

# BIG BROTHER'S MISERABLE LITTLE GROCERY STORE

STUDIES ON THE HISTORY OF THE HUNGARIAN  
SECRET SERVICES AFTER WORLD WAR II

Edited by György Gyarmati and Mária Palasik



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HISTORICAL ARCHIVES OF THE HUNGARIAN  
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# INTRODUCTION TO THE JUBILEE COLLECTION OF STUDIES PUBLISHED BY THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

The Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security in Budapest was founded 15 years ago. Its predecessor – the Historical Office – was established in 1997, but due to a law amendment, the institute has been operating under its current name since 2003. The Historical Archives store the surviving documents of secret services operating during the decades of Hungarian state Socialism. One of the duties of this special archive is to provide access to the surviving documents of persons legally sanctioned – or their character assassinated – by communist secret services to said persons (or their successors), and we have issued over half a million (545,000) pages worth of documents to approx. 10,000 citizens over the past one and a half decades as *individual information compensation*. On the other hand, the stored documents also serve as *collective information compensation*, and in the past fifteen years, we have issued over three quarters of a million (787,000) pages worth of copies to visitors with research licenses. We must also note with regard to the latter that the average researcher may look at five to ten times as many original documents as those selected for copying, eventually resulting in a new piece of collective information compensation in the form of published documents, studies, books or even films.<sup>1</sup>

The third task of the archives is to participate in the historical reconstruction of the past by way of the stored documents. The organizational order of the archives – the internal distribution of employees – serves to fulfill the tasks outlined above; however, several archivist colleagues are also committed in other ways to the systematic reconstruction and public dissemination of recent history.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, our priority was to publish two volumes for the current jubilee. After one and a half decades

<sup>1</sup> In this case, “researcher” means a Hungarian or foreign person not employed by the Historical Archives. Legal regulation in Hungary allows a greater circle of “outsider” professionals to engage in the reconstruction of the past and thus in collective information compensation than in some other post-socialist countries.

<sup>2</sup> In the 20th century, the most highly regarded scholars of Hungarian historical studies spent a smaller or larger part of their professional careers “close to the source” as professional archivists rather than just frequently visiting “outsider” historical researchers.



of systematic exploratory work and “life commitment” to the sources, our colleagues are preparing a volume in which they trace the changes of the institutional structure and the – regularly modified – organizational order of state socialist secret services. The present generation is probably aware of the fact that during the peaceful, “discursive” years of the political system change – in Hungary, at least –, the majority of secret service documents was lost or quietly displaced. What is less known is that once the institution of information compensation was established, the remaining documents arrived to the archives as a veritable “haystack”, and to this day, daily archival work still involves reestablishing the “filing order” of these traces of former secret service activities – an order that might have never existed even when the services were actually active. The least spectacular part of work within the Historical Archives – essential for the reconstruction of the past – is to file the trash heap of worn documents we receive in correct logistic order. *It is through archival work that a chaotic mess of dead documents becomes a genuine and applicable historical source.* This is how – the changes of – structural operational schemata become reconstructable (which is essential to the history of the institution), and then allow us to discover who, when and in what position operated the apparatus of the secret services behind the political party scenes (or engage in archontology, if you will). Since such work is considerably time consuming, we thought it important to show how far we have come in reconstructing the institutional and structural history of the Hungarian secret services for the upcoming jubilee.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the ways mentioned above, the present volume composed by the small research team of the Historical Archives is another means of offering a sneak peek of the research aimed at reconstructing Hungarian secret service activities – we say “sneak peek” since even the bibliography of over five hundred individual publications had to be omitted due to width constraints,<sup>4</sup> and because not all papers were specifically written for the present volume. It was the editors’ choice to include certain papers written by fellow historians of the archives – mostly within the past two years – in the volume. In this respect, these papers (also) represent what

<sup>3</sup> *A megtorlás szervezete. A politikai rendőrség újjászervezése 1956 után – Intézménytörténeti tanulmányok.* [The organization of retribution: The reorganization of the Secret Police after 1956. Studies on the history of the institution.] Edited by Gergő Bendegúz Cseh and Imre Okváth. Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–L’Harmattan, Budapest, 2012. Under publication.

