

# **Remembering the Hungarian Voice of Radio Canada International 1956 -1991**

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**As time goes by** memories fade away. The memories of the existence of Radio Canada International's Hungarian Section also faded away from the collective memory since its closure in 1991. So much so that today even the mainstream of the Hungarian community in Canada do not remember about its existence. As the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian revolution and freedom fight already passed — the Hungarian Section was born in Canada during those tumultuous days in Hungary — it is time to put personal recollections on paper while it is not too late, before they really fade away into the mist of time. It seems to be an urgent task since the members of the former staff are not getting younger and sadly some of them are not even with us anymore. The reason behind the political tale that follows is to enlighten future generations about some of the Canadian consequences of the Hungarian revolution and freedom fight of 1956.

Once upon a time but not so long ago the world was divided into two political entities: the capitalist world and the communism world. Life was not perfect in either of these realms but capitalism seemed to offer more to its citizens than communism. While capitalism states progressed by leaps and bounds after World War II, people in the communist camp seemed unable to improve their lot at all in spite of working hard day and night. Communism was another form of slavery sanctioned by the Communist Party. People in communist countries were slim, trim and relatively healthy. Hungarians of the times were happy to have a piece of bread and a pot full of beans with a trace of some meat or bacon. For them there were definitely “more days than sausages” as the popular adage went. The government certainly did not fatten people up on the abundant quantity of slogans at the centrally ordered meetings and forced participations in pro-communist demonstrations of the early 1950s.

Communism was paranoid and full of institutionally-generated fears. There was the fear of external attacks by the capitalist enemy as well as supposed counter-revolutionaries at home. In reality, however, what the Communists feared most was their subjects. During the “Era of Personality Cult” communist idols wanted to be as popular and revered as Gods among the people — consequently they forbade religions. This was also the time when walls had “ears” and nobody knew whom to trust. Fear was everywhere among the people too. Fear of the state security agents who could at any time come and pick them up for whatever concocted reasons. This could be followed by forced deportation, show trials, or re-education — for cruelty was the communists’ game. It is not surprising under these circumstances eventually a wildfire of rebellion swept over the Communist camp in Europe.

In Hungary it happened in October 1956. Hungarians could not take it anymore and spontaneously revolted against their cruel communist government backed by the mighty Soviet Union and its massive military force. Although Hungarians did not want to resurrect the previous regime they didn’t want the existing one either. They dreamed of a world of peace and plenty a world without cruelty and external political influences — a world of democracy.

During those glorious fall days of 1956 Hungarians fervently listened to radio programs broadcast from the Capitalist West. Among those the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe’s programs in Hungarian were the most encouraging but became a source of great disillusionment later. Canada’s newly-created Hungarian voice was always distinctly balanced, different, unique, and popular with the listeners until the very end of the total collapse of Communism in Europe in 1989. During its entire history Canada’s Hungarian Voice was always credible — distinctly Canadian representing a Canadian point of view and not serving any émigré or other political interests. What follows is a chronicle of the Canadian International Service’s Hungarian Section.

### **The Origins of Radio Canada International**

Public radio broadcasting in Canada was born in the 1930s out of fears that private broadcasting would contribute to the domination of Canadian culture by American media. Just as Canadian cinemas were increasingly dominated by Hollywood, Canadians were listening more and more to American private radio broadcasts, and when Canadian entrepreneurs went

into radio broadcasting, they were often bought out by their American competitors. There was also a problem of stations, usually American ones, interfering with the broadcasts of Canadian stations. Out of this situation was born a movement for public broadcasting in Canada. It has been said that this movement was motivated not so much by socialist ideology but by nationalist concerns.<sup>1</sup> Great many hurdles had to be overcome before a solid beginning to public broadcasting could be made. These included a court case to determine whether the Canadian federal government had jurisdiction over the airwaves. With the case settled in favour of the government in Ottawa, the way was cleared for the establishment in 1932 of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission or CRBC. The commission's chief functions were to promote Canadian "national consciousness" and to foster Canadian "national unity."<sup>2</sup> Not all radio stations in Canada became public but the CRBC was given a mandate to regulate private broadcasting ventures throughout Canada, regardless of their ownership.

The CRBC, having been created during the early years of the Great Depression, had a limited budget. It was also faced by a host of other problems. As a result, lobbying started for the creation of a stronger agency with greater income and a higher degree of independence from the government. As a result, in 1936 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation or CBC replaced the CRBC. The new agency inherited the CRBC's mandate, received an income independent of the national budget, and continued to regulate private radio broadcasting in the country.

The Second World War brought changes to the CBC, as it changed many other things in Canada. First to emerge was the idea of an overseas radio service the aim of which would be to inform Canadian troops serving in Britain and elsewhere of events in Canada. By 1941 the CBC had its own News Service broadcast over short-waves overseas, which became known for its impartiality. Next came the suggestion that there should be a multi-lingual news service for the numerous immigrant groups in Canada to be informed of the progress of the war as well as to counteract extremist (mainly leftist) propaganda. At first such a service functioned only for the printed media — and not through the CBC but within the newly created Nationalities Section of the Department of National War Services.<sup>3</sup> Also during the war the consensus emerged that Canada needed a radio service to publicize the Canadian point of view to the world. Out of these concerns arose, at the end of the war, a multilingual international service, sponsored jointly by the CBC and the federal government. This service later became Radio Canada International (RCI).

