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Mátyás Rákosi, the Rajk Trial, and the American Communist Party

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On May 12, 1949 Noel Field, an American citizen who had worked intermittently for Soviet intelligence agencies over the previous fifteen years, was arrested by the Czechoslovak secret police in Prague and handed over to representatives of the Hungarian state security agency (the AVO). He was immediately whisked off to prison in Budapest, where over the following months he was subjected to brutal interrogation and torture by AVO and KGB agents. Field's arrest was the opening act of a Hungarian Stalinist-type "show trial" that took place later that year.[1] It had been decided by Joseph Stalin and his acolytes in Budapest that Noel Field was to play a central role in the Hungarian show trial (which the Hungarians called a "koncepciós per"). According to the script, or "concept," of the trial that was being developed in Moscow and Budapest, Field was to confess, falsely, that he had long been an American agent in the service of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) and of Allen Dulles's CIA; that during and after World War II he had worked with and coordinated a network of Titoites, Trotskyites, and other deviationists; and that he had recruited László Rajk, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, and numerous other Hungarian Communists to participate in a plot to overthrow the Hungarian communist regime and assassinate its leaders.[2]

The role that Noel Field played in the Rajk trial and in other East European show trials has recently received considerable attention from historians.[3] But the Rajk trial had another American connection that has gone almost completely unnoticed. Noel Field was deeply committed to the communist cause, but he had never been a formal member of the American Communist Party (hereafter CPUSA). However, a number of Hungarian Communists who had been, or continued to be, active in the American communist movement were also implicated in the alleged Rajk conspiracy. A study of how and why these émigré Hungarians became victims of government-sponsored terror in Hungary provides insights into the nature of the Rajk show trial, the motives and methods of its chief Hungarian instigator, Mátyás Rákosi, the willingness of American Communist Party leaders not only to approve the methods used in the Stalinist show trials but to offer up additional victims, and the long-term impact of these events on the American and Hungarian communist parties.

Several developments in the preceding two years had set the stage for the Rajk trial, the first major Stalinist show trial since the 1930s.[4] The willingness of the Hungarian communist regime to use the most ruthless methods to defeat and degrade its opponents had been demonstrated in February, 1949 at a public trial of Hungary's most prominent religious figure, Cardinal Mindszenty. After weeks of physical and psychological torture by state security agents, Mindszenty had been forced to confess to trumped-up charges of espionage and treason.[5] Yet Mindszenty had in fact been a vociferous opponent of the regime, unlike László Rajk and his alleged accomplices at the Hungarian show trial later in 1949 who were all in fact dedicated Communists and had never engaged in anything resembling oppositional or traitorous activity. That they were nonetheless swept up in a wave of terror had much to do with the decision Stalin had made in 1948 to launch a full-scale attack on the communist regime in Yugoslavia. Marshal Tito, who during World War II had been acclaimed in the Communist world as one of the great heroes in the anti-fascist struggle, was now denounced by Moscow as a traitor to Communism and a tool of the imperialists. "Titoite" and "Titoism" now became terms of abuse, to be linked with that previous amorphous category of enemies, the "Trotskyites."[6]

Stalin soon made it clear to Rákosi and the leaders of the other "People's Democracies" that vigorous steps needed to be taken to uncover and eradicate the "Titoist cliques" that had supposedly developed in each of the East European communist parties. Rákosi, who styled himself as Stalin's "best pupil," was eager to take the initiative in this campaign and stage a show trial along the lines of those Stalin had masterminded in the 1930s. It remains unclear whether the decision to target Rajk was made in Moscow or Budapest, but it certainly suited Rákosi's purposes.[7] He regarded Rajk as a political rival, and for some time had been seeking to diminish his importance in the Party and the government. Rajk was arrested on May 30, and soon dozens of his "accomplices" joined him in the AVO prisons. In planning the Rajk trial Rákosi worked closely with Gábor Péter, head of the secret police. How did Rákosi and Péter proceed in identifying the "Titoites," "Trotskyites," and "agents of American imperialism" who had allegedly embedded themselves in the Hungarian Communist Party? Like his mentor Stalin, Rákosi was driven by an obsessive suspiciousness and the inclination to believe that any Communist who spent an extended period of time in the West must have become "contaminated."[8] Thus there was a definite pattern that knowledgeable observers at the time could discern in the arrests of Rajk's alleged accomplices. Those most vulnerable were Communists who had spent considerable time in the West, for example as functionaries in Western communist parties or, like Rajk, as volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. Anyone who had come into contact with Noel Field or had collaborated with Yugoslav Communists during World War II was almost certain to be arrested. Equally suspect were those who had had worked with Earl Browder, who headed the CPUSA for most of the 1930s and 1940s. Such individuals were believed to have been tainted by the heresy known as "Browderism." Communists of petit bourgeois and/or Jewish origin were also in danger, for such a background made them vulnerable to the charge of being "Zionists" or "cosmopolitans."[9]

The initial "concept" of the Rajk conspiracy required a sizable cast of characters, and the dynamics of all the Stalinist show trials were such that those who confessed their crimes (as almost all those arrested eventually did) were prompted to name others with whom they had collaborated. The prisoners were required to write and re-write personal statements in which they listed all the Communists they had ever collaborated with in their Party activity in the West. These statements were scrutinized by the Hungarian and Soviet interrogators to determine how individuals named could be drawn into the evolving "Titoist plot."

Because he wished to boost his own importance as Stalin's surrogate in the supervision of the Rajk trial, Rákosi insisted on taking a direct role in selecting the victims, studying the text of the interrogations and the written statements of the defendants, and refining the script. In addition, he sought to spur other communist parties to action, citing the Hungarian party's policy of vigilance as a model. In a public speech in Prague in June, he declared that the Hungarian CP had been found to be ridden with "spies and provocateurs," but that the government was now waging "a campaign of destruction with an iron hand."[10] Privately Rákosi urged the Czechoslovak leaders to carry out a similar purification of their party, since evidence gained through interrogation of Rajk's "accomplices" suggested that some Czechoslovak Communists were implicated in "Titoite" activity.[11] Rákosi sent a similar warning to leaders of other communist parties, including the CPUSA. Because he spoke excellent English and had visited the United States in 1946 and met many leaders and members of the American Communist Party, Rákosi thought of himself as an expert on American affairs. It seemed self-evident to him that there would be "spies and saboteurs" in the cohort of Hungarians who were returning to their native land from long years of Party work in the United States.[12] Some time in early summer of 1949 Rákosi alerted Gene Dennis, general secretary of the

CPUSA, to the escalating campaign in Hungary against agents of American imperialism. To assist the Hungarian Party he asked Dennis for a report on the Communist movement in the United States, with comments on the role and political reliability of Hungarian Americans comrades, both those who remained in the United States and those who had returned to Hungary. This task was assigned to the most prominent Hungarian in the CPUSA, Louis Weinstock, whom Rákosi had met in New York in 1946. Weinstock dutifully prepared a long report that he personally delivered to Rákosi in August, 1949.[13]

Weinstock, who was a great admirer of Rákosi, must have sensed that if he made a negative evaluation of any of his Hungarian-American comrades, they would possibly be placed in great personal danger. Thus, he was careful to avoid incriminating some of the individuals he mentioned. The most prominent individual on his list was József Péter, who under the name J. Peters had been during the 1930s a very influential member of the CPUSA leadership and a collaborator of Soviet intelligence agencies in espionage work. Concerning Péter, Weinstock merely noted that, on the advice of CPUSA leaders, he had left the United States in May, 1949 as a result of the deportation proceedings against him. On the other hand, Weinstock named several Hungarian-born Communists, including Mózes Simon (a British citizen) and John Lautner (an American citizen,) who, he claimed, had engaged in activities that had raised some suspicions among American communist leaders.

