

Fresh Breeze in Hungary

by LAWRENCE KIRWAN

THE FRESH BREEZE now blowing through the countries building socialism is no better illustrated than in Hungary.

Not only have sincere efforts been going on there to set right the results of abuses of power between 1948 and 1953, but at the same time a most vigorous discussion has been shaping the democratic forms to prevent anything like it happening again.

The general relaxation in political atmosphere is plain to see. Almost every institution has been going through a period of self-examination and self-criticism which is having results from Parliament down (or should we saw up in such a sporting country?) to the Football Association.

But before we look at some of these results, let us look back at the mistakes, how they came to happen and what has been done about them.

Few have put the background more clearly than Gyorgy Non, the

Chief Attorney, in a recent statement to Parliament. Mr. Non's department was set up in 1953 to hear public complaints of infringements of law and to clear up injustices committed earlier.

"In the tense international situation after 1948," he said, "the mistaken view that the class struggle sharpens everywhere had a damaging effect in Hungary. The cult of personality developed and throttled criticism, and the effects of the lack of confidence in people were made worse by the special position of the State Defense organs.

"In this atmosphere many leaders and officers of the State Defense authority abused their power, abused the lack of adequate supervision, and, using moral and physical force, prepared false evidence and extorted false confessions."

First the Attorney's department dealt with the security chief Gabor Peter—he got life imprisonment—and his henchmen. Then all the prosecutions which they had handled were re-examined.

Of 149 cases reopened, 124 were acquitted, 10 were found guilty in lesser degree and 15 were found justly convicted of crimes against the State. In a further series of re-examinations 456 people were found

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incorrectly convicted. More than a thousand others, justly convicted, had their sentences reduced.

Most of those involved in fabricated charges were old Communists, Social-Democrats and Yugoslav émigrés. One of those rehabilitated, (György Marosán) has been appointed a deputy Premier, while he and János Kádár, another victim, have been co-opted to the Party's political committee.

How could it happen? In the tense political atmosphere the finger of suspicion was often enough to start an investigation—and no provision had been made to check up that the security authorities were not exceeding their powers.

It is true that safeguards of public liberty were written into the Constitution. *But the big lesson which has been learned in Hungary is that paper safeguards are not enough.*

There must be effective democratic institutions to supervise and check that the law is being carried out, or as the Hungarians put it, that

“socialist legality” really prevails.

So they've given the Chief Attorney's office the job of checking on people's complaints. (There have been 77,000 in the first three years, most of them quite trivial, such as quarrels over flats, many on minor labor questions.)

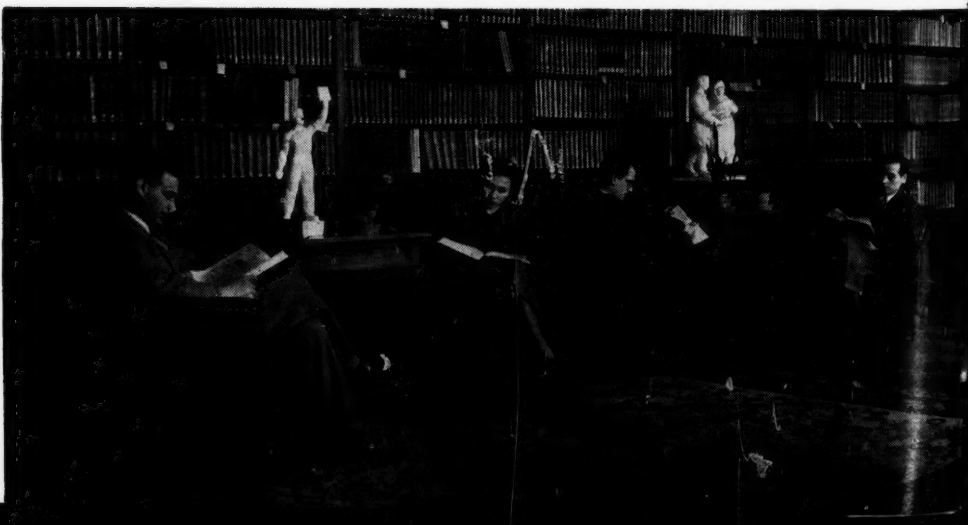
Courts are all being placed under supervision of the Minister of Justice, judges are to be elected as provided for in the Constitution, but never carried out.

Prisons are taken out of the hands of the Home Office and put under the control of the Minister of Justice so that the department which does the detection does not supervise the sentence—a safeguard against false imprisonment.

At the same time the rigidity of penal policy is being relaxed so much that the general prison population is dropping rapidly—it totalled 37,027 last November, 22,088 last month.

Minor infringements of regulations, often sharply punished in the

The Library of Parliament in Budapest. Before liberation only Members of Parliament were permitted to use the library—today it is open to the public



past, come out of the realm of the courts. In future "social courts" of local citizenry will handle such cases, possibly by reprimand only.