The first couple of years were taken up with such basic issues as where to locate the studios and transmitting facilities. It took about two and a half years to set up the studios in downtown Montreal and the transmitters at Sackville, New Brunswick. Montreal, being already a cosmopolitan city, seemed to an ideal location since the CBC there had an extensive production facility and plenty of available broadcasters who could handle several languages. By the end of 1944 everything was ready for test broadcasts to Europe. During the next two months a small but regular audience of Canadian troops still overseas and European listeners developed. Following these successful tests it was announced that the CBC International Service would go on air with its first real broadcast on February 25, 1945. And it did.<sup>4</sup>

At first Canada's voice was heard in three languages: English, French and German. All transmissions were targeted to Great Britain and Western Europe providing a total of six hours of daily programming. By 1946 the International Service had expanded to include regular transmissions in Czech and Dutch.<sup>5</sup> Beginning of July of the same year a special once-a-week program was broadcast to Scandinavia in Swedish and Danish and later in Norwegian as well. In November, daily broadcasts started to the Caribbean region in English. Sunday night programs were added aimed at Cuba, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador in Spanish and to Brazil in Portuguese. Daily transmissions in Spanish and Portuguese began on July 6, 1947.<sup>6</sup>

The International Service became involved with the newly-formed United Nations. As one of only a handful of international broadcasters at that time, the International Service was asked to provide transmission facilities for daily UN broadcasts. These programs were produced at the UN radio facility at Lake Success, NY in the USA and fed by phone lines to Sackville, New Brunswick. These transmissions continued until November 29, 1952 when they were transferred to larger short wave facilities run by the Voice of America.<sup>7</sup>

RCI's English service to Australia and New Zealand began in mid-1947. Italian programming started in January 1949 while a once-a-week service in Finnish began in December 1950. With the onset of the Cold War, the Russian Service was established in January 1951, followed in September 1952 by the Ukrainian and a year later by the Polish Service.

By May 1953 the "Voice of Canada" was heard in 15 different languages daily on short wave practically all over the world. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation International Service as it was called then, beamed programs to Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean region, and

also to the South Pacific: Australia and New Zealand. It had special transmissions for the Canadian Armed Forces stationed in Korea and Europe at the time.<sup>8</sup>

With the mandate to “inform the world about Canadian life and culture” Canada’s Voice was a great source of other valuable information. It provided uncensored news, comments and reports in native languages for those listeners behind the Iron Curtain who otherwise had no other sources to vital information. For Central and Eastern European listeners this was the most important aspect of the Canadian short wave programming.

### **The Hungarian Service: Program Format and Content Highlights**

Radio Canada International added the Hungarian service to its line-up in 1956 in the wake of the Hungarian uprising and freedom fight. “Itt a Kanadai Rádió Montreálból” (“Here is Radio Canada from Montreal”) was heard the first time on November 12, 1956. It was a 10 minute long newscast inserted into the Polish program broadcast twice a day, five days a week. In the beginning there were no transmissions in Hungarian on weekends. Within weeks, however, a full-fledged Hungarian Service was inaugurated with its own 15 minutes-long daily broadcast. This was increased to a 30 minutes-long daily broadcast in the fall of 1976 and stayed that way until its termination in 1991.

During its existence the set-up of the Hungarian program followed RCI’s guidelines coupled with liberty of artistic, political or religious adaptation to target area needs. The program was divided into three blocks of equal length. Five minutes each in case of 15 minutes-long broadcasts although the political segment actually added up to about 10 minutes daily. Subsequently this was upgraded to 10 minutes each when the broadcast length was raised to 30 minutes daily. By general classification it can be said that the content covered only two topics: political events and magazine type items related to any other subjects than the daily political arena.

The program always began with a centrally provided newscast followed by commentaries and press reviews picked up from different Canadian newspapers also made available centrally by RCI’s own Newsroom. They were adapted and translated into Hungarian daily. The choice was always at the discretion of the producer providing translation to this program segment. For many years Mr. Imre (James) Végh was doing this with great passion. Later this workload was divided more or less equally

between all the staff members in spite of some protests by the male colleagues. Eventually the female team proved able to deal with political subject matters just as successfully.

A colourful magazine followed the daily news and political events. At first due to a shorter broadcast time this program segment was only 5 minutes long but it was still full of information on business sports cultural and religious news and events. Some associated with Hungarians living in Canada, some connected to purely Canadian events home or abroad. In spite of its short duration there were interviews with prominent Hungarian-Canadians or visiting Hungarians from abroad. Later bilingual interviews with important Canadian artists, musicians and politicians also appeared in the program.

To mention a few major events such as Canada's centennial year festivities Expo 67, the 1976 Olympic games in Montreal, or the Commonwealth games in Winnipeg and Edmonton. Pope John-Paul II's first cross-country visit to Canada was extensively covered. So much so that a copy of related documents were requested by the Catholic Church and sent to Hungary. Cardinal Mindszenty's visit to Canada was also reported in detail but no one had asked for that coverage as far as we know. Canadian universities requested other programs and some of the major productions of RCI's Hungarian Service were deposited in key Hungarian, French and Canadian archives.

