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## Astrologers and the Hungarian State Security Agency\*

Márton VESZPRÉMY

MÁRTON VESZPRÉMY  <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0626-6367>

Hungarian National Library (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár)

E-MAIL: [veszpremy@gmail.com](mailto:veszpremy@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The history of astrology in twentieth-century Hungary has not yet been a subject of research. Consequently, the attitude of Hungarian state security agency towards astrologers and astrology during the communist era is unknown – especially since the files of agents have not been made public in Hungary. In the present article, I examine the question through the cases of Sándor Raisz, András László, Zoltán Lemhényi and Viktor Juhász-Schlatter, using sources preserved in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security Services (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára). I conclude that the secret service was only interested in astrologers because they met regularly with their students, all regular and secret meetings being politically suspicious. Astrology as an illegal activity or a subject of contempt only appears in sources from the 1980s. All the astrologers discussed in my article were in one way or another opposed to the ruling communist regime. Part of the reason for this is that astrology was a popular intellectual, middle-class activity in the Horthy era, and representatives of this stratum were considered enemies of the regime after 1945. Also, the communist system represented an avowedly materialist ideology, while astrology flourished primarily among those interested in mysticism, theosophy and anthroposophy. The picture that emerges from the sources is that astrology classes were not overtly political, but their participants were nevertheless bound together by the knowledge that they were listen-

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ing to forbidden, secret teachings. In this respect, astrology can be classified as counterculture in the era. The topic also offers a valuable insight into the overlapping subcultures in twentieth-century Hungary.

**KEYWORDS:** *astrologer, history of astrology, Hungary, communist era, subculture, Buddhist Mission (Buddhista Misszió), yoga, Hungarism (ideology), far-right ideologies, political history, security agency, Ministry of Interior*

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** *astrolog, historia astrologii, Węgry, epoka komunizmu, subkultura, Misja Buddyjska (Buddhista Misszió), joga, Hungaryzm (ideologia), ideologie skrajnie prawicowe, historia polityczna, służby bezpieczeństwa, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych*

## Introduction: Astrology in Hungary<sup>1</sup>

After its rebirth in the late nineteenth century, astrology appeared in Hungary relatively late compared with the United Kingdom (1884–1914), France (c. 1900), Austria (1904/1908) and Germany (c. 1915). People able to cast a horoscope emerged for the first time in 1926/1928, but the real interest started only in the 1930s. That was when some astrologers started to advertise their services in newspapers, some of them turning out to be frauds. Astrological symbols were little known; in an analysis of the year 1938 by Eduard Lederer in a 1937 issue of the magazine *Színházi Élet* (Theatre Life), they were printed upside down.<sup>2</sup>

Serious and learned astrology arrived in Hungary from German-speaking countries; partly because of their closeness, and partly because most of the population spoke German in the double monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Apart from individual practitioners, three main 'schools' can be distinguished: the 'Berlin school', the 'Vienna school' and the Buddhist Mission (all three in the capital, Budapest).

Eduard Lederer (1883–1957) was a German mechanical engineer of Jewish origin who learned astrology in Berlin from Johannes Vehlow (1890–1956). He probably settled permanently in Hungary after Hitler came to power in 1933. By 1935, he was a well-known astrologer, whose interviews and articles often appeared in the papers. His students included textbook-author Imre Alpáry (1895–1957), Viktor Juhász-Schlatter (1901–1996) and Endre Balogh (1919–2012).

The second school originated with László Györfly (1879–1955). He learned astrology from the famous Austrian textbook-author Friedrich Schwickert

<sup>1</sup> For more information and detailed references, see (in Hungarian) Veszprémy 2019, 62–96.

<sup>2</sup> "Mit mond Önnek az asztrológia 1938-ra" ["What Astrology Predicts for You in 1938"]. *Színházi Élet*, 1937, 52: 257–268.



(1857–1930), who visited Györfly in Budapest in May 1928. The Nazi occupation of Austria drove the Austrian astrologer and anthroposopher Paul Regenstreif (1899–1981) – also of Jewish origin – to Budapest in 1942. He came into contact with Györfly and managed to survive the world war, the far-right Hungarian (nyilas) terror and the siege of Budapest. It was through Györfly that László Dubravszky (1905–1999) came to know Regenstreif and became a student of both of them.