Rákosi apparently paid little attention to the distinctions Weinstock tried to make. In fact he soon convinced himself that every Hungarian communist mentioned by Weinstock in his report, and even Weinstock himself, was a traitor or FBI spy.[14] He thus ordered the AVO into action against those individuals mentioned by Weinstock who were then residing in Hungary. Mózes Simon had returned to his native land in 1948 from many years abroad in Great Britain and the United States. He had been made a legal advisor in the Hungarian National Bank and served as the Party's liaison with all returning communist émigrés. He seemed to have a good working relationship with Rákosi and other Party officials.[15] Nonetheless, he was arrested in September, 1949 and accused of being a British spy and one of Rajk's accomplices. As happened all too often in the hysterical atmosphere of the East European show trials, Simon's wife assumed that her husband was guilty and denounced him: "Good riddance, he is gone. They took him away."[16]

Apparently Rákosi contemplated a move against József Péter as well. Péter certainly fit the profile of émigré Communists that Hungarian leaders imagined to be likely accomplices of Rajk. The numerous autobiographies that Péter had been required to submit to the Party since his arrival in Hungary in May, 1949 may have suggested to suspicious minds that in his career he had displayed certain "petit-bourgeois tendencies." For example, he had studied to be a lawyer and during World War I he had served as an Austro-Hungarian infantry officer. As a CPUSA functionary he had likely had contacts with Noel Field and worked closely with Earl Browder, thereby becoming infected with "Browderism."[17] In the United State Péter had supposedly been hounded and arrested by the FBI and INS. But how was it that in the end he was allowed simply to leave the United States voluntarily? Might he have made a deal to cooperate with American police or intelligence agencies? Even more suspicious was his friendship with Mózes Simon and John Lautner. Finally, Péter's Jewish origins and long years spent in the West placed him squarely in the category of Communists likely to have become "cosmopolitans" and "Zionists."[18] For a time in late 1949 Péter thus remained under surveillance and was denied a Party position that had been promised to him when he returned to Hungary.[19] In the end, however, he managed to escape arrest, perhaps because the KGB advised Rákosi that Péter had supervised a successful espionage operation in Washington that had greatly aided Soviet Intelligence.

The case of John Lautner was a different matter. Rákosi had met Lautner briefly during his visit to New York in 1946. But he knew little about him, except for the negative comment Weinstock had made in his report. However, Rákosi soon discovered that one of Rajk's alleged accomplices, Sándor Cseresnyés, had mentioned Lautner's name while being interrogated. Cseresnyés had been arrested in June and charged, falsely, with being a British spy. After several weeks of torture, he concluded that the only way to save his life was to capitulate and cooperate with his interrogators. In one of the many autobiographical statements that he was required to write he apparently mentioned that he had met a number of American soldiers, including John Lautner, while they served together in the Allied Psychological Warfare Branch during World War II in Bari, Italy.[20] He had become particularly friendly with Lautner, and they had continued to correspond after the war when Cseresnyés returned to Hungary. Most likely it was Rákosi who, while reading through the interrogation file of Cseresnyés, noticed the mention of Lautner and decided on a way that he could be introduced into the Rajk conspiracy. Having already agreed to implicate Rajk along the lines demanded by his interrogators, Cseresnyés was now induced to confirm his interrogators' suggestion that while serving in Bari he had been introduced to agents of

Marshal Tito by John Lautner, whom he knew to be an American espionage agent.[21]

At the public Rajk trial in September, 1949, Cseresnyés testified merely that while working for the "British espionage service" in Bari in 1944, he had come into contact with Yugoslav spies, but did not mention John Lautner or the role that he allegedly played.[22] This was a deliberate omission, for any mention of Lautner at Rajk's trial would have thwarted Rákosi's plan, which was to lure Lautner back to Hungary, where he, like Mózes Simon, could be arrested. As Louis Weinstock prepared to return to the United States in October, Rákosi informed him that conclusive evidence had been uncovered that demonstrated that Lautner was an American intelligence agent who was involved in Rajk's "Titoist plot." Weinstock, like most Communists world-wide, believed that all the defendants in the Rajk trial were guilty as charged. Thus, he had no compunction about cooperating with the Hungarian leader. Upon his return to the United States in November, he passed on to the CPUSA's leaders Rákosi's message and copies of the recently published English language transcript of the Rajk trial. All the American Communists thus informed, even several who had been longtime personal friends of Lautner, immediately accepted the idea that he was an enemy agent who must be sent to Hungary to receive his just punishment. Apparently no one had any hesitation in implicitly trusting the word of the leader of Communist Hungary, even though, as one Party leader later conceded, Rákosi's warning had been no more concrete than a "veiled reference."[23] In fact, so alarmed were CPUSA leaders by Rákosi's message that they immediately drew the conclusion that all Party members who had served in the OSS or military intelligence during World War II had to be identified and purged, for they were likely to be secret Titoists and imperialist agents.[24]

Lautner himself, being a loyal Communist, obtained and read the English-language edition of the transcript of the Hungarian show trial and concluded that Rajk and his "accomplices" had truly been guilty of the crimes to which they had confessed.[25] Nor did the report that his former associate, Mózes Simon, had been arrested as a British spy create any doubts in his mind. Thus, when Louis Weinstock suggested to Lautner that he should take a trip to Hungary and get a first-hand experience of the building of socialism there, Lautner was willing to comply, especially since, as Weinstock assured him, all his expenses were to be paid by the CPUSA and a Hungarian trade union. Other Party leaders also urged him to go, assuring him that he could be spared for such an important assignment: "Have a good time," they told him, "have a good vacation."[26] However, Lautner was unable to obtain a passport, since the State Department had placed a temporary ban on travel to Hungary.

