" was the colloquial term for members of the State Security Authority until 1956 (and for the staff of the political police even after 1956). "Kék" (blue) was the color of the police uniform.

surface of his past and come up with some information about the archives”⁵² [italics of the author]. It was as if he tried to draw Antall’s attention to what had actually taken place, and lead him to confess, this time to his friends. But his friends were unsuspecting. We may imagine, naively, that this was his way of asking for help, asking for absolution. Or, to the contrary, that he was enjoying the new game, the game of his new-found power: now it was he who knew everything, whereas those who he was observing knew nothing.

Operations

According to the file kept by his handler, Kátai was coopted in connection with the alleged Antall-conspiracy bearing the code-name “Árvai.” If the acquaintance was superficial, the task given to the agents was to “deepen the relationship” by finding various activities in common, seeking opportunities for meetings and topics of conversation. There was no need for this in the case of Kátai and Antall. They had known each other for a decade and a half, they practically grew up together, close to one another, they knew almost everything about each other. Nevertheless, in September 1960 Kátai was required to write summary reports about their relationship, by then in the form of an agent’s report, completing and “rethinking” the confessions recorded during cooptation. The service made him write similar reports and characterizations about his teacher colleagues, about those whose names had come up during his confessions and first reports.⁵³ This process, which lasted roughly until November 1960,

⁵² Report by Gyula Egri, August 26, 1960, same place, folio 529.

⁵³ The reports of György Kátai, between August 1960 and December 1962, are contained in a work dossier of 434 folios (ÁBTL M-18729). The dossier contains all handwritten original reports including the assessment and comments of the handler, and even the follow-up tasks assigned by the officer, as noted on the report. It also contains typewritten copies of these reports, usually prepared a few days later, with some data added. Thus it may contain the marginalia added by the handler, and possibly his or her typewritten comments at the bottom of the report. In each case a number is assigned to the report, an indication of how many carbon copies were prepared, to whom were these forwarded, whether or not there was an abstract, for whom was it prepared. One copy of the typewritten report was always for the work dossier and another usually for the dossier established for the particular project on which the agent was working at the time (many reports, however, did not make it into this latter one) and a copy was often made for the information section of the service, to be included in the

served a double purpose: the authorities intended to assess more exactly the operational opportunities open to their agent, whereas the agent was expected to create the new world of the network man. This world would be inhabited not by colleagues, friends, acquaintances, people he had met by accident, or had heard about in conversations with others, but rather by various categories of potential target persons. He would definitely receive assignments with regard to some of them; with regard to others he may receive assignments; and with regard to yet others he could not know whether he (or the authorities through him) needed anything from them. The microcosm of the network man, through its reorganization into the conceptual and linguistic terms or jargon of state security, assumes new meaning. These categories are imposed on him from without, but he is expected to apply them in detail to his social microcosm.

The social contacts of the network man expand to include a new player, the handler, an officer whose identity may change. During the first year and a half Kátai's handler was the person who performed the cooptation: Captain Imre Papp, the deputy head of the sub-section in charge of counterintelligence of domestic reaction of the Political Investigation section of the Ministry of the Interior. Thereafter he was taken over by First Lieutenant Imre K. Nagy. At times he also met with group leader Major István Csonka. As a consequence of these meetings, the order of life and schedule of the network man gets thoroughly reorganized. At the beginning he would meet his handler once every two weeks, later once every three weeks, in a public place (mostly cafes), or meet at an „S” (secret -- *titkos*) apartment. He had to prepare for these meetings: he had to memorize particular events, conversations, words, or even written texts in connection with his assignments. Keeping it a secret from family members, from his social environment, he would have to prepare handwritten reports for the

documentation used for periodical or thematic reports. Other departments of the service, other handlers, the relevant department of the Ministry of the Interior as well as the Soviet advisors (then the report was addressed to „Comrade Tado”) were often copied. Thus Kátai's reports about Antall can also be found in the “Árvai” dossiers. ÁBTL O-11386/2-3 volume.

meetings, sometimes more than one, depending on the number of his assignments; each of these reports would be four to six pages on the average, sometimes much longer. It was not unusual for Kátai to prepare three or four pieces of writing for a single meeting. During the meeting he would carry on a conversation, partly in connection with the report which the handler read on the spot, and assessed, commented upon, as if it were a student's essay prepared for a tutorial. But other issues may have been discussed as well -- including problems related to the agent's work or his private life -- or about the tasks, their wider implications.⁵⁴ An order from 1972 issued by the Minister of the Interior concerning network building prescribed that the handler must show patience with regard to the work of the network man, but must also be "demanding as well as empathic, helpful and humane with regard to personal problems."⁵⁵ Even the psychologists of the agency were well aware that, as the handler wanted to make the agent turn against his own former world emotionally, the process might elicit anxiety and stress. The handler was expected to resolve the conflict situation that necessarily arises in his agent, otherwise the latter's professional work would suffer: the agent would strive to hang on, preserve his earlier attitudes, and would be selective with regard to the data he seeks and submits.⁵⁶

In the first few years Kátai worked to the satisfaction of his handlers, provided four- to six-page reports every two weeks, mostly about Antall. In this period the two met not simply at friendly gatherings, during mutual visits, walks, but even took English lessons from a former colleague in Antall's apartment. In the days following cooption Kátai gave a very detailed report -- detailed compared to his later reports -- about the visit to Budapest of Pál

⁵⁴ "As yet we have trouble awakening [the agents'] interest in new assignments by shedding light on the existing assignments from various perspectives" -- lamented in this connection a confidential study produced and used within the service. Tibor Balázs and István Sziklai, *A belső reakció elhárítási területén foglalkoztatott ügynök vezetésének és nevelésének néhány pszichológiai sajátossága. Állambiztonsági tanulmány* [Some psychological issues in the training of agents employed in domestic counterintelligence. A study in state security], 1975, nr. 2, BM Tanulmányi és Propaganda Csoportfőnökség, 1975. ÁBTL ÁB document nr 722.