The third school came to existence in 1956 with the establishment of the Buddhist Mission (Buddhista Misszió) in Budapest, where astrology was taught during the communist era as ‘cosmobiology’. Several people taught astrology at the Buddhist Mission, the most prominent being Sándor Raisz (1896 – after 1974) and Károly John (1926 – between 1986/89). Loosely connected to the Buddhist Mission was the noted art historian, Indologist, and astrologer Ervin Baktay (1890–1963).

Astrological life in interwar Hungary was colourful, lively, and free. The birth horoscopes of leading politicians (such as Kuno Klebelsberg and Gyula Gömbös) were printed in the press – although only after their tenure.<sup>3</sup> (Nobody, however, dared cast a horoscope for the birth or ascent to power of the governor, Miklós Horthy<sup>4</sup>). The authorities very rarely acted against astrologers – only when complaints from the public clearly pointed to a fraudulent imposter.<sup>5</sup> The press showed a keen interest in astrology, mainly its popular political predictions rather than the technical or philosophical details. However, unlike the trends in Germany or Austria, there was no dedicated astrological organisation or journal in Hungary. The very few (ca. six) astrologers in the country of 8.6 million had no need of one. This function was fulfilled by the Hungarian Theosophical Society (Magyar Teozófiai Társulat), founded

<sup>3</sup> “A te csillagod...” [“Your Star...”] *Színházi Élet*, 1932, 4: 52–54, 52; Konkoly 1936, 14; Györfly 1935, 269–276. According to Marc Edmund Jones (1888–1980), Gömbös was born at midnight on the night of 25–26 December. Györfly therefore made two errors: firstly, when he set the horoscope to 0:00 p.m. instead of 0:00 a.m., and secondly, when he shifted the (already incorrect) birth time by a further 55 minutes or so as a ‘rectification’.

<sup>4</sup> At least publicly. Horthy’s birth data can be found on a slip of paper in Ervin Baktay’s estate, from Eduard Lederer. Veszprémy 2018, 18–41, 21–22, note 20.

<sup>5</sup> There were so few of these cases that the press had to make them up. The *Budapesti Hírlap* reported the case of a certain Ferenc Kádár in 1911, 1924 and 1933. In all three decades, the astrologer, who worked in Csalogány Street, deceived the widow Johanna Sélinger, who had turned to him. Their names do not appear in any other sources: the amusing story existed exclusively in the pages of the newspaper. *Budapesti Hírlap*, 31. évf., 101. sz., 30 April 1911, 52; *Budapesti Hírlap*, 44., évf. 64. sz., 16 March 1924, 13; –ázs: “Mit üzent a Jupiter?”. [“What Does Jupiter Say?”]. *Budapesti Hírlap*, 53. évf., 86. sz., 16 April 1933, 34.



in 1906,<sup>6</sup> and the Hungarian Metapsychical Scientific Society (Magyar Metapszichikai Tudományos Társaság), founded on 17 October 1932.<sup>7</sup>

This flourishing of astrology came to an abrupt end with the rise of the communist regime in 1945–1948. Newspaper articles and public lectures typical of the earlier period appeared again only during the Kádár regime's period of the *détente* in the second half of the 1960s. While seven astrology books by well-known authors were published between 1935 and 1944, after 1947, no more appeared until shortly before the change of regime in 1988. Astrology books and lecture notes were distributed from hand to hand in type-written copies. The Iron Curtain also put an end to the formerly lively Austro-Hungarian astrological relations: László Dubravszky and Sándor Belcsák, President of the Austrian Astrological Society, met for the first time in 1990.<sup>8</sup>

Until now, no research has been done on the history of astrology in twentieth-century Hungary. It is generally assumed that astrology was forbidden during the communist era and astrologers were under surveillance by the regime, but as the files of agents were not made public in Hungary, the issue is lost in conjecture, supposition and suspicion. For this article, I have sought out reliable sources on the attitude of the security agency towards astrologers and astrology during the communist dictatorship. I conducted research at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security Services (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára). My search of all the relevant material turned up much fewer usable sources than I expected, mostly documentation related to cases that were already known. In the meantime, however, I was given access to the estate of Viktor Juhász-Schlatter (1901–1996), the most important student of the famous astrologer Eduard Lederer, which compensated for the scarcity of official sources.<sup>9</sup> Here, due to lack of space, I give only brief accounts of the four cases with the richest source material: those of Sándor Raisz, András László, Zoltán Lemhényi and Viktor Juhász-Schlatter.