This placed the CPUSA leadership in a dilemma. Soon after Weinstock had returned from Hungary with Rákosi's urgent message, Party leaders had begun an internal investigation of Lautner. The purpose was not to discover if he in fact had been a spy, for that was now taken as a given. Rather, the investigation was intended to find evidence that would demonstrate the nefarious work Lautner had supposedly carried out for many years as an FBI informant. Since Lautner had in fact never had any contact with the FBI, the only evidence uncovered was trivial or insubstantial. But Party leaders soon realized that Lautner would make a convenient scapegoat for certain recent lapses in Party security. During the Smith Act trial of eleven Party leaders in 1949, the U.S. government had called as surprise witnesses several individuals who had worked undetected for many years in the Party as undercover agents for the FBI. Party officials now agreed among themselves, despite the lack of any real evidence, that this embarrassing situation was the fault of Lautner, who, as head of security for the New York district, had deliberately failed to follow up leads that would have led to the uncovering of the nest of FBI informants.[27]

Since Lautner could not now be sent to Hungary to face Rákosi's "people's tribunals," CPUSA leaders were confronted with the decision of what to do with a Party member whom they were convinced was a despicable traitor. Perhaps there were some in the leadership who thought it would be best simply to denounce him publicly and immediately expel him from the Party. However, the constitution of the CPUSA stipulated that members threatened with expulsion were entitled to a hearing at which the accused would be given a chance to defend himself or explain his actions. In practice, such hearings were not always held and when they were they were typically haphazardly organized and seldom allowed for an impartial judgment of the evidence.[28] Nonetheless, Gil Green, the CPUSA national secretary, Alexander Trachtenberg, chairman of the National Control Commission (the Party's disciplinary body), and John Gates, editor of the *Daily Worker*, apparently decided that there should be some sort of trial at which Lautner would be confronted with proof of his guilt and would be threatened "with his life unless he would tell us the truth."[29] Accordingly, early in January, 1950, Jack Kling, the Party's treasurer, a member of the National Control Commission, and a leading organizer in the Midwest, was given the assignment of luring Lautner, who at this point was still unaware of the accusation that Rákosi had made against him, to a house in an unsavory part of Cleveland, Ohio. Lautner was to be told that he had been selected to replace Kling as a member of the National Control Commission and needed to consult with some Midwestern Party leaders on security matters. Since Lautner had for some time been eager to join the National Control Commission, he complied willingly with the request that he travel to Cleveland with Kling.[30]

Instead, in the unheated basement of that house Lautner was confronted by several physically intimidating Party members who apparently had been instructed to apply what they imagined to be the "Bolshevik" methods that had convinced the "Titoite" defendants at the Rajk trial to confess their guilt. Lautner was forced to strip naked and was subjected to abuse and psychological pressure from his interrogators, who carried long, sharp knives, pointed a pistol at the back of his head, and brandished rubber truncheons, which they constantly banged against the table and walls.[31] One of them, waving a copy of the published Rajk trial proceedings in Lautner's face, shouted: "We know you! We know who you are!" In the vilest language they could muster Lautner's inquisitors called him a spy, traitor, stool pigeon, Trotskyite, and Titoite. He was, his tormentors insisted, an F.B.I. and C.I.A. agent who had worked with the nefarious Noel Field and had consorted with agents of Marshall Tito during World War II. When Lautner, bewildered and shocked by what was happening, replied in tears that they were making a "terrible mistake," he was warned that unless he "came clean" he would not leave the building alive. To induce him to speak the truth, a primitive (and transparently bogus) lie detector was set up. A tape recorder was on hand to record Lautner's confession, though it malfunctioned. Nonetheless, Lautner continued to insist on his innocence. Finally, after several hours of abuse and fearful for his life, Lautner agreed to write out in his own hand a dictated confession in which he admitted his "crimes" and declared that he had received a "fair and impartial hearing."[32] His ordeal over, Lautner was blindfolded and dropped off otherwise unharmed in an industrial part of Cleveland.[33]

When he returned on his own to New York several days later, Lautner still clung to the hope that either a dreadful mistake had been made, or that perhaps the episode had been some sort of test to see if he could withstand the kind of pressure that the government might inflict on Party members who were being interrogated. But he quickly learned that his fate had been sealed. The *Daily Worker* of January 17, 1950 announced that, on the basis of a recommendation from the National Review Commission, John Lautner had been granted a hearing and been expelled from the Party as "an enemy agent of long standing."[34] For any dedicated Communist who had devoted most of his adult life to the Party, expulsion was truly a devastating personal blow. Desperate to argue his cause, Lautner attempted to contact Alexander Trachtenberg and other Party leaders, but his letters went unanswered. His former friends in the Party leadership, including Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, refused to have any contact with him. Perhaps the cruelest blow was the reaction of

Lautner's wife, who was told by Party leaders that unless she denounced Lautner, she too would be expelled from the Party. As a loyal Party member, she concluded that she could not accept her husband's protestations of innocence. She thus told him that she could no longer live with him because he had brought disgrace on both herself and their daughter. She thereupon left him and demanded a divorce, which was granted several months later.[35] In other words, literally overnight John Lautner had become, in the eyes of the Party, a loathsome creature, a pariah with whom no member should have any contact.

Thus, although Mátyás Rákosi had not succeeded in luring Lautner to Hungary to share the fate of other "accomplices" of Rajk, he had provided the information that led to Lautner's humiliating expulsion from the Party. Yet Rákosi seemed to regret that he had not yet been able to ensnare one of the other Hungarian Americans he suspected of being a "traitor," Louis Weinstock. It is possible that Rákosi had been mulling the idea of having Weinstock arrested during his several months visit to Hungary in late 1949. At the time Hungarian trade union officials learned, presumably from Rákosi, that "not everything was in order" with Weinstock.[36] Nonetheless, Weinstock had been permitted to return home so that he could persuade Lautner to visit Hungary. It appears that early in 1950 Rákosi sent word to Weinstock that he would like to confer with him again in Budapest, but Weinstock, as a member of the National Committee of the CPUSA, was too busy to make another visit to Hungary so soon after his previous one. In any case, since he was facing probable arrest and prosecution by the government, it was unlikely that he would be permitted to leave the country. However, by chance, his wife, Rose Weinstock, who was also a Hungarian by birth, traveled to Hungary in October with their eleven year old daughter. Both of them were American citizens. Rose Weinstock was a delegate to the world congress of a communist women's group. After the congress she intended to remain in Budapest for several months, contributing in any way she could to the work of the Hungarian Party.

Unable to take action against Louis Weinstock himself, Rákosi apparently decided to punish his family. In November, 1950, about a month after the arrival of Weinstock's wife and daughter in Budapest, several Hungarian secret police agents appeared at their apartment and ordered them to leave. Without any explanation, they were exiled to Nagyléta, a small town on Hungary's eastern border, where they were forced to live in primitive building that a friend later described as a "cowshed."[37] Soon thereafter the daughter became severely ill with influenza. When Louis Weinstock learned of this development through a cautiously worded letter from his wife, he immediately wrote to Antal Apró, a leading trade unions official, whom he perhaps felt would be more sympathetic and helpful than Rákosi himself.[38] But Apró, aware that Weinstock was regarded by the Hungarian Party leadership with suspicion, merely passed on Weinstock's message to Rákosi, assuring him that "naturally we will not respond to this letter."[39] In fact, no explanation was ever given to Weinstock for the treatment of his wife and daughter, whose exile and house arrest in Nagyléta ended only in 1955, when they were finally allowed to return to Budapest and, eventually, to the United States.

Mátyás Rákosi's scheme to bolster his own self-image as the arbiter of the fate of Hungarian Communists who had been connected with the CPUSA had certainly succeeded in the short term. He had arranged for the arrest, torture, and long-term imprisonment of Mózes Simon and perhaps other innocent Hungarian American Communists living in Hungary. On Rákosi's suggestion John Lautner had been subjected to psychological torture and summarily expelled from the CPUSA. Louis Weinstock's wife and daughter had been dealt with severely and arbitrarily by the Hungarian secret police. In the long-term, however, Rákosi's megalomania contributed to developments that were detrimental to both the CPUSA and the communist regime in Hungary. In particular, the repercussions of what came to be called the "Lautner affair" were certainly not what Rákosi or CPUSA leaders had anticipated.