⁵⁵ Hungarian People's Republic, Minister of the Interior, Order nr. 005/1972.

⁵⁶ ÁBTL ÁB document nr 722.

Tar's fiancée.⁵⁷ Papp and company quickly came to the conclusion: the new agent can be inserted between Tar and Antall, even be used in "operational combination"... They prepared a fresh assignment plan for him as early as November 1960, with Pál Tar in the focus. At first they suspected Tar of collecting intelligence against Hungary and later, to the contrary, they were contemplating coopting him into the Hungarian intelligence service. In this case Kátai would have played the role of personal contact, through whom they could gather materials for a closer "examination" of Tar.⁵⁸ In addition to all this, in the process of „mapping the enemies among his contacts”, he wrote descriptions of ten to fifteen lines about 35 to 40 persons.

During the interrogations Kátai could conclude: the personnel of the state security knew quite a bit about Antall already. This should not have surprised him. Antall kept saying, as if obsessed, that he was constantly being watched, that they followed him every step of the way; he was suspicious of everyone, except of those who were indeed watching him. If Kátai was nervous (we do not know this), he could calm himself with regard to Antall by telling himself that he could report nothing which the agency did not already know. On the other hand, his characterizations of his teacher colleagues, all minor denunciations, tell of the solidification of his identity as a network man. Most of these persons were beyond the authorities' horizon and they could not notice or watch them in any other other way. In other words, Kátai was under no compulsion to deliver so many "enemy" acquaintances, with so much specific data. In this period of *Sturm und Drang* in the network it is obvious that Kátai wanted to make a good impression. He was observing everything closely, gave detailed reports about conversations with Antall. He corresponded with Tar, collaborated in smuggling messages and letters to the West (and, by the same token, entrapped the lay-persons who undertook this task). He wanted to oblige and he was ingenious. He even initiated plans, widening the horizon of the authorities. He was not choosy: he reported about the neighbor

⁵⁷ Report by György Kátai, September 12, 1960, ÁBTL O-11386/2, folios 510-15.

⁵⁸ Dossier of Pál Tar, ÁBTL KO-8-092/1.

allegedly hiding weapons,⁵⁹ about a woman who should be courted because her husband, a coach, smuggled letters to the West, about teachers of the Italian language at the *gimnázium* (mostly former pupils of the Benedictine *Gimnázium* who had contacts in Italy),⁶⁰ about the Institute of Child Psychology or the Piarist *Gimnázium* which he intended to infiltrate under the pretense of scholarly research. Numerous aspects and details in Kátai's reports reveal a deliberate and calculated conduct while he was playing his role and also that he thought it important that his handlers should be aware of this. Antall's predicament was hardly affected by Kátai's reports: of this he was aware, or at least he could try and make himself believe that this was the case. Pál Tar lived in Paris, far beyond the jurisdiction of the Hungarian secret service, out of reach of all except the most distant agents. But at least one third of those who were denounced became registered by the service, mostly as a result of Kátai's signals. Even if no collection of additional data was ordered on a particular person, the existing data could have been "mobilized", used at any moment. At this point in our research we cannot measure what explicit or implicit harm resulted from all this to the individuals concerned.

After 1961 the monitoring of Pál Tar was halted, the idea of cooptation apparently dropped. Kátai took up many threads, but József Antall remained the focus of his operations. Most of the information regarding the operations of Kátai, the network man, derive from this strange coexistence. Since I have discussed their relationship in considerable detail in an earlier essay,⁶¹ here I mention only a few aspects relevant to our present topic.

In the spring of 1961, not much after the cooptation of Kátai, state security closed the dossier with the code-name "Árvai" and for a long period of time there was no mention of the

⁵⁹ Report from György Kátai, September 21, 1960, ÁBTL M-18729.

⁶⁰ Report from György Kátai, December 20, 1961, same place p. 288. While talking about a colleague, he explained that teachers of Italian formed a special caste. Major Csonka even noted that "we have to build on this." Kátai even elaborated a plan on how to approach the Italian teachers; he would be at the core of the plan, offering them translation work.

⁶¹ Rainer (2003a).