<sup>6</sup> Its statutes were approved by the Minister of the Interior on 21 October 1906. *Budapesti Közlöny*, 40. évf., 244. sz., 21 October 1906, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ujság*, 8. évf., 234. sz., 18 October 1932, 7. According to an interview from 1923, Vilmos Torday had wanted to found the society earlier, but the Minister of the Interior did not approve it. f. m.: “Négyszemközt az élet titkának kutatójával. Beszélgetés Torday Vilmostal, a magyar metapszichikusok vezérével”. [“In Private with the Seeker of the Secret of Life. A Conversation with Vilmos Torday, the Leader of the Hungarian Metapsychics”] *Pesti Napló*, 74. évf., 267. sz., 25 November 1923, 3.

<sup>8</sup> And not in 1994 as is erroneously stated on the website of the László Dubravszky Foundation. [dubravszky.hu](http://dubravszky.hu). Accessed: 15.10.2017.

<sup>9</sup> I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Bernadette Juhász-Schlatter, Sándor Lakatos and Dr. Viktoria Lakatos, for giving me access to the estate of ‘Uncle Viktor’.



## A jailed astrologer predicts the end of the system: Sándor Raisz

The only major criminal investigation involving astrology began in 1954. The setting was Komló in Baranya County, and the five main characters in this sometimes somewhat comical case were Tamás Diósi and his wife, Diósi's friend Árpád Halász and his wife, and Magda Tóth.

The case, with 470 pages of investigative material<sup>10</sup> and 62 participants, began in April 1952 at the Electrical Appliances and Instruments Factory (Elektromos Készülékek és Műszerek Gyára) in Kispest, a suburb of Budapest, where Sándor Raisz, an astrologer released from prison, was working as a warehouse clerk.<sup>11</sup> It was here that he was introduced to Mrs. Halász, née Erzsébet Langmár, who later introduced him to her husband, who in turn introduced him to Tamás Diósi. Diósi studied astrology with Raisz, but it is not clear from the sources how long or to what depth. In any case, Diósi and his future wife began to believe seriously in astrology. The extent of the friendship and trust between Sándor Raisz and the couple is shown by the fact that on 20 August 1954, Raisz was the Diósis' witness at their wedding.<sup>12</sup> It was in the town of Komló, however, rather than in Budapest, that events were to unfold. Diósi, a geologist, had been offered a mining job there and asked Raisz whether he should accept it. Raisz, who had served his prison sentence in the Balinka mine<sup>13</sup> and had learned the trade, advised him to accept.<sup>14</sup>

Sometime in the autumn of 1954, between the marriage and the beginning of the investigation in November, Raisz cast a horoscope for the political system of the time, and predicted that it would fall between February and May 1955, or by July at the latest. Raisz predicted that the end of the regime would not be a political turnaround, but an economic collapse.<sup>15</sup> As to what kind of political system would replace it, Raisz could not say for sure, but he thought it would be more of the 'Western type'. (Raisz made

<sup>10</sup> Investigation of Tamás Diósi and his associates. Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára (Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security Services, henceforth ÁBTL) 3.1 9. V-139885.

<sup>11</sup> For Raisz's background, see Veszprémy 2019, 75–77.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Baranya County Department, Komló Municipal Police Headquarters, witness interrogation report (10 January 1955). ÁBTL 3.1 9. V-139885. 342.

<sup>13</sup> See Veszprémy, 2019, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Report (20 January 1955) 212-6787. ÁBTL 3.1 9. V-139885. 217.

<sup>15</sup> This fact is mentioned in numerous reports and testimonies (among others: ÁBTL 3.1 9. V-139885. 38., 61., 66.)



no secret of the fact that he felt more comfortable with the pre-1945 system, because he was better off then.) The Diósi family had by then been working for some time in Komló, where Diósi spoke with great enthusiasm about astrology to three or four of his acquaintances, and mentioned Raisz's prediction. From there, it was a straight road to the investigation. On 15 December, Diósi's house was searched and various astrological materials were seized, including Hitler's horoscope (surprisingly, this later played no part in the investigation.) After the search, Diósi's wife, Éva Gersi, wrote a letter to one of her family members, scribbled in pencil on a piece of paper, asking them to inform Raisz of the incident and to have him check the horoscope of the disturbing event.<sup>16</sup> She also asked that the letter be burned immediately. (Typically, this letter also came into the possession of the security agency.)

From then on, Sándor Raisz, whose name appears on every third page of the case files, played no role in the events or the investigation. In December 1954, the information available on him was requested for the investigation,<sup>17</sup> but he was not summoned. Although the original charge was "incitement against democracy", astrology played no role in the later course of the case. (Diósi defended himself by claiming that he had done everything under the influence of Sándor Raisz). At the end of the overall somewhat comical and petty case, only Árpád Halász was sentenced to 4 years in prison.