Listeners especially liked programs related to Canadian history with Hungarian links. And there were some... Beside Hungarian connections to the discovery of Canada the East Coast provided many stories of ghost ships and famous treasure hunts although not necessarily related to anything Hungarian.

Among those was the story of a mysterious woman from "Hungarian Land" Roza Braun who gave up the secret location of a gold field in Ontario to Harry Oaks. Or the story of the famous Houdini whose roots were in Hungary and a museum is dedicated to him in the province of Ontario at Niagara Falls. Then there was Blondin the ropewalker that biked over the Niagara Falls on a rope. He also visited Hungary and did the same over the Danube between Buda and the Marguerite's Island but there with Barocala on his back. Blondin founded the Városligeti Cirkusz (Circus of Városliget) in Budapest as aptly described by co-author Iván (Ivan) Fehérdy in the *Canadian Travelogue* (Kanadai útikönyv) published by Panorama in Hungary in 1985.

There were recording tours to the West coast the Canadian Prairies and the Northern regions of the country where native Canadians the

Indians and Inuit live. This is the land of the Midnight Sun the Aurora Borealis and also the great Klondike gold rush of 1896. Many programs resulted from several visits to the northern regions of Canada. There were interviews with Hungarians living in the Yukon Territories. Among them was a gold miner — did very well financially I might add — a restaurant owner and a copper miner turned lumberjack. The list is too long to mention all. These were unique experiences not only for the listeners but also for the reporters.

The history of the Canadian Prairies has numerous Hungarian connections. Hungarians who worked the land and made the region prosper settled the area of Esterhazy (Saskatchewan) in the 1880s where the Kaposvár settlement was located. The descendents of those settlers — if speaking Hungarian at all — still have the original accent of their ancestors' homeland. Visits to the area resulted in a number of popular programs and documentaries.

Alberta, the “land of the cowboys” and oil fields and the Rocky Mountains, and the province of British Columbia provided many interesting subjects from animal husbandry and the oil industry to commercial fishing at the lush Pacific shoreline and the natural beauty of the Rockies. On those trips there were some unexpected revelations like the dry sandy cacti growing region the abandoned gold mines and ghost towns on the eastern slopes of the Coastal Range in British Columbia and the related stories from famous treasure hunters and infamous ghosts of the West.

There were extensive live reports from Expo 86 that commemorated the city of Vancouver's centennial. The main theme of that world exposition was “World in Motion, World in Touch”. It also featured the next-to-last appearance at a world's fair by the Soviet Union. It was also the last world's fair in North America to date and proudly showed to the world that such an event could still be financially viable on the North American continent.

By the nature of the beast the short wave medium is not associated with music. Regardless the Hungarian broadcast always featured some music in the daily broadcast. At times to illustrate a punch line or underline a point or the musical piece had some kind of Hungarian connection. Such was the case of jazz guitarist Gábor (Gabriel) Szabó or Joe Murányi, member of Louis Armstrong's band.

Celebrated Hungarian classical musicians and conductors working in North America and such Hungarian-Canadians as Márta (Martha) Hidy conductor or Zsuzsa (Susan) Reményi harpist were featured on the Hungarian program often. One of the highlights among many was the cere-

mony of Zoltán Kodály receiving an honorary doctorate at the University of Toronto followed by a concert of Kodály's *Missa Brevis* performed by the Canadian organist of the University.

Famous Canadian composers and musicians were also presented in the Hungarian broadcast. To mention only one related tidbit is that Oscar Peterson the world-renown jazz pianist studied the "Liszt style" from professor Pál (Paul) Márki at the Université de Montréal.

The list of all the interviewees would be too long for a short presentation especially that every staff member had his or her favourites. Hence is my asking for my former colleagues forgiveness to mention only a randomly picked few. Suffice to say every strata of the Canadian society were represented from the simplest corner newspaper vendor to the most highly educated and decorated ones.

Among so many interesting encounters perhaps the most memorable were with Cardinal József (Joseph) Mindszenty, anthropologist Gyula (Julius) László, world renown humorist György (George) Mikes, writer Ephraim Kishon, the Hungarian-born successful Canadian publisher Anna Porter, composer Jenő (Eugene) Horváth, football star Ferenc (Francis) Puskás and Jenő (Eugene) Tihanyi trainer of Olympic gold medallist swimmer Alex Baumann.

Sports-related news and reports were regularly broadcast in Hungarian. Among them was the extensive coverage of the 1976 Olympic summer games in Montreal and the 1980 Olympic winter games at Lake Placid, N.Y. the Olympic winter games in Calgary and the British Commonwealth Games in Winnipeg and later in Edmonton. Our sport reporter Mr. Károly (Charles) Hlatky unexpectedly met Prince Philip at the Edmonton games and had a chance to exchange greetings when the Prince visited our studio. These were truly the golden days of glory of sport broadcasts at RCI's Hungarian Section.