Antall „conspiracy”.⁶² There were events and incidents later on, but basically the authorities were only interested in what Antall thinks and does (or does not). Their offensive stance and policy of interference had been left behind, they became rather defensive and confined themselves to monitoring, only occasionally attempting to influence. Kátai served the new policies well. He reported on persons who were indifferent to him apparently without any inhibitions, but it seems he was “sparing” Antall. In the early and mid-sixties, he provided detailed reports about Antall’s desire and endeavors of upward mobility, his wish to break out from the mediocre existence of a *gimnázium* teacher, and about his perception of domestic and international events. The headquarters of the agency no longer assumed that Antal was doing anything of any significance and it could be just as well revealed that he was not doing anything. Thus, while Kátai’s work lost its “operative value”, it gained significance as it was tapping into the prevalent “climate of opinion.” By the late sixties the flow of Kátai’s texts was ebbing (and they were less and less about Antall), yet it constituted a consistent narrative about the socialization and adjustment process of one person. Antall became integrated into the society of the Kádár era as an intellectual in a not too significant leadership position. This is what is reflected in Kátai’s ongoing reports.

Informers in the bureaucratic regimes of the modern age reveal less about the persons under observation and more about the expectations of the regime (in contrast to the police informers of the premodern or early modern era, who benefited from a degree of freedom even if they were subordinates; they were able to play games with the authorities by managing the information they collected).⁶³ The reports say as much about the authorities as they do about the person observed. Kátai did not have to know that his reports were no longer collected in a dossier for the case, but rather in his own service dossier. It is possible that he was told that the “Árvai” case was closed. But even if he was not told he could surmise as

⁶² Same place, and ÁBTL dossier O-11386/3, folios 197-202.

⁶³ Cobb (1970), pp. 5-8.

much from the instructions he received, which were reduced to inquiring about Antall's opinions on certain events, on internal affairs of the former schools of former colleagues, on common acquaintances, or about his plans for writing. Kátai's supervisors happened to be interested in the same things as was Antall in the sixties, even though with quite different emphases: how to adjust to the regime, how does the "enemy" become neutralized in the "period of consolidation." Apparently they were not too happy about being confined to passive monitoring and observation, but they reluctantly accepted that the obsessive search for subversive conspiracies was a thing of the past. Nor were they happy to see that, as they got „neutralized”, the enemy was becoming integrated into the intelligentsia. They would have liked to prevent Antall from returning to a career in teaching, from getting hired as a librarian, and as a museum curator -- but it was no longer up to them.

State security classified Antall, in the sixties, among the right-wing of "former Smallholders" due to his father. In the eyes of the agency, the father, who was beyond their reach, demonized the son. The chances for integration of such a person were assessed by the security service according to where he stood in the continuum between being a political fellow-traveler or actively involved in hostile underground activities. At the beginning there was not much nuance in between, and even the fellow-travelers were looked upon with suspicion: is this not merely a disguise? In the early sixties, however, the existence of intermediary stages was acknowledged -- there were those who frequented the local clubs of the Patriotic People's Front, those who regularly met their circle at restaurants or pubs, and those who never went anywhere. Private circles were occasionally busted as late as in 1962-63 -- meaning the members were summoned to the police station, they received warnings, etc. But it had been a new development that even in these cases members of these circles were advised to visit the clubs of the people's front, where they could discuss politics as much as

they liked.⁶⁴ Antall and his father were among those who never went anywhere, expressed their opinions to very few (Kátai, among others), and these opinions were less and less important. In May 1962, when the elder Antall's pension was significantly raised with reference to his merits in the resistance against the Nazi occupation, the son tried to keep the news secret, so that "Ortutay and the others"⁶⁵ would not come to solicit statements; he was afraid that a gesture of loyalty toward the regime would compromise the family.⁶⁶ In 1965, however, he was the one to ask Kátai to call on József Pálffy, the editor-in-chief of the weekly *Magyarország*, offering to write about his father's role in saving Poles during the World War.⁶⁷ In 1968 he was trying to persuade another journalist of *Magyarország* to write a whole series of articles, of which the latter wrote and published but one.⁶⁸ It was probably not state security that intervened to prevent the publication of the others. The service merely observed the process of integration and reported that, along with his symbiotic relationship to the regime, Antall maintained his own opinions on political and ideological matters.

In addition to integration and conformity, the main theme in Kátai's reports was career. He recorded the political opinions of his targets, because that was his assignment. But he regularly recorded Antall and his friends' opinions on existential matters, on promotion, on their aspirations for higher salaries, a higher standard of living, on the possibility of obtaining positions abroad, on travel -- because he, too, was very much concerned by these issues.

Indeed, these were perhaps his prime concerns. Kátai probably thought of his secret

⁶⁴ This was the case with the affair of László Samu, former MP for the Smallholder Party and his table companions, ÁBTL dossier V-167. 121. It is worth noting that in the report summarizing the pertinent documents dated March 1, 1963, Department III/1 (Investigations) of the Ministry of the Interior criticized the conduct of Department III/III, the „dissolution” of the table, pointing out that it was based on an incorrect assessment derived from dubious and biased [!] agent reports. “The persons concerned are all politicians of a bygone era who, in their private conversations, feel almost obligated to express an opinion on current domestic and international events. From the available data we can conclude that they do nothing beyond expressing opinions. Most of their opinions cannot be held against them.” Same place, folio 133.

⁶⁵ I.e., loyal fellow-travellers of the Kádár regime.

⁶⁶ Report from György Kátai, May 24, 1962, ÁBTL M-18729, folio 364. A few years earlier Ortutay (fellow-traveller, former Smallholder politician, after 1956 general secretary of the Patriotic People's Front) did indeed visit Antall Sr., requesting him to make statements and write various editorials, which the latter turned down.