<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of Historical Archives publications comes from the works of historical researchers. A list of titles is available at the end of this volume.

we have accomplished in the course of reconstructing the activities of secret services in the past century as well as our current interests. The papers of the volume are integrally connected to the above mentioned historical reconstruction done by “outsider” researchers, but there are also areas that we only touch upon very briefly – such as the extensively researched state security aspect of the history of the churches –, having recently published a separate volume on the subject.<sup>5</sup>

In this introduction, we do not discuss the contents of each paper since their titles, listed in the table of contents, provide sufficient information to readers interested in the volume. We considered it more important to start with a few conclusions based on research experience, whether these concern the content of these papers or experience with historical reconstruction regarding secret service documents in general. Some of the papers both confirm and represent the historical determination that Hungary was a small state without sovereignty in the decades following World War II, and the establishment and operation of the Hungarian secret services was directly influenced by the “Big Brother” – the Soviet state security bodies. Besides the obvious difference in the size of the two countries, differences arose chiefly from the fact that Hungary only had limited strategic importance even compared to other Soviet satellite states. This and the limited amount of available resources in Hungary meant that state security agent “coverage” in Hungarian society was less extensive than in East Germany, for instance. When compared to a country like East Germany, the Hungarian state security system seemed like a “miserable little grocery store” even in the eyes of its own leaders.<sup>6</sup> (In fact, the title of this volume is a reference to Hungary’s subordination and international insignificance.)

Hungary’s powerlessness is confirmed by several papers in this volume inasmuch as they show how Hungarian intelligence had remarkable success in integrating into the social and political organizations of several large Hungarian emigration waves in foreign “host countries” in the 20th century, but could not “penetrate” neither the strategically important institutions of opposing Cold War countries nor the opposing secret

<sup>5</sup> *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a katolikus egyház történetéről, 1945–1989.* [Caught in a trap: Studies on the history of the Catholic Church, 1945–1989.] Edited by Gyarmati György and Bánkuti Gábor. Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–L’Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> András Oplatka, *Egy döntés története. Magyar határnyitás – 1989. szeptember 11. nulla óra.* [The history of a decision: Opening the Hungarian borders on September 11, 1989 at zero hour.] Helikon, Budapest, 2008. 143.

services. It was an almost consistent characteristic of this era that secret services in Budapest sometimes knew more about emigration organizations abroad than the organizations themselves, but foreign countries still regarded their information gathering as a “Hungarian internal affair” despite the fact that it covered every continent and was a very costly operation. The uselessness of Hungarian secret service endeavors abroad can also be measured by their lack of scandals threatening “system breakdowns”, such as the defection of deputy head of Polish intelligence Lieutenant Colonel J. Światło (1953)<sup>7</sup> and Romanian chief of foreign intelligence General I. M. Pacepa (1978), and by the lack of results boasted by the likes of the East German MfS during the Cold War when they infiltrated the most intimate circle of an FRG chancellor (the Guillaume Affair).<sup>8</sup>

In retrospect, the Hungarian secret services may seem like “amateurs” compared to their fellow organizations in the communist bloc, but this does not change the fact that the people who suffered their activities still felt – and were – very much at the mercy of the secret service. Historical analyses may expose – and should expose – the differences between, say, the Soviet GULAG system and the Hungarian concentration camps and deportations of the 1950s, but those subjected to the latter still felt like pariahs in the face of the State Security Authority seeking to permanently destroy them and their captors telling them that “we don’t have to account for you to anyone”. This does not mean that relatively objective academic analysis is any more “accepting” of the most devoted servant of the Hungarian reign of terror, or as they liked to call themselves, the “fist of the [Communist] Party”, but rather the contextual difference is due to a necessarily – and functionally – different viewpoint. In this volume, this

<sup>7</sup> Although his compatriot, Colonel R. Kukliński rendered more important services (on the level of Kim Philby) by smuggling “an archive” of secret information on the Polish armed forces and the Warsaw Pact, we chose Światło because unlike Światło, who was employed at the secret service, Kukliński was a military officer and we did not wish to expand the list of defected high-ranking “moles” in this direction when they were merely mentioned as an example.

<sup>8</sup> On the Hungarian side, the person with the greatest potential to accomplish such a feat would have been one András Tömpe, who was a “borrowed guest worker” of the Soviet secret service operating as Moscow’s South American resident in the 1950s. Upon his “return” in the first decade of the Kádár era, he became the grey eminence of the de-Stalinization of the Hungarian secret service and then served as the East-Berlin ambassador of the People’s Republic of Hungary, but after the bloody “brotherly intervention” in the Prague Spring of 1968, he resigned from office, returned to Hungary and committed suicide.

is presented by a counter example analysis in which a fellow colleague scrutinizes the autobiography of one of the leaders of the Hungarian secret service, and not only exposes the self-legitimizing passages of said curriculum vitae, but also systematically unravels and decodes linguistic formulae that serve to mystify and conceal information.

