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REPORT []
CD NO. []

STAT

COUNTRY Hungary
SUBJECT Political - Police, AVO
HOW PUBLISHED Biweekly newspaper
WHERE PUBLISHED St. Cloud, France
DATE PUBLISHED 31 Jan, 14 Feb 1950
LANGUAGE Hungarian

DATE OF INFORMATION 1950
DATE DIST. 21 Apr 1950
NO. OF PAGES 4
SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.

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SOURCE Nyugati Hirnok, No 5-6, 7-8, 1950.

THE STORY OF THE AVO

Arthur Garamvolgyi

[The author does not reconcile his use of "NKVD" and "MVD."]7

The Hungarian State Security Department (AVO) occupies the gray block of buildings bounded by Andrassy Road, Vorosmarty, Aradi, and Csengery streets in Budapest. The premises are surrounded by a cheval-de-frise and patrolled by police armed with machine guns.

Local inhabitants try to avoid this part of the city and if they must pass this way, they always use the far sides of the street.

The history of the AVO begins with the establishment of the Hungarian State Political Police in November 1944 at Debrecen, then the headquarters of the provisional government. It was headed by Andras Tompe, a Spanish Civil War legionnaire. Two months later, on 11 January 1945, Gabor Peter also established a political police unit out of the Communist resistance movement group which had operated under the code name Maroth, Szir, and Feher. The group, with approximately 30 members, was headed by Miklos Padanyi, Dr Gyula Decsi, and former police captain Andras Gyenes-Dienes, in whose home Gabor Peter was hidden during the Arrow Cross Party rule. Gabor Peter (alias Beno Auspitz) himself was not a Muscovite.

The Gabor Peter group occupied 60 Andrassy Street with the permission of the Soviet military commander Chernishev. When the provisional government moved to Budapest, Andras Tompe clashed with Gabor Peter. The latter had assumed the rank of general and pulled his rank on Tompe who had only taken the rank of colonel. There was a good deal of disagreement between the two men and for several weeks the two groups operated independently, with the Tompe group taking over the former Vigyazo Ferenc Street police headquarters. Laszlo Solyom, who was named Budapest commissioner of police at this time, championed the cause of his friend Gabor Peter. The dispute was finally settled in favor of Gabor Peter by Erno Gero, the highest ranking Hungarian appointee of the Russian NKVD. Tompe lost out because he had been a Spanish legionnaire. The two political police organizations were merged. Tompe was put at the head of the provincial police and as a

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consolation raised to the rank of general. Nevertheless, the competition between the two groups continued, with Gabor Peter always having the upper hand, until Tompe was finally taken out of circulation along with Rajk, another "Spaniard."

In 1945, while the country as a whole was in financial ruin, the AVO had ample funds with which to expand. They bought 62 Andrássy Road, 39 and 41 Csengery Street, then 64, 66, 68, 70, and 103 Andrássy Road and 37 Csengery Street, and finally the whole block. They also purchased new automobiles and other equipment. The secret source of funds for this expansion was traced to 14 trunks of looted gold treasure buried by fleeing Arrow Cross Party members in a cellar on Szent István Boulevard. The location of this treasure was communicated to the political police as a part of a deal for leniency toward a former Arrow Cross Party leader who had been condemned to death by the People's Court.

Until the end of 1945, the political police operated as a defensive organization under the direction of former police captain Andras Gyenes-Dienes who was given the rank of major.

Early in 1946, NKVD General Baklanov called Gabor Peter to 33 Vilma Kiralyno Road [Soviet MVD headquarters in Hungary] and told him the political police must be reorganized along the Soviet NKVD pattern. To carry out this program, Janos Kovacs, a Soviet citizen and high-ranking NKVD officer was imported from Moscow to work as a deputy to Gabor Peter. Kovacs was given only the rank of lieutenant colonel but became in fact the secret guiding hand of the political police. Kovacs trusted no one, including Gabor Peter. First Lt Laszlo Csillag was appointed liaison officer between 60 Andrássy Road and 33 Vilma Kiralyno Road. Important positions in organizing the Hungarian MVD also went to Soviet MVD Maj Antal Weller and MVD Lt Col Jozsef Fickert.