⁶⁷ Report from György Kátai, May 24, 1962. ÁBTL M-30561, folio 35.

⁶⁸ Cf. Rainer (2003b).

collaboration with state security as an adequate strategy for his own integration and promotion. He presented his bill after his first accomplishments. As early as in November 1960, at a special meeting, he requested the help of the service in securing the position of national secretary of the pedagogical and psychological section of the TIT.⁶⁹ Although the suggestion originally came from the Party apparatus, there were complications. The Association wished to consider other candidates within the profession, whereas Kátai's name was not a household word. The justification he gave to Captain Papp is quite revealing, because it shows that a few months suffices for someone to identify with the role of network person. "The position would be to my advantage from a work and financial points of view, but also from the point of view of my scholarly ambitions. Moreover, it would offer me a role of control across the nation, facilitate contact with many persons, even leading ideologues, and make study tours abroad a possibility. It would provide opportunities for securing information from a vantage point other than that of a back-woods *gimnázium* in Rákospalota."⁷⁰ The agency, however, asked for a lot, and gave little in return. According to the rules the agent may, "in the case of extensive collaboration ... ask for a modicum of help in resolving financial, existential issues."⁷¹ Captain Papp, however, opined that if Kátai obtained the position on his own, that would be a good thing, "but there is no possibility for us to arrange for the position without disclosure." Kátai insistently tried to travel, obtain a scholarship from UNESCO, find second jobs, secure an appointment to a national research institute, but state security made no arrangements on his behalf. Although there was talk of foreign travel already in November 1960 (granted, only as far as the German Democratic

⁶⁹ TIT is the acronym of *Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat*, Hungary's National Association for the Popularization of Scientific Knowledge.

⁷⁰ Report from György Kátai, November 14, 1960, ÁBTL M-18729, folio 76.

⁷¹ ÁBTL fonds AB number 848, folio 71.

Republic), but it was not realized before 1963.⁷² Only in 1966 did he succeed in traveling to the West, to Paris, on a tourist visa.

Kátaí was driven by significant ambitions. Indeed, these may have even been overstretching his abilities.⁷³ He felt that his background and role in 1956 were what prevented him from making good and that he could overcome this handicap by collaborating with the authorities. He received no direct assistance, but the connection must have played an indirect role in his promotions. If nothing else, it gave him confidence, self-reliance. We do not know what part his network role played in his moving from pedagogy in the direction of psychology. His scientific ambitions in the fields of pedagogy and psychology were mentioned in his reports merely as career moves. As in the case of his target person, Antall, for him to become an expert meant to become indispensable, the unfavorable circumstances and political discrimination notwithstanding. It meant to obtain a position in which he did not have to constantly prove his loyalty to the regime, yet a position of leadership, if not very high at least at a level safe from the whims of minor bureaucrats. Kátaí reached this point at the beginning of 1963, when he was appointed as a professor at the Department of Pedagogy at the Military Academy in Szentendre, and from there as industrial psychologist at the Egyesült Izzó company, in 1964. He continued his career at the Hungarian Shipbuilding and Crane Works in 1968, and later as a research fellow at ministerial institutes of applied industrial research. He then continued his scientific work as a professor at the Technological University of Budapest. As a researcher, he can not been credited with any significant scientific achievement. Rather, he was involved in researching the history of his specialty, in compiling bibliographies, in organizing projects.

⁷² Tar (2003), p. 46.

⁷³ Although from the early 1970s he worked as a researcher, only in 1990 did he obtain his Candidate of Sciences (PhD) degree.

Career in the network

When Kátai came to the military academy, the political investigators of the Budapest Police Headquarters handed him over to the army counterintelligence.⁷⁴ What little information we have regarding his work at the military academy comes from a report he filed at the time of his departure, in September 1964, in which he writes about the mission assigned to him by his former handlers. He was to report on the foreign contacts of the personnel of the department of pedagogy at the academy and on possible infractions against the rules of military secrecy on the commuter trains running between Budapest and Szentendre. In addition, he continued to file reports about Antall, apparently without interruption. In the fall of 1964 he returned not to the Budapest Police, but to Section 4 (dealing with counterintelligence in the cultural area) of Group Command III/III of the Ministry of the Interior.⁷⁵ Here he worked until December 1969, when his service dossier was closed. There were 326 pages of reports in this dossier; in other words, considerably less in a period of over five years than during the previous not quite two years and a half (August 1960 to December 1962), when his dossier accumulated over 430 pages of reports. Kátai no longer worked on specific cases. He reported on the mood and attitudes, in connection with current events, of his acquaintances who were professionals mostly in the humanities, sometimes in technical fields. József Antall is mentioned in many of these dispatches, but by no means all of them. Kátai was no longer required to correspond with the other old friend, Pál Tar, whose name turned up in Kátai's reports due to his increasingly frequent visits to Hungary, and due to Kátai's own trip to Paris, in April 1966. The latter gave rise to a number of reports. In

⁷⁴ Report from György Kátai, November 22, 1962, ÁBTL M-19729, folio 408, and Kátai's network dossier nr 6, ÁBTL 2. 2. 2. He was transferred to Section 2 of the III/IV Group Command of the Ministry of the Interior, which was in charge of counterintelligence at the central offices of the Ministry of Defense. On October 27, 1964, he was transferred to the network of the Group Command III/III of the Ministry of the Interior. The service dossier nr M-22264 documenting his activities in the network of III/IV cannot be located, according to the staff of ÁBTL.

