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THE TATTOOED CHILDREN

by Bela Fabian

This article is by a former leader of the Democratic Party in Hungary. Now in the U.S. as a member of the executive committee of the Hungarian National Council, he bases it on firsthand reports that have come to him from the Hungarian underground.



Bela Fabian

IT IS always hard to make people in a free country realize what conditions really are behind the Iron Curtain. Perhaps I can do it best by telling you just one fact:

In my native Hungary today there is a boom in tattooing.

The tattooer's needle is no longer applied just to the brawny chests and arms of soldiers. Today the Hungarian tattooer does a flourishing business — with children.

So widespread has the practice become that even the Party "faithful" are having their children tattooed. With the tattoo, the Hungarian Reds themselves have confessed their basic mistrust of Moscow.

Tattooing started in Budapest when the government began the eviction and deportation of "class aliens." These are persons whom the Communists regard as socially dangerous. They are forced to leave the capital, and in many cases may not take with them any children under the age of 10. Instead, the youngsters are placed by the State in Matthias Rakosi Children's Homes, to be brought up as 100-per-cent Communists.

The same thing often happens to the children of mothers called up for military service or assigned to labor groups. The Communist agent convinces

the mother that her child will be better off in a home. He offers her money — 2,000 florins. In return for this, however, the mother must sign a paper renouncing her parental rights and placing the child under the guardianship of the home.

Many mothers, with neither relatives nor friends to turn to, have no other choice. They know it is entirely possible that the child will be recorded under a different name, and that all papers relating to his origin will be destroyed.

Yet secretly, these mothers believe that all this will some day change. The reign of terror of the Communists is bound to come to an end. When it does, they will get their children back.

Before their final separation, mother and child have the same symbols tattooed on their arms. Sometimes it is a sort of code for place and date of birth. Sometimes it is a simple, characteristic sign known only to the family.

NOT long ago a group of 300 children of high-ranking Communist functionaries was taken to the Soviet Union for education in loyalty. At least, that was the official reason. Yet some of these "children of the faithful" were also tattooed before they started their journey eastward!

It was no secret that they would never come back. The children would be held in Moscow as hostages to insure their parents' loyalty.

No one in Hungary trusts the Russians — not even the traitorous few who have worked with them. The people believe that parental love and family ties will some day prove stronger than the Iron Curtain. The tattooed children of Hungary are a grim pledge to that belief.