Janos Kovacs transformed the organization into an offensive weapon which was to use every available means to bring the Communist Party into power. With this change there was also a change in name from political police to State Security Department. Following the Moscow pattern, the AVO is organized into the following 17 separate subdivisions:

1. The domestic political unit headed by Col Sandor Horvat (former lieutenant colonel) infiltrates party and political organizations and conducts surveillance over the activities of political figures.
2. The foreign political unit headed by Colonel Istvan Dekany (former major) infiltrates the Hungarian embassies, consulates, and missions abroad and conducts surveillance over foreign embassies, consulates, and missions in Hungary.
3. The church unit headed by Maj Janos Tibanyi (promoted from first lieutenant after the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty) works its way into the churches and spies on church personalities, with special attention being paid to the Roman Catholic church.
4. The youth unit headed by Maj Gyorgy Szollosi infiltrates youth organizations and movements.
5. The social unit headed by Maj Endre Weititz (formerly captain) infiltrates the aristocracy, former bourgeoisie, and politicians and watches over their activities.
6. The ministries unit headed by Col Dr Bela Janikowszky (formerly lieutenant colonel) infiltrates the ministries and their agencies and observes the activities of the officers.
7. The observation unit headed by Lt Col Gyula Princz, former Arrow Cross Party functionary, watches over the public in general; on the streets, in restaurants, hotels, motion-picture houses, etc.

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8. The policy staff headed by Col Dr Gyula Decsi (promoted from major because of the successful campaign against Cardinal Mindszenty) holds hearings and gets confessions from people brought before them.

9. The social organizations unit headed by Col Endre Szaberszky (formerly lieutenant colonel) infiltrates social organizations, directs the secret records office, and keeps the infamous AVO black list.

10. The records office headed by Capt Rudolf Pohl (formerly first lieutenant) prepares and keeps records.

11. The AVO people's prosecutor's office headed by Maj Peter Pal Takacs brings to trial and examines those accused of unlawful acts.

12. The economic office headed by Maj Mihaly Szabolcsi uses the terror machine of the State Security Department for economic purposes.

13. The passport unit headed by Maj Antal Weller (also a Soviet MVD major) controls foreign travel of Hungarians and finds out the real object of their trips abroad.

14. The organizational unit headed by Lt Col Tamas Matroy (formerly major) recruits personnel for the AVO units in Budapest and for the rest of the country, and conducts political surveillance over AVO personnel.

15. The ministers' and president's service unit headed by Lt Col Jozsef Fickert (also a Soviet MVD lieutenant colonel) provides personal bodyguards for these government officials and also watches over their private lives.

16. The districts unit headed by Maj Imre Sandor (formerly first lieutenant) represents the AVO section of the Budapest district police stations and has functions similar to the above-mentioned seventh unit.

17. The economic unit headed by Col Andras Villanyi (up to the time of his arrest) is really the same as the Economic Police which appears to be an independent unit but is actually a unit of the AVO. This unit cooperates closely with all the other units in tracking down economic "criminals."

The above 17 units were scattered in all parts of the city under great secrecy from the end of 1946 to the spring of 1947. Only the organizational unit and those closely connected to it remained at 60 Andrassy Road, and the others all moved into private homes or mansions. The move was not even known to Balassa, Commissioner of Police for the entire country. This was a sign that the AVO had broken away from and was going ahead of all the other police organizations.

With the reorganization of the AVO complete, Jancs Kovacs started on the infiltration program in earnest. First, a 6-week evening course based on the works of Yagoda, the organizer of the Russian GPU, was given at 60 Andrassy Road. The course was given by MVD Maj Antal Weller and NKVD Lt Col Jozsef Fickert. At the end of the course, 14,670 former lower-ranking Arrow Cross Party men were summoned to appear before the AVO. Almost an equal number were taken from the internment camps. All of them were then coerced into becoming informers and reporting to Maj Gyula Princz, in writing, if they should hear of any illegal activities.

At this same time, the social unit of the AVO summoned all of Budapest's fortunetellers and spiritualists and asked them also to become informers under threat of having their licenses revoked. Approximately 7,000 fortunetellers and other charlatans agreed to inform the AVO as to who consulted them, when, and what questions they asked. The fortunetellers were also instructed to answer their reactionary patrons, the retired army officers, aristocrats, and church officeholders in such a way that they would not expect any help from the West.

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A Gestapo list of infiltrators which Lieutenant Colonel Szaberszky had in his possession gave the names of several leading actors and actresses. It was no trouble to convert these into AVO informers and to get others with whom to build up the spy organization in the motion-picture industry.

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