## **Hungarist in the Buddhist Mission: András László**

The most serious investigation of an astrologer concerned András László (1941–).

András László is not primarily known as an astrologer, but in the early 1960s he played an important role in the astrological life of the Buddhist Mission. He enrolled at the Buddhist Mission Seminary on 16 May 1960.<sup>18</sup> It was around this time that he met Sándor Raisz, the Mission's astrology teacher, and he also knew Zoltán Lemhényi, the protagonist of our third case.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Mrs Tamás Diósi, née Éva Gersi (15 December 1954). ÁBTL 3.1 9. V-139885 73.

<sup>17</sup> Questionnaire concerning the person of Sándor Raisz (Komló, 28 December 1954). ÁBTL 3.1 9. V-139885 368/1.

<sup>18</sup> Report of Police Lieutenant Béla Kacsik (Budapest, 9 February 1961) Ministry of the Interior, Subdivision II/2-e. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525/a 278.



András László was a convinced Hungarist<sup>19</sup> as early as 1954, partly due to the influence of his maternal uncle Kálmán Baross (1909–?).<sup>20</sup> He had read Hitler's *Mein Kampf* at the age of 15,<sup>21</sup> although he denied this during later confessions.<sup>22</sup> In 1959, he met two friends, Zoltán Tárkányi and Kubányi,<sup>23</sup> in the Buddhist Mission. Together with a few other boys of their age they formed the nucleus of a group of 6–12 people, of varying size, who are referred to in official records as the 'Young Hungarists' or 'District XI Gang', and who came under surveillance by the secret service in September 1960. The investigation was triggered by the fact that László, the group's political 'mouthpiece', had proposed the formation of an Arrow Cross party that could 'take power' if the opportunity arose. During their conversations, László often gave evidence of his anti-Semitic views;<sup>24</sup> he spoke with high regard of Ferenc Szálasi, Hungary's Fascist dictator,<sup>25</sup> and of Hitler, whose horoscope he had also cast.<sup>26</sup> On 21 October, the authorities arrested Zoltán

<sup>19</sup> Hungarism (hungarizmus) was a far-right ideology in Hungary between 1930 and 1945, in many respects similar to Nazism. Its main ideologist was Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the Arrow Cross Party (Nyilaskeresztes párt), leader of Hungary between 16 October 1944 and 28 March 1945.

<sup>20</sup> Undated report of agent codename 'Hajdú' [Budapest, September 1961]. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-17524/1 131/1. Kálmán Baross is referred to in the reports as a pilot captain and a friend of Ferenc Szálasi, Hungary's right-wing war criminal dictator. Report of agent codename 'Hajdú' to Subdivision II/5-a of the Ministry of the Interior (Budapest, 18 February 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525/a 285.

<sup>21</sup> Report of agent codename 'Hajdú' (Budapest, 2 January 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-17524 140–141., report of agent codename 'Hajdú' (Budapest, 4 January 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525 205, ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-17524 151.

<sup>22</sup> Interrogation report of András László (20 September 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525 558.

<sup>23</sup> His first name in the sources is variously given as Géza, Gábor or László. Probably Géza is correct, cf. the report of Police Lieutenant Béla Kacsik (Budapest, 9 February 1961) Ministry of the Interior, Subdivision II/2-e. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525/a 278.

<sup>24</sup> Undated report of agent codename 'Hajdú' [Budapest, September 1961]. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-17524/1 132–132/1, interrogation report of András László (20 September 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525 566., interrogation report of András László (25 September 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525 573., report of agent codename 'Hajdú' to Subdivision II/5-a of the Ministry of Interior (Budapest, August 1961. 10.). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525/a 473., interrogation report of Attila Krompaszky (September 1961 27.). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525 621.

<sup>25</sup> Interrogation report of Attila Krompaszky (27 September 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525 621., interrogation report of Zoltán Tárkányi (28 September 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525 593., report of agent codename 'Hajdú' (Budapest, 29 August 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-17524/1 87., undated report of agent codename 'Hajdú' [Budapest, September 1961]. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-17524/1 132–132/1.