⁷⁵ Report from György Kátai, September 11, 1964. ÁBTL M-30561, folios 7-9.

addition to reporting on Tar, Kátai was instructed to reconnoiter the offices of *Informations Ouvrières*, a minor radical leftist organization, where he talked to Balázs Nagy, the former deputy secretary of the Petőfi Circle who went into exile in 1956.⁷⁶ (Interestingly enough, the agent of the Hungarian security service introduced himself under his own name, whereas Nagy was using an alias). As an agent, Kátai did hardly more in this instance than reported on the messages of Tar to Antall: that there was no such thing as Hungarian political emigration, that no political change could be expected in the near future (in Hungary), and that Antall Sr. might receive a French medal only with the consent of the Hungarian government. Otherwise, he was writing reports on the mood of friends and acquaintances, reports that had no operative value for the service and that were ever briefer and more spaced as time elapsed. The number of reports multiplied in typewritten copies decreased too (even though he must have had access to typewriters on occasion), while his handwriting became increasingly illegible (it had never been pretty). The information he could provide the network and state security with was less and less substantial.

All of a sudden, in September 1966 Kátai was “rechristened.” From then on he reported as Jenő Kovács, even though at that moment neither the identity of the handler (who changed frequently after 1964) nor his service assignment changed. The regulations regarding cooption note that the terms of the cooperation must be revisited, at the latest, at the time when the hypothetical sentence for his supposed crime was about to expire.⁷⁷ It is possible that this „sentence” in Kátai’s case was precisely six years and, since the agent found no reason to break the relationship even after that, a new christening was in order. In the second half of the sixties Kátai’s reports mention the names of increasing numbers of prominent

⁷⁶ Report from György Kátai, April 25, 1966. Same place, folios 62-64. Regarding Kátai’s reports on Tar and Antall, see Rainer (2003a).

⁷⁷ ÁBTL ÁB document nr 848, folio 71.

intellectuals, such as literary historian Ambrus Oltványi and sociologist Gábor Tánczos.⁷⁸ As he became established as a psychologist he collected materials about his colleagues, for instance Ferenc Mérei⁷⁹ and his friends. From the summer of 1967 his target person became József Kéri (the husband of Kátai's former colleague teacher Júlia Soós), and others. He enjoyed the confidence of several other people, as a friend of Antall.

On February 10, 1968, 2nd Lieutenant Miklós Jávör asked Kátai to write a report about all his contacts, grouped by occupation. The note, listing about 90 names, mentions three individuals as “non-professional friends”, with József Antall in the lead. The largest group was made up of 27 psychologists, but there were 8 professionals from film and television, 12 teachers, 9 engineers, furthermore historians, researchers in the field of education, physicians, journalists, lawyers and economists. According to a note by Jávör the list, “incomplete, to be completed by question and answer”, was to be used in planning “the agent’s assignments.”⁸⁰ In the same month Kátai once again offered to collect information about Gábor Tánczos and he gave the service to understand that he was changing employment (he joined the Hungarian Shipbuilding and Crane Works as a labor psychologist) because he had no opportunity for development or for scientific work at his previous place of employment. The existential crisis entailed a crisis in the career of the network man: his reports became even less regular. There was but a short page about Pál Tar's visit to Hungary in July 1968, although the student movement of May 1968 in Paris provided ample topics for conversation. After a few very brief reports regarding Antall and others, meetings were increasingly cancelled, and his reports contained literally nothing. Early in February, 1969, at the secret apartment code-named Pilóta [Pilot] he told Jávör, the handler, “that he had not yet

⁷⁸ Gábor Tánczos (1928-1979) was secretary of the Petőfi Circle, the forum of young anti-stalinist intellectuals in 1956; he got a 15 year prison term in one of the subsidiary trials to the Imre Nagy trial, and was released under an amnesty in the spring of 1962.

⁷⁹ Ferenc Mérei (1909-1986), one of Hungary's leading psychologists. He received a 10 year prison sentence in 1958 for “anti-state conspiracy” and was released under the amnesty of 1963.

⁸⁰ Report by Jenő Kovács [György Kátai], February 10, 1968. ÁBTL M-30561, folios 245-46.

been able to carry out his assignment in connection with Ambrus Oltványi” and he brought no “information of operative value” and “prepared no report.” Jávör’s supervisor felt that a serious “deterioration” had set in the agent’s work. He ordered an investigation and a report on the results.⁸¹ We do not know the contents of this report, if it exists. Jávör continued to try his best and insisted that Kátai prepare summaries on other persons on the list (including Ambrus Oltványi and Ferenc Pataki). This reminds us of the procedure where the service makes its agent “map“ of his circle of acquaintances, which normally points to new tasks for the agent, „inspiring” the persons in charge. But in this case something altogether different happened: the dossier of György Kátai (or, by now Jenő Kovács), was closed on December 5, 1969, without the customary summary (i.e., without a general description of the documents in the file, or the reason for sending the records for deposit), and placed among the inactive files a few days later.⁸²

Collaboration over nine years may be said to be “lasting” in the practice of the network. The cases I am familiar with usually did not last as long. The cover of the network dossier does contain a note, in abridged form, regarding the reason for the removal: “there has been a change in family circumstances.” According to the recollection of those who knew Kátai around this time he was undergoing a serious personal crisis, his marriage was falling apart, he attempted to commit suicide.⁸³ I already referred to his problems at the workplace. The increasing lack of contents -- from the network’s point of view -- of his reports was a logical process, but may reflect a crisis of conscience as well. The break with the role of the network man in this situation could have been reasonable on either part.