A case study featured in this volume may also serve as the starting point of another conclusion. It was already well-known that the difference between the Hungarian Stalinist period – what Hungarians call the Rákosi era – and the “post-Stalinist” Kádár era was more stark than in many other European satellite states of the Soviet Union. What is less well-known is how the difference can be traced in the relationship between the reigning regime and its most faithful ally, the Hungarian secret services. While the State Security Authority was “the fist of the Party” in the Rákosi era with all the cruelty such a position entails, in the Kádár era (from the second third of the 1960s to the collapse of the system) the role of the secret service was reduced to being “the eyes and ears of the Party”, and the secret services – especially the internal reaction counter departments – saw the abolition of the practice of *immediate and sui iuris* repression as the weakness, the “revisionism” of the system. To put it differently, there was a constant behind-the-scenes tension between the secret police that upheld and sought to renew “chekist traditions” and its leader and “master”, the party leadership of the Kádár era. One contributing factor may have been that from the mid-sixties, the number of Soviet “advisors” was considerably reduced and their function changed from previous extensive interference to observer and “postal service/contact” status between Budapest and Moscow. (However, this cannot be confirmed in a satisfactory manner until the relevant Soviet sources become available.)

This volume also exposes the shortcomings of the self-proclaimed “omnipotent” secret services operating under the allegedly totalitarian system – how they could not even control their own “operative technics” enough to catch the suspects of a not very heavily conspired leaflet raid, or when it became evident that even they could not make sense of their own records on “hostile elements” categorized by various ideological criteria. However, an even greater service blunder was when, even despite routinely disregarding the law, they could not even manage to fabricate the “sabotage trial” they initiated to set an example and prove the failure of the strategically important coal mining industry to meet the goals set in the economic plan. If we were to generalize, we could say that the activities of the Hungarian secret services mirrored the peculiarities and the rhapsodic – often unpredictable – turns and changes of the communist

one-party regime. To quote a contemporary of the era, the totalitarian dictatorship and the plan-based economy of the pre-1956 Rákosi period operated as a “centralized anarchy” that constantly tried to fend off the system of irrationalities it generated by unleashing an endless string of more and more dysfunctional measures (campaigns). The “shoddy dictatorship” of the consolidated period of the Kádár era – which sought to pacify and depoliticize Hungarian society – led to an identity crisis across the secret services as they were forced to go easy even on people that they wanted to teach a lesson the good old-fashioned chekist way. A typical – but not unique – example in this volume is the case of national democratic politician Imre Kovács, whom the secret police started to observe after he was labeled “fascist” following World War II, and then received orders in the Kádár era to try and “sweet talk him into coming home” from emigration, because this would be “another victory” for Kádarian consolidation and it would confuse the ranks of Hungarian political emigration as well.

The example mentioned above allows us to revisit an issue we have only mentioned in passing. One can hardly argue that all available secret service documents are a valuable contribution to the political and historical processing and exploration of the state socialist system reigning in the second half of the 20th century; however, these are even more important for those exploring the period from a socio-historical perspective. (Without arguing whether there is or could be occasional demand for the exposure of state security agents from the perspective of collective social information compensation, this volume does not contribute to the list of *Prügelknabe* preferred by the media.) Some 81% (!) of the documents stored in the Historical Archives are about the victims who had been crucified by the system in the second half of the 20th century – people who have been observed and their characters assassinated. In comparison, only 12% of these documents inform us of institutional history *per se* (documentation of secret service protocol) and a mere 7% contains information on state security agents and secret informants.<sup>9</sup> The vast majority of sources – investigation and surveillance documents, and even the majority of gossip-heavy secret informant reports – showcase a fascinating or downright terrifying diversity of forms of social experience and suffering. In other

<sup>9</sup> György Gyarmati, *Megfigyelők és megfigyelték – társadalomtörténeti nézőpontból*. [Observers and the observed from a socio-historical perspective.] *Bárka*, 2008/6. 67–75. On the original GDR Stasi documents cf. *Staatssicherheit und Gesellschaft. Studien zum Herrschaftsalltag in der DDR*. Edited by Jens Gieseke. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2007.

words, besides contributing to political history, the secret service documents available in Hungary are a veritable socio-historical treasure trove for this particular era – after a considerable amount of patient and Sisyphean research, of course, coupled with source criticism and due adherence to professional conventions and, in some cases, intuition as well.