<sup>26</sup> Report of agent codename 'Hajdú' (Budapest, 29 August 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-17524/1 87, report of agent codename 'Hédi Hamvas' (Budapest, 14 September 1961). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525



Tárkányi, who from then on wrote reports under the codename ‘Hajdú’.<sup>27</sup> In 1961, the group was joined by Klári Hajdú, a former classmate of László in primary school. Her reports, written under the codename ‘Hédi Hamvas’, were used by the secret service to check the authenticity of the information received from ‘Hajdú’. The seriousness of the investigation is shown by the fact that the members of László’s circle were followed in the street, watched and photographed, and their phones tapped. The archives of the case run to more than a thousand pages.<sup>28</sup> The group’s ‘activity’ consisted mostly of night-time revels and singing Hungarian songs. They tried to obtain three revolvers,<sup>29</sup> but failed to do so.<sup>30</sup>

By September 1961, the security agency also felt it had gathered enough evidence. A coordinated search was carried out on the members of the group, the boys were arrested and the minor players in the case were summoned to the Gyorskocsi Street prison for questioning. László was the only member of the group to be sentenced; the others were released. As a result of his arrest, the secular branch of the Buddhist Mission was suspended for a year from 5 October 1961.<sup>31</sup>

The above illustrates both that some of the people who grouped around the Buddhist Mission were explicitly right-wing, and that the communist secret service thoroughly investigated and cracked down on all right-wing groups – even if they were a basically frivolous and harmless group of half a dozen twenty-year-olds. The reason why the state security agency took such strong action against László’s circle was because of fears that they were linked to Árpád Henney, the leader of the Arrow Cross emigration abroad, or other Hungarists (the investigation was partly aimed at uncovering these alleged links, but was unsuccessful in this respect).

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512. László became acquainted with Hitler’s birth horoscope from a West German astrological publication, which the investigating authorities obtained and had copied and translated. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525/a 500.

<sup>27</sup> Agent codename ‘Hajdú’ was a member of the Buddhist Mission from 1959 to 1961, sending reports from November 1960 until his emigration to Italy in 1972. His name often appears on the typed documents with a short ‘u’ in the form ‘Hajdu’. I use the version with a long ‘ü’ throughout this article.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Young Hungarists’. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525., ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525/a, ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525/b.

<sup>29</sup> Report of agent codename ‘Hajdú’ (Budapest, 24 November 1960). ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-17524 76.

<sup>30</sup> Report of agent codename ‘Hajdú’ (Budapest, 24 November 1960). ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11525 105.

<sup>31</sup> Szamosközi 2010, 29, 76–77. Thanks to Béla Kelényi for making the manuscript available to me!





## A cautious dissident: Zoltán Lemhényi

In 1959, the authorities turned their attention to Zoltán Lemhényi (1919–2022), who they suspected was the leader of a large opposition group. Lemhényi was a lawyer who had been disbarred because of his support for the revolution of 1956, and during the period under discussion, he worked as a swimming and water polo trainer and weightlifting coach. He also practised yoga, and was an instructor for a time. Lemhényi took his astrology exam at the Buddhist Mission in January 1960.<sup>32</sup> He then applied for an official licence to practise astrology, but was told by the Council of District V that he did not need a licence and was free to practise astrology.<sup>33</sup>

Lemhényi was put under secret surveillance on 12 October 1959.<sup>34</sup> An internal document on him states that:

During the application of external surveillance, we found that he was in contact with many young people. The monitoring of these young people is ongoing. During the external monitoring, but also before, we were convinced that he is very careful and circumspect. According to several reports by agent codename 'Hámori', he organises and leads excursions for his group in the spring and autumn months, during which nationalist and chauvinist scout songs are sung and scout activities are held. Some of the young people are of class alien origin and have criminal records. Dr. Zoltán Lemhényi has no job and supports himself through astrology. He is a member of the Buddhist Mission and, according to our information, is its priest. Further secret agent and operational work is required to more thoroughly investigate and document Dr. Zoltán Lemhényi's hostile activities. It is necessary to establish, by infiltrating young people, the specific hostile, anti-democratic activities of the people at meetings and on excursions.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Report of agent codename 'Tarcsey' to Subdivision V of the Political Investigation Department of the Budapest Police Headquarters (Budapest, 6 February 1960). ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-20358/1 192. In the second half of 1960, Lemhényi ceased to attend the courses of the Buddhist Mission, for which he was repeatedly called to account.

<sup>33</sup> Report of agent codename 'Tarcsey' to Subdivision V of the Political Investigation Department of the Budapest Police Headquarters (Budapest, 10 February 1960). ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-20358/1 198., ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11198 114. 111.

<sup>34</sup> Operational file of Zoltán Lemhényi. ÁBTL 2.2.1. VI/2. box 4.