There were many other programs. Again, it is just impossible to mention them all. Without exception they were all close to the heart of the reporters or producers in one-way or another. Some were easy to do others needed delicate approach but the staff always rose to the daily challenges.

### Target Audience and Milestones

The Hungarian program reached not only its target area Hungary but also the Hungarian minorities of the Carpathian Basin in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Subcarpathia, once a part of the for-

mer Soviet Union, now part of Ukraine. As audience mail revealed Hungarians residing in Western Europe, Israel, Latin America and Australia also listened regularly. At the same time there was a large audience in Canada and the United States.

In the early 1960s interest in Canada was growing leaps and bounds especially that a great number of listeners had family ties in Canada. Although the RCI's Hungarian broadcasts were "never jammed," only regularly monitored there was a time when Hungary's communist government banned personal contacts between its citizens and their friends and relatives living in Western countries. As time passed this ban became obsolete and by necessity gave way to a more open society.

Canadian experiences of modern production lines were regularly reported in the Hungarian language program. At the time this business angle generated interests in higher Hungarian political circles in regards to the new economic system being set up in the middle of 1960s. Hence foreign experiences and personal contacts deemed to be useful again.

The audience mail clearly confirmed this political change. While in 1963 there were only 50 letters from our main target area, two years later this reached 800; but it increased to 1,000 following the events of the Prague Spring of 1968.<sup>10</sup>

A statistical breakdown of the audience mail shows that all levels of society were involved but students and the over fifty generation were most prominent in numbers. This is somewhat related to parents listening on behalf of their children occupying key positions in Hungary needing regular information on Canada for it was still not really politically correct to listen by themselves.

In the 1980s Cold War seemed on its way out and *Détente* was the order of the day. As a result the RCI's Hungarian Section became a revolving door by having more direct contacts with visiting listeners from Hungary due to Expo 67 the 1976 Olympic games, as well as Canadians returning from trips to Hungary or the neighbouring areas. This brought in some interesting intelligence from behind the Iron Curtain and widened our own knowledge on many levels.

In view of growing Canadian trade relations with Eastern European countries the Hungarian broadcast regularly presented new Canadian products, publicized Canada's participation at International Book and Trade Fairs — in Budapest, Zagreb, and Brno — to name only a few. We presented important Canadian exhibitors. Among them was the famous Bombardier of Montreal, Balthes Farm Equipment of Ontario, Sicard Co. from Quebec, and MacPhar Geophysics of Ontario. According to reliable

feedbacks visitors flocked to the different Canadian exhibits following our broadcast presentations.

At that time the CBC was still the main source of information for Hungarians for the Canadian ambassador to Hungary was based in Prague. Thus Hungarians avoided direct contact with the small embassy personnel in Budapest. This resulted in a large number of requests for documentation on Canadian products. As trade relations between the two countries increased from \$3 million in 1969 to 7 million dollars in 1970 while import from Hungary represented \$9 million the same year the demand for product information grew accordingly.

In the 1980s RCI's Hungarian Section also provided assistance and documentation to visiting producers from Hungarian Radio and Television and to visiting Hungarian journalists. The Section regularly contributed key information and live programs on Hungarian subjects to the Canadian English and French Radio and Television networks and helped to organize interviews with visiting prominent Hungarians.

The first shipment of program exchange with the Hungarian Radio was dispatched in 1965. The Hungarian Radio called it a "gift program" from Canada. In the summer of 1966 the section head Mr. János (Jean) Mezei officially visited Hungary. The Department of External Affairs, the budgetary authority of the International Service at that time, approved his trip. Mr. Mezei discussed the problems of program exchange with the Hungarian Radio and TV authorities. They showed great interest in broadcasting more Canadian programs although not necessarily those made by the Hungarian Section. Nevertheless during the Centennial and Expo years the Hungarian Section sent 41 items of spoken word and music programs and also 20 segments for TV transmission.

One of the most important contributions provided a major input into a 2-1/2 hour program on Hungarian Radio. That included, among others, English and French Canadian poems translated by Hungary's best poets. "With this broadcast we wanted to underline the importance of the opening of Expo and our good relations with Canada" wrote Mrs. Szarka, head of Foreign Relations at the Hungarian Radio at the time. Every July 1st the Hungarian Radio broadcast a special Canada Day program prepared by RCI's Hungarian Section since 1966. The closure of the Hungarian Service most likely negatively influenced this tribute.

From 1968 on, a regular monthly musical program prepared by Mr. Károly (Charles) Hlatky was sent to Radio Budapest at their request. Many of these exchange programs were supplemented by printed documentation related to the subjects. The Hungarian Radio always recip-

located our shipments with contributions to the Canadian national English and French Radio network programming – in 1969 the CBC dispatched 38 hours of recorded music to Budapest while Hungary sent back 103 hours of music.

Some of RCI's major Hungarian programs to name only a few such as the one on Marius Barbeau's Canadian folk music, the first Hungarian settlements of the Canadian Prairies, or Zoltán Kodály's visit to Toronto, and others were deposited by the Hungarian Radio into the Archives of the Hungarian National Museum.