In the past decade, the employees of the Historical Archives have often been faced with the question of how valuable these secret service documents are as sources. There is no single pro or contra answer, and even a relative and generalized “value judgement” – deeming them “more or less authentic” for instance – will be received with justified skepticism. Nevertheless, with adequate research experience and extensive knowledge of other sources and the history of this period, the information contained in these documents can be more accurately assessed. The emphasis is on the *singularity* of every single piece of information and data contained in each document – this forms the basis of evaluation and is the deciding factor in whether we include them in historical interpretation or let them stay dead texts in the bottomless well of Thomas Mann.<sup>10</sup> Let us examine the two extremes. It is problematic to dismiss these documents altogether as inauthentic because a portion of them contains “illegitimately” acquired information and this fact affects every other document; but at the same time, we cannot accept the data and information in these documents as authentic just because they were created behind the scenes by a closed circle of like-minded insiders who had no reason or motivation to misinform themselves. Nevertheless, with extensive study of a multitude of sources, this opinion can be refuted by a plethora of counter examples in either case.

As a third case, let us make a (simplified) comparison. Are state security documents less authentic than triumphant communications of the completion of one-year or five-year economic plans, or the self-legitimizing and self-soothing party conventions reports? Are the closing statements of farming collectives issued to higher authorities, corporate balance sheets, council campaign reports or trade union mood reports more authentic? All mentioned institutions were prone to positive self-representation – face-lifting, if you will – to avoid a negative image and the risk of having to account for their activities. We do not mean to say that the above mentioned documents are useless as a whole, but rather that, even when it comes to factual information, the same page can

<sup>10</sup> The first two sentences of Thomas Mann’s *Joseph and His Brothers*: “Very deep is the well of the past. Should we not call it bottomless?”



contain both real and questionable data and statements, and historians must sort through them in order to reconstruct the past. In comparison, the function of state security bodies within the system was to engage in the reconnaissance and investigation of undesirable, deviant or downright hostile phenomena, which would explain why – when compared to bodies mentioned above – the resulting documents showcased the negative side of events and their (private!) content presented the same phenomena and events in much darker tones. However, we cannot claim based on our sources that these documents contain nothing but historically useless information when these documents are just as much a mixture of authentic and accurate facts, false statements and biased interpretations as the material created by other forums. Regarding the characteristic tendencies in these documents, we may conclude that critical reading must reverse the “positive overtones” in the sources coming from party, state and “semi-state” bodies (such as the People’s Patriotic Front or trade unions) as well as the overtly negative dimensions of seeking hostile elements in the secret service documents examined here.

Researchers of the following topic might have an easier job – if there is such a thing – when they happen upon the following excerpt in the interrogation records of Father Ferenc Vezér: “I frequently ordered them to murder Soviet soldiers, the more the better, and report their kills to me. The members of my team followed my orders, murdering approx. 30 Soviet soldiers and regularly reporting these killings to me. I constantly emphasized that killing Soviet soldiers is not a sin, and if they confess their killings to me, I will grant them absolution. [...] In this manner, I even used the confessional to aid me in my crimes. [...] Besides the above mentioned crimes, I ordered my »militia« to protect the valuables of fascist László Endre and other land owners in Pálósszentkút from the proletariat. To this end, we searched the homes of the proletariat so we could save the fortunes of the absent landlords. In my sermons, I attempted to intimidate democratic elements and exposed them to ridicule on the pulpit.”<sup>11</sup> This record is formally authentic inasmuch as these are the exact contents, though the actual amount of truth therein is certainly problematic. It is highly improbable that the defendant would have used the above quoted formulae in the “admission” of his crime, and even less believable that he would have voluntarily “profaned” his own position as a clergyman in this manner. We may assume that no one would want to experience the interrogation techniques used by State Security Captain János Komlós –

<sup>11</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-96674/3. 140–154. Literal translation by É. M.

head coryphaeus of the “socialist cabaret” two decades later in the Kádár era – to force captives to sign a host of similar interrogation records that were used to sentence to death and execute the above mentioned Pauline monk. Such sources are more of a testament to the ways in which the secret police managed to produce so many “enemies of the system” primarily in the first half of the 1950s – the period of “increased vigilance” in the Cold War – and used prosecution and the court to incarcerate or execute them, while they hardly help us in the reconstruction of the original events.