<sup>35</sup> Police Lieutenant Róbert Benjamin: Proposal. (Budapest, 26 September 1960) Budapest Police Headquarters, Political Investigation Department, Subdivision V, Group b. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11198/1 9.

Lemhényi was a member of the Regnum Marianum scout troop before 1945. Those who returned from Austria with amnesty. Budapest Police Headquarters III/II-A subdivision. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-17052 3.



Although they moved in similar circles, Lemhényi was much more serious and cautious than András László. Lemhényi used his old, no longer current address for official business. He deliberately avoided meeting his young friends so as not to arouse suspicion. However, agents were everywhere, and the secret service managed to introduce two agents into Lemhényi's circle, making all his caution futile. Although Lemhényi had no way of knowing it, sometimes both of his conversational partners at three-person evening meetings reported what was said: his old acquaintance Miklós Bauer, under codename 'Miklós Bakos',<sup>36</sup> and Sándor Verebély as 'Tarcsay'.<sup>37</sup> Lemhényi was somewhat more realistic and practical than András László, and less captive to ideologies. The only ideological reference in the investigative material dealing with his person is that Lemhényi wanted to introduce 'Turanian' philosophy after the forthcoming regime change, but he did not specify what this consisted of.

Although Lemhényi was interrogated once on the pretext of his short defection to Austria,<sup>38</sup> his case was closed on 15 May 1961 for lack of evidence.<sup>39</sup> All they could establish was that he was not working (making him, in official terminology, a 'publicly dangerous shirker').<sup>40</sup> He defected to Sweden in 1970.<sup>41</sup>

There are several similarities between Lemhényi and András László: neither of them built a career, both of them concentrated on anti-establishment 'organising', but this only consisted of meeting young people and keeping alive hostile feelings against the existing regime. Although they were both politically phantasmagorical and their 'organising' posed no real threat to the regime, the memory of 1956 was still too close for the communist leaders not to feel threatened. Both were followed in the streets, and their phones were tapped.

<sup>36</sup> For more on him, see (in Hungarian): Takács 2015, 5–21, 17.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on him, see the following Hungarian-language blog post: Levente Koós. *Az ügynök halála* ["Death of the Agent"]. [besugnak.blog.hu/2019/01/24/az\\_ugynok\\_halala\\_807](https://besugnak.blog.hu/2019/01/24/az_ugynok_halala_807). Accessed: 12.06.2021.

<sup>38</sup> Lemhényi spent the month of December 1956 in Austria. During his interrogation, Lemhényi openly admitted his hostility to the current political system and argued at length with the interrogating officer, who tried to convince him that only the communist system could bring happiness to the Hungarians.

<sup>39</sup> Operational file of Zoltán Lemhényi. ÁBTL 2.2.1. VI/2. box 4.

<sup>40</sup> In Hungarian 'közveszélyes munkakerülő', KMK for short.

<sup>41</sup> The source of the data is László Végh's chronology of events. See Kürti 2018, 255. Lemhényi's decision was influenced by the fact that he did not own his own home. After being disbarred by the Bar Association, he had no means of support, and was supported by friends. In Sweden, Lemhényi worked, for example, as a stevedore in the harbour, a job made possible by his strong physique. In his old age, he lived on a Swedish state subsidy and would have liked to move back to Hungary. Personal communication from László Végh (26 May 2021).



## A vegetarian astrologer: Viktor Juhász-Schlatter

The fifteenth of January 1953 was a turning point in the life of Viktor Juhász-Schlatter (1901–1996). It was the day he became acquainted with the book *Sorsunk és a csillagok* (Our Fate and the Stars) by I. van Tromp, the pen name of Imre Alpáry.<sup>42</sup> Having read van Tromp's book, he started to search for the astrologer from whom the author had learned astrology, and he joined Eduard Lederer's course on 1 March 1955.<sup>43</sup> A year and a half later, on 6 November 1957, he began teaching astrology, as his master had entrusted him with one of the classes due to illness.<sup>44</sup> Lederer died next month, and Viktor Juhász-Schlatter was asked by some of Lederer's students to continue teaching their group.<sup>45</sup> After his retirement, at the age of 60, he was able to devote his full time to astrology.<sup>46</sup> Uncle Viktor, as his students called him, held his astrology classes every weekday in his apartment at 24 Fehérvári Road, for small groups of ten or so people.<sup>47</sup> Although he generally avoided politics, the participants were bound together by a sense of secret solidarity against the official materialist ideology of the ruling political system.<sup>48</sup>

In the early summer of 1981, two members of one of his groups were summoned to the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>49</sup> Their names could only have been known to the authorities if another member of the group was writing secret reports. Viktor Juhász-Schlatter, who made political statements in his classes on one or two occasions, hinted to at least one member of the group

<sup>42</sup> The estate of Viktor Juhász-Schlatter. The estate is owned by the family, the individual documents are not inventoried and they do not have a shelf mark. Due to the relatively large volume of the estate and the short time available for research, I have not been able to do this work, but I will continue to indicate when a document in the family's possession is the source of information.