Unlike many other American Communist Party members who had been unjustly expelled, John Lautner did not simply fade away quietly, perhaps with the hope that things might change and in the future he might gain re-admission to the Party. For several months he brooded over the treatment he had received, especially the brutality of his "trial" in the Cleveland basement. When in August, 1950 he received word that the divorce demanded by his wife had been granted, Lautner felt that he had suffered the final indignity. Convinced now that he had wasted his entire adult life in serving a political movement that "had no respect for the dignity of the human individual," he decided to launch a personal counter-attack. In September he addressed a letter to J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, in which he offered to give his "fullest cooperation to the aims and objectives of your organization."[40] Lautner soon became in reality what the CPUSA had falsely accused him of being: a government informant, a "stool pigeon." In the following months Lautner met frequently with FBI agents and provided valuable insider information about the leaders and inner workings of the CPUSA. But the greatest blow he dealt to the Party was the testimony he gave as a government witness at a series of Smith Act trials in the 1950s, at which Communist Party leaders were charged with advocating the violent overthrow of the American government. He appeared at over twenty such trials and hearings all across the country, the most important of which occurred in New York in 1952. Among the defendants at this so-called Foley Square trial were his former friend Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and several of those responsible for his expulsion, including Louis Weinstock, Mark Trachtenberg, and Jack Kling (as a co-conspirator).

The defendants at the Foley Square trial regarded John Lautner as a truly sinister figure, looking "vengeful, grim-faced, with tinted glasses that concealed his eyes," even though privately some of them admitted that his testimony relating to Party structure and practices was "essentially true."[41] To their dismay Lautner proved to be a very effective and believable witness. He seemed to have a prodigious memory and related his experiences in the Party in a straightforward and fluent manner, though at times he came off as a bit pedantic. Unlike many other ex-Communists who became government informants, Lautner refrained from histrionic condemnations of Communism and was relatively cautious about identifying individuals as Communists. Although he monotonously emphasized his belief that force and violence were intrinsic to the communist movement, in general he lacked the "zeal of the reformed sinner."[42] Lautner's chief contribution to the prosecution's case was the evidence he offered that the CPUSA engaged in a variety of conspiratorial activities that belied the democratic provisions of the Party's constitution. The lawyers for the defendants at the 1952 Smith Act trial, who apparently accepted as true all the allegations against Lautner made by the Party at the instigation of Rákosi, did their best to discredit him as a witness. They brought up a few incidents where Lautner may have been embellishing the truth or suffered from a faulty memory,[43] but they were unable to offer any credible evidence he had previously been an FBI informant, let alone that he worked with American and "Titoite" intelligence services during World War II. Therefore they had to rely on the tactic of emphasizing that since Lautner was being paid by the government for his testimony, he would tell whatever lies his masters required. Lautner's vivid account of the "trial" to which he was subjected in Cleveland posed a particular problem for the defense lawyers, since they realized that the story would likely have a strong impact on the jury.[44] Yet here too they had no evidence to bring forward that would discredit Lautner's dramatic account. Moreover, they were doubtless reluctant to call as witnesses those Party leaders, such as Trachtenberg and Kling, who had knowledge of Lautner's treatment by the Party, since they would then be subjected to cross-examination that could be damaging to the case of the defendants.

John Lautner's testimony thus went largely unchallenged, and it appears that it carried a good deal of weight with the judge and jury. Early in

1953 all the defendants were found guilty and sentenced to prison terms of 1-3 years. In 1954 when a U.S. Court of Appeals affirmed the convictions, the judges cited Lautner's testimony as particularly persuasive in supporting the government's argument that the CPUSA was not an ordinary political party, but functioned "in a covert, deceptive, violent, and highly disciplined manner, such as might be expected of a revolutionary organization."[45] Throughout the period of the Smith Act trials, and especially once it became clear that Lautner's testimony was playing a key role in the conviction of many Party officials, the ex-Communist was vilified in CPUSA publications as a loathsome creature who testified falsely against his former comrades purely for monetary gain.[46] At least a few Party leaders knew, of course, that Lautner's account of the "Cleveland incident" was not a fabrication, but other officials, including most members of the National Committee, were apparently never apprised of this. This seems the only explanation for Lewis Weinstock's willingness to focus on the "Cleveland incident" in his public condemnations of Lautner. In a *Daily Worker* article in the summer of 1952 Weinstock sarcastically described Lautner's account of what happened in Cleveland as an "idiotic concoction," a ridiculous "cloak and dagger tale" based on cheap Hollywood gangster movies and the "best comic book tradition." This was the kind of fantasy, Weinstock observed, that one would expect from a "cheap stoolpigeon, labor spy, and provocateur."[47]

Yet even as Weinstock and other CPUSA officials continued to fulminate against Lautner in the summer of 1952, a few Party leaders had begun to have some misgivings about the "Lautner Affair." Among them was Joseph Starobin, foreign affairs editor for the *Daily Worker*, who early in 1951 passed through Budapest on his way to interview Soviet leaders in Moscow. During a conversation with Rákosi Starobin asked for an elaboration on the evidence for the charges against Lautner. The Hungarian leader could offer nothing more than what he had told Weinstock: that Lautner had been implicated by one of Rajk's accomplice. To Starobin's amazement Rákosi then went on to volunteer his belief that Weinstock was also not to be trusted, that he too was a government agent. How else could it be explained, for example, that after his visit to Hungary in 1949 Weinstock did not accept the invitation for a return visit in 1950, but instead had sent his wife? In insisting that this was highly suspicious behavior, Rákosi cited an old Hungarian saying: "When you don't have a horse, send an ass."[48]

That Rákosi could make such a vulgar and capricious accusation against Weinstock, one of the most respected leaders of the CPUSA, greatly shocked Starobin, who would no doubt have been even more disturbed if he had been aware of the action that had been taken only a few months earlier by the Hungarian secret police against Rose Weinstock. He nonetheless returned to the United States with the conviction that an "extraordinary paranoia" prevailed in Hungary and that the leader of the Hungarian CP was not trustworthy. This led him further to conclude that John Lautner had been "framed:" he had not been a government agent, but "his own comrades made him one."[49] Starobin must have sensed that giving an accurate report to the CPUSA National Committee on his encounter with Rákosi and his misgivings about the "Lautner affair" (and perhaps the Rajk trial as well) might have undesirable repercussions, given the fragile state of the Party and the prevailing revulsion towards Lautner as a "stool pigeon." Furthermore, Starobin knew that some Party leaders already regarded him as too independent a thinker and a potential "deviationist."[50] Thus, he seems to have related his experience in Budapest and the conclusions he had drawn only to a few close associates, including George Charney, John Gates, and possibly Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.[51] Other Party leaders, including Louis Weinstock, apparently remained unaware of what Rákosi had told Starobin, and the campaign of vilification of Lautner continued unabated.[52] Typical of this attitude were the views privately expressed in 1954 by Betty Gannett, a member of the National Committee. In explaining to a Party member (who happened to be an FBI informant) what the "Lautner affair" was all about, she assumed that Lautner was guilty but otherwise gave an accurate description of his "trial" in Cleveland. She stated that Lautner had been stripped, beaten, and tortured, but had refused to confess and had been released. That was a mistake, she suggested, and in the future once the Party learned the identity of a spy, he would not be allowed to walk out alive.[53]

