

New Background

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THE LAND OF FAT

March 4 August 1961, (Urban) — Mr. Hegedus has had a dream — a curious and daring dream at that. Dreams are, of course, reactionary almost by definition, and, under a more rigorous political constabulation, Mr. Hegedus's dream would have never seen the light of day or, to be more precise, the printed pages of "Elet es Iradalom". But these are more frivolous times in Hungary (at least at the upper flights of Parnassus) and Mr. Hegedus's pointed fancies are now the tale of that very garrulous town, Budapest.

One fine night, lean and thin man that he is, he found himself flown to the land of Fat and Happy Men. Smiles grinned at him from every signpost and fatness was extolled at every street corner) as the one outstanding virtue which made this land superior to all others. Double chains, three round the waist and spreads of various kinds at the lower parts of the citizen's anatomy were this country's hall-marks of respectability and belonging. Driving past the "Inn to the Well-fed Boogie", a store which served customers that lean patrons are not served, and posters exhorting the citizen to distrust thinness, love the fat and be vigilant against all of a serious mind or a reflective temper, Mr. Hegedus was finally draped in a soothing mass of overweight humanity.

Our visitor was none too happy in these surroundings because in this land of corpulent men and women he was only too conscious of his own shortcomings and the nervous condition of his stomach which he brought with himself from Central Europe.

Fortunately, he was not completely isolated, because he soon discovered that there was a local minority of people of an inveterately skinny and choleric complexion, who neither state-feeding nor propaganda could convert to the company of fat citizens. And, goodness knows, it was for no lack of trying. Big Joker, who first thought of the historic destiny of the fat over the lean, had seen to it that there was no easy way out of happiness. There was a Ministry of Public Joy run by the Chief Smiler. One of his duties was to be a kind of Public Relations Officer and explain to the delegates from less enlightened lands why fat men and their social order were superior to those of the thin, and why it was right that the bony and leane-limbed should be eliminated from public life.

At this point in his dream occupies befalls our dreamer's mind. Was this country really democratic? He could well understand that in the land of the fat the majority of people were born fat, but he could not help wondering whether it was not, at least occasionally, possible for fat parents to give birth to skinny

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offspring. How would they fare in this land of state-enforced obesity? How, God forbid, would he fare if he had to live among the fat and the happy?

There had, of course, been a minority of thin men -- the Chief Smiler explains -- who had turned out to be enemies of the common weal. These had to be put to death. It was all very unfortunate.

But others, who did not oppose the rule of the fat, were tolerated in menial jobs. Of course, they were on probation all the time and, the Chief Smiler added gently, should they dissent against the rule of the fat, the full severity of the law would be brought to bear upon them. To live down your thinness is no easy matter, he continued. The lean and the morose have missed no trick to pass themselves off as members of the ruling cast. But the state is on its guard. A medical examination is held before candidates are appointed to public office and unless their inclination to obesity is convincingly established they are invariably rejected. The same rule governs admission to the universities and, what is more, fat men who lose weight while holding public office are liable to be dismissed upon reaching proportions of an insidious thinness.

On the last leg of his tour Mr. Hegdus was whisked past the municipal art gallery. For centuries, the Great Smiler explained, the finest paintings of the world had been collected there. But, before Big Joker liberated the people from their troubles, the pictures had been arranged with ineffectual care, and some of poisonous content were allowed to be shown. Under the new regime, however, the gallery, too, underwent a salutary reform. The pictures of El Greco, for instance, had been removed and burnt because his figures were subversively gaunt and unhappy to behold. Pride of place is now given to Rubens in whose paintings the citizen can feast his eyes on a galaxy of constructively fat women.

At this state Mr. Hegdus wakes from his dream and his story ends with the homily that lean dictators and fascists should learn from his allegory, because there is no more truth in fascism than in Big Joker's faith in the superiority of fat men.

The symbolism is too transparent to need comment. Nothing more daring has appeared in the Hungarian press since 1956.

End

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