<sup>43</sup> The estate of Viktor Juhász-Schlatter.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid..

<sup>45</sup> Personal communication from László Torvaj (31 October 2020).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Uncle Viktor's first own group started on 18 September 1961. The earliest items in his collection of horoscopes date back to 1959. The estate of Viktor Juhász-Schlatter. It is a recurring motif in the biographies of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian astrologers that they only had the opportunity to delve into their favourite pastime after retirement. See the biographical sketches of Friedrich Schwicker and László Györfy in: Veszprémy 2019, 63, 69.

<sup>47</sup> We find horoscope of András László's wife Ruth (née Emma Fabók, 1938–) in Viktor Juhász-Schlatter's collection of horoscopes at the year 1978, and her name is on the list of ephemeris subscribers, so it is likely that she attended astrology classes with him, or at least visited him a few times.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication from László Torvaj (31 October 2020).

<sup>49</sup> Personal communication from Klára Szegárdy-Csengery (27 September 2018).



that there was an informer among them and said that, from the students' horoscopes, he thought he knew who it was.<sup>50</sup> He himself was questioned by the police and charged with illegal meetings.<sup>51</sup> The authorities were bothered not by the teaching of astrology, which they considered to be nonsense, but by the fact that he was meeting people in secret on a regular basis, which they considered politically dangerous.<sup>52</sup> Uncle Viktor then decided to get official permission for his activities.<sup>53</sup> In the autumn of 1981, he wrote a letter to Imre Pozsgay, Minister of Culture.<sup>54</sup> His case was forwarded to the Labour Committee of the Budapest City Council, whose Executive Council gave him permission on 6 January 1982 to give private lessons in 'cosmobiology'.<sup>55</sup>

There is no material available in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security Services relating to the 1981 case. Viktor Juhász-Schlatter's name appears only once, in a neighbourhood report from 20 years earlier. The document does not mention the teaching of astrology. The reason for this may have been that Uncle Viktor asked his neighbours not to mention his lessons to anyone.<sup>56</sup> The brief description states:

He is non-partisan, does not comment on political issues, and is passive and disinterested. He abstains from social work and events. During the counter-revolution,<sup>57</sup> he stayed in his home, did not engage in hostile activities and did not express his opinions. He leads a quiet, secluded life and does not associate with anyone outside his environment. He has no harmful habits and leads a well-ordered family life. His wife is a homemaker, a non-partisan. His political and moral conduct is beyond reproach.<sup>58</sup>

The comment about the absence of harmful habits is certainly correct: Viktor Juhász-Schlatter was a vegetarian and did not even eat eggs.<sup>59</sup> Earlier, in 1946,

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> The estate of Viktor Juhász-Schlatter.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. (Registration number of the original document: 152.266/1981). Astrology was also taught as 'cosmobiology' in the Buddhist Mission.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication from Dr. Viktória Lakatos (19 October 2020).

<sup>57</sup> The revolution of 1956.

<sup>58</sup> Environmental study on Antal di Gleria for the subdivision 4/F of Group Directorate III/I. Major János Juhász, Head of Division. Ministry of Interior III/ V 1-d subdivision. ÁBTL 3.2.4. K-1338 31. Viktor Juhász-Schlatter was indeed not involved in the events during the 1956 revolution. The reason was that his master Lederer had predicted on 26 October that the revolution would be crushed by the Russians.

<sup>59</sup> Personal communication from Klára Szegzárdy-Csengery (27 September 2018).



he had studied yoga.<sup>60</sup> There is a striking similarity with Zoltán Lemhényi, who was also a vegetarian<sup>61</sup> and also studied yoga and astrology. Whereas Lemhényi also claimed to be a disciple of Lederer,<sup>62</sup> however, Viktor Juhász-Schlatter had no connection with the Buddhist Mission.