For the next few years those in the CPUSA leadership who had concluded that Rákosi had misled them in the "Lautner affair" turned to other urgent matters confronting the Party. The process of de-Stalinization that slowly began to develop in Eastern Europe not long after Stalin's death in 1953 did not receive much scrutiny by American Communists until events in Moscow and Budapest in 1956 riveted their attention. Historians have tended to concentrate on the traumatic effect that Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" of February, 1956 had on members of the CPUSA,[54] but months before the full text of that speech became available to Party members in June an intense debate had already been triggered by rumors about the speech and by developments in Hungary. In the three years after Stalin's death Rákosi had had to contend with growing pressure for de-Stalinization coming from both Moscow and from factions within the Hungarian Communist Party. Finally, in a desperate move to dissociate himself from his former mentor, Rákosi announced in March, 1956 that László Rajk had been rehabilitated. Though refusing to take any personal responsibility for what had occurred, he admitted that the defendants at the 1949 trial had been innocent "victims of a frame-up" and that there had been no vast "Titoist" conspiracy.[55]

Rákosi's speech naturally had an electrifying impact in Hungary, but it also was a great shock to many American Communists, especially those who even earlier had suspected that they had been duped by Rákosi in 1949. Among those on whom the news had a profound effect was John Gates, who could justifiably feel that in the "Lautner affair" he and other CPUSA leaders had been personally manipulated by and lied to by Rákosi. Compared to more orthodox members of the CPUSA leadership, Gates and his fellow editors of the *Daily Worker* "felt a greater sense of guilt for the past and a greater sense of responsibility to alter the public image of the party."[56] As chief editor of the Party newspaper Gates was in the position to express the outrage that he and many other American Communists felt. As a rule no communist newspaper ever criticized the leaders of other communist states, except as part of a campaign inspired by Moscow. For this reason an editorial in the *Daily Worker* on April 2, entitled "The Rajk Case," astonished many readers of the newspaper. The editorial bemoaned the fact that a socialist government had employed "the age-old capitalist method of frame-up, sending innocent persons to their death or to prison." The public had a right to know how such a "terrible miscarriage of justice" could have happened and who had instigated it: "Not one, not some, but all those responsible should be brought before the bar of justice."[57]

Since early in 1956, when the news of Khrushchev's indictment of Stalin first reached the CPUSA leadership, there had been an increasing willingness on the part of the editors of the *Daily Worker* to allow a relatively free and open discussion of issues in letters to the editor, called the "Speak Your Piece" section of the paper.[58] After the April 2 editorial there appeared many letters from Party members, most of whom expressed support for the position taken by the *Daily Worker* and asserted that they were exhilarated by the chance finally to voice opinions that they had long held but previously were fearful of expressing.[59] The name of John Lautner, who at this time was still serving as a government witness at trials of Party leaders, was of course never mentioned. But at least some of the letter writers seemed to know, or suspect, the true circumstances surrounding Lautner's expulsion, including the false information that had been supplied by Mátyás Rákosi. The writer of one letter argued that it had been a mistake to blindly accept everything that had come from prominent European Communists: "Not only did we actively defend abuses where we had no proof of guilt, merely a statement from the Soviet party, unsubstantiated by fact — where, with perhaps some justification, we gave the leaders the benefit of the doubt and assumed they had good reasons why they couldn't make such proofs public — but we even went so far as to defend things that we knew were outright lies."[60] Others demanded explanations not just from the Hungarian government, but also "from the leaders of the American Communist Party." A few, including a journalist who had attended and reported on the Rajk trial, confessed their gullibility and their blind willingness to "accept the mere accusation as justice" and "to shun anyone who dared protest." One writer even suggested that the time had come for a re-examination of the cases of those who had previously left the Party and "yes, even some of the expulsions."[61]

Not all leaders of the CPUSA approved of the audacious opinions expressed by John Gates and his like-minded colleagues at the *Daily Worker*. They might agree that the actions of the Rákosi government had been deplorable, but nonetheless questioned why the CPUSA should meddle in the affairs of the fraternal party in Hungary when American Communists had very pressing problems of their own, including continuing prosecutions of Party leaders by the government. In fact, even as debate about the crimes of Stalin and Rákosi raged in the pages of the *Daily Worker*, those Party leaders who had been tried in 1952 were undergoing a re-trial in New York. But the perspective of a few of them had been changed by the shocking revelations of the past months, and at least one of them was undergoing a political crisis of conscience. At his first trial in 1952 George Charney, despite certain misgivings, did not believe that Lautner's testimony could be true. In any case, "he was a rat and deserved no consideration." By his second trial in 1956, however, the revelations from Budapest and the memory of what Rákosi had said to Joseph Starobin in 1951, convinced Charney that Lautner had been and was now telling the truth. This created in him a "feeling of guilt," for he could only conclude that Lautner's experience in "the dark cellar in Cleveland" formed "a link with the frameups, the darkness at noon history of Stalin's party." The CPUSA had subjected Lautner, an innocent man, to a "horrible nightmare" and pressured his wife to abandon him, which forced Charney to ask himself: "What kind of morality was it that allowed an institution to blot out family integrity and the lives of people?"[62]

For some CPUSA leaders and members like George Charney and John Gates, the discovery of the truth behind the "Lautner affair" contributed to their growing disillusionment with the Party. Their disgust over the crimes and duplicitous behavior of the regimes presided over by Stalin and Rákosi began slowly, and imperceptibly, to erode their commitment to the Communist Party. The events that unfolded in Hungary in the autumn of 1956 reminded them once again of the iniquity and treachery of the Rákosi government. In their reaction to the Hungarian uprising many CPUSA leaders were ambivalent and preferred to remain silent until it was clear how the Soviet government would react. But members of the "John Gates wing" of the Party, who had for some months been feuding with those whom they considered to be too wedded to the Stalinist past, did not hesitate to express sympathy for and encouragement of the Hungarian insurgents.[63] Editorials in the *Daily Worker* declared that the Hungarian people were justified in seeking "changes to democratize their country and improve the standard of living." What was happening in Hungary was not, as some Communists were arguing, a "counter-revolutionary plot" but "primarily a people's upheaval arising from the failure of Hungarian socialism to base itself on the people." Thus, the Hungarian uprising was not to be explained as a plot manipulated by outsiders, but as the inevitable result of the failure of Hungarian communist leaders to dissociate themselves from the repressive methods of Rákosi and his Stalinist comrades.[64]

When in early November Soviet troops were dispatched to crush the insurgency in Hungary, the response of the editors of the *Daily Worker* was unprecedented. In a November 5 editorial the Soviet intervention was condemned as retarding rather than promoting the development of socialism in Hungary, since "socialism cannot be imposed on a country by force."[65] Inspired by a group of editors who, partly because of their personal experience of Rákosi's malevolence, had come to loathe the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Hungary, the *Daily Worker* thus became the only communist newspaper in the world that denounced the Red Army's military suppression of the Hungarian uprising.[66] This editorial greatly exacerbated the rift in the CPUSA leadership, for many Party veterans regarded such criticism of the Soviet Union as reprehensible and unacceptable.