What followed, however, is all the more mysterious and, for the time being, the pertinent documentation is almost entirely lacking. According to its tab, Kátai’s (missing) recruitment dossier was removed on August 21, 1970, to the Political Department of the

⁸¹ Report by Police Lieutenant Miklós Jávör, February 4, 1969. Same place folio 282.

⁸² Same place folio 326, and the network dossier of György Kátai, nr. 6, ÁBTL 2. 2. 2.

⁸³ Communication by Géza Jeszenszky and Gábor Hanák, June 2003 and June 2004 to the author.

Headquarters of the Budapest Police and placed into the custody of Major Pollacsek. This meant that after an interruption of less than a year Kátai was reactivated, by the very department where he began his network career in August 1960. Thus it was not really a break, but rather a period of recuperation for the network man, a temporary cessation of activity.⁸⁴ Indeed, Pollacsek's name does not appear as handler on any previous document. The number of the new service dossier does not appear on the tab. Instead, somebody wrote on it in large, upper-case letters: SECRET. As if there were a new dossier to collect and summarize reports, but containing matters that were to remain confidential for ever, matters that should not be traced even through the most secret files. (Actually it means a special category of "secret networkmen", whose real personnel data and field of activity were not accessible even within the state security organs – except to a very few high-ranking officers.)

Yet there is no secret dossier in the world from which some information may not leak, from which a document or two may not be transferred to another dossier, from which some tidbit may not be included on a somewhat less secret tab. Kátai remained a network man, at least from 1970 to 1981, but more than likely up to 1989. By 1970 he could not be blackmailed with the charge of counterrevolutionary activity. The few surviving documents which illustrate this new collaboration, which lasted far longer than the first, prove that Kátai, under the code-name Jenő Kovács, was functioning in the network no longer as an agent, but as secret agent. The secret agent is a "member of the secret service network who participates in secret collaboration as a matter of principle"⁸⁵ -- that is, no longer under pressure, blackmailed with incriminating evidence, but voluntarily.

The main subject of Kátai's reports as secret agent of the Political Department of the Budapest Police Headquarters remained Antall. Presumably in the same moderate, sparing tone he reported about Antall's always resigned, passive political opinions. The major themes

⁸⁴ Kenedi (1996), vol. 3, p. 424.

⁸⁵ "Rövidítések és szakkifejezések szótára" (Dictionary of abbreviations and technical terms), <http://abtl.hu>.

of the 1960s, such as accommodation, the symbiotic relationship with the regime, social advancement, economic enrichment, prestige and career, were no longer topical. The network person and his target had “arrived”: in their opinion they had attained the position which they could hope to attain under the circumstances, with all their reservations. As the faculty of the university of technology, Kátai reached the rank of associate professor (*docent*). In the eighties he was visible as the author and editor of an increasing number of publications, as an office-holder of scientific associations, and as a member of the editorial boards of international journals. Antall, who had been the assistant curator of a minor museum, became its curator by the late eighties, and he was the author of numerous, although not too significant publications, benefiting from international recognition in a narrow field. The topics of the reports from the seventies -- from leisurely conversations in Antall’s office or at Kátai’s apartment -- included politics, current events, demonstrations on March 15,⁸⁶ the 25 year class reunion (Antall’s speech “was slightly nationalistic, although he did not criticize anyone”),⁸⁷ Pál Tar’s visits to Hungary, the politics discussed at dinner-time among the three of them,⁸⁸ a former colleague of Antall from the Toldy *Gimnázium*, József Horti.⁸⁹

Kátai did not change much, but the environment in which he was writing his reports changed all the more. Over a period of two decades the state security service had no real political targets in Hungary, for there was no true political opposition. By the end of the seventies, however, there emerged, for the first time since 1956, conscious groups who defined themselves as opposition. A casual comment made by Pál Tar in those days, according to which after his retirement (he was not even fifty at the time!) he would write a book about Hungary for Western consumption, about the real conditions (including the

⁸⁶ ÁBTL O-14820/2a. folios 86-90. The reports survived in Antall’s „F” (*figyelő* – observation) dossier that was closed in 1972 and attached to the line-dossier of the Smallholder Party; they date from 1973-75.

⁸⁷ Excerpt, June 216, 1975, same place, folios 92-93.

⁸⁸ Budapest Police Headquarters (BRFK), daily bulletin number 87, May 30, 1979. ÁBTL 2. 7. 1. and BRFK daily bulletin number 105, July 10, 1979, same place.