Working out of democratic forms in a new state takes time. Ernő Gerő, new secretary of the Working People's Party in place of Mátyás Rákosi, spoke to the Central Committee about the problem of overcoming bureaucracy, which is just one of the battles now going on in Hungary.

"We must remember," he told them, "that as a people's democratic state we can look back on an extremely short past, only a few years. Against this, some of the capitalist states—look at Britain—can look back on a past of 300 years."

Though Rákosi stepped down from the Party leadership he was not disgraced as some newspapers have suggested. He has a proud record as a working-class fighter since the first world war. His beliefs and activities cost him 16 years in fascist prisons between the war years.

But he had to take responsibility for the wrongs that occurred during his leadership after 1948, and he felt that the Party would tackle the big clearing-up job better if he stepped out of the picture. He remains a Member of Parliament and member of the Presidential Council, and a member of the Party's Central Committee.

Nowhere has the process of reassessment been more lively than in the intellectual field. Tremendous discussions have been going on among writers, musicians and others to fit the best features of democratic life as we know it into the new socialist society.

I was in Budapest when the big storm blew up around the meeting on "Press and Information" which

drew 6,000 people and went on until three in the morning. There were plenty of criticisms of the Hungarian press—that it was not informative enough, even that it failed to give the whole truth. Journalists countered by saying that they were hamstrung by Government officials giving little or no information.

I asked Ferenc Vadász, general secretary of the Journalists' Union, whether this was just so much "letting off steam," or whether results were materializing.

He assured me results had come and more were on the way. The police, for example, had promised to give out facts and figures about crime and other social trends which they had always refused before. Government ministers had undertaken to give fortnightly press conferences at the Journalists' Club.

Three or four days later results began to show. Péter Rubin, newly appointed Foreign Office spokesman, gave the first of what is now a regular series of press conferences by him; the Budapest chief of police gave another. The Ministry of Justice did likewise.

Another example of the awakening of journalism appeared in the English-language *Hungarian Review* in which the writer, referring to misleading reports about Hungary in the foreign press said: "It cannot be denied that the scanty—and not very interesting—information forthcoming from Hungarian sources is also at fault."

At the same time the Hungarian press was sometimes at fault in giving too superficial appraisal of foreign affairs. "The growing demand in Hungary for exact, factual information is making it incumbent upon Hungarian newspapers to pay greater attention than hitherto to foreign

affairs," he wrote. These sort of things could not have been said publicly a few months ago.

Sport? Well Gusztáv Sebes has been relieved of the job of picking the national football team and it has been handed over to a five-man committee—a practical example of collective responsibility replacing one-man rule.

But perhaps the most significant change in Hungary towards fuller democratism can be seen in Parliament.

Deliberate steps are being taken to liven up parliamentary life, which had been inclined to take a back seat in recent years. The National Assembly will in future meet much more often and for longer periods.

Instead of legislation coming out in the form of Government decrees it will be properly discussed by MPs first.

And that vital feature of Parliamentary democracy, Question Time, which had fallen into disuse, has already been revived.

At the August session Ministers found themselves under fire from MPs for the first time for many years. Twenty-two questions were asked.

And it was Question Time with a difference. After an answer was

given the Speaker would ask if the questioner was satisfied. If he said "No!," the Assembly was asked to vote if *it* were satisfied. If they also said "No!," the Minister was told to prepare a better answer!

One woman member said she was not satisfied about the answer to her complaint that a few young people between 16 and 18 were being employed on night work in some textile factories, contrary to the Labor Code.

The reply of the Minister of Light Industry (another woman, by the way) was so circumlocutory that the Assembly backed the MP in rejecting it. And the Speaker ruled that the Minister must come back with a more satisfactory answer.

And so it goes on. But make no mistake. The Hungarians are not changing their social system, no matter how much they are altering its methods of working.

Ernö Gerö put the whole thing in a nutshell when he told the Party's Central Committee:

"This new state, our people's democratic state, with all its merits and faults, is our state, which we would not change for any kind of bourgeois state! And we shall put right the faults which are in it, led by our Party!"

MEDICAL COOPERATION

DR. PAUL DUDLEY WHITE, heart specialist who treated President Eisenhower, recently visited the Soviet Union with four other American doctors. According to the *Herald Tribune*, Sept. 7, while there he invited the Soviet Union to join the United States in "war on our common enemy—heart disease." Dr. White formally invited four leading Russian doctors to visit the United States "as our guests for a period of six to eight weeks to study and work with us."

Dr. White said that his group had been received with warm-hearted hospitality everywhere they went. The brevity of their visit had made impossible, he said, a comparative study of the methods of heart disease treatment in the Soviet Union and the United States, "but generally speaking, the problems there are like our own."