Debates among CPUSA factions continued to rage through the first half of 1957, with the "Hungarian question" often the focus of controversy.[67] In June the orthodox wing of the Party was bolstered by the appearance of a book entitled *The Truth About Hungary*, written by Herbert Aptheker, a noted Marxist historian. Aptheker, who did not read Hungarian, had no first-hand knowledge of Hungarian affairs, and viewed Hungarian history through a Stalinist prism, fully backed the interpretation of the Hungarian uprising that had been proposed by Moscow and the Soviet-backed regime in Budapest. The events in Hungary, he argued, had been a counter-revolution fomented by Western imperialists and fascists. Apetheker conceded that one of the sources of popular discontent that led to the uprising of 1956 was the "violation of socialist law" that had occurred in the late 1940s, but he dealt with this topic very briefly and insisted that "such inhumanity was alien and hostile to

Socialism."[68] Aptheker's conclusions were challenged by a reviewer in the *Daily Worker*,[69] but spokesmen for the orthodox wing, which now seemed to be in the ascendancy, came to his support. Among them were Rose and Louis Weinstock, who apparently bore no resentment over the persecution that Rose and their daughter had suffered in Rákosi's Hungary. Indeed, they insisted that they had had "the good fortune" to visit Hungary and were first-hand witnesses to "the great transformation that took place during the first five years after fascism was crushed." They acknowledged that some "mistakes, shortcomings, [and] violations of socialist law" had occurred under the Rákosi regime, although the authors of course made no mention of the fact that Louis Weinstock had collaborated with the Hungarian leader in identifying Rajk's alleged accomplices in 1949.[70]

These developments were dispiriting to members of the "John Gates wing," who now began to leave the Party in large numbers.[71] But even as ex-Communists some of them continued to feel a sense of guilt over the "Lautner affair" and its ramifications. They realized that none of the leaders of what remained of the CPUSA were ever likely to give an accurate account of the "Lautner affair," let alone rehabilitate him. Thus, the first public explanation of how and why Lautner had been expelled from the CPUSA came in George Charney's memoir, published in 1968. Charney expressed shame that he had been a loyal member of a party that had employed such Stalinist methods. Yet he could not forgive Lautner for having offered his services to the FBI in order "to destroy the party that had destroyed him" and to enjoy his "brief moment of revenge and infamy."[72] John Gates proved more forgiving. At a university conference that both attended in 1969, Gates sought out Lautner and apologized for the role he had played in his expulsion from the Party.[73] Gates' last act of atonement came in 1973, when in a nationally broadcast television interview on NBC, he admitted that Lautner's account of his expulsion had been accurate and that he was ashamed of his role in organizing the "Cleveland incident."[74]

After 1957 most of the other Party leaders who were responsible for the "Lautner affair" remained loyal to the CPUSA, which was shrinking rapidly in membership and becoming an inconsequential political factor. None of them ever acknowledged the truth of Lautner's story or expressed any regret over their role in his expulsion. As late as 1985, when his memoirs were published, Jack Kling continued to insist that the Party was justified in taking action against Lautner because it had received incriminating evidence "through various channels." He acknowledged that Lautner had been lured to Cleveland, but gave no details about his "trial" except that "the facts at our disposal were so complete that the trial committee voted to expel him from the

Party as a government agent."[75] Kling, like so many of his comrades, could never bring himself to admit publically that the party to which he had dedicated his life had employed what George Charney had called "darkness at noon" methods.

During the Smith Act trials of the 1950s CPUSA officials had argued that theirs was an independent political party that did not receive its marching orders from Moscow. Yet the actions of the CPUSA leadership at the time of the Rajk trial demonstrated otherwise. In the late 1940s CPUSA leaders joined without hesitation in the campaign against "Titoism" that Stalin launched. They accepted at face value the preposterous accusations made against László Rajk and his "accomplices." At the snap of Rákosi's fingers they offered up for sacrifice several Hungarian Communists who had worked in the United States. On the flimsiest of evidence provided by Rákosi they convinced themselves that John Lautner, a loyal Party official, was in fact an imperialist agent and "Titoite." When by chance Lautner was able to avoid the horrible fate awaiting him in Budapest, they felt justified in applying their own version of "Bolshevik justice" in a Cleveland basement.

Yet, as has been seen, Rákosi's political machinations had consequences that neither he nor his CPUSA collaborators could have imagined. Completely shattered by his brutal expulsion from the Party, John Lautner was in time emboldened to offer his services to the FBI. In part because of his persuasive testimony and dramatic recounting of the "Cleveland incident," several of the Party officials who had organized his expulsion were found guilty in Smith Act trials and received prison sentences. Later, when some more independent-minded CPUSA leaders learned of Rákosi's duplicitous methods in the Rajk trial and his regime's repressive policies, they were able to persuade themselves that the Hungarian uprising of 1956 was not an "imperialist plot" but a genuine popular revolt against Stalinist tyranny. As a result the *Daily Worker* was the only communist newspaper in the world to endorse the motives of the Hungarian insurgents and condemn the Soviet military intervention. The bitter debates among American Communists about the "Hungarian question" contributed to the shattering of the CPUSA. This was the final result of Rákosi's attempt to act as "Stalin's best pupil" and to persuade American Communists to help him find additional victims for the Hungarian show trials.

NOTES

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[1] For a discussion of the Hungarian leadership's understanding of the nature of the "koncepciós per," see Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow. The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism 1941-1953* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 243-44; and István Rév, "Indicting Rajk," p. 26, http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/slavic/events/slavic_symposium/Comrades_Please_Shoot_Me/Rev_Rajk.pdf.

[2] For the Rajk trial, see George Hodos, *Show Trials. Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948-1954* (New York: Praeger, 1987), pp. 25-72; Tibor Hajdu, "A Rajk-per háttere és fázisai" [The background and phases of the Rajk Trial], http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/szakirod/hajdutib.htm; and Árpád Pünkösti, *Rákosi a csúcson, 1948-1953* [Rákosi at His Zenith] (Budapest: Európa, 1996), 174-75.

[3] See Mária Schmidt, "Noel Field – The American Communist at the Center of Stalin's East European Purge: From the Hungarian Archives," *American Communist History*, 3, 2 (2004): 214-45; and Hodos, pp. 24-32. For Field's career in general, see *Der Fall Noel Field*, vols. 1 and 2, ed. Bernd-Rainer Barth, Werner Schweizer, and Thomas Grimm (Berlin: Basis Druck, 2005-07).

[4] A small-scale trial was staged in Albania in May-June, 1949, but it was conducted behind closed doors and was limited in its objectives. Hodos, pp. 5-12.

[5] Mátyás Rákosi personally intervened in the drawing up of Mindszenty's confession, insisting that the cardinal admit to having engaged in "monumental espionage" to aid American imperialism. Mevius, pp. 238-39.

[6] Mevius, pp. 242-43.

[7] Mevius, p. 243; Mária Schmidt, *Battle of Wits. Beliefs, Ideologies, and Secret Agents in the 20th Century* (Budapest: XX. Század Intézet, 2007), 171.