⁸⁹ BRFK, daily bulletin number 8, January 22, 1980, same place.

negatives and the positives), and his interest in the new dissenting movements and in samizdat literature, elicited a major reaction from the secret police. On the basis of the information collected by Kátai (it could only have been he), in October 1980 the service launched a confidential investigation code-named Kopsz (Bald) and reopened the dossier on Antall.⁹⁰ Of course, Tar, who was at the time a rather busy bank manager in France, did not collect materials of any kind, hence Antall and friends could not be helpful to him either. What more, after 1980 Tar did not return to Hungary for a number of years, because his bank had reassigned him to Houston, Texas. Yet the Group Command III/III of the Ministry of the Interior asked the Budapest Police Headquarters to lend their secret agent. Their instructions for the agent made it clear what they would like to know more about -- in other words what was missing from Kátai's reports on Antall: "need information not only about the subject's political views, but about his family life, his possible problems, contacts with other women, the atmosphere at work, his relations with colleagues, his existential worries, his travel plans ... let him attempt to find out about Dr. Antall's relations with circles of domestic opposition."⁹¹

The investigation was closed in May 1982. Kátai's reports in this dossier, the surviving fragments in various daily reports⁹² from a later period, indicate that he tried to work in the same manner as before. There is no indication that he tried to report in greater depth or about anything other than the political views of Antall and his friends. But in the eighties the stakes were rather different from what they had been in the sixties and seventies. Kátai reported first of all that Antall demonstrated a deep distrust of the emerging democratic opposition, he did not think much of their political activities or of the personalities involved:

⁹⁰ ÁBTL O-18402. Regarding the reopening of Antall's F-dossier, see the report of Police Lieutenant Lajos Tokaji on József Antall, February 25, 1981, same place, folios 39-41.

⁹¹ The tasks assigned to Jenő Kovács, April 16, 1981, same place, folio 46.

⁹² Regarding the daily informational bulletins, see Müller (1999).

“he told us, that he too was approached by the *Magyar Füzetek*⁹³ to write about history, while others asked whether he would sign the Hungarian document protesting the trial of those who signed Charta 77, but he had not at all been impressed by these groups. The Marxist spirit imbuing these writings, and the analyses of people who belonged to the Lukács⁹⁴ school were unacceptable to him. Tar agreed with these assessments and told about Konrád and Szelényi’s work⁹⁵ on intellectuals that it struck him as a rather confused piece of work. Antall told us that these movements, petitions and cahiers make no sense, when there exist acceptable outlets for which one may write: the *Magyar Nemzet*, the *Élet és Irodalom*, the *Új Tükör*. Among the leading intellectuals he mentioned Gyula Illyés, the poet János Pilinszky, the pianist Zoltán Kocsis. These persons shape the opinion of the intelligentsia to some extent, and that should suffice, according to Antall. It is possible to publish just about anything in Hungary, provided that it contains no direct attack on the socialist system or against the Soviet Union. There are friends who function as editors at the above-mentioned periodicals, etc.”⁹⁶ Antall even complained that „he is constantly ’sought out by every dissident’ although he had done nothing.”⁹⁷ Kátai probably agreed with Antall, as usual. The opposition was not as far away as Poland, where one may rejoice in the revolution of Solidarnosc, as one may rejoice that this sort of thing would be impossible in Hungary. The appearance of a democratic opposition challenged the tacit contract, the symbiotic relationship between the Kádár’s regime and members of the traditional middle-class, members of former coalition governments who resurfaced even in 1956. It turned this relationship into a dubious thing, it questioned its legitimacy and righteousness. For Kátai, as for Antall, the real force of opposition resided in

⁹³ *Hungarian Cahiers*, a dissident publication series published by emigree Hungarians in Paris in the 1980s.

⁹⁴ György Lukács, 1885-1971, the most famous Hungarian Marxist philosopher; his disciples were Marxist critics of the Soviet type regime in the 1960s and 1970s, some of them later joined the democratic opposition.

⁹⁵ György Konrád, writer, and Iván Szelényi, sociologist, wrote their famous *The Road of Intellectuals to Class Power* in 1974. The manuscript was confiscated by the state security organs and the authors were arrested. Szelényi was forced to emigrate while Konrád became one of the activists of the Hungarian democratic opposition.

⁹⁶ Note from sub-section III/III-D of the BRFK to the head of section III/III-3 of the Ministry of the Interior, September 18, 1980. Same place, folios 17-18.

⁹⁷ BRFK daily bulletin nr 131, July 22, 1981. ÁBTL 2. 7. 1.

the “rulers of literature” -- in national-populist writers, like in Gyula Illyés, or Sándor Csoóri from the younger generation, whose position in the Kádárist social order can be seen as paradigmatic of the symbiosis we have in mind: they enjoyed privileges, including a certain degree of artistic and professional autonomy, at the same time as they desisted from open confrontation with and any radical critique of the regime.⁹⁸ Thus they looked upon the democratic opposition the same way as the great majority of Hungarian society, and society elsewhere in the region: uncomprehending, suspicious, and with a great deal of hostility.