This trend continued well into the 1970s and 1980s. Family ties and such major events as the 1976 summer Olympic games in Montreal were still the most important factors in steadying our target area listeners. A five and a half hour Canadian program on Hungarian TV also generated interest in RCI's Hungarian broadcast. In spite of the wind of change short wave was still the only means to reach people in far away corners of the Carpathian Basin with unbiased news.

By now the initial daily 15 minutes program was expanded to 30 minutes. It was still the same format of a news line up, commentaries and press reviews coupled with features often in form of interviews gathered during recording tours all over the country. The newly created 30 minutes-long broadcast in 1976 although kept the same format lent itself to more details in every program segment. This was also the time when the International Service of CBC officially became Radio Canada International to distinguish between national and international radio services.

The program exchange with the Hungarian broadcasting agency continued as did the reporting and publicizing Canadian participation at different world fairs; trade shows, cultural and scientific or religious events. Providing support to visiting Hungarian professionals and dignitaries also continued.

By this time institutions in charge of Canadian-Hungarian cultural and trade relations in both countries often turned to the Hungarian Service for assistance. At times the Hungarian Section was called to render translation services for visiting Hungarian TV and radio delegations and the author was delegated to do simultaneous translations on several occasions in English and French. Among the services many were related to Place des Arts' musical programming and the Montreal International Film Festival. There was always a strong Hungarian participation at these major Canadian venues and events.

Canadian universities used some of the Hungarian Section's major documentaries in their Social Studies curriculum while Ottawa's Museum

of Man and the Musée de l'Homme de Paris, France also became depositories of RCI's most relevant Hungarian programs.

During the last 15 years of its existence the Hungarian Service also had its ups and downs, just as the RCI did. While the broadcast time was expanded to 30 minutes daily, the RCI faced financial uncertainties due to the recession. In spite of this it was the "golden era" under the directorship of Betty Zimmerman (1923–2009).

## **The Coming of the End**

In January 1989 the dynamics of the program were radically changed under Mr. Andrew Simon's directorship. The Hungarian-born Simon, a forceful character, by his own admission was kind of a trouble-shooter,<sup>11</sup> a broadcast repairman but at RCI there was little need for fixing. Nevertheless in the short-lived Simon era all RCI programs became fast-paced and animated due to more live reporting and much shorter interviews and magazine segments than before.

Other than that Mr. Simon's short rule was full of crises — mostly self-created ones. He was definitely "problem-prone."<sup>12</sup> Although his intentions were good, he did not get far with them. Nevertheless the commotion he created resulted in a negative and stressful working environment for all employees at RCI.

The collapse of Communism in 1989 led to dramatic political and economic transformations in Central and Eastern Europe and shook international broadcasting to the core. By now the RCI's days were numbered again — although for different reasons. The wind of political change blew RCI into a debate about the changed role of international radio broadcasts by smartly initiating in 1990 a decade of biennial conferences "Challenges for International Broadcasting". Six volumes of proceedings published in partnership with several Canadian universities between 1991 and 2001 provided a dynamic record of the industry's evolution during these crucial years.

Amidst of an already brewing financial turmoil the RCI started broadcasting in Arabic in 1990 as a response to the first Gulf War. Later in the same year the agency faced its toughest financial challenge. With the Canadian economy in recession the federal Conservative government made sweeping cuts to all its departments and RCI faced the serious possibility of termination.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the eventual reunification of Germany were factors in External Affairs' decision to postpone an earlier plan of closing the German Section. As the last drop into the proverbial cup Mr. Andrew Simon inadvertently created an embarrassment for then External Affairs Minister Joe Clark by his insistence on unusual alternate funding — one that never materialized. This affair resulted in the elimination not only of the German but also of the majority of RCI's other language sections, Hungarian included.

In the whole process what was perhaps the most upsetting was Mr. Simon's behaviour towards the Hungarian Section: he offered it practically on a plate as one of the first candidates for elimination.<sup>13</sup> At that moment the Hungarian staff became totally devastated. Morally the members of the Hungarian Section expected much more from a fellow countryman.

Unfortunately during its entire existence Radio Canada International was always in the middle of a financial tug-of-war between the Department of External Affairs and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. In the end, the federal government placed RCI again under the exclusive aegis of External Affairs — with funding being allocated for a period of five years. The amount was significantly less than previous grants and Canada's international voice was almost silenced. Not so long ago it had survived yet another financial crisis thus the Voice of Canada remains at least for the time being.

## **Conclusions**

We all experienced the revolution of 1956 differently depending on age and personal involvement. To some it was a life and death defining moment, for others it was a scary event underlined by a staccato of periodic gunfire. For most Hungarians it was a milestone, a short-lived total freedom for a few weeks, a bloody but bittersweet experience. The population was divided into two factions: those who would never leave the country in spite of the real possibility of grave reprisal and punishment, and those who choose freedom and the world at large. Those who left found a new home in their chosen country all over the world, Canada included.

For better or worse, the Hungarian refugees had to re-establish themselves and adopt a totally new lifestyle unknown to them until then. In spite of language difficulties most made it good in the new land. Slowly

but surely they prospered and contributed greatly to the economy and culture of their new country as the refugees became full-fledged citizens and melted into the social and economical fabric of their new homeland.