[8] Ironically, Stalin was suspicious even of Rákosi, in part because of his Jewish origins, but specifically because he had once been shown a U.S. newspaper photo of Rákosi, during his visit to the United States in 1946, sitting at a table with President Truman. Both men were caught laughing about something, and for Stalin this was evidence that Rákosi was possibly an American spy. Paul Lendvai, *One Day That Shook the Communist World. The 1956 Hungarian Uprising and Its Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2008), 33.

[9] Tibor Hajdu, "A Rajk-per," p. 2,

[10] "200,000 Expelled in Hungary Purge," *New York Times*, June 24, 1949, p. 8.

[11] Rákosi's letter of Sept. 3, 1949 to Klement Gottwald, cited in Igor Lukes, "The Rudolf Slánský Affair," *Slavic Review*, 58, 1 (1999): 172.

[12] Rákosi's trip to the United States is described in his autobiography, *Visszaemlékezések, 1940-1956* [Recollections, 1940-1956], vol. 1 (Budapest: Napvilág, 1997), 284-85. At the time he met Gene Dennis and many Hungarian-born comrades.

[13] Weinstock's memo of Aug. 8, 1949, Magyar Országos Levéltár (hereafter MOL), MszMP, 276-G5, pp. 1-15.

[14] In September Rákosi had a conversation with János Szánto (John Santo), perhaps the only Hungarian American he trusted. Rákosi asserted that Lautner, Péter, Simon, and Weinstock were all "spies placed in the Communist Party of the United States by the Government of the United States, by the FBI." When Szánto responded that surely this could not be the case, the Hungarian leader told him he was naïve and not privy to certain confidential information. Weinstock, for example, was a heavy drinker and it was inevitable that the American secret service would blackmail him and force him to become a spy. House Committee on Un-American Affairs, *A Communist in a Workers' Paradise, John Santo's Own Story* (Washington: Govt. Printing Office, 1963), 19-20.

[15] During Rákosi's visit to New York in 1946, Simon served as his liaison with CPUSA leaders. Testimony of Paul Nadányi, Sept. 28, 1949, "Communist Activities among Aliens and National Groups," *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization*, Committee of the Judiciary, United States Senate, 81st Congress, Part 2 (Washington: Govt. Printing Office, 1950), p. 9440. See also Simon's memo of May 19, 1949 to Rákosi on the question of Hungarian government subsidies that were provided to support the newspaper *Magyar Jövő*, which was published in New York. MOL, MszMP, 276-G5, 216.

[16] Santo, *A Communist in a Workers' Paradise*, pp. 17-18. Simon was finally released from prison in 1956, but the years of torture and isolation had taken their toll. He spent the last years of his life in a mental institution.

[17] On "Browderism" in the Rajk trial, see Schmidt, "Noel Field," p. 218.

[18] Though he himself was of Jewish origin and Rajk was not, Rákosi nonetheless professed to see the Rajk affair as a kind of Jewish conspiracy, as can be seen in a report he gave to the Political Committee of the Hungarian Workers Party in February, 1953: "Since there are Jews everywhere, it was inevitable that Zionism should come to the forefront as an espionage network. This happened here already in connection with the Rajk case, where most of those condemned to death were … petit-bourgeois Jews." Cited in Schmidt, *Battle of Wits*, p. 194.

[19] "Péter József visszaemlékezése" (Memoir of József Péter), Politkatudományi Intézet (Budapest), 867, f. p-235, Part 2, p. 40. For more information on Péter see my article "Sándor Goldberger/J. Peters és az amerikai kommunista mozgalom" [Sánor Goldberger/J. Peters and the American Communist Movement], *Századok*, vol. 141, no. 1 (2007): 185-202; and my forthcoming book: *Red Conspirator: J. Peters and the American Communist Underground* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

[20] Cseresnyés was certainly a tempting target for those organizing the Hungarian show trial. He had fought in the Spanish Civil War and had met Rajk at that time; as an interpreter in the British army during World War II he had come to know several members of Tito's partisan army; and after the war his career as a

journalist in Hungary had been facilitated by Rajk. After several weeks of torture he came to the conclusion that the only way to save his life was to cooperate and make a full confession to the fictitious crimes he was being accused of. He thus agreed to offer evidence against Rajk and other individuals. See Tibor Hajdu, "Júdás mindig velünk van. Két különös karakter; Stolte István és Cseresnyés Sándor" (We Always Have Judas Among Us. Two Unusual Characters, István Stolte and Sándor Cseresnyés), *Valóság*, 35, no. 12 (1992): 52-64.

[21] Hajdu, p. 60.

[22] *László Rajk and His Accomplices Before the People's Court* (Budapest: Budapest Printing Press, 1949), 217. In fact, the allegation that Lautner was an imperialist spy and an accomplice of Rajk was never made in any Hungarian newspaper or public forum.

[23] George Charney, *A Long Journey* (Chicago: Qaudrangle, 1968), 219; Junius Irving Scales and Richard Nickson, *Cause at Heart. A Former Communist Remembers* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1987), 269.

[24] Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers. A Life in the American Communist Party* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1990), 131.

[25] Ironically, Lautner also procured several copies of the transcript for use by Party leaders. Lautner's testimony at a hearing of the Subversive Activities Control Board, Jan. 22, 1952, *Records of the Subversive Activities Control Board*, Part 1 (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1988), reel 17, 9308. Cited hereafter as SACB.

[26] SACB, 9294-9295.

[27] Lautner had in fact declined to take severe action against one of the Party members, Angela Calomiris, who later turned out to be an FBI informant. Calomiris had been accused at the time by a local Party functionary not of being a government agent but of being a "sexual pervert" who consorted with lesbians and "bisexuals" in a way that was damaging to Party interests. Lautner later explained that he was not prepared to "destroy an individual" on the basis of such an accusation. See Lautner's testimony, Feb. 11, 1952, SACB, reel 17, 9999-10007. Calomiris gave her account in Angela Calomiris, *Red Masquerade. Undercover for the F.B.I.* (New York: Lippincott, 1950), 222-26.

[28] Earlier in 1949 Bella Dodd, a noted educator and member of the CPUSA National Committee, was summarily expelled on spurious charges and denounced as anti-Negro, anti-Puerto Rican, anti-Semitic, and anti-labor,. She described the bizarre nature of her hearing in her memoir, *School of Darkness* (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1954), 217-19.

[29] Helen C. Camp, *Iron in her Soul: Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the American Left* (Pullman: Washington State U.P., 1995), 238.

[30] Jack Kling, *Where the Action Is: Memoirs of a U.S. Communist* (New York: New Outlook, 1985), 47.

[31] Lautner later related this event on numerous occasions, but most fully in his testimony before the SACB in September, 1952, reel 17, 9301-9323. A summary of his various accounts can be found in Herbert L. Packer, *Ex-Communist Witnesses. Four Studies in Fact Finding* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1962), 193-95.

[32] "Ex-Red Says Party Threatened Death. Confessed to Escape Beating, Former Communist Official Tells Federal Panel," *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1952, p. 8.

[33] Lautner was instructed to return the following day to an agreed-upon meeting point, at which he would be taken to a continuation of his "trial." Remarkably, Lautner, still believing that in a calmer atmosphere he could straighten out the apparent misunderstanding, showed up as instructed. When after a time no one else did, he left and determined to resolve the matter at Party headquarters in New York. Packer, pp. 194-5.