It was with these shared convictions that Kátai was muddling through the 1980s, in the shadow of Antall, until the turn in 1989. They sat next to each other in 1988 in the Jurta Theater, at the second rally of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, in the Városmajor church attending the founding meeting of the Association of Piarist Students. He was present and listening as Pál Tar and György Osváth were trying to talk Antall into forming a “true opposition party” in April 1989. His last identifiable report, from late July 1989, talked about Antall’s trip to Paris and Bruxelles, which Antall undertook as a participant of a conference on medical history, but he was already engaged in discussions with the leaders of the Christian Democratic fraction of the European Parliament.⁹⁹ In all probability, he remained a network man until the turn in 1989-90, when the so-called “Dunagate” scandal resulted in a partial reorganization of the state security services.¹⁰⁰

Epilogue

In 1990 György Kátai was revealed as a former agent. He was found out, but only as far as Jozsef Antall and his closest associates or members of his family were concerned.

⁹⁸ S. Révész (1997).

⁹⁹ BRFK daily operative information reports nr 55, March 25, 1988; nr 98, June 1, 1988; nr 148, August 22, 1988; nr 87, May 26, 1989; nr 130, July 28, 1989, etc. all in ÁBTL 2. 7. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. B. Révész (2003).

Typically, for the “unmasking” several persons claimed credit. The famous list of agents produced by the last Communist prime minister Miklós Németh (which, in reality was a list of network men among the emerging new political elite) may have included Kátai’s name, and it is possible that Péter Boross, the minister without portfolio responsible for state security affairs, also looked into the files on Antall.¹⁰¹ Regardless of how it happened, it must have come as a shock to Antall. What the two men told each other, we cannot know. What is certain, however, is that Antall forgave Kátai and soon after the formation of the new government appointed Kátai to the prime-minister’s office, where he was placed in charge of the press and of the media in general. According to his recollections Pál Tar chose to remain silent: he never spoke to his friend about what he had found out. Kátai hardly assumed his high-ranking position, he barely took over the office, when he suffered a heart attack in the Fall of 1990. Did the fact that no punishment was meted out to him hurt him more than his unmasking? It has been said that “what got him sick is that Antall forgave him.”¹⁰² He soon returned to the University, but remained close to Antall, played a role at the funeral, and in the first steps of commemoration, such as the publication of his speeches and writings. He died in the mid-nineties.

Toward the end of our story the question-marks only multiply. We believe it is worth our while taking stock of these rather than toying with hypothetical explanations for things difficult to understand and for which we have few clues. Can one justify thirty years of collaboration by referring to a strategy of adjusting to the circumstances, to the pressures from the authorities, to cowardice at key moments, to a serious inferiority complex of a man who is weak and timid vis-à-vis his best friend, to a mixture of love, envy and revenge; or should one interpret this collaboration as simply the result of a total relativisation of values and moral

¹⁰¹ According to Tar (2003), p. 18, and to the communication of Gábor Hanák, it was from the Németh list, or from the observation materials turned over to him by Németh, that Antall found out that Kátai had been an agent. According to a communication by Miklós Csapodi the same observation materials were turned over to Antall by Boross.

¹⁰² Gábor Hanák’s words.

principles?¹⁰³ Sure enough, each of these factors provides an explanation, each of them constituted a motive force, and traces of each can be detected in the reports. But I am not at all sure that they can explain a career as a network man over a period of thirty years. From the point of view of the network it is also not easy to claim that the reports from György Kátai were worth nothing at best, or at worst they testified to a mood. It seems he really did not provide reports on which the fate of human beings was left hanging, yet, if he had not been useful as an agent, how can one explain that he was reenlisted in 1970? By 1960-62 the main targets of the secret service were no longer the participants in the revolution of 1956, but rather the grassroots of the Catholic Church. Although his person and his circle of acquaintances were perilously close to this area, Kátai was left out of this campaign, as far as we know. His reconnaissance mission (covering Pál Tar) likewise resulted in nothing. His main target person was completely inactive in the 1960s and 1970s, politically speaking. Paradoxically enough, Kátai would have been “most useful” precisely during the period we know so little about: in 1988 and 1989, when Antall became important in politics.¹⁰⁴ At this juncture, the reports of Kátai may have metamorphosized, from inconsequential into true pearls, from the point of view of understanding the political thinking and ideology of a person who turned from nobody into a key personality with lightning speed. That is, assuming that anyone read or reread these reports.

It is possible that this happened, it is possible that the agency had a premonition of these kinds of things, but we are doubtful. The apparatus employing Kátai was convinced that it had the right to know everything about the society subjected to it, and that it may use this knowledge as it pleased, or as the higher authorities expected. Kátai himself fed this store of knowledge by his work, and he was living proof of the omnipotence of the agencies, who had reasons to believe, and probably did believe, that if the friend in the innermost circle could

¹⁰³ On these issues see Gorkij (1969) and Csepeli (2000).

¹⁰⁴ Whether the state security services tried to influence the process of regime change has been debated. They probably tried, but obviously without much success. For a specific analysis of this issue, see B. Révész (2000).

spy on his friend for decades, there can be no substantial opposition to be afraid of. They proved wrong. For what Kátai did was not mandatory, it was not imposed on him as a result of an irresistible pressure, and by no means did everyone give in to such pressure. He took his convictions, if he had any, his excuses, if he found any, his explanations, which he surely kept up-to-date, with him to the grave. Whatever these were, György Kátai, the network man and his „actual” persona combined, constituted the cement in Hungary’s Soviet-type social order. As such, regardless of his own other identity, he deserves a thorough study.

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ISSN 1501-6684