The beginning of the end for Canada's Hungarian Voice was those incredibly exciting events of 1989 when the Communist regimes crumbled and disintegrated one after the other in Europe. After that historical moment it took only two short years for the RCI's Hungarian Language Service to disappear. During this time however the Hungarian Voice of Radio Canada International significantly contributed to the development of democracy in Hungary by conveying its Canadian model to Hungarians.

The Hungarian Section existed for 35 years in glory where the employees had unconditional trust and faith coupled with unlimited creative powers as defined by RCI's mandate and guidelines. During its entire history Canada's Hungarian Voice was always credible. It was specifically Canadian, representing Canadian interests and not serving any émigré or other political causes.

We can all be proud of the Hungarian Language Service's accomplishments. It grew up, became a strong and successful Voice although — in my opinion — it came to its end prematurely. Still it provided important and at times vital information for 35 years!

It was a great privilege to work for RCI. To work day in day out in one's mother tongue to inform Hungarians living everywhere from Europe to Australia, Latin America and Asia was a very satisfying experience. I truly feel blessed to have worked with our small crew of usually four people and an ever-changing number of outside contributors. Thank you all for the great experience.

Unfortunately even in-house publications barely mention RCI's Hungarian language service. If they do it is in regards to the first broadcast of 1956, and the last one in the spring of 1991, but nothing in between. This Final Report should fill the gap.

Perhaps the gap is there because we dealt with our differences privately and discretely. There were no scandals and juicy stories to remind colleagues and management of our existence, even after we were long gone. We didn't have spies among us and didn't make self-serving political waves. We simply registered moments in time for posterity.

Like "minstrels" of the 20th century as broadcasters of our modern era we faithfully recorded and communicated in Hungarian what happened between 1956 and 1991. We provided vital information, Canadian style. RCI's Hungarian programs were about as much of political happenings as people — their lives, their struggles, sorrows and happiness — as integral

part of the political, cultural and religious fabric of Canada. Too bad it had to end most prematurely.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 299.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>3</sup> N.F. Dreisziger. "The Rise of a Bureaucracy for Multiculturalism: The Origins of the Nationalities Branch, 1939-1941," in *On Guard for Three: War, Ethnicity, and the Canadian State, 1939-1945*, ed. Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan and Lubomyr Luciuk (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988), 1-29.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew K. Finnie, *Radio Canada International 51st Anniversary 1945-1996; Canada's International Voice for 51 years* (Montreal: RCI, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Siegel, *Radio Canada International: History and Development* (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1996), 68.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> Finnie, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Jean Mezei, *Highlights 15 Years of the Hungarian Section, Radio Canada International* (Montreal, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> János (Jean) Mezei, *Twenty Years of the Hungarian Section of Radio Canada International* (Montreal, 1976), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Siegel, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the first staff meeting concerning the possibility of elimination in early 1991.

## Appendix

### Notes on the Staff and Free-Lancers of the RCI's Hungarian Section

**János (Jean) Mezei** was the Hungarian Service's first member and head who actually set up the section and organized its program. He was asked to do it on November 11, 1956 by Charles Delafield, director of the International Service. At that time Mezei was working for the Canadian government at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. At first he was on loan to RCI from November 11 1956 to January 1, 1957 when he was formally released from his duties to continue to work for the International Service.

Mezei single-handedly organized and set up the Hungarian Section in 1956. The Hungarian Voice of Canada went on air first on November 12, 1956. For a time he was a one-man-show and carried on for almost three decades as section head. He very much liked simple stories, stories close to the listeners' heart. At the same time he was not a stranger to the political aspects of the work and recorded interesting conversations with all kinds of people. His name is forever stamped on some major documentaries of the Hungarian Section. After almost three decades he was promoted and moved over to the French Radio Services of the CBC's national network. Eventually he retired and lives in the Montreal area.

Edit (Edith) Kovács was the Hungarian Section's first female reporter who also did some secretarial work then moved on as a newspaper journalist to the field of the written press. Years later she was diagnosed with lung cancer and she died in Montreal.

Less than a year after the Hungarian Section's establishment Imre (James) Végh joined it. He was hired in September 1957. Originally he was a journalist with his own Hungarian newspaper in the province of Ontario. As a former military man he was the political pillar of the Hungarian Section for many years. He edited the news commentaries and press reviews with great passion. At times he wrote other stories and did inter-

views but he rarely touched sports and never handled music. Following Mr. Mezei's departure he became head of the section. He retired from this position in 1985 but he stayed active and worked for the Canadian government as a free-lance interpreter. He also published a book, *Magyar otthon: Foyer Hongrois* (Montreal: Transatlantic Kiadó, 1992) that tells the story of Montreal's seven-story Hungarian seniors' residence. Végh's life was cut short by lung cancer; he passed away in 1996.

Mr. Károly Hlatky became member of the Hungarian Section in 1962. With his journalistic background he did excellent work especially in the field of music and sports. His program segments and varied interviews were always as amusing as serious as the need dictated. His unique flair made him an all time popular communicator with the staff and listeners alike. He also regularly produced exchange programs for the Hungarian Radio and produced and co-produced some of the Hungarian Section's major documentaries. During his long and successful career with RCI Mr. Hlatky also invented and taught a "how to" seminar about magazine type programming for RCI's in-house producers. For a time he was heading not only the Hungarian but also RCI's Polish Section. He retired from RCI in 1987, edited and published a book (*A halál közelében, Hlatky Endre naplója, 1944. október 16 – 1945. május 2* [Budapest – Montreal, 2003]) and lives in Montreal.