## Conclusion

The cases presented above indicate that although the security services of the communist state considered all kinds of groups to be dangerous and kept them under surveillance, they did not specifically target astrologers. Prior to the 1980s, astrologers were only investigated by state security agency in connection with political affairs. Neither astrology itself nor confiscated horoscopes played any role in official investigations. Astrology only emerged as a despicable or downright illegal activity in the last decade of the ‘soft dictatorship’, in the 1980s.

It is more difficult to determine what role astrology played in the mentality of the people of the time. In the Buddhist Mission, interest in astrology was often associated with enthusiasm for the ‘ancient Turanian religion’ and extreme right-wing views, and I have not found any astrologers from this period who were left-wing or loyal to the system.<sup>63</sup> Part of the reason for this is that in the Horthy era, astrology was an intellectual, middle-class activity, and anyone from this stratum was considered an enemy of the regime after 1945. Also, the communist system represented an avowedly materialist ideology, while astrology flourished primarily among those interested in mysticism, theosophy and anthroposophy – intellectual currents that were born as a rebellion against the materialistic worldview of the Enlightenment.<sup>64</sup> We gain the impression from the estate of Viktor Juhász-Schlatter that astrology classes were not overtly political but their

<sup>60</sup> The estate of Viktor Juhász-Schlatter.

<sup>61</sup> Report of agent codename ‘Kaposvári’ (Budapest, 22 November 1960), Budapest Police Headquarters, Political Investigation Department, Subdepartment V. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11198/1 38.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. In the source he is called ‘Emil Lédera’, but it cannot be anyone else. Although I have not found any clear sources on this, it is possible that Lemhényi started attending the Buddhist Mission after Lederer’s death, or because of it. For chronological reasons, the Buddhist Mission, founded in 1956, successfully filled the void in the astrology education ‘market’ after Lederer’s death in 1957.

<sup>63</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that in many of the astrologers surveyed, right-wing orientation was not accompanied by religiosity.

<sup>64</sup> Veszprémy 2019, 92–93.



participants were nevertheless bound together by the knowledge that they were listening to forbidden, secret teachings. Attraction to (extreme) right-wing ideologies is a legacy that persists in the contemporary Hungarian astrology community.

The topic also offers a valuable insight into the overlapping subcultures in twentieth-century Hungary.<sup>65</sup> Their common passion for astrology brought together people interested in Steiner's anthroposophy (László Dubravszky), Jungian psychology (Endre Schnell, Jenő Kalo), yoga (Viktor Juhász-Schlatter, Zoltán Lemhényi), Eastern languages (Ervin Baktay, Ernő Hetényi, Zoltán Lemhényi), Esperanto (László Dubravszky), and poetry (Emili Móricz), Buddhists, Catholic priests and scouts (István Előd, Zoltán Lemhényi), vegetarians (Viktor Juhász-Schlatter, Zoltán Lemhényi), homosexuals (Ralph Brewster),<sup>66</sup> far-right Hungarists (András László), and organizers of 'native American' camps (Ervin Baktay). Some of these pairings are common and trivial today, like the combination of an interest in astrology, Jungian psychology, and yoga. Some are unusual and interesting, e.g. Esperanto and 'native American' nostalgia, and perhaps are the result of mere chance. And some seem at first glance highly unlikely or even contradictory, for example being a devout Catholic and a devotee of astrology at the same time. Although the Catholic Church had often expressed hostility or at least mistrust toward astrology in the past, during the communist era, both became suppressed intellectual streams, and indeed countercultures, being in conflict with the openly materialistic ideology of the ruling political system. Again, the pairing of astrology and far-right sympathies should not be viewed as necessary or self-evident, but as a result of historical development.

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<sup>65</sup> For details of the persons referred to in this paragraph, see: Veszprémy 2019; Veszprémy 2022, 33–71.

<sup>66</sup> Brewster's homosexuality is not explicitly revealed in the memoirs of his years spent in Hungary. On this question, see in Hungarian: Eszter Kiss. *Melegfiúk és melegbácsik a háborús Budapestben. Ralph Brewster, egy angol meleg memoárjaiból a negyvenes évek Budapestjéről* [“Gay boys and gay men in wartime Budapest. From the memoirs of Ralph Brewster, A gay English man in Budapest in the 1940s”]. Index. [index.hu/kultur/2019/07/06/ralph\\_brewster\\_hontalanul\\_budapesten\\_holokauszt\\_meleg\\_homoszexualis/](http://index.hu/kultur/2019/07/06/ralph_brewster_hontalanul_budapesten_holokauszt_meleg_homoszexualis/) Accessed: 29.08.2021.



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