The source value of surviving documents from the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is a different matter. Since the most prolific “information database” after the crushed revolution was supplied by the retaliatory secret police, the majority of the massive influx of documents from the hot autumn are stored at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security; however, the data found in these investigation and trial documents are misleading in several ways. On the one hand, these documents were created to determine and ensure retribution by way of criminal trials, and on the other, those prosecuted constructed “narratives” to either avoid the foreseeable consequences or at least mitigate the severity of their sentence. Furthermore, the retrospective, incriminatory “reconstructions of events” and the exonerating “expository confessions” do not share a root vector of “the truth is in between” because the questions asked during investigations were laden with prejudicated falsehoods and the answers attempted to avoid stating facts in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons. Therefore, since this nearly immeasurable amount of investigation and trial documents comprises the vast majority of sources on the fall of 1956, it is uncertain how much these various confabulations, created in the ways mentioned above, have to do with actual events.

In the past one and a half or two decades, once secret service documents became available, the issues outlined above were inevitably influenced by the fact that there was also a *demand beyond academia* to overwrite the “counter revolution” axiom of the collapsed system and reconstruct the past in “revolutionary” ways. In order to restore collective self-pride and gain recompense so that “shame and hurt [could] now be washed away like dirt”, it was necessary to restore the integrity of those whose character had been assassinated, and to – indirectly – seek help from researches to found claims for material recompense and demands for pension supplements. Although the latter considerations can and should be respected, in comparison with the disciplinary requirements of historical science, these belong more in the category of maintaining a sense of



national identity or, as Gábor Gyáni put it, “even in the modern era, there is fervent demand for mythical narratives of the past”.<sup>12</sup> It still remains to be seen whether distancing ourselves from the events in time will offer a (more) reliable control standpoint or “method” of distilling the 30-40 year-old memory constructs – oral histories *conditioned by the moment of recording* – and the false or downright forged information of documents created in the process of retribution to arrive at an accurate, authentic picture. This constantly poses a two-fold problem. One problem is that the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is still in the realm of “the recent past” – mostly on account of its repercussions – and more time must pass before it becomes history and can thus be examined as such. The other problem is that when it comes to the history of the revolution, we would have to dip into the granary of apocrypha mass-produced by the falsehood factory of the secret police to separate the wheat from the chaff. While it may seem that the basic *political-historical* schemata of the Hungarian autumn of 1956 has been deciphered and can be reconstructed with traditional historical methods (as well), the *social history of the revolution* is still very hazily mapped despite our attempts to convince our readers that the Historical Archives is a veritable source depository of the multitude of social experiences. We hardly think there is a single relevant Archimedean point to be found, but – in our opinion – this is a real problem that we and future generations will have to face for quite some time.

It is worth mentioning two more issues before we conclude our introduction. One of them is the – temporary (?) – singularity of secret service documents as historical sources. There is a multitude of examples to choose from, including the Hungarian *Provida* movement inspired by the encyclical letter *Provida Mater* by Pope Pius XII in 1947. The participants left no traces of their activities – since they were *ab ovo* involved in a conspiracy –, so the only traces are those collected by the secret services during arrests and house searches.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, only the secret police documented the *sub rosa* agreement between the state security bodies and the superior general of the Society of Jesus – one of the religious orders that was forced to operate underground after its dissolution in Hungary (as well) –, which ensured that the order was implicitly acknowledged but left to vegetate in peace; in fact, the agreement was

<sup>12</sup> Gábor Gyáni, Mítoszban, folklórban és történelemben elbeszélt múlt. [Narrating the past in myth, folklore and history.] In *Folklór és történelem*. [Folklore and history.] Edited by Szemerényi Ágnes. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2007. 7–17.

<sup>13</sup> Péter Bertalan, *Provida Mater. Egy rejtőzködő enciklika magyarországi utóélete*. [Provida Mater: The Hungarian repercussions of a lurking encyclical letter.] Palatia, Győr, 2009.

even approved by the general of the Society in Rome.<sup>14</sup> The above mentioned examples remain “singular” until the relevant sources – their counterparts – become available at the Secret Archives of the Vatican. However, there is also another extreme of the conspiracies against the single-party communist system and the secret service treatment of different thinking (dissidence). In the ice age of the Cold War – especially until Stalin’s death –, the Hungarian secret services issued a slew of investigations of anti-system organizations. Although there had indeed been such organizations,<sup>15</sup> the majority of these investigations were launched by an overzealous secret police trying to prove its “increased vigilance” and systematic operation – or, to put it simply, they used their most cruel methods to make a mountain out of a non-existent proverbial molehill. Based on the secret service documents alone, one would think that “the whole country was in permanent resistance and revolt” when the actual resistance potential of that era was very much the reverse<sup>16</sup> – not to mention that this would historically justify the multitude of miscarriages of justice committed by the State Security Authority using chekist methods under the reign of terror of General Secretary Mátyás Rákosi. This sort of “singularity” can be misleading even in high numbers and would lead to documenting the extent of terror, rather than the extent of social resistance.

Another conclusive remark pertains to the critical treatment of secret service documents as sources and to our research and methodological experience with the reconstruction of the past. While in general practice only a small portion of state security documents were archived due to the destruction of documents in different periods and for different reasons, researchers may get the (first) impression that the secret services might have known more of investigated cases and target groups than the observed people themselves. (This impression is mainly due to the extensive coverage of churches, the more important centers of Hungarian emigrations abroad, the dissident organizations of the opposition in the 1980s and the largely intellectual-dominated institutions and civil social circles.) Nevertheless, we argue that this is a “trick of history”, a Hegelian paradox – the secret

<sup>14</sup> Gábor Bánkúti, *Jezsuiták a diktatúrában. A Jézus Társasága Magyarországi Rendtartománya története, 1945–1965*. [Jesuits under the dictatorship. The history of the Hungarian Province of the Society of Jesus, 1945–1965.] L’Harmattan–JTMR–ÁBTL, Budapest, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Sándor Őze, *Magyar parasztkallada. Fehérgárda a Dél-Alföldön*. [Hungarian peasant ballad: The White Guard in Dél-Alföld.] Hódmezővásárhely Önkormányzata, Hódmezővásárhely, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Tamás Meszerics, Politikai ellenállás [Magyarországon] 1945–1956. [Political resistance (in Hungary) 1945–1956.] *Beszélő*, 2000/8–9. 74–84.

services preferred to seem “omniscient”, and affected members of the subjugated Hungarian society may have harbored such illusions about them, but this was very far from the truth. This is simply a matter of the current generation of – lucky – researchers possessing and familiarizing themselves with an “aggregated database” of amassed information the likes of which was never simultaneously available to the contemporary secret police itself, not even when these documents had been in their possession. As a result of the divided and hierarchical structural-operational order of the “business”, the obligation of confidentiality – even among employees – forming part of the inner service drill and the way organizational units hastily spliced the received and available information together, “they didn’t even know what they could have known”. Researchers examining this issue today are theoretically unhindered by the – self-imposed – logistic obstacles of the secret police, and should they acquire enough research experience to navigate through this information labyrinth “structurally oversimplified” by its creators and operators, they will be able to use the surviving pieces of the puzzle to reconstruct a largely authentic historical overview.<sup>17</sup> This is how the historian becomes (or may become) the – almost – omniscient “creator” of the past.

In conclusion, we argue that secret service documents are indispensable sources on the decades of Hungarian state Socialism; however, there is no general “recipe” for their application in the reconstruction of said time period. The “true/false” binary logic of science can only be applied with individual but contextualized source criticism, including constant comparison with a multitude of different types of sources stored elsewhere. When these sources are “voiced” and contextualized within a period and situation, they are just as useful in the reconstruction of past events as any other sources of the era containing interpretive catches or other confabulatory elements.

*The Editors*  
*Translated by Éva Misits*

<sup>17</sup> It was this limitation on vigilance, secrecy (and rivalry) within the business that allowed József Antall Jr. – Prime Minister of Hungary between 1990–1993 – to escape prosecution for teaching high school history “in a nationalist spirit” in the 1960s. János M. Rainer, *Jelentések hálójában. Antall József és az állambiztonság emberei, 1957–1989*. [In a web of reports – József Antall and the shattered mirrors of state security men, 1957–1989.] 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 2008. Such short circuits in the flow of information between certain departments of the secret services also presented a way out for Kim Philby – although his “mole status” had been confirmed in London, he had enough time to make his escape to Moscow.