[34] "John Lautner Expelled by CP as a Traitor," *Daily Worker*, Jan. 17, 1950, p. 2.

[35] FBI report on interview with Lautner, Sept. 25, 1950, FBI FOIA file on John Lautner, 100-16177 (cited hereafter as Lautner FBI File.)

[36] Letter of Antal Apró, Secretary of the National Council of Trade Unions (Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa) to Rákosi, Dec. 5, 1950, MOL, MszMP, 276-G5, p. 26.

[37] Santo, *A Communist*, p. 33.

[38] Weinstock's letter to Apró, Nov. 28, 1950, MOL, MszMP, 276-G5, p. 27,

[39] Apró's letter of Dec. 5, 1950 to Rákosi, MOL, MszMP, 276-G5, p. 26.

[40] Lautner's letter to Hoover of Sept. 14, 1950, in Lautner FBI File; FBI interview of Lautner on Sept. 20, 1950, in Lautner FBI File; and Lautner's testimony, SACB, reel 17, 9974.

[41] Charney, p. 219; Scales, p. 269.

[42] Packer, p. 216. Packer, who made a careful study of the testimony of ex-Communists, concluded that Lautner was, "on a fair appraisal," a reliable witness. (p. 219).

[43] For example, at a trial of leading Communists in California, the defense insisted that Lautner's account of having demonstrated to Dorothy Healey a portable mimeograph machine that was designed to be used in underground operations was a lie. Healey insisted that she had never been shown such a machine by Lautner. Healey, pp. 140-41.

[44] Defense lawyers succeeded at some of the Smith Act trials (but not at the New York trial in 1952) in persuading the presiding judge to declare testimony about the "Cleveland incident" to be inadmissible.

[45] Decision of the United States Court of Appeals Second Circuit on United States vs. Flynn, 216 F.2d 354 , No. 150, Docket 22763, Oct. 14, 1954, p. 6, found at http://openjurist.org/216/f2d/354/united-states-v-flynn.

[46] Typical of this attempt at character assassination was an article in the *Daily Worker* in which Lautner was described as a person who "exuded hate as a snake does venom." He was a "small and seedy" man who was active in the "shady, international world" of Horthites, Titoites, Trotskyists, blackmailers, and imperialist spy agencies. Richard O. Boyer, "The Real Portrait of a Spy," *Daily Worker*, July 11, 1952, pp. 4 and 6.

[47] Louis Weinstock, guest column of June 20, 1952, *Daily Worker*, pp. 5, 8. Weinstock's willingness to believe, on the basis of the information he had received from Rákosi, that Lautner had long been an imperialist agent and FBI informer was apparently not diminished by the arbitrary and brutal way in which his wife and daughter were being treated by the Hungarian regime.

[48] Joseph R. Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1972), 218-19. Actually, the Hungarian saying would best be rendered as: "If you don't have a horse, an ass will do." István Rév cogently argues that Rákosi's seemingly illogical reliance on such a linguistic formulation of the problem "exemplifies the logic of how the political trials were scripted." Rév, p. 25.

[49] Starobin, p. 219.

[50] In fact, Starobin's general disillusionment and growing belief that the CPUSA was too subservient to Moscow led him to resign from the Party in 1954.

[51] Charney who knew Weinstock as "one of the most popular mass figures in the party" rejected Rákosi's accusation out of hand. Like Starobin, he now began to have serious misgivings about the original accusations against Lautner. Charney, p. 222. At her trial in 1952 Elizabeth Gurley Flynn challenged Lautner's testimony on several points, but she did not dispute his account of the "Cleveland incident." In a private letter in 1955 she accused Lautner of being a "Judas," but did not repeat the earlier accusations about his alleged collaboration with American and Yugoslav intelligence agencies. See Flynn's letter of Dec. 2, 1955 to Clemens France, in Rosalyn Fraad Baxandall (ed.), *Words on Fire. The Life and Writing of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 251-52.

[52] When Lautner appeared at a session of the House Committee on Un-American Activities in March, 1957, an attack on him in the *Daily Worker* was accompanied by an unflattering caricature. Virginia Gardiner, "Open Witchhunt here with Paid Witnesses," March 13, 1957, p. 1.

[53] Gannett's comments, made in December, 1954, were recorded in an FBI report of Feb. 2, 1955, in Lautner FBI File. Gannett was one of the few Party leaders who had learned the full story of the "Cleveland trial," including the identity of Lautner's inquisitors (Klug, Wellman, Brandt).

[54] Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1993), 249-50.

[55] "Hungary Clears Hanged 'Traitor;' Socialists Freed," *New York Times*, March 30, 1956, pp. 1, 4; "Hungary Says 5 CP Leaders Were Executed in False Accusation," *Daily Worker*, March 30, 1956, p. 2.

[56] Charney, p. 275.

[57] "The Rajk Case," *Daily Worker*, Apr. 2, 1956, p. 5; John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1958), 162-63.

[58] Charney, pp. 256-57; Irving Hower and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History (1919-1957)* (Boston: Beacon Hill, 1957), 484.

[59] There were, however, a few letter writers who were critical of the April 2 editorial, arguing that the evidence was not clear and Rajk and his accomplices might still be guilty of some of the crimes for which they were tried. Others maintained that the editorial of April 2 was a betrayal of "working-class internationalism." See "Letters on the Rajk Case," *Daily Worker*, Apr. 6, p. 4; and Gates, p. 163.

[60] Letter of A.G., "Respect But Not Blind Faith," *Daily Worker*, Apr. 2, p. 4.

[61] Unsigned letter, "Was in Hungary During Rajk Trial," *Daily Worker*, Apr. 9, p. 4; "Would Re-evaluate Expulsions," Apr. 23, p. 4.

[62] Charney, pp. 221-22.

[63] David A. Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism. A History of the Communist Party of the United States Since 1945* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham Bookseller, 1959), 301-02; 309-13.

[64] "The Events in Hungary," *Daily Worker*, Oct. 25, 1956, p. 5; "Popular Upheaval in Hungary," Oct. 30, 1956, pp. 1, 5.

[65] *Daily Worker*, Nov. 5, 1956, p. 5.

[66] Gates, pp. 179-80.

[67] Shannon, pp. 342-43. Dorothy Healey later wrote that in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Hungary "the arguments grew shrill and the forces pulling the Party apart increased geometrically." Healey, p. 160.

[68] Herbert Aptheker, *The Truth About Hungary* (New York: Mainstream Publishers, 1957). Aptheker noted that "terror appeared" in the late 1940s, but devoted only two pages (150-52) to this topic, mentioned the Rajk trial only in passing, and suggested that although Rákosi had committed and confessed to serious "errors," he had otherwise accomplished much in his long career as a "staunch Communist leader." (p. 152).

[69] Robert Friedman, DW, June, 19, 1957, p. 6.

[70] Rose and Louis Weinstock, "In Praise of Aptheker's 'Truth About Hungary,'" *Daily Worker*, July 23, 1957, p. 6.

[71] From 1956 to 1958 Party membership dropped more than 85%. Shannon, p. 360.

[72] Charney, p. 221.

[73] Starobin, p. 306, fn. 7.

[74] Camp, p. 238.

[75] Kling, p. 47.