Zsuzsi (Susan) Stano followed Edit (Edith) Kovács as the Hungarian Section's first real administrative secretary in 1966. Susan's great gift of communication made many friends for the Hungarian Section all over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Ms. Stano remained with the Hungarian service for about ten years. In 1976, just before the Olympics, she moved over to RCI's Commentary and Script Department, then to the Newsroom. Eventually Ms Stano ended up being the administrative secretary of the Central and Eastern European Section. Following the 1991 cuts she worked for CBC's Canadian Armed Forces broadcast unit (abolished in 1998) as production assistant. From this position she returned to RCI and as a production assistant to care for two years of the Mailbag program targeted to Africa and Asia. She retired in 1997. She lives in Montreal.

Veronika (Veronica) Bognár Ludmer was hired in the fall of 1976 following the program increase to 30 minutes daily. Ms. Bognár was employed as secretary and production assistant. Eventually she became a full-fledged announcer-producer. She produced interesting entertainment stories and had a great knack for interviews. She went to work for the Voice of America and moved to Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1985. Cancer also cut Veronika's life short — she died in 2000.

Judit (Judith) Galántha Hermann, a former announcer of the Hungarian State Radio and author of this paper, joined the Hungarian Section in 1976. She very much enjoyed the travel aspect of the job and meeting people. She always brought in not only interviews but also impressions of the visited regions. These stories were favourites with all. Her programs were always illustrated by local musical talents, anecdotes and other amusing or important information conveyed often in form of bilingual interviews. She was just as interested in working with the news and local national and international political cultural or business events. Following Mr. Hlatky's retirement in 1987 she became head of the Hungarian Section and held that position until the very end. She had the dubious honour of saying the final good-bye to the listeners on the fateful day of March 22, 1991. A few months later Radio Free Europe's Hungarian Service hired her as a free-lance contributor on Canadian affairs. She worked for them for two years until the closure of the Hungarian Section at RFE. Not long after she became a contributor to the *Encyclopaedia Hungarica*. She is also contributor-translator to the *Encyclopaedia Hungarica* (the English edition) and chief translation contributor to the *World Hungarian Encyclopaedia*. She is member and former president of the Hungarian Studies Association of Canada. Her 21-year-long research about Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, the founder of modern Tibetology, led her on important field trips all over Asia and to international recognition. She lives in the greater Montreal area.

János (John) Szanyi joined the Hungarian Section at first for a short period of time in 1976 as a production assistant. In the summer of 1977 he was re-hired as an announcer-producer-summer relief. In time he became a permanent employee and worked as an announcer producer until the closing of the section. Sports, political- and business-related features and such cultural happenings as music and film festivals were Mr. Szanyi's main fields of interests. He is a distinguished playwright. His film script of "Revolution's Orphans" was nominated for Gene Award (1980) as "Outstanding Screen Play". He published several dramas, among them "Szigismund és Kunigunda (Sigismund and Kunigunde) "Balassi Concerto" and "Nincs új a hold alatt" (There is nothing new under the moon). He is still with the CBC French TV network. For a period he was very much involved with the Hungarian civilization and language courses offered at different times by different departments of McGill University. He lives in the greater Montreal area.

Gábor (Gabriel) Méhes was hired when Mr. Végh retired in 1985. His preference was also the political arena but he successfully dealt with

other type of stories too. He authored and co-authored several scholarly books and studies mostly in the field of psychology and sociology. After the closure of RCI's Hungarian Section he left broadcasting but still lives in the Montreal area.

Judit (Judith) Jobbágy (nee Szántó) got her broadcasting experience at the Hungarian State Radio in Budapest where she was working as an announcer. She was hired by RCI in 1986 and came from Toronto in view of the anticipated retirement of Mr. Hlatky in 1987. Ms. Jobbágy was quite versatile and a good interviewer. Subsequently she moved to Washington, D.C. to work for the Voice of America. Following the closure of VOA's Hungarian Section apparently she returned to Hungary.

RCI's Hungarian Section was lucky to have had a large number of contributors on a free-lance basis and could heavily rely on those professionals from practically all over Canada. The number of contributors fluctuated from the beginning. Some worked more than others and they were always generously remunerated. Usually they were commissioned to do reports and interviews but at times they came up with their stories and reports on their own. There was always a close relationship between the Hungarian Section and its free-lance staff.

To cover an enormous-size country such as Canada free-lance contributors were very much needed. There were several reporters in British Columbia. The first one among them was József (Joseph) Sallós, former conductor of the Hungarian Choir in Vancouver. Mr. Sallós steadily provided interesting stories and interviews for many years. Starting with 1988, the talented Vancouverite Györgyi (Georgina) Hegedős — a former Hungarian actress, singer and choreographer, Gene Award nominee (1983) and successful author — provided over 300 witty reports from the West Coast. Thanks to her artistic talents even the dullest subject became an entertaining story.

From Alberta there was Tom Kennedy (Tamás Keresztes) an all time favourite contributor with the listeners and staff alike. For years he covered every interesting event possible, especially the world-renown Calgary Stampede and the 1988 Calgary Olympic winter games. He also worked hard to convey even the heaviest oil industry related subjects in a light-hearted way. Due to his strong Hungarian accent at times he was downright funny but credible, always in an amusing way. He was a professional through and through — a great communicator. He moved back to Hungary some years ago but his life was cut short by a road accident in 2005.

Winnipeg, with a relatively large Hungarian population, supplied only one contributor — and that only for a short period of time. Unfortunately his name is forgotten by now. He distinguished himself with one tape only that featured the voice of the late Professor Watson Kirkconnel, a well-known English translator of Hungarian poems.

The province of Ontario provided a number of contributors among them Andor Sima who reported from Ottawa. For many years Magda Zalán was most prolific. She lived in Toronto. Ms. Zalán was most interested in literature, theatre and the entertainment industry in general. Her interviews were so popular with listeners that they wrote praises among others from Brazil and Israel. Later Ms. Zalán moved to Washington D.C. and worked for the Voice of America for years. Now she lives in Hungary.

Zoltán Böszörményi was a former local broadcaster in Toronto. He worked for RCI's Hungarian Section as a contributor from that great Canadian city. Originally he was from Romania's Transylvanian region where he tried to establish himself as a writer and published short stories in Transylvanian newspapers. His first book of poems was published there in 1979 followed by another one in 1981. In 1991 he produced a third volume of his poems. Mr. Böszörményi had wide interests and was always eager, enthusiastic and diligent about the work at hand. His reports and interviews were fast paced and so much to the point that his reports rarely needed adjustment. After the closure of the Hungarian Section, Zoltán left broadcasting altogether and became a savvy businessman. Today Mr. Böszörményi is a true citizen of the world with homes in Romania, Hungary, Monaco and Canada. He still keeps in touch with some former members of RCI's Hungarian Section.

Mária (Maria) Papp worked as a contributor only for a short period of time. Her reports and interviews covered mostly the Hamilton area of the province of Ontario. One Christmas we got into hot water with some listeners because she used a communist-era expression for Santa Claus by calling him Father Winter and this gave a great boost to our audience mail... From 1991 on she studied theology and became a Protestant minister in the St. Catherines, Ontario area where she settled.

Péter (Peter) Sipos is a successful composer, arranger, bandleader and music producer. From 1981 he regularly contributed for about five years to our weekly musical program. He was the Hungarian Section's music man. Since his arrival to Canada Péter was always deeply involved with the Montreal Jewish community's musical events as a composer, musical director, arranger, conductor or producer. Celine Dion picked up one of his songs "Pour Vous". He produced and orchestrated the world-

renown mezzo soprano Julia Hamari's record "Mozart Rock". He composed underscores for stage plays and large scale Broadway style musicals. He still lives and works in Montreal.

Keeping with traditions RCI inserted a Romanian newscast into the Hungarian program for a brief period of time during the Romanian uprising of 1989. This segment was translated and read by Péter (Peter) Pusztai, a talented and successful graphic and photo artist originally from Transylvania who was our listener for many years before he became a Montrealer in 1982.

The Rev. Dr. Aladár Komjáthy was not on staff but a minister of the First Hungarian Reformed Church of Montreal. He was RCI's Hungarian Section's resident expert on religious topics. His regular contributions mostly related to important religious historical events in Canada but at times he reached into his own experiences as a minister dealing with a beautiful but often difficult job. His book „*A kitántorgott egyház*” [The church that staggered out] was published in 1984; it dealt with the history of the Hungarian Reformed church in America. Around the time of the Hungarian Section's closure he moved to the USA. He passed away in Pittsburgh, PA in 1998.

Iván (Ivan) Fehérdy was a local free-lance contributor in Montreal between 1980 and 1985. He mostly presented regional events related to history and culture often with a Hungarian underlining. Our listeners always enjoyed his descriptive style. He is still in Montreal.

László (Ladislás) Kemenes Géfin — educator, poet and essayist — was an infrequent literary contributor to RCI's Hungarian program in the 1980s. Born in Hungary, he came to Canada after the 1956 Revolution and settled in Montreal. He completed his university studies at the Loyola College and McGill University, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1979. He taught English and contemporary literature at various schools, including the Concordia University until his retirement. He has published poems, essays and articles in several periodicals in Western Europe, Canada and Hungary. He is co-editor of *Arkánum*, a periodical for avant-garde authors. Eventually he moved to the Netherlands.

Members of the Hungarian Section usually covered Eastern Canada. There were no local contributors due to the region's small Hungarian population. Even today only a handful of Hungarians live in Newfoundland and not too many more in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

Louise Fabrizzi was indirectly but almost on a daily basis in contact with the Hungarian staff. She was heading RCI's research department,

took care of staff participation in press conferences and got accreditations to major events. She always knew what was going on and where to look for specific information and how to go about it. Her contribution was always ready for our asking. Eventually she married a colleague, Imre Vegh, and retired from RCI. She